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Exporting Radicalization and Strengthening Resilience: Tunisia and Kosovo

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Tunisia and Kosovo are countries of origin of a significant number of radicalized individuals who have joined the ranks of jihadist insurgencies in the Middle East, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. Therefore, although Tunisia and, to a lesser degree, Kosovo have experienced the occurrence of violent extremism (VE), they are often indicated as examples of an externalization of the problem (Fahmi and Meddeb 2015; Consigli 2018). In repressing and persecuting radicalized individuals while showing a certain degree of externally assisted institutional solidity, these two countries have created an environment conducive to these individuals' departure. The return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) after the territorial defeat of ISIS in the Middle East and, in turn, the demise of the self-proclaimed Caliphate has opened a whole range of challenges, such as the lack of social, economic, or psychological support for them and mechanisms to handle their eventual reappearance in what are still enabling environments. Against a backdrop marked by tumultuous histories of the war in Kosovo and authoritarian rule in Tunisia, optimism rose for both nations in recent decades as they seemingly stood on the precipice of significant change. However, as time progressed, the hopeful narrative of democracy remained applicable solely to Kosovo, highlighting a noteworthy divergence in Kosovo's and Tunisia's trajectories. Yet, despite the underlying structural and contingent differences that make proper comparison difficult, in this chapter we maintain that observing and contrasting patterns of radicalization and, more broadly, jihadist militants and counterterror responses in Tunisia and Kosovo is fruitful. It yields new insights that problematize "hydraulic" representations of social order—that is, views that violent extremism is a force to be channeled—and that better explicate the

phenomenon of "exporting jihad." Therefore, we examine the empirical evidence to understand how the emigration and the return of radicalized individuals are linked to domestic political stability.

Focusing on Tunisia and Kosovo, we do not neglect the larger contexts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the Western Balkans, where Kosovo is part of the Albanian-speaking populations in countries like Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. In the modern Balkans, unlike in the Arab world, religion—not only Islam—is intertwined with national belongings, an essential part of even nonbelievers' identity (Evstatiev 2019). In the 1990s, the Yugoslav succession wars added violent connotations, portraying the region as distinct from Europe and affiliating it with the Middle East through Islam's transnational community—the *umma* (Sadriu 2019). We amplify the cases of Tunisia and Kosovo as indicative of regional and international developments in "exporting jihad" to reveal some commonalities and differences between the Western Balkans and the MENA, seeking to grasp cases of occurrence and nonoccurrence of VE as a result of social resilience.

This chapter`s analysis of Tunisia and Kosovo is based on interdisciplinary collaborative research, including fieldwork in specific localities in both countries. It unfolds through our examination of cases of VE occurrence in Tunisia and Kosovo, in which we address the drivers and historical, social, and political contexts shaping these enabling environments. We discuss the role of external actors, particularly the European Union (EU) and the United States of America, before focusing more closely on the issue of FTFs and closing off with our conclusions.

Tunisia, Kosovo, and Violent Extremism

Tunisia in the Maghrebi Context

Violent extremism is certainly a significant issue in Tunisia. A dozen years after the 2011 revolution, we must debunk two parallel myths: the idea of Tunisian democracy gaining traction through a linear transition in which violent political extremism did not play a crucial role; and the idea that, faced with no chance of success in the domestic arena, Tunisian jihadism simply "found its way" abroad, under the guise of thousands of Tunisian nationals who joined the legions of foreign terrorist fighters. The following paragraphs provide details to dispel these two notions.

Set within a regional context deeply marked by transitions derailed into resurgent forms of authoritarianism, militarization, and civil wars, for some years, Tunisia stood out as an exception. It was acclaimed as a model of national compromise and resilient democracy. At the same time, observers noted that, as a proportion of its overall population,

Tunisia contributed the highest number of foreign terrorist fighters in the MENA region.

Over time, things have become more complex. There is ample evidence of the critical role Tunisian citizens played in terror attacks, including attacks in Europe. Yet, the "outward diversion hypothesis" rests on a simplistic "hydraulic" assumption (i.e., VE as a force to be channeled) concerning the nature of political order and social relations. This hypothesis should be relaxed, considering the unfolding of *voice* (citizens expressing their discontent and grievances in an effort to improve conditions) and *exit* (citizens opting to leave or disengage) and the political interactions during transition years (Hirschman 1970).

The elected President Kais Saied seized de facto control in mid-2021, divesting the authority of democratic institutions and actors, including Parliament, the political parties—most notably the Islamist party Ennahda—and the trade unions. Counterterrorism laws are now being exploited and used as a tool of political repression and to overtly criminalize the democratic opposition, thus effectively turning counterterrorism into a means of governance.

Tunisia was shaken by major terrorist attacks in the years 2013–2015, and its security forces have continued to be targeted by violent extremist groups.[1] In particular, the homicides of socialist leader Mohamed Brahmi and unionist leader Choukri Belaid marked the first apparent interventions of jihadi violence in Tunisia's policy arena. The murders put Islamist leaders on high alert and possibly contributed to their adopting a pragmatic line in search of a constitutional consensus to stabilize a transition where the party could affirm itself. This was a somewhat momentous choice, given how events unfolded in other countries where political parties affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood were making their way through elections.

By then, religious extremism had long been waxing in Tunisia, just as much as everyday manifestations of violent intimidation (e.g., against women's associations) (Salem 2021). By targeting and killing dozens of foreign tourists, the terror attacks at the Bardo Museum in March 2015 and three months later at Sousse beach were heavy blows to the Tunisian economy. The next phase was mainly focused on Mount Chambi, near Kasserine, where an al-Qaeda-affiliated group started a violent insurgency, which was met with a series of military counterinsurgency operations. Parallel to this, in March 2016, ISIS-affiliated jihadists crossed into the border city of Ben Guerdane from Libya in a foiled attempt to seize the city, leaving many casualties.

As of the writing of this book, it can be claimed that jihadism as an insurgency has been defeated in Tunisia. Both the border with Libya and Mount Chambi are seeing declining levels of violence. More broadly, one can safely say that jihadi violence in North Africa has failed to advance. Yet

this state of affairs could not be taken for granted in the mid-2010s and stands in stark contrast with the propagation of jihadist movements active across the Sahara Desert and the Sahel Belt (ICG 2021).

Kosovo and the Albanians

The foreign fighters' phenomenon in the Western Balkans dates to the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, when jihadis from Middle Eastern countries supported the Muslim fighters in the region, particularly in Bosnia and Kosovo.[2] Islamic relief organizations from or supported by the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, proliferated and set up branches across the Balkans. They funded mosques and educational facilities that disseminated a "new" interpretation of Islam and granted scholarships for Muslims to study in the Middle East. In the Balkans, ubiquitous were the perceptions of a "traditional" as opposed to an "alien" Islam imported from the Arab world, in which "Arab" Islam was described by a plethora of terms with negative connotations such as *Wahhabism*, *Salafism*, *Islamism*, and *radical Islam* (Evstatiev 2022, 75–78). Over the years, several *para-jamaats*, or parallel "underground" mosque communities, have been established in all these countries, attracting disillusioned youth.[3] The areas around the *para-jamaats* became gathering places for radical indoctrination and the recruitment of FTFs because they were beyond the purview of formal Islamic institutions recognized by the states. The recent focus on Islamist extremism in the Western Balkans thus came mostly with the spread of global Salafism clashing with the locally practiced Hanafi tradition of Islam (Azinović 2018).

The issue of extremism became particularly pressing after the outbreak of the recent war in Syria, as violence occurred—mostly following the export of FTFs to the theaters of Salafi insurgency in the Middle East. More than 1,070 persons from the Western Balkans made their way to Syria and Iraq and joined the ranks of primarily Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda affiliates (Azinović 2018, 3–6; Shtuni 2019, 18). The Western Balkans is currently Europe's region with the highest number of returned FTFs. The return of jihadis to their Balkan homelands was perceived as a direct threat to national security, and by 2015, foreign fighting was criminalized in virtually all countries in the region (Shtuni 2019; Azinović and Bećirević 2017). Although enabling environments where extremism is shaped are usually associated with drivers such as economic depression, rising unemployment, and low and declining levels of education, the Western Balkans indicate that these factors are not necessarily the primary driving force and their relative weight should be considered context-specific.

In Kosovo, religious extremism has been shaped in an enabling environment entailing violence along ethnic and political lines. Kosovo is the

country in the MENA region with the highest number of FTFs and jihadi mobilization in Europe (Azinović 2018). The jihadi groups were not welcomed by the political and military structures of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which followed national ideologies and sought to avoid the influence of religion. The generations educated in a nationalist spirit were not susceptible to radical Islamic movements and propaganda. However, the educational system, ruined by the Kosovo War of 1998–1999 opened the door to the spread of Islamist ideologies. Societal disorientation amid a weak economy and political vacuum made Kosovo fertile ground for the resurgence of religion (Demjaha and Peci 2016). As in Bosnia and Sandžak, the "new" Islam was imported to Kosovo from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries. According to some estimates, faith-based aid agencies from Middle Eastern and Gulf countries invested around $800 million in Kosovo, mainly in rural areas (Azinović 2018).

Kosovo declared independence in 2008, with the Serbs governing ten out of thirty-eight municipalities and certain government ministries. Kosovo's Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015–2020 puts the threat of "national radical extremist groups of Albanian and Serbian origin" on par with the threat posed by Islamic extremism (Republic of Kosovo 2015). The four municipalities in the northern part of the country bordering Serbia (Leposavic, Zubin Potok, North Mitrovica, and Zvecan) lack effective control by the central government, and extremist and organized crime groups continue to obstruct the basic rule of law in this area. The city of Mitrovica, divided since 1999 between an Albanian south and a Serbian north, and especially the Ibar Bridge connecting the two areas, has become a focal point of numerous protests since 1999.[4] Almost 80 percent of violent extremist threats were political, and nearly 70 percent of unexecuted threats were religious (Kursani 2018a, 10).

Over the past several years, approximately a dozen protests organized in Kosovo have turned violent. In March 2015, for example, Albanians from Kosovo were suspected of performing violent acts in the Republic of North Macedonia. During operations carried out by the North Macedonian police in the city of Kumanovo, eight policemen and ten members of armed groups were killed, and thirty-seven people were indicted, most of whom came from Kosovo (Radio Free Europe 2017). In another operation of the North Macedonian police, carried out in 2010 in Tetovo, six people were killed, including some from Kosovo (Voice of America 2010). More recently, after the defeat of ISIS in the Middle East, nationalist-motivated riots and social-based violent protests are on the rise in Kosovo. Those believed to be at the highest risk of engaging in violence are found to be educated individuals who have failed to achieve an occupational position commensurate with their level of education (Kursani and Krakowski 2021).

International Assistance and the Extremist Challenge

Tunisia

The Tunisian Islamic landscape has evolved considerably since the 2011 uprising, becoming more complex, as mentioned earlier. This complexity goes beyond secularization to involve the contention and renunciation of political violence as a revolutionary and transformative tool (Merone, Sigillò, and De Faci 2018). Hence, the polarization and fragmentation of the Islamic landscape can be seen as a result of dynamics of political contention, opportunities and closures provided therein, and resource mobilization.

Salafism in Tunisia can be divided into two major currents (Torelli, Merone, and Cavatorta 2012; Marks 2013). *Salafiyya 'ilmiyya* ("scientific Salafism") is a quietist current that rejects the use of violence while preaching a purist interpretation of Islam. The second, jihadi Salafis, grew significantly after the 2011 revolution (Merone and Cavatorta 2013). Despite their heterogeneity, Salafis are perceived by secular liberal elites as a homogeneous group and a major threat to the Tunisian social order (Cavatorta 2015). It should probably be remembered how Habib Bourguiba, the first Tunisian president, pursued a secular, modernist, and socialist governing model in which religion was considered primarily a private affair. He closed several mosques, prohibited the wearing of the veil in public institutions, and undermined the power and authority of *ulama* (religious scholars) vis-à-vis politics. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who ruled Tunisia between 1987 and 2011, followed the same ideological and political path. Yet, with some opening to religious influence during periods of crisis, characterized by acute competition among elites, stricter rules on Islamists were imposed during the end of the 1990s.

By 2012, the ideological spectrum of the Islamic landscape had crystallized into four main trends: Islamists akin to the Muslim Brothers (represented by Ennahda), Salafi political parties (the most prominent being Jabhat al-Islah—the Reform Front), religious associations of various ideological affiliations, and revolutionary jihadi Salafis (mainly Ansar al-Shari'a). After the 2013 political assassinations, the jihadi Salafi group Ansar al-Shari'a was banned, and Salafi associations suspected to have links with terrorist groups were shut down. The post-2011 political equilibrium hinged on the inclusion of the majoritarian party Ennahda in the institutional field as a legitimate political force and the redefinition of Tunisian religious space. Mosques and several religious associations were brought under the state's control. In reaction to the attacks at the Bardo Museum in Tunis and the resort in Soussa, the government officially announced a new campaign of securitization under the label of the "war against terrorism," aimed at curtailing all the "extremisms" present in the country.

Overall, Tunisian authorities have often been quick to label these attacks and assassinations as more or less direct expressions of terrorism. At the same time, however, they have also proved eager to seek international assistance on how best to respond to such challenges. These two circumstances have generated strong contradictions. Initially, strong securitized approaches emerged and prevailed at the meeting point of the supply and the demand of counterterrorism cooperation. International cooperation efforts usually targeted the Tunisian Ministry of Interior as a local counterpart, a choice that incidentally undermined the hopes for change that had animated the 2011 revolution. As a matter of fact, during the revolution, popular mobilization was very explicit in targeting the national police, portrayed as the quintessential expression of systematic regime abuse.

In a very critical moment for the survival of democracy in Tunisia, EU member states collaborated with Tunisian authorities to design counterterrorism tools and EU support for the Tunisian security sector and, crucially, to target Tunisia's counterterrorism law enforcement apparatus. At the same time, the rise of irregular migration flows from Tunisia to Europe and the fear that they would increase the EU's vulnerability to terrorism led the EU to increasingly focus security cooperation on land and sea borders. The EU and its member states, such as Italy and Germany, have been intensifying their support for the Tunisian Coast Guard by supplying training, equipment, border surveillance technologies, and Germany`s Integrated Border Management system. Although Tunisia views the EU as a key security partner, it harbors concerns that militarizing border regions might fuel grievances and exacerbate the discontent of marginalized communities in enabling environments, where the features conducive to the journey into VE exist. The growing emphasis of EU cooperation with Tunisia on countering irregular migration raises concern among Tunisian stakeholders, at least in public rhetoric, who see it as prioritizing the EU agenda to the detriment of local ownership. The clampdown on irregular cross-border flows exhibits a limited context sensitivity: extra-legal economies are crucial to the resilience of borderland communities and help reduce the vulnerability to VE (Meddeb 2020).

In recent years, the (perceived) reduction of terrorist threats in Tunisia has softened the sense of emergency. Consequently, Tunisian authorities and their international partners have increasingly focused on longer-term approaches to combat VE. These include framings, concepts, programs, and tools inspired by preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) approaches, which involve as Tunisian partners not only the ministries of security and defense but also those of social affairs, justice, and youth. The EU and the United Nations (UN) agencies support community policing projects, security sector reform (SSR), and an updated national counterterrorism strategy, aiming to inject a human rights–based and whole-of-society approach. Within this framework,

a specific emphasis is laid on the judicialization of counterterrorism response, preventive measures, and inclusion of civil society, the private sector, and academia (Simoncini 2021). The EU is also sponsoring small-scale pilot projects in youth engagement for the social rehabilitation of individuals incarcerated for terrorism and, most crucially, reform of the Tunisian education sector.

Overall, we can observe an expansion of the counterterrorism agenda toward prevention. This shift is backed by a professionalization discourse that materializes through expanding capacity-building and train-and-equip formats targeting the police, usually through multilateral schemes. If Tunisia has so far rejected structured cooperation with some law enforcement agencies, such as FRONTEX (European Border and Coast Guard Agency), its security institutions are involved in regional programs by CEPOL (EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training—with whom Tunisia has recently signed a working agreement) and EUROPOL (EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation). It is also active in cooperation on criminal justice as part of a consortium led by Eurojust.

These accounts show how most EU resources in Tunisia are invested in traditional security cooperation and counterterrorism, although the EU claims to attach considerable importance to P/CVE action and goals in Tunisia. On paper, P/CVE features alongside the EU's crosscutting priorities in the country, alongside gender mainstreaming and human rights. In practice, though, the EU appears to lack the conceptual and financial resources to bridge the intention–implementation gap. Moreover, although the EU's considerable investments in other more "social" domains, such as youth, education, and development, are considered supportive of the EU's P/CVE agenda, we cannot help but note the lack of a convincing theory of change and assessment tools to back up this claim. EU actions could benefit greatly from a broader engagement in the Tunisian religious field. Yet, the fragmentation of Tunisia's religious field makes it hard for program coordinators to identify valuable partners without fueling feelings of exclusion, stigmatization, and polarization in the population. This suggests that the EU should pay special attention to context and conflict sensitivity if it decides to increase its role in this domain; then it may play a constructive part in building and supporting local sources of resilience. But this must happen with a light footprint, which would minimize the risk of undermining and delegitimizing local actors of resilience.

Kosovo

The transnational type of radicalization and VE spread throughout the region, coupled with the "export of jihad," brought Islamist VE into focus for the EU and other external stakeholders. Their P/CVE approaches in the Western Balkans vary along the continuum of "hard" to "soft" measures.

Hard approaches focus on security and securitization, whereas soft approaches entail programs aimed at social cohesion. Several external stakeholders operating in the region have pursued distinct strategies, which has created a tapestry of competitive and partially overlapping approaches to both preventing and countering violent extremism. Most instrumental, next to the EU, has been the United States, working through entities such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and alongside the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and local nongovernmental and civil society organizations (NGOs/CSOs). In addition, external stakeholders active in the Western Balkans include institutions based in the Muslim-majority world, such as the Turkish Diyanet or the Hedaya, an international organization based in the United Arab Emirates.

The EU strategy for combating VE is spelled out in the March 15, 2017, EU Directive 541 of the European Parliament and Council of Europe (European Council 2017, 6–21). This directive builds on the 2005 EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which envisages countering radicalization by "promoting even more vigorously good governance, human rights, democracy as well as education and economic prosperity, and engaging in conflict resolution" (European Council 2005). In 2020, while pointing to the dangers posed by far right and far left forms of VE, the EU restated that Islamist movements, such as al-Qaeda and the IS, remain the main threat to the union (European Council 2020). Nevertheless, both the EU and other external stakeholders, notably the United States, seek to combine hard and soft approaches. Whereas the United States continues to prioritize hard measures, with a strong emphasis on law enforcement and developing military instruments to persecute terrorists, in contrast, the EU emphasizes softer approaches.

When it comes to influencing the P/CVE policies of Western Balkan states, the EU possesses a set of comparative advantages that are not available to governments in the MENA and the Sahel. The union's enlargement and integration process are instrumental as incentives for most Western Balkan countries to undertake various reforms, including implementation of preventive measures, enforcement of the rule of law, democratization, and transparency, which could positively address the key drivers of the emergence of VE. The region's proximity to the EU means its security directly impacts the union's stability.[5] Since 2018, all EU engagements in the region have been aligned with its overall strategy for the Western Balkans (European Commission 2018a). Compared to earlier regional strategies, this overall strategy puts more emphasis on counterterrorism and P/CVE.[6] To strengthen states' cooperation on P/CVE, the European Commission (2018b) and the Western Balkans governments signed "Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans 2018–2020," which builds on

the outcomes of a series of high-level counterterrorism (CT) visits ("CT Dialogues") in 2017–2018 with the interior and justice ministers, police heads, intelligence agencies, CSOs, and umbrella structures such as national CVE coordination centers.[7] Complementing this joint initiative, between 2018 and 2020, the EU concluded separate bilateral "arrangements on antiterrorism cooperation" with the governments in the region.

Overall, unlike in the MENA region, where the EU pursues a "security first" approach (Skare et al. 2021b, 4), the union's P/CVE strategy in the Western Balkans has been predominantly soft, entailing measures targeting democratic and systemic reforms or community initiatives. In some "hot" areas, such as Kosovo, the EU approach also involves security-based programs prioritizing deradicalization in prisons and of released violent extremists.

In Kosovo, several lawsuits were filed against imams. The biggest case was that of Zeqirja Qazimi, an imam who lectured at the El Kudus Mosque in Gjilan who was sentenced to ten years in prison on charges of indoctrination and recruitment of FTFs (Leposhtica 2016). During interviews with relatives of FTFS in 2021, most respondents highlighted the decisive role of imams in three localities, from where some of those involved in the war in Syria and Iraq originated.[8] At the same time, the interviewees were divided regarding the role of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK). Some believe that it has performed a deterrence role by identifying and counteracting extreme interpretations of Islam.[9] Others claim that BIK was reluctant to face these new extremist currents and interpretations while they were at their earliest stages of growth. Perhaps because it feared them.[10]

An issue of particular relevance to Kosovo and other Western Balkan countries is the use of communication platforms for online radicalization (Peci and Demjaha 2021a, b). In 2020, the Kosovo Police arrested a person who promoted participation in foreign wars through social media. There have been many cases in Kosovo where extremist individuals use the internet to spread extremist ideologies and recruit adherents (Shtuni 2016). Digital communication systems have also been vital in recruiting Kosovo's diaspora through the distribution of propaganda videos to indoctrinate audiences. Forty-eight of the 255 Kosovar FTFs, or nearly 20 percent, who joined different terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq came from the diaspora (Perteshi 2020).

The Foreign Fighters Question

Tunisia

Religiously motivated extremism is deeply rooted in Tunisia. During the early 1980s, a small radical organization called Jamaat Al Jihad aimed to support all Muslims against hypocrisy and injustice. Historically speaking, and much like Morocco, in comparison to Algeria and Libya in the 1980s

and 1990s, Tunisia did not produce FTFs on a massive scale. The first cases of domestic VE took place in the late 1980s, in the wake of the ban on the Islamist party Ennahda. Violent contestation in Tunisia remained limited, far from the scale and intensity it reached in Algeria in the early 1990s or Libya between 1995 and 1998. Some young Tunisians answered the ever more pervasive and pressing calls to "protect Muslims" and left to join jihad battalions in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most of them gathered around Tarek Maaroufi and Seifallah Ben Hassine, who were Tunisian émigrés who became active outside of Tunisia itself. By the year 2000, the al-Qaeda-affiliated Tunisian Islamic Fighting Group (TIFG) stood out as the main Tunisian jihadi group. Under the Ben Ali regime, surveillance and repression were such that Tunisian jihadists were forced to fight abroad. An exception was the so-called Suleiman Group, a group of Tunisian jihadists linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which failed to provoke an Islamist uprising from December 2006 to January 2007. In 2003, Tunisia's involvement in global jihad was minimal until the US-led invasion of Iraq. In 2006, a document, later known as the Sinjar Report, containing a list from al-Qaeda in Iraq, revealed that out of 570 Arab FTFs who went to Iraq in the 2000s, only 3 percent were Tunisians. Most of the fighters came from Saudi Arabia and Libya (Bergen et al. 2008).

A closer look at the numbers indicates their significance. It can be claimed that 1.7 percent of FTFs killed in Iraq between 2003 and 2005 were Tunisians, and out of the fighters held in Camp Bucca in 2008, 3.8 percent were Tunisian (Bergen et al. 2008; Zelin 2020). The Sinjar Report points out the fact that 41 percent of the fighters who entered Iraq were marked as volunteers for suicide bombing, showing their strong commitment to both the movement and its ideology.[11] A lawyer who defended arrested jihadists claims that as many as six hundred Tunisians were detained between 2005 and 2007 while attempting to join jihadist resistance in Iraq (Zelin 2020). Still, the numbers of Tunisian FTFs were insignificant and were perceived as such.

It was only after the Arab Spring that this perception changed as a result of thousands of young men leaving to join the jihad in Syria and Iraq via Turkey or Libya. In addition, the local insurgency led by the AQIM-affiliated Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade (OIN-B) in Western Tunisia garnered attention, while a smaller Daesh affiliate called Jund Al Khilafa in Tunisia (JAK-T) emerged too (Ben Dhaou 2021). But by the beginning of the 2020s, with domestic armed insurgencies severely weakened, the main issue concerned the revenants (i.e., foreign fighter returnees), with some eight hundred cases still pending in Tunisian courts.

A key to understanding radicalization in Tunisia was the creation in 2011 of the organization Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AST). Seifallah Ben

Hassine (aka Abu Ayyad) is a former Tunisian "Afghan" (TIFG) who, along with some two thousand prisoners reportedly with some jihadist record, was released from jail in 2011 shortly after the fall of Ben Ali. According to a former associate, Abu Ayyad had been strongly influenced by the ideas of a radical preacher, London-based Abu Qatada al-Filistini. With two other imams, Abu Ayoub and Al Khatib al-Idrissi, Abu Ayyad founded AST in the context of a security vacuum that followed the revolution.

As Ayari (2017) explains, Abu Ayyad intended to unify all the radical currents in the country, much like the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria in the 1990s. By helping poor, marginalized people from populated areas, AST aimed at indoctrinating and mobilizing the people for its Islamic radical project. AST grew at the intersection of two radical schools of thought: radical jihadi Salafism and Maqdisism.[12] AST meant to mobilize the people for the jihad without actually crossing the threshold of violence: following al-Maqdisi's teaching, AST portrayed Tunisia as a land of preaching (Da'wa) rather than a land of violent jihad. By so doing, AST became a referent for the post-2011 revolutionary fever of large segments of the Tunisian youth, which did not agree with the Islamist party Ennahda's decision to endorse democracy.

Ennahda itself has often been blamed for the rise of AST because it did not act decisively against it during the first phase of transition (2011–2013) and instead allowed the AST network to develop all over Tunisia. It was only after the attack against the US embassy in September 2012 and the political assassinations in 2013 that the Tunisian state decided to crack down on AST. However, by that time, thousands of Tunisian youths had already joined the areas of conflict in Syria, Iraq, or Libya.

Ayari (2017) reveals the typical profile of youths arrested and incarcerated for terrorist involvement as predominantly young adult males under the age of thirty-five. Between 2013 and 2016, out of four hundred people prosecuted for terrorism, a surprising 40 percent had a university diploma or a university level of education. Although the jihadists came from various socioeconomic groups all over Tunisia, a noticeable proportion were from the Governorate of Tunis and southwestern region of Tunisia. It is estimated that more than 36 percent of Tunisian jihadists came from the semiurban populated areas (*zone peri-urbaine*) of Tunis (Sterman and Rosenblatt 2018).

The youth in marginal areas, neglected by state intervention and often suffering from police repression and unemployment, became vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment. They had little or no religious knowledge. Thus, by clearing and abandoning the religious field during his rule, Ben Ali had removed a crucial source of local resilience in the enabling environment of rural Tunisia, rendering the youth in those areas open to radical ideas and VE. It is also significant that many of these

young men had some form of criminal record: joining the jihad offered them a redemption narrative and status. The collapse of Ben Ali and the ensuing political fluidity, the free-for-all postrevolutionary situation, paved the way for AST in these semiurban areas. AST provided help and economic support for the local poor population. The fact that the young people did not recognize themselves in the Tunisian state, which was identified as the (defeated) police, facilitated this process of brainwashing. AST provided youths with jobs, food, and money, thus becoming an alternative to the state. Using propaganda and mobilization, AST organized big rallies and demonstrations in semiurban areas. The absence of "the family cell," which would have otherwise protected the youth, made the radicalization process easier. Young adults' lack of education in the context of conservatism and poverty, amplified by their rejection of the state, created a permissive and enabling environment. Furthermore, the utilization of modern technologies simplified the process of mobilization and radicalization. AST developed its website and Facebook page, which were accessible to the marginalized youth of Tunis's suburbia.

At this point, AST set up "preaching tents," or *Khayamat al-Douawiya,* for the youth. In those tents, AST would address these young people with an extremely efficient and strong religious and political discourse to psychologically empower. Leaders of AST would claim: "You are today's leaders" and "You are the ones who will revive the Islamic Sharia." AST recruiters attempted to respond to and tap into youths' social-economic grievances and discomfort through the "preaching tents," which amounted to a nearly one-to-one strategy of recruitment and indoctrination.[13]

Note that not all in AST were in favor of jihadi violence. As Georges Fahmi and Hamza Meddeb (2015) explain, although AST was ideologically linked to al-Qaeda, it was neither politically nor operationally connected to that organization.[14] Also, some members, such as Abu Iyadh, advocated for Tunisia to be a land of predication and did not see AST as an organization to lead the jihad in Tunisia, but others advocated for the use of violence. Among them were Boubaker al-Hakim, who went on to become one of the most important ISIS leaders in Syria, and Ahmed Rouissi, a prominent ISIS fighter in Libya.

The first wave of foreign fighters' departures occurred as early as 2011, when AST had just been created. At that point, Ennahda supported anti-Asad fighters in Syria and thus played an essential role in mobilizing Tunisian youth. The recruitment for the jihad was not done openly or in public but rather more discreetly at the intersection of various local networks, including AST, Ennahda, and other organizations claiming to be for charity and moderation while in reality radicalizing and recruiting young people and sending them abroad.[15] Overall, the mobilization for jihad resulted from favorable socioeconomic conditions or strong idealism

matching puritanical ideas and opportunities created by these networks. The recruiters typically played heavily on the emotions of the youths, showing civilian massacres to convince them to cross the line and veer into jihadism, not simply religious radicalism.

By mid-2013, after violent attacks and assassinations, the government, dominated by the Ennahda party, finally decided to crack down on AST. Thus, the authorities barred the organization from organizing its congress in May 2013 and accused it of being directly responsible for the attacks. The AST reaction happened directly in the suburb of Hay Ettadhamen, where its supporters mobilized massively, which led to confrontations with law enforcement. This was the moment when the first violent riots against the Tunisian government occurred, which ended the permissive environment that had allowed the organization to recruit and radicalize young Tunisians. The second and maybe largest wave of departure to Syria and Iraq occurred after 2013, while the AST leadership went into exile and joined either al-Qaeda or ISIS. Faced with state repression by a government run by an Islamist party, many decided to leave, causing an upsurge of FTFs voluntarily joining ISIS.

Thus, as Hatem Chakroun argued in a 2017 interview, poor socioeconomic conditions in the context of an absent or hostile state played an important role in the semiurban centers, of which Hay Ettadhamen was a good example.[16] However, in the semirural areas, other factors played roles. Mobilization and radicalization took a distinct path in rural versus semirural areas because of somewhat different drivers: in rural areas the cultural element was crucial; in urban centers the material element was important. In semirural areas, modernity and modernization often clashed with traditionalism. In these contexts, political secularization was not necessarily well received by many Tunisian conservatives because it was perceived as pushing the country away from its Islamic identity.

Ennahda, which represents one of the most evident cases of an Islamist party undergoing a process of moderation as a result of external pressures and social changes, and Ansar al-Shari'a, which underwent a failed process of institutionalization between 2011 and 2013 before being neutralized in 2013, are both telling examples. Thus, while social and economic problems played an important role in mobilization, other important factors, primarily defense of the community defined in either religious terms (*Umma*) or Arab nationalist terms (Pan-Arabism), also played key roles. In Tunisia, the post-2011 Arab Spring revolutionary situation weakened the state. It paved the way for a major upsurge of VE, with Tunisia the country from which the largest number of FTFs originated while AQIM and IS were deployed in the country itself. Another essential obstacle in the propagation of VE in Tunisia has been the role of CSOs as agents of resilience. The crackdown on violent extremists who gravitated to jihadi Salafi groups and the reorder

of mosque activities under the frame of state authority made clear the need to address the issue of VE.

Kosovo

According to the Kosovo Police Department, at least 356 Kosovars have traveled to Syria and Iraq (256 male adults, 51 females, and 49 children), making Kosovo the country with the highest per capita share of FTFs in Syria (Gazeta Express 2020). Still, several researchers estimate that the actual number of Kosovar FTFs in Syria and Iraq may have been as many as 1,000 (Krasniqi 2020, 157). Most of these fighters were males between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five; more than a third of the FTFs originated from five municipalities in Kosovo: Hani i Elezit, Kaçanik, Mitrovica, Gjilan, and Viti, where 14 percent of the country's population lives (Demjaha and Peci 2016). Indicative of the transnational character of jihadism, 30 percent of the people who went to Syria and Iraq were from the diaspora.

After 2014, an estimated 120 Kosovars returned (Krasniqi 2020, 157), and Kosovo stepped up its CVE activities, with investigations and arrests of persons suspected of being involved in recruitment activities for terrorist organizations such as ISIS and the al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front. Some individuals were arrested on suspicion of planning terrorist acts or for being part of terrorist organizations. Several terrorist attacks had been planned and attempted, both inside Kosovo and abroad, but were thwarted by police and intelligence agencies (Govori, 2016).

A second wave of repatriations followed in April 2019, when Kosovo brought home from Syria another 110 of its citizens, including 74 children, 32 women, and 4 men. The total number of adult returnees has reportedly reached about 250 (Ahmeti, Dahsyla, and Murtezaj 2021; Gazeta Express 2020; Krasniqi 2020).

Kosovo has been praised for its ability to deradicalize and reintegrate returnees (Deutsche Welle 2019). However, if, for the time being, the immediate threat from FTFs and returnees has been eliminated, there is still a latent threat from Islamist fundamentalism (Kursani 2018b). Two future threats have been highlighted: imprisoned FTFs and religious preachers who are serving sentences on terrorism charges, and future returnees from Syria and Iraq (Kursani 2018b).

In an analysis of FTFs in Kosovo, about 64 percent came from average or above-average economic circumstances, and only about 36 percent lived in poor conditions (Shtuni 2016, 7). It is interesting that, of the five municipalities exporting the most foreign fighters, none is ranked among the regions with the lowest scores in Kosovo on the 2014 Human Development Index (HDI) (Lücke 2014). Extreme poverty and low levels of education in Kosovo are highest in other municipalities, such as Skenderaj,

Kastriot, and Malisheve, from which a smaller number of FTFs originate (Shtuni 2016). Therefore, no correlation can be observed between income or educational level and VE.

Some radicalized citizens of Kosovo were introduced to radical Islam and extremist ideologies in public schools in EU countries. For example, Bujar Behrami, a Kosovar born in Belgium, became radicalized after attending Islamic religious classes taught by a Chechen teacher who later became a well-known extremist imam. Behrami's family moved to Germany to disengage him from extremist network, but he continued spreading propaganda embracing Islamist extremism online and was involved in planning and financing terrorist acts. In 2018, he was arrested in Germany and extradited to Kosovo, where he was sentenced for planning terrorist acts.

In Kosovo, radicalization in schools also remains an issue. An OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (OECD 2018) shows that Kosovar pupils are not educated to read and think critically. In contrast, the Ministry of Education data demonstrate that less than 10 percent of schoolteachers are trained in media literacy or how to cope with extremism among younger generations (Ahmeti, Dahsyla, and Murtezaj 2021). This reveals that Kosovar pupils might be vulnerable to being deceived by the recruitment propaganda of extremist groups.

Jihadi extremists in the Western Balkans are not acting in isolation. They are well connected with those who share their views in the region, the Gulf, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Many individuals who joined militants in Syria and Iraq had previously stayed in Bosnian villages (e.g., Gornja Maoča, Ovše, Bočinja), where strict Salafis live, wherefore these villages have been dubbed "jihadist hotbeds" (Qehaja 2016). It is reported that leaders and individuals from these settlements were well connected with several extremist groups operating in masjids (mosques) in Vienna. The Austrian capital became a center for indoctrination and recruitment of FTFs, as well as for collecting money from the diaspora and funneling Saudi funds to the Western Balkans. Austrian authorities conducted several law enforcement operations, including arrests of preachers and members of these masjids, until many of the groups had been suppressed. Among the most prominent and radical group leaders were individuals from Sandžak, which neighbors Kosovo: Mirsad Omerovic, Adem Demirovic, and Nedzad Balkan. Each was arrested and prosecuted for recruiting, organizing departures of people to Syria, and financing VE and terrorism (Kešmer 2020). They had direct ties with ISIS and Al-Nusra as well as with extremists in Bosnia and Serbia. According to Austrian authorities, Omerovic maintained a direct line of communication with ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Counter Extremism Project n.d.).

In neighboring Albania, VE was fueled by individuals' deepened sense of belonging to the global Islamic Community, which led a great number of

FTFs to join jihadist groups. Narratives of victimization evoked emotional responses and strengthened ties to the perceived oppressed community (Wright-Neville and Smith 2009). They likened the Syrian conflict to the Spanish Civil War, portraying Assad as a modern Franco, to recruit fighters (Dyrmishi et al. 2021). The emotional pull of the *umma* was also exploited, appealing to Muslims' anxieties and aspirations to rebuild the Caliphate (Fernandez 2015).

In Kosovo, local-global connections and transnational dynamics are crucial drivers of radicalization and VE (Demjaha and Peci 2016). Transnational Islamic movements, migration dynamics and diaspora networks, pilgrimage, and cultural and educational links have catalyzed such trends. The local-global connections in Kosovo must be seen through two lenses: transnational cooperation in the diffusion of extremist interpretations of Islam, on the one hand, and the proselytization of more conservative and radical religious interpretations, on the other (Kursani 2018a). A further distinction may be made between international and regional connections regarding their ideological goals. The transnational cooperation in the diffusion of violent extremist interpretation involves nonstate actors—predominantly a handful of Albanian-speaking individuals from North Macedonia (and some from Kosovo), who spent time in the MENA region during the late 1990s and early 2000s and whose ideological motives are driven by the call to jihad in conflicts abroad. Such individuals often explicitly called for the use of violence and participation in foreign conflicts (Kursani 2018a).

The Kosovo Islamic Council (BIK) follows the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam and positions itself as the only Islamic authority in Kosovo. However, several radical religious figures in Kosovo do not accept the legitimacy of the BIK and try to undermine this institution by following radical imams and the Salafi interpretation of Islam adopted by groups such as ISIS. These interpretations, calling for the establishment of an Islamic state based on Islamic law (sharia) and jihad as its appeal, are perceived by local analysts as inherently contradicting Albanian ethnonational identity. According to analysts, this type of transnational loyalty to the global *umma* and conflict with the official BIK disturb the traditional Albanian interreligious harmony based on tolerance of religious customs (Peci and Demjaha 2021b).

Demographic data show that Kosovan recruits originate predominantly from the country's two most populous municipalities: Pristina (35 persons) and Prizren (26 persons) (Peci and Demjaha 2021a). However, the rate of mobilization per capita is highest in the five municipalities mentioned earlier: Hani i Elezit, Kaçanik, Mitrovica, Gjilan, and Viti, which together account for only 14 percent of the country's total population (Shtuni 2016). Our research indicates that the high mobilization rates result from targeted

and effective radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization efforts by extremist networks that have operated in that particular geographic space across borders for more than a decade.[17] After 2014, ISIS changed its strategy from concentrating attacks in a single area to instead organizing attacks in countries where adherents to its ideology are located.

With increased communication via the internet and a changed ISIS strategy, there is a high risk of attacks in Kosovo and the region. In 2021, five people, radicalized primarily online, were arrested for planning attacks in Kosovo (Sejdiu 2021). What is it that stops decisive moments such as the appeal of ISIS from erupting into violence in such enabling environments as Kosovo? And what makes local communities resilient? Cragin (2014, 337) reasonably suggests that it is impossible to understand pathways to radicalization or to design policies to preempt them without a complementary knowledge of why individuals resist the influence of VE.

Social Resilience

Tunisia

Maybe the most important demonstration of how resilient Tunisia—and especially Tunisian youth and society—has proven to be vis-à-vis the call of VE is the aforementioned battle that took place in December 2016 in Ben Guerdane. A medium-sized city at the frontier between Tunisia and Libya, Ben Guerdane is part of the Medenine governorate and has historically suffered from the lack of coordinated state actions there, such as economic investment and delivery of basic services. Marginalization, especially since the fall of Ben Ali, was widely felt by inhabitants in the city. Since then, the city saw a rise in the popularity of Ennahda, and the border increasingly became an income-generation source. The end of the Ghaddafi regime and the rise of civil war in the neighboring country unleashed violent power competition between new and old actors in the smuggling business. During the 1990s and 2000s, jobs generated by the "border economy" progressively overshadowed private or public employment. This area of Tunisia also presents a very conservative social outlook compared to that in more advantaged areas of the North (i.e., Tunis, Sfax, Sousse). The fear of spillover of violence from Libya fueled people's feelings of insecurity, most notably in connection to the restrictions on cross-border activities imposed by Tunis.

Increasingly, the public space in Ben Guerdane has become dominated by protest movements calling for a state-supported development project and the immediate reopening of the border for business. Since 2014, strikes, roadblocks, sit-ins, and protests, particularly involving youth in precarious employment situations and unemployed persons, have shaped collective

action in the city. But the cross-border economy also allowed the circulation of networks linked to VE. Violent jihadi Salafis have started to play more critical roles in cross-border smuggling, especially after the closure of the frontier. Such networks and their ramifications among local families in Ben Guerdane proved crucial in staging the 2016 attack by the Islamic State from neighboring Zuara in Libya.

Unlike the attacks at the Bardo Museum or in Sousse, this was a violent extremist attack aimed at overthrowing authorities in the city and capturing the city. The assailants from Libya and their local allies in Ben Guerdane simultaneously attacked the army barracks, the headquarters of the National Guard, and the city's main police station. Although there were casualties among the police and Customs officials, the anti-terrorist unit mobilized and eventually managed to repulse the attack.

The attack was an attempt by violent extremists to use their rage against authorities, politicians, and the state to start a mass revolt in the city. However, Ben Guerdane's inhabitants showed outstanding resilience by rallying with the state security forces upon their deployment. They resisted or even sabotaged the propaganda of the Islamic State that asked Ben Guerdane's people to join the revolt, ignored messages on loudspeakers, and even refused to be intimidated. Additionally, they provided intelligence and information so the army could find violent extremists.

Nonoccurrence of VE in Tunisia was also seen in the areas of Sfax and Sousse. These cities have historically benefited from larger state investments and might qualify as the wealthiest regions in Tunisia, which makes them much less of an enabling environment. Yet, the sprawling city of Tunis can be seen as an environment that fosters VE because of its large size, geographical features, and significant inequality. In more remote areas such as Ben Guerdane, the lack of government presence, relative underdevelopment, and active cross-border trade can all contribute to the growth of VE.

Still, the foiled attack on Ben Guerdane at the Tunisia–Libya border proves to be an important case of nonoccurrence. Despite the deep infiltration of VE networks in the city, not to mention the city's booming smuggling economy, most of the population not only avoided joining VE networks while these were staging an armed attack but also actively resisted them. Families and social networks proved to be veritable sources of resistance to VE, although vulnerable to be exploited or manipulated by VE actors, as the Ben Guerdane case demonstrates. Despite the relative estrangement from the central government, local authorities, or even state symbols and the discontent in peripheral areas of the country, protests and contestation demonstrate citizens' deep attachment to the Tunisian state. They are meant to be instruments to engage institutions in peaceful manners. On the other hand, attempts to overthrow the state and feed a violent

extremist attack against state representatives are met with ambiguity or are vastly rejected. In particular, the Ben Guerdane case demonstrates how everyday forms of resistance and small-scale subversion can coexist with regime opposition and regime contestation, showing the strength of civic values and the resilience of Ben Guerdane's inhabitants to extremist discourses (Simoncini 2021).

Tunisia shows that amid all the confusion and chaos of an unfulfilled transition, most people remain deeply attached to their state if they can engage meaningfully with it through legitimate institutions. If this is the case, attempts to overthrow the state using violence based on an extremist ideology will be resisted by most of the population.

Kosovo

Some explanations for Kosovo`s social resilience focus on the diversity of the religious sphere (Kurzman 2011); logistical and financial barriers to violence; strong ideas against violence; family influence; and the efficiency argument related to cost-benefit (Fahmi 2017). Our study indicates that two types of factors have strengthened communities' resilience to VE: (1) resilience factors during the radicalization wave (2011–2014), and (2) resilience factors after the radicalization wave (from 2015 onward). The first category includes religious counternarratives, social cohesion, and civic values as the main factors that helped communities resist radicalization during the peak propaganda wave. The second category involves the hard approach by state institutions and the soft response by international donors and CSOs. Seeking to understand the nonoccurrence of violence and resilience to violence and extremism in the Middle East in the example of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Georges Fahmi (2020, 7) outlined four main factors: legitimacy, social trust, institutional rules, and external pressure. In the Balkans, our fieldwork-based research foregrounded three major factors of resilience and nonoccurrence of violence: (1) local communities exhibiting social cohesion and civic values; (2) the role of imams and individuals of authority; and (3) preventive measures (Evstatiev and Mishkova 2022, 3–4).

Besides the local predominantly Hanafi Muslim traditions, half a century of communist rule in Eastern Europe instilled a sense of secularism in Balkan Muslim communities that gave rise to a local Muslim culture palpably different in its interpretations and practices from its more conservative counterparts in the Arabian Peninsula and elsewhere in the MENA. Hence, many refer to Muslims in the Balkans as "progressive Muslims" or "cultural Muslims" (Akyol 2019). These specific features of mainstream Muslim communal life in the Balkans draw on inherited prevailing traditions of religious and interethnic tolerance.

An important factor of resilience on the community level in Kosovo is the inherited religious tolerance, which also embraces interethnic communication. In the aftermath of the Kosovo War, people went out in the streets requesting a return to their homes in the north, which then escalated into protests.[18] Gradually, tensions calmed in an environment where imams and priests demonstrated respect for each other using the communal religious celebrations to build religious harmony (Koha.net 2021). The Islamic Community, the leading religious institution of Muslims, played an awareness-raising and preventive role.[19] It sends out imams to provide lectures in state correction institutions that contributes to the rehabilitation and resocialization of convicts and helps prevent the radicalization of other prisoners (Indeksonline.net 2018).

Communities with stronger social cohesion are less conducive to the occurrence of violence because social connections within and between communities help mitigate the risk factors associated with VE (Ellis and Abdi 2017). Mainstream Muslim institutions can play a crucial role in Kosovo (Evstatiev and Mishkova 2022, 8). Imams and other individuals of authority also play important roles in the nonoccurrence of VE and in strengthening resilience. As explained by a Muslim official in the area of Maliq in neighboring Albania, radicals exploit certain sensitive topics, and through these forms of "scouting," they manage to polarize people.[20] In Kosovo, major radicalization drivers were neutralized in areas such as Podujeva and Prizren, because imams refused to accept groups that promoted such ideas. Muslim officials from the Islamic Community in North Macedonia also stressed the efforts their institution exerted in combating religious radicalism. Although this institution did not predefine the texts to be read at sermons in the mosques, it closely monitored sermon content, and the religious leaders criticized the radical ethos of "those who had returned from studies in the Middle East and with whom one cannot talk in a normal way."[21]

After 2014, the hard measures have limited violent extremist activity to propaganda because violent extremists are now more easily spotted and risk facing criminal proceedings for recruitment activities. This has influenced their modus operandi by making it harder for them to organize in groups. In Kosovo, the hard approaches to P/CVE receive and often depend on strong support from the US government. Foreign actors, including the EU, mainly support the soft measures. Nonstate actors, such as international NGOs and CSOs, have engaged in P/CVE by setting up referral mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns, and grassroots projects to build stronger community resilience. Moreover, training programs are still in great demand in Kosovo. Our study brings to the fore the importance of the interrelations between the three factors: hard and soft preventive measures combined with the decisive role of the local community and individuals of authority in bolstering resilience (Evstatiev and Mishkova 2022, 10).

Conclusion

During our observation period, the two cases navigated crucially different trajectories: Kosovo consolidated as and has remained a democracy, while at the same time, Tunisia, heralded as the Arab Spring's success story, has regressed on its democratic journey into autocracy through a gradual coup. This marked a critical shift away from a contended power landscape in Tunisia to one where the democratic mechanisms and the option of contesting power are markedly constrained, with implications for voice and exit dynamics. Along the divergent paths of Kosovo's democratic consolidation and Tunisia's backsliding, the focus shifts to understanding the multifaceted nature of community resilience and the localized response to VE through examination of these contrasting political environments.

Resilience is systemic in that it does not depend on one single factor but rather on the interconnection of factors and the role actors play in shaping them. Overall, local resilience to VE in Kosovo and the Western Balkans is determined by the community's social cohesion and civic values; the efficiency of the preventive measures and interventions undertaken by state institutions, religious authorities, and community actors; and the community's attitude toward these measures. As the cases of Tunisia and Kosovo indicate, nonoccurrence and resilience are highly context-specific. Concentrating the preventive efforts in areas where there has been an occurrence of violence threatens to oversaturate certain communities while it ignores the needs of communities that are commonly acknowledged as resilient.

Salafism, which underlies the recent jihadi appeal, is, despite its global call, intimately context-specific and tied to drivers present in each enabling environment. It has different appeal in the Muslim-majority societies of the Middle East, where Islamic identity is already established and concerns mainly theology, and in Europe, where it is more closely tied with identity (Hegghammer 2021, 26). First, jihadi Salafism spread most widely in places where the quest for a revived Islamic identity blended with severe social disruptions, such as the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars. Second, despite its global appeal and transnational channels, Salafism in the Balkans has become increasingly "localized" as radicalized individuals are reaccommodated into local "traditional Islam" and its official institutional representation. Thus, local Muslims who had previously "globalized" through Salafism and its jihadi branch undergo a process of "relocalization" by finding a modus vivendi with the "traditional" Hanafi school of Sunni Islam—a tendency already noticed in Tunisia and the Middle East (Drevon and Haenni 2021, 27).

This (re)localization is related to hybridizing Islam, which also affects Islamism. As a result of external (securitization) and internal (the

local Muslim communities and its institutions) pressures, Salafis in the Balkans, including Bulgaria, have adopted a strategy of merging into the locally embedded Hanafi tradition. Sociologically, Salafis are becoming less exclusive, more flexible, and adaptable to the national context. Doctrinally, the outcome is a hybrid combination of a Salafi creed and Hanafi practices—a new phenomenon of "Salafi-Hanafism" (Evstatiev 2023). Hybridized Islamism leaves less room for political Islam and shifts the stress from activism to a more inclusivist approach to religion, society, and communal life.

The reshuffling resembles what some recent studies designate as "Salafi-Malikism" in Tunisia, where the adaptation to the local Maliki context allows Salafis to preserve their teaching and preaching activities within the securitization wave (Merone, Blanc, and Sigillò 2021). Others observe hybridized forms of Islamism and nationalism by which Salafis and movements influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood adopt "Islami-nationalist stances" (Gade and Palani 2022, 222). In the Balkans, including Kosovo, these developments assume a "Hanafization" of Salafism (Kursani 2018c). The paradox in this competition for autochthony amid social and existential uncertainty (Bøås and Dunn 2013a, 20), from which Salafism provides a way out, is that Salafism seeks to doctrinally assimilate Hanafism, getting, in the same time, locally legitimized through an adaptive hybridization with Hanafi discourses and practices. This major shift in Islamist pathways signals a new stage of hybridization and adaptability.

Notes

1. See Inkyfada's map of attacks: https://inkyfada.com/fr/2014/06/15/carte-terrorisme/.

2. Interview with an official from the Anti-Terrorism Unit in Kosovo, Pristina, 2021.

3. From Arabic *jama'a* (assembly)—either the entire community of believers or a certain community or local assembly around a religious leader or a mosque. *Para-jammaats* are groups of Salafi Muslims proliferated in the Western Balkans following the Bosnian War (1992–1995).

4. The interviewed (2021) Nexhmedin Spahiu, a university professor from Mitrovica, and Nerimane Ferizin, a civil society activist in Mitrovica, hold that the impossibility for Albanians to return to their homes in the northern part of the city is the main reason for the recurrent protests.

5. Interview with EU official, October 26, 2020; interview with EU official, November 2, 2020.

6. Interview with EU official, November 2, 2020.

7. Interview with EU official, October 26, 2020.

8. Interviews with relatives of and people involved in the wars in Syria and Iraq, November 3–9, 2021.

9. Interview with a citizen in Polac, November 3, 2021.

10. Interviews with citizens and relatives in Bukovik, Capar, Polac, as well as Shipol in Mitrovica, November 5–9, 2021.

11. Bergen et al. (2008, 56).

12. Derived from the ideas of the radical Jordanian preacher Muhammed al-Maqdisi.

13. PREVEX interview of the head of an NGO consultant and specialist in radicalism in Tunisia, October 2021.

14. See, for example, Wolf (2013) about the factors leading to this rally organized by AST in May 2012 led by Abu Iyadh.

15. PREVEX interview with an expert on those issues, November 2021.

16. PREVEX interview with Hatem Ben Chakroun, researcher at the Observatoire Tunisian de la Transition Democratique, Tunis, Tunisia, October 2021.

17. Interview with Luan Keka, Head of the Anti-Terror Unit of Kosovo Police, November 2, 2021.

18. Interview with Professor Nexhmedin Spahiu, Mitrovica, November 2021.

19. Islamic Community of Kosovo. See https://bislame.net/intvstvoa/.

20. Interview with Muslim official in Maliq, August 31, 2021.

21. Interview with local representatives of the Islamic Religious Community, Tetovo, August 25, 2021.