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# How Corruption Affects Vulnerability to Radicalization into Violent Extremism:

*Examining the Case of Kosovo's Foreign Fighters*

—  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis seeks to examine how corruption affects the vulnerability to radicalization into violent extremism by examining the process of radicalization, what makes individuals vulnerable to this process, and how these vulnerabilities are affected by corruption. The assumptions made are further examined through the case of Kosovo. Findings made in this thesis suggest that while corruption is not the main driver for radicalization into violent extremism, it has an impact on several socio-economic factors that can create an environment in which people become more vulnerable to violent extremist narratives and the group dynamics of radical and violent extremist groups. These socio-economic factors, called “vulnerability factors” in this thesis, include a lack of good quality education, a lack of employment and economic opportunities and lack of social trust. Using theory and the case of Kosovo, this thesis further argues that corruption can affect these vulnerability factors in a number of ways, such as syphoning funds that were meant for education into private investments, and by affecting the labour market through widespread nepotism and lack of foreign investments. Corruption can also cause isolation and polarization in a society by weakening the trust in state institutions, leading to frustrated expectations and a feeling of hopelessness which are used by radical and violent extremist groups that utilizes grievances created or facilitated by these vulnerability factors in their recruitment. The challenge of violent extremism and radicalization can therefore be seen as a symptom of wrong or lacking development, further exacerbated by high levels of corruption. Because of these consequences, this thesis argues that corruption needs to be seen as a security issue and that incorporation of anti-corruption efforts should be included in strategies that relate to countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism, and in the academic discourse on the topic.

**Key words:** Corruption, Violent Extremism, Radicalization, Kosovo, Foreign Fighters, Vulnerability

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## **List of Abbreviations:**

ASK Kosovo Statistical Agency

CMS Corruption Monitoring System

ÇOHU! Organization for Democracy, Anti-Corruption and Dignity

CPI Corruption Perception Index

CVE Countering Violent Extremism

EFTA European Free Trade Association

EU European Union

FDI Foreign Direct Investment

GLPS Group for Legal and Political Studies

HDI Human Development Index

ICJ International Court of Justice

ISIS Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

KCSS Kosovo Center for Security Studies

KDI Kosovo Democratic Institute

KIPRED Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development

KLA Kosovo Liberation Army

LASH League of Albanian Educators

LDK Democratic League of Kosovo

MEST Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

NSD Norwegian Centre for Research Data

OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

RTK Radio Television of Kosovo

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNMIK United Nations Mission in Kosovo

UNODC United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime

USAID United States Agency for International Development

US United States



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 *Introduction and Research Focus*

Since 2011, the conflict in Syria and Iraq, the surge in foreign fighters joining violent extremist groups, and terror attacks in Europe, have shown that the threat of radicalization and violent extremism continues to pose a security risk. It is important to note that corruption seems to be an important common part of the narratives used in mobilization and recruitment of radical and violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram (Anaedozie, 2015; Hendrix, 2016, p. 6; Onuoha, 2014). However, apart from research on its use in the narratives of violent extremist groups for recruitment and mobilization purposes, there have been few inquiries and little research done on how corruption affects people's vulnerability to the process of radicalization into violent extremism especially in post-conflict societies or transitional democracies. This thesis seeks to fill this research gap. Kosovo is a country that is plagued by corruption and has one of the highest rate per capita in Europe of foreign fighters travelling from Kosovo to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. This thesis seeks to examine what impact corruption has on the vulnerability towards radicalization and violent extremism by using the case of Kosovo and focusing on three socio-economic challenges, or what is defined as vulnerability factors in this thesis, that lead individuals to become vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism: education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust. In order to do this, the thesis will formulate and answer three main research questions, each with a sub-question applying it to the case-study of Kosovo:

Research question 1: *How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism?*

Sub-question 1: *How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism in the case of Kosovo?*

Research question 2: *What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process?*

Sub-question 2: *What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process in Kosovo?*

Research question 3: *How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors?*

Sub-question 3: *How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors in Kosovo?*

This thesis will not generalize the topic, but rather highlight potential connections and create a basis for further research and analysis. Furthermore, the research done in this Master's project does not single out corruption as an independent factor leading to radicalization and violent extremism, separate from the vast amount of direct, indirect and other contextual factors. Acknowledging the complex and subjective motivations and reasons for individual radicalization and violent extremist behavior, this thesis rather seeks to explore the contextual environment that corruption creates and in which the processes of radicalization into violent extremism occurs. It seeks to examine how widespread corrupt behavior on a grand level, negatively impacts the quality of education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust, and thus affects people's vulnerability towards radical narratives and the group dynamics of radicalized groups.

## *1.2 Context, motivations and added value*

### *1.2.1 The Context of Kosovo - From Conflict to Declaration of Independence*

In order to understand the situation, it is important to know the context and recent history of Kosovo. The first part of this sub-chapter will therefore briefly present the history of modern Kosovo. Kosovo is situated in the Western Balkans and was, alongside a majority of the other territories within the former Yugoslavia, affected or directly involved in the violent breakup of the republic that took place throughout the 1990s (Wachtel & Bennett, 2012). The tensions between ethnic Kosovo Albanians and ethnic Serbs eventually would lead to the conflict in Kosovo in 1998-1999. This problem has been seen by many as a process of status reversal that has taken place between the two ethnicities. Whenever the Serbs administered Kosovo, as they did during the period from the end of World War two until the end of the 1998-1999 war, Kosovo Albanians were discriminated against in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and were forced or intimidated into leaving. When Albanians were in a position of dominance, usually with the assistance of foreign troops such as the Ottomans, Austro-Hungarians or NATO, the Serbs suffered discrimination and often had to flee Kosovo (Pavlović, 2012, p. 49; Wachtel & Bennett, 2012). This process of power- and status reversal was accompanied by the revival of painful and unpleasant historical memories from both sides, as well as actual acts of persecution that reinforced these memories further, contributing to inter-ethnic tension and conflict (Pavlović, 2012, pp. 49-50).

These tensions would be even greater in Kosovo during the rule of Serbian President Slobodan Milošević (1989-1999). This period was marked by a high level of political conflict that eventually led to open rebellion followed by international intervention. Milošević pursued a

nationalistic policy of homogenization and ethnic mobilization throughout Yugoslavia, and the subjugation of Kosovo was an important goal to ensure Serbian domination in the Yugoslavian republic. Throughout this period Milošević and his nationalist supporters and sympathizers invoked inter-ethnic distrust through the use of nationalistic narratives and othering. This rhetoric, along with discrimination against ethnic Albanians served to heighten the tensions and perceived conflict from both parties (Janjić, Lalaj, & Pula, 2012). Albanian leaders in Kosovo responded to this by creating “parallel state” institutions and eventually declaring independence. Both sides claimed justification for their political agenda in historical terms, with the nationalist Serbs claiming to preserve Kosovo as the cradle of statehood of Serbia, while the nationalist Albanians endeavoured to reverse the division of Albanian lands by the Great Powers in 1913 (Janjić et al., 2012, pp. 275-276).

The conflict in Kosovo quickly escalated from the cold war between the Milošević regime in Belgrade and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) who promoted Albanian autonomy in Kosovo. Hostilities broke out in 1998 between the combined forces of the Yugoslav Army, the Serbian Interior Ministry special police and an assortment of paramilitary units on one side, against the joint umbrella for militant action for Albanian independence in Kosovo, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), on the other (Gow, 2012, pp. 305-306). Attacks on police and security forces by the KLA and an intense counterinsurgency campaign by Serbia, resulted in hundreds of thousands of people being forced from their homes, and numerous accounts of human rights violations. The hostilities ended in 1999, following the failed mediation attempts by international actors between the two parties in the “Rambouillet accord”, and the ensuing three-month long NATO military operation against Serbian targets in order to cease hostilities and prevent ethnic cleansing and atrocities, which forced the Serbs to agree to withdraw their military and police forces from Kosovo (CIA, 2018b; Gow, 2012).

Following the war, the UN placed Kosovo under a transitional administration, the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), awaiting the final determination of the status of Kosovo. UN led negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina began in 2006-2007 without agreement, although a report by the UN was produced, endorsing independence. On February 17, 2008 the Assembly of Kosovo declared Kosovo as independent, and over 110 countries have recognized its independence. However, Serbia still rejects Kosovo’s independence, although it was deemed legal by the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) advisory opinion. Serbia and Kosovo reached an agreement to normalize their relations in 2013 through talks facilitated by the EU which are still being implemented. The international community ended the supervised

independence period in 2012 and elections were held on both municipal and state level in 2013 and 2014. However, the relationship between Belgrade and Pristina continues to be strained (CIA, 2018b).

Despite declaring independence in 2008, Kosovo is still plagued by a number of challenges related to high rates of unemployment, high levels of corruption, as well as radicalization and violent extremism and the unresolved issue of international recognition and official status of the country. Having established a brief overview of the recent history of Kosovo, the next part of this chapter will elaborate on the motivations for choosing Kosovo as a case, as well as the added value of researching how corruption affect vulnerability to radicalization into violent extremism.

### *1.2.2 Motivations and Added Value*

As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, Kosovo was selected as a case because of its high rate of foreign fighters per capita, its socio-economic factors and the prevalence of corruption (Knudsen, 2017, p. 20) which makes the country ideal for examining the theory and assumptions made in this thesis. According to data from early 2017, 19 Kosovar men were known to have travelled to Syria and Iraq in 2012. A sharp increase of the flow of Kosovars into the conflict was observed in 2013 with 140 individuals, while the number was decreasing in 2014 with 114 and even fewer in 2015, with 60 registered individuals travelling to Syria and Iraq (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 20). In a 2015 article by scholar on radicalization and violent extremism, Adrian Shtuni, states that relative to its population of 1.8 million, Kosovo is the largest source of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, with over 16 fighters per 100.000 nationals. He also states that the recruitment rate of Kosovo is more than eight times higher than France, Europe's largest overall source of violent extremists in Syria and Iraq, and that the per capita recruitment rate also exceeds that of Libya with around 60 percent (Shtuni, 2015b).

Since 2014, the high proportion of Kosovar foreign fighters, and the challenges related to radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo have been covered extensively by English-speaking print and online media. A lot of media attention was also given to Kosovo after an article on the issue titled: "How Kosovo was turned into fertile ground for ISIS", was published in The New York Times in May 2016 (Gall, 2016). The article was later criticized for overstating the scale of the problem and the overall international reporting has been criticized for being guided by skewed assumptions and superficial understandings (Knudsen, 2017, p. 4). However, although it is important not to overstate the scale of the problem, and to acknowledge

the complexities of the challenge and contextualize the numbers and proportions, the traits found in Kosovo makes it an ideal case to study the topic of corruption and its impact on vulnerability on radicalization and violent extremism.

To prevent radicalization and violent extremism, the government of Kosovo in mid-April 2015 introduced a law that prohibits participation in foreign wars as part of foreign armies, police, paramilitary or parapolice groups, organized groups or individually, and person found guilty of these crimes can face imprisonment for up to fifteen years. Additionally, Kosovo institutions drafted and approved “The Kosovo Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020” (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 21). The national strategy and action plan is a thorough plan that incorporates a variety of approaches to prevent and counter radicalization and violent extremism and reintegrate foreign fighters (*Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015). However, although the strategy acknowledges that corruption is present and can impact institutional trust, the impact corruption has on the quality of education, economic opportunities and the vulnerability towards radicalization is not mentioned (*Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015). This thesis seeks to highlights the deeper effects of corruption on the abovementioned socio-economic issues, thereby shifting more attention towards the security implications of corruption and providing a basis on which the impact of corruption on the vulnerability towards radicalization can be examined further. This thesis presents recommendations that can be used as a foundation for further research on the topic and to shape policy that can prevent radicalization and violent extremism by raising awareness of how corruption shapes the environment in which radicalization into violent extremism takes place.

### 1.3 Thesis Overview

The thesis will in chapter two give an overview of the methodology used and critically discuss the challenges faced in the process of research and data collection for this thesis as well as the scope and limitations. The following three chapters are structured in such a way that each of them answers one of the research questions presented earlier. Each of these chapters are divided into two parts, one theoretical part where the relevant theories are presented and critically discussed, and a case-study part where the theories and assumptions drawn from them are applied to the case of Kosovo. Each chapter will then conclude by presenting the findings made. The first of these chapters, chapter three, seeks to answer the first research question: “*How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism?*”. The theoretical part of

the chapter will present and critically discuss the theories and concepts related to radicalization and violent extremism, distilling them into two main elements or drivers: *motivational factors* and *group dynamics*. This part of the chapter will also look at the role of *ideology*, which provide both Motivational Factors and Group Dynamics. The case-study part of this chapter will then use this framework to analyze the main drivers for radicalization into violent extremism in Kosovo. Chapter four seeks to answer the second research question: “*What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process?*”. The theoretical part of this chapter presents another element that affects the environment in which the other two main elements in the radicalization process, are present: Socio-economic challenges and grievances, in this thesis are described as *Vulnerability Factors* because they increase vulnerability towards pull factors such as radical and violent extremist narratives and Group Dynamics. This thesis focuses on three vital vulnerability factors: lack of quality education, unemployment and lack of economic opportunities, and lack of social trust. The case-study part of this chapter applies the concept of vulnerability factors to Kosovo to examine how a lack of quality education, unemployment and lack of economic opportunities, and lack of social trust increase the vulnerability to radicalization into violent extremism in Kosovo. Chapter six of this thesis will then answer the third and final research question: “*How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors?*”. The theory part of this chapter will present and critically discuss the concept of corruption, and present theory on how it affects the three vulnerability factors as well as how it can contribute to conflict and violent extremism. The case-study part of this chapter will then present and discuss how corruption affects the three vulnerability factors in Kosovo, and then link each vulnerability factor back to how they lead to increased vulnerability towards radicalization into violent extremism. The sixth chapter will critically discuss the findings and its limitations, before presenting some recommendations for further research and policy implementation. The seventh chapter will then sum up and conclude.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Having established an overview of the topic, the motivations for this research project and the research questions it seeks to answer, this thesis will now reflect on the choice of using qualitative methods as well as the challenges of using abstract concepts in research and how to deal with them through the process of triangulation. This chapter will then focus on the data collection process and fieldwork, ethical considerations and the scope and limitations of this research.

### *2.1 Utilizing Qualitative Methods in Research*

Qualitative approaches to research differ from the, often numerical focus of quantitative methods. The use of sources such as interviews, texts, and different forms of media are more prevalent in qualitative research in order to find what often is described as “deep” or “rich” forms of data. In other words, by utilizing such data, qualitative approaches to research tries to establish what can be described as deeper and more subjective interpretations of events, rather than trying to find objective truths that can be generalized, as is the case of quantitative studies (Bryman, 2012, p. 380; Gray, 2009, pp. 202-203; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014, p. 3). Because of the abovementioned traits, qualitative methods can explore the subjective understandings and interpretations of a concept, and potentially give the researcher a deeper understanding of the social reality in which the concept is situated, thereby providing valuable context and understanding. However, even though qualitative approaches have several positive traits, qualitative research has also received criticism. This criticism often revolves around the claims that the research is too subjective, that it is difficult to replicate the findings, and that it is problematic to generalize the findings. Critics also argue that much of qualitative research relies on the researchers own views on what is significant and what is not, as well as the, often close, relationship or interaction between the researcher and the informant which can lead to bias and compromise the findings in the research (Bryman, 2012, p. 398). However, even though qualitative research has to deal with the issue of subjectivity and the resulting problems with generalization, replicability and validity of findings, it also provides useful data that add depth and richness to the research in ways quantitative research cannot (Gray, 2009, pp. 200-203). This thesis utilizes qualitative methods through interviews with informants and the interviews found in the secondary sources such as in reports and academic literature on the topics researched to enrich the numerical data, adding depth and complexity to a multifaceted topic.

## *2.2 Selection of Secondary Sources*

Secondary sources, especially literature reviews and an understanding of the main contributions to the discourse of the topics being researched is essential in all research projects (Meth & Williams, 2006). In this research project, great care was taken to get an overview of the literature, and to acknowledge the limitations and critiques of the literature and data used. Because of the complexities of the topic of radicalization, this thesis chose to use a variety of articles and a broad range of theories in order to compare them and find commonalities. This made the process of distilling the main theories on the radicalization process down to the two main elements mentioned in the theory part of chapter three, easier. Reports and datasets from a range of organizations both international such as UNDP and Transparency International, as well as local organizations and institutions, such as the Kosovo Police, KCSS and Riinvest Institute, helped to provide a sturdy theoretical and empirical basis on which the arguments of this thesis could be presented. The primary data gathered throughout the fieldwork of this research project further added subjective interpretations and richness to the arguments and data, as mentioned above. However, as will be examined in the next part of this chapter, the abstract concept of corruption provided challenges which had to be overcome.

## *2.3 Using Abstract Concepts in Research*

When conducting research there are two common elements that often need to be in place. Firstly, the concept or phenomena studied requires a clear definition, and secondly, the researcher needs to attain certain attributes to the concept or phenomena that allows it to be measured. The process of attaining attributes to a concept or phenomena to make it measurable is called “operationalization” (“Operationalization,” 2012). When studying social phenomena, researchers often deal with abstract concepts, and this can provide a challenge for the researcher. There are two main challenges that needs to be addressed when a researcher seeks to generalize findings or explanations based on abstract, subjective concepts: The lack of a precise unified definition, and the difficulties of measuring the concept and operationalizing it (Lancaster & Montinola, 1997, p. 185).

Corruption can be considered a good example of a concept that is abstract and subjective, as the definitions and local ideas and understandings of what constitutes corruption are not always the same, and what constitutes corrupt behavior by some are not considered corruption by others. This can be expressed through cultural relativism, meaning that there are different understandings of a phenomena or concept based on the cultural context of the individual or group. This can be exemplified by a study conducted by scholar David Jackson on corrupt



practices and norms in Kosovo municipalities, that show how acts that help one's kinship and family relations are accepted and even encouraged and seen as pragmatic in that context, while the same acts would be considered unacceptable and corrupt in other cultural contexts (Azfar et al., 2001, pp. 44-45; Jackson, 2018; Nichols, Siedel, & Kasdin, 2004; Pillay & Dorasamy, 2010; Spiro, 1986, pp. 259-263). This will be dealt with in more detail in the first part of chapter five.

The abstract and subjective nature of the concept of corruption also affect attempts at operationalizing and measuring it, exemplified by the critique against one of the most widely used measurements of corruption: Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Some critics argue that corruption is too complex to be measured by a single score, and this score will not reflect the local realities and understandings of corruption around the world. Measuring perceptions rather than actual experiences of corruption might also reinforce stereotypes about corruption and provide a misleading picture of actual corruption. The CPI also just measures corruption in the public sector, leaving out the private sector. Because of this, the CPI doesn't necessarily reflect perceptions of corruption as a whole in a country. This also contributes to the perception that corruption is only something the powerful elite in a country do. This can potentially lead to flawed policy solutions that do not take into account the problem of corruption at other levels of society. Scholar Fredrik Galtung argues that the CPI only punishes the takers, not the givers or abettors, letting major bribe-givers and safe-havens for corruption off the hook. He also states that the sample used is biased, leaving out the experiences and perspectives of corruption held by women, poor and disenfranchised people. Galtung also criticizes the definition of corruption used in the CPI to be too narrow and imprecise. Furthermore, Miller note that citizens' images of corruption might also reflect other experiences such as an experience of unfair treatment leading to a sense of injustice and the perhaps unjustified inference that corruption was the cause ("Corruption Perceptions Index 2017: Short Methodology Note," 2017; Galtung, 2006; Hough, 2016; Miller, 2006).

However, despite its many negative traits, some scholars, such as Alexander Hamilton and Craig Hammer (Hamilton & Hammer, 2018) argue that indexes such as CPI are useful tools for measuring corruption. They argue that it is possible for robust subjective indicators of corruption such as those in the CPI to measure underlying levels of corruption based on different objective and subjective measurements of corruption, literature review and correlation analysis. Furthermore, being aware of the limitations of the CPI and combining it with other sources of data on corruption can help to diminish the limitations of the index.

To help counter the limitations and critique of the CPI, this thesis will not only focus on the perception of corruption, as expressed in the Corruption Perception Index and among the interviewees, but also on citizen's direct experiences with corruption practices by including reports and other sources that utilizes the Corruption Monitoring System (CMS). One such major source utilized in this thesis is the 2016 assessment of corruption in Kosovo undertaken by the Riinvest Institute, which use the CMS (Serhati et al., 2016, p. 12). By incorporating local perspectives and actual experience with corruption rather than just perceptions, it is possible to get a more thorough understanding of the level of corruption in Kosovo, than is possible by just using the CPI alone.

### 2.3.1 *Triangulation – Making Abstract Concepts More Tangible?*

The act of combining different methods, different sources of data, different theories or different researchers, are often used in research to increase the validity of findings as well as making the research more resilient towards critique. This process is called “Triangulation” and is often defined as either “across method” triangulation, which describes the use of data collection techniques and approaches from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, or “within method” triangulation, which describes the use of different data collection methods from the same methodology (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Hussein, 2009; Jick, 1979; Mathison, 1988). Triangulation can be beneficial when dealing with abstract concepts, like corruption. The phenomena being researched involves subjective understandings that are difficult to express in numbers alone.

This research project used triangulation through the combination of different theories and perspectives as well as the combination of secondary and primary sources. Combining statistical data on corruption, with structured interviews with experts on the topic from Kosovo and abroad, helped to validate the statistical findings in the secondary sources. It also incorporated subjective understandings and interpretations of corruption, thereby allowing for increased depth and validity in the findings and the scientific process in general. At the same time, the statistical data also helped to validate the qualitative data gathered in the interviews. By triangulating, this research project was able to confirm and validate the findings, and account for alternative explanations and spurious effects of the phenomena being researched (Thurmond, 2004, pp. 254-256).

Having explained the benefits and challenges of qualitative methodology, the challenges of using abstract and subjective concepts, and the benefits of triangulation, this thesis will now

focus on how these elements have been utilized and dealt with in the collection of primary data in this research project.

## *2.4 Fieldwork*

The fieldwork and data collection for this thesis were conducted in the period from August 2017 to the first quarter of 2018. Interviews with experts, researchers and policy workers in the relevant fields of study gave great insights and limited the risk related to security and privacy compared to interviews with radicalized individuals or individuals convicted of corruption. The subjective nature of the topics of research also would have made this difficult. This research project therefore relied on surveys and other quantitative and qualitative data through secondary sources, and used primary data as a way to contextualize and enrich the data and the findings by commenting, critiquing or affirming the points made. As a result, the selection of primary data is limited. The implications of these choices, is something that will be elaborated further later in this chapter.

### *2.4.1 The Use of Interviews in Data Collection*

Primary data used in this thesis consists of statements from four selected individuals, gathered through interviews. The use of interviews in data collection is a good way to gain a wide range of information that the researcher might not be able to find elsewhere. The use of interviews also provides the researcher with first-hand accounts or explanations of information, as well as the attitudes and opinions of informants. This can enrich secondary data or provide unique information on its own. As mentioned previously, this research project chose to gather the observations and perspectives of experts and workers within the fields of corruption, radicalization and violent extremism. Their statements helped confirm or critique different parts of theories and secondary data, as well as the findings made in this thesis (Willis, 2006, p. 146).

However, when conducting interviews, it is also important to be aware of the implications of the selection of interviewees, the interview format, the selection of questions, the location the interview takes place, and the choice of using a recording device, as they can affect the data and can lead to potential bias in the research (Willis, 2006). The selection of interviewees for this research project took place by identifying some of the key stakeholders and organizations that work on the relevant issues in Kosovo. The so-called snowball technique, when one contact or informant suggest other potential informants who then suggest others, was also used to identify potential informants (Willis, 2006, p. 148). The five interviewees were selected from

both international organizations and local NGO's in order to get statements that reflected different aspects, perspectives and opinions on the topic. The interview format used was semi-structured, as it allows for more freedom in the layout of questions depending on the topic and informant being interviewed. It also gives the interviewees the possibility to develop their responses, providing potentially more depth than a fully structured interview. The locations of the interviews were also selected by the interviewees themselves in order to ensure a comfortable environment for the interview (Willis, 2006, pp. 144-145).

The interview questions were similar for each informant, with one set of questions on corruption and its cause and impact in general and in Kosovo, and one set of questions on radicalization and violent extremism, its cause and impact in general, and in Kosovo. Slight variations were made regarding what set of questions was given first depending if the informant's field of expertise was corruption or radicalization and violent extremism. The questions were also made broad enough to allow the informant to come with their own perspectives while staying on topic. An example of this is the question: "According to your experience, what are the motivations and causes for radicalization and violent extremism?". This question allowed the informant to come with their own opinions, perspectives and experiences and it provided an opportunity to follow up on points that are relevant for this thesis.

However, the challenge of dealing with abstract and subjective concepts such as corruption, was also present in the collection of data from the informants, as different informants could have different interpretations and understandings of the concepts used. This research project therefore chose to let the informants themselves define the concepts during the early parts of the interview process to see if there were any commonalities between the different informants' definitions. This made it possible to establish a baseline through which to interpret their statements. An example of this is the informants' definition of corruption. There were several commonalities in the definition of corruption that were observed among the informants, such as giving and/or taking bribes, misuse of one's position and nepotism. These commonalities made it possible to compare their definition with the definitions used in this thesis, and incorporate their experiences, subjective interpretations and understandings of the concept of corruption into the thesis. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the interviews conducted in this research played a secondary role to the literature review and secondary sources used in this thesis, and primarily served to enrich the data and assumptions made, thereby limiting the possibilities for biases that would be more present if the research was based on primary data.

All informants were asked, both orally and in writing, if they would agree to be recorded, and three out of the four informants chose to be recorded on tape. However, the use of a recording device can have implications on how freely the informants express themselves, and informants can be reluctant to provide sensitive information if they feel it could be traced back to them, thereby affecting the data, potentially limiting its usability. On the other hand, the recording device enables the researcher to go back and accurately transcribe the statements, making it easier to get accurate data. It also provides the opportunity to check the meaning of phrases and statements that may have been missed during the interview (Willis, 2006, pp. 149-150). In other words, there is a tradeoff when using a recording device, and for the purpose of this research project, the decision was made that the benefits of using a recorder warranted its use.

#### *2.4.2 Ethical Considerations*

In all research, ethical conduct is highly important. The interviewee has to give informed consent to the researcher, and the informants must be given adequate information about the research and given the opportunity to be anonymous. Other considerations such as the use of a recording device also requires informed consent and can have implications. These considerations are especially important when researching topics that are sensitive or controversial which can have negative consequences for the informant or participant and even have consequences in regard to the safety of the informant or researcher. It is also important to be aware of power relations in the research, both between the researcher and the informant but also internal power-relations between the informant and the community or society in which he or she belongs. Depending on the context, different forms of power structures might affect the data and research process, especially in situations such as interviews. These power-structures can be difficult to ascertain, and might require a longer period of contact with the research environment or field presence. Furthermore, it is also important to be aware of the context of what is ethical, as the definition of what is ethical might be different from the researcher and the informant. Transparency in the whole research process is therefore important, in order to minimize the impact and negative consequences (Bradon, 2006, pp. 26-32; Momsen, 2006, p. 47; Willis, 2006).

In this research project, all five interviewees gave their informed consent to participate. This was done by providing written and oral information about the research project as well as requiring the participants to give written and oral consent to participate and to choose if he or she wanted to be recorded. All informants were anonymized according to the regulations of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) (NSD, 2018). This thesis chose to use a code,

where all informants with an expertise on corruption were coded with the letter A and number one through three, while the expert on radicalization and violent extremism was coded with the letter B and the number one. Great care was also given to provide the participants with information about how their data would be used, their rights, and their opportunity to, at any time, withdraw from the project altogether. All recordings of primary data were deleted after the end of the research project, in accordance with NSD regulations.

### *2.5 Scope and Limitations of Research*

It is important to mention that there are several limitations to this thesis. As a result of the challenges faced during the fieldwork, as well as the immense task of untangling the vast amount of theories and sources in the available academic literature, some compromises and limitations had to be made in order for the research to fit within the parameters of this thesis. The selection of participants was limited by the busy schedules of potential participants as well as a lack of access, especially to governmental and state institutions. However, recent reports and secondary data with access to these sources were also used, and as the interviews and expert statements is meant to enrich the secondary data, this has not had any serious detrimental effects on the research project.

Other limitations include the fact that many of the terms used in this thesis, such as corruption, violent extremism and radicalization have subjective definitions that sometimes slightly differ between the informants and other sources. Furthermore, research and analysis done on radicalization and violent extremism supports the fact that there is no single pathway or explanatory theory that applies to all forms of groups or to all individuals which makes the topic very complex to study (Borum, 2011, p. 15; Kruglanski et al., 2014, pp. 72-73). This makes generalizing the findings of this research project, difficult.

Some of the studies referenced in this thesis also have small sample sizes and a limited diversity of informants. This affects the ability to generalize these studies. Furthermore, the views expressed by returning foreign fighters and the data extracted from these statements is also the result of self-selection, and the opinions may not be an accurate representation of all registered foreign fighters, but rather of those that chose to be interviewed and get their viewpoints and opinions heard. Other opinions that could potentially conflict with the findings are therefore not present in these reports (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 68).

Additionally, as will be examined in the next chapter, the people committed to violent extremism represent a minority of individuals committed enough to perform such actions,

while the majority of individuals holding radical and/or violent extremist ideas might have opinions and viewpoints that are not reflected in the statements and findings of the reports used in this thesis. Even though arguments could be made that the focus of these kind of studies should be on the individuals committed to carrying out violent extremist action, this thesis argues that the issue of radicalization and violent extremist ideas is of no less importance.

It is also important to emphasize that the research done in this Master's project in no way tries to single out corruption as an independent factor, separate from the vast amount of direct, indirect and other contextual factors. Acknowledging the complex and subjective motivations and reasons for individual radicalization and violent extremist behavior, as explored in the previous chapter, this thesis rather seeks to explore the contextual environment that corruption creates and in which the processes of radicalization into violent extremism occurs. It explores how widespread corrupt behavior might impact vulnerability factors such as quality of education, employment and economic opportunities, social trust, isolation and grievances which in turn affect the vulnerability of groups and individuals towards radicalized and violent extremist narratives. As this thesis will elaborate on through the next chapters the findings done in this research project, warrants further study on the impact of corruption on radicalization and violent extremism.

Having established the methodological framework of this research project, as well as the scope and limitations, this thesis will in the coming chapters answer the three research questions, and examine the process of radicalization into violent extremism, what makes individuals vulnerable to radicalization, and how corruption affect this vulnerability.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE RADICALIZATION PROCESS

Radicalization and violent extremism are concepts that are widely used in both the public debate and in academic texts. But what do these concepts really mean, and what are the reasons for-, and the impact of, these phenomena? It is important to understand these abstract concepts and the complexities of the discourse, to be able to delve into a deeper analysis of the subject matter. By using some common theoretical perspectives from the social sciences, this chapter will try to answer the first research question:

*“How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism?”*

Recognizing the large amount of perspectives and theories on these topics, the first part of this chapter will focus on how groups form, and how these groups and individuals within them can become radicalized into violent extremism by examining theories on what motivates people to radicalize, group dynamics and the role of ideology.

#### *3.1 Group Formation, Radicalization and Violent Extremism*

##### *3.1.1 Group Formation*

In recent years within the field of Social Psychology, there has been an increased interest in using this psychological discipline to explain the reasons for and the process of, radicalization into violent extremism. Social Psychology is a sub-discipline of Psychology that studies the relationships, transactions and influences among people, with a special focus on group behavior, intergroup conflict and dynamics (Borum, 2011, p. 20). The concepts of social identity and group formation and the concept of intergroup relations and conflict, are topics of study in Social Psychology that are often used when analyzing radicalization and violent extremism, and it is important to explore these concepts and theories in order to get an understanding of the contributions of social psychology in this discourse.

A relevant theory within Social Psychology is the theory of social identity. Social Identity is the idea that individuals define themselves largely in terms of their membership in social groups and that they tend to seek a positive social identity. The social identity itself is the aspects of an individual's self-image that come from the social categories an individual perceives themselves as belonging to, and the value and emotional significance that is attributed to the membership of said group. An example of a source of group formation and social identity is religion. Social identity theory proposes that members of each social group will differentiate themselves primarily on dimensions that provide them with a favorable view of their own group, and where the in-group is superior to the out-group. Following this,



Intergroup discrimination is often driven by in-group favoritism rather than out-group derogation (Hewstone & Cairns, 2001, p. 321; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This favoritism links to the concept of nepotism that will be covered later in this chapter.

Furthermore, social identity theory proposes the idea that individuals to a large extent define themselves in relation to the social group they identify with. The identity of the individual is strengthened through the membership of the group, which serves to reinforce the connection between the group and the individual. Threats towards the group can therefore be seen as a threat towards the identity of the individual (Miall, 2007, pp. 63-64).

This chapter has so far established an overview of group formation. But how can these groups and the individuals within them become radicalized and Violent Extremist?

### *3.1.2 Radicalization and Violent Extremism – Radicalization of the Individual and Group*

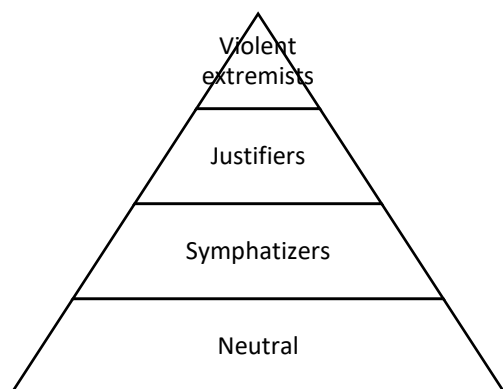
Although Radicalization and Violent Extremism are often seen in both news articles and academic journals, the usage and contextualization of these concepts can sometimes be less than clear (Borum, 2011, pp. 7,9; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2009, pp. 107-108). A proper understanding of the terminology is therefore important in order to create a baseline for analysis. Radicalization, although a contested term, is commonly used to define the process through which an individual or a group comes to consider violence a legitimate and desirable means of achieving their goals. However, not all radicals need to be violent, and radical ideas that do not condone the exercise of violence could be seen as acceptable if the individuals or groups are acting within the boundaries of law. (Kruglanski et al., 2014, pp. 70-71; UNESCO, 2016, pp. 11-13). In other words, radicalized individuals accept violence as a legitimate course of action, but do not see it as the only course of action. According to UNESCO's definition, Violent Extremism is the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to carry out radical ideological, religious or political views. Violent Extremist views can be political, or religious or social, perhaps related to gender relations, or environmental protection among other things, and no worldview, religious community or society is immune to Violent Extremism (UNESCO, 2016, pp. 11-13).

### *3.1.3 The Two Pyramids Model – The Separation of Thought and Action*

The fact that there is a difference between radical thought and violent extremist action, therefore warrants a perspective that allows for a differentiation between levels or degrees of radicalization, as it could be argued that there is a difference between a radicalized individual that engages in violence and joins a terrorist organization, a radicalized individual that provides

logistical support to a radicalized violent extremist group, and an individual that merely supports the idea of terrorism while going about his or her business. This can be visualized in the pyramid model of participation in terrorism which promotes the idea that passive supporters of terrorism make up the wide base of followers, while the number of followers diminishes as one moves towards the apex and increased radical and violent action. Potential reasons as to why such a small portion of followers show sufficient commitment to the goal or cause to engage in violent extremism and ignore common concerns such as health or survival is something that will be discussed later in this chapter (Kruglanski et al., 2014, pp. 71-72).

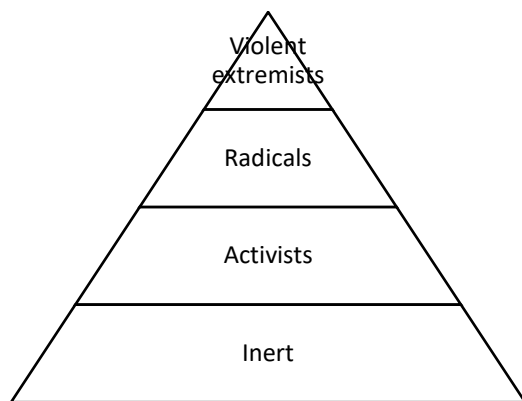
As suggested in the previous paragraphs, it can be easy to overemphasize the connection between radical ideology and radical action when analyzing the process of radicalization, and the connection between radical ideology, and Violent Extremism in action, is not necessarily clear. Research in social sociology has long established that attitudes do not necessarily easily translate into actions. The weak relationship between attitude and behavior is even more apparent when examining attitudes relating to extreme behaviors. Examples of this is studies done on college students with suicidal thoughts where about 45% reported suicidal thoughts while only 5% ever attempted suicide (Rudd, 1989). Furthermore, a similar study on homicidal thoughts revealed that although 91% of respondents replied that they had these thoughts during their life, only a small fraction ever acts on their fantasies (Duntley, 2005). Likewise, anger about group discrimination also rarely translates into protests (Klandermans, 1997; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017, pp. 211-212).



**Fig. 1 The "Opinion pyramid"**

The two-pyramids model tries to respond to this criticism by promoting the idea of a clear separation between radicalization of opinion and radicalization of action by utilizing two pyramids: the "Opinion pyramid", and the "Action pyramid". At the base of the opinion pyramid are individuals that do not care about a political causes (neutral), higher in the pyramid

are those who believe in the cause but do not go so far as to justify violence (sympathizers), even higher on the pyramid are the individuals that justify the use of violence in the defense of the cause of the group (justifiers). At the apex of the pyramid are the people that feel a personal moral obligation to take up violence in defense of the group's cause (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017, pp. 211-212). This pyramid model has similarities to the pyramid of commitment and terrorist participation explained earlier in this chapter.



**Fig. 2 The "Action pyramid"**

The action pyramid on the other hand, consists of individuals that do nothing for a political group or cause. This makes up the base of the pyramid (Inert); higher on the pyramid are people that are engaged in legal political action for the cause (Activists); even higher up on the pyramid are individuals that engage in illegal action for the cause (Radicals); and at the apex are the people that engage in illegal action that violently targets civilians (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017, p. 212). However, the application of the two-pyramid-model faces some challenges when utilized on the concept of lone-wolf terrorism, the concept of an individual terrorist acting without support from a network or affiliation with a group.

It is clear that any analysis that seeks to find connections and reasons for radicalization into violent extremism needs to carefully consider the relationship between thought and action and not overemphasize the potential effect certain conditions have on violent extremist action. The two-pyramid model helps to distinguish between levels of action and levels of opinion, and can be used to analyze changes between the levels of each pyramid. It also provides a useful framework to analyze the process of radicalization and the relationship between opinion and action. This can have policy implications on efforts to counter violent extremism and radicalization, as combating violent extremist ideas is different than combating terrorists. Furthermore, it highlights that the connection between belief and action is weak and that there

is no one size fits all solution to remove violent extremism (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017, p. 213).

### 3.1.4 *Theories on the Process of Radicalization and Violent Extremism*

There are many theories within social sciences that try to explain the processes of radicalization and violent extremism, and each of these theories suggests different explanatory factors for these phenomena. However, there is a lot of overlapping between these different theories and the different factors, regardless of whether the scientific theories use three, four, five explanatory factors or more. This thesis will therefore broadly define two areas that are reoccurring in most of the theories: motivational factors, or the need for an individual to engage in violent action because of individual or collective strains and grievances; and the role of group dynamics, through social networks that facilitates the process of radicalization into violent extremism (Agnew, 2010; Borum, 2011; Horgan, 2008; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, 2017; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018).

The process of radicalization into violent extremism is often seen through so-called push- and pull factors. As their name suggests, these are factors that push or pull an individual or group into radicalization and violent extremism. Which factors are considered push and pull factors, varies somewhat depending on the sources, but there are some common elements that can be outlined. Important push-factors can be marginalization, discrimination, persecution or a perception of suffering from these things, limited access to quality education, denial of rights and civil liberties, as well as other historical, environmental and socio-economic grievances. In this thesis, push factors that relates to individual motivations for radicalization and violent extremism, are categorized as motivational factors (UNESCO, 2016, p. 12; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 24-31). Pull-factors on the other hand, often strengthen the appeal of violent extremism, for example through the existence of well-organized groups that provide services, revenue, employment or interesting discourses in return of membership and support. These groups can also strengthen their appeal by presenting themselves as outlets of grievances as well as providing spiritual comfort and a sense of belonging and a supportive social network. In this thesis, these pull factors are categorized into group dynamics and radical narratives (UNESCO, 2016, pp. 12-13; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 32-57). Contextual factors also play a role in this, such as lack of rule of law, lack of strong institutions, presence of corruption and criminality (Denoux & Carter, 2009, pp. 27-50; UNDP, 2016, p. 13). From this perspective, corruption is not considered one of the main factors that leads to the processes of radicalization and violent extremism, but is rather a contextual factor that strengthens the other more direct

push and pull factors. However, further studies on the effect corruption has on these push- and pull factors is warranted.

### 3.1.5 *Motivational factors - Significance Quest Theory and the role of Social Identity*

As mentioned above, research on the process of radicalization and violent extremism, often looks at motivational factors. These are individual or collective motivations that make people or groups become radicalized and violent extremist. One theory that conceptualizes motivational factors is the significance quest theory which emphasizes the importance of identity and emotions. Prominent scholars in the field of social psychology and its application to the study of radicalization, such as Arie Kruglanski and Michele J. Gelfand, have emphasized the role of emotions and humiliation in the process of radicalization and violent conflict (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013; Kruglanski et al., 2014; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017, p. 214) Kruglanski theorizes that humiliation and a so-called quest for significance lost to said humiliation, push individuals to radicalize into violent extremism.

Psychologist and conflict researcher Evelin Lindner also argues that humiliation is such a strong emotion that it can start to dominate an individual's life to such an extent that their behavior becomes destructive both for themselves and others. If the feeling of humiliation is experienced as a collective trauma it can, according to Lindner, potentially lead to a feeling she calls entitlement of revenge (Lindner, 2006, pp. 277-278). The feeling of Humiliation is also temporal, as the feeling of collective humiliation can originate in things that have happened in the past. (Fierke, 2009, pp. 74-75). Groups can use these narratives to support their agendas and goals. However, this does not mean that the individuals that are mobilized by these narratives do not have legitimate and real grievances.

Significance loss can be due to individual or group humiliation, and can originate in either conflict-related matters and be a direct consequence of violent conflict and personal losses caused by an enemy out-group, but it can also originate in matters completely unrelated to the conflict. Individuals suffering from humiliation and significance loss seek to rectify it by volunteering for what they perceive as a socially venerated cause. The issue of commitment and other factors relating to what degree individuals commit themselves to radicalized and violent extremist groups also link to the two-pyramid model, highlighting the complex dynamics of this process (Kruglanski et al., 2014, pp. 74, 80; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018, pp. 131-134).

Individual significance loss can also be the result of general, economic, social and political conditions prevailing in a given state: internecine conflict, instability, insecurity and the failure of the government to instill order (Kruglanski et al., 2014, pp. 74-75). This can often occur in extractive and corrupt states, where such order often is diminished. According to sociologist Emile Durkheim this can lead to a situation where the state is failing to provide the opportunities and means by which its citizens can attain their goals. This situation which Durkheim calls “anomie” can again lead individuals in the state to develop feelings of helplessness and personal insignificance, that potentially can be taken advantage of by a terrorist organization or a violent extremist community (Denoux & Carter, 2009, pp. Vi, 38-40; Durkheim, 1984; Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 75). In short, a failure of the state to provide opportunities for its citizens, or the lack of trust in that the state provide opportunities, can make individuals more vulnerable to alternative narratives that address their grievances, including radicalized and violent extremist narratives, as will be examined further later in this thesis when examining the vulnerability factor social trust.

The experience of humiliation and significance loss can also relate to one’s social identity being disrespected by others. An example of this is the widespread disrespect and “Islamophobia” faced by Muslim immigrants coming to Europe by the native population of the countries they migrate to, leading to acute significance loss and humiliation (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 75). Another example of this can be seen in the rhetoric and narratives used by radicalized Islamic groups that trace humiliation back in time to the Christian crusades against Muslim lands in medieval times, making parallels to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, mobilizing support of violence against the current western “crusaders” and humiliators. Examples of this type of rhetoric are present in the magazine of ISIS, “Dabiq” (Al-Kinānī, 2014).

Terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaida explicitly use religion in their messaging and narratives for mobilization and recruitment, and religion is often attributed or connected to Violent Extremism and Terrorism by media and by scholars. It is therefore important to define and clarify the potential role of religion in this context. One useful definition of religion is presented by scholar of religion history, Bruce Lincoln, who proposes that all religions and ideologies include a *discourse* that transcends the human, claiming to be an authority and the source of a higher truth, as well as a set of *practices* with the goal of producing an ideal world and/or ideal human beings (Lincoln, 2003, pp. 5-7). The prescription of practices meant to create an ideal world, as well as religion as a provider of a higher truth, suggests utopianism and normative elements. These traits can justify actions deemed extraordinary, in order to reach

the utopian vision of the world (Mozzafari, 2011, p. 172). In short, ideology can justify actions that are deemed necessary for the greater good, and as a result, the potential for violence and radical behavior can be said to be present in ideologies by default.

The role of a terror-justifying ideology is promoted by scholars such as psychologist Arie Kruglanski, who emphasizes how such ideologies contains the element of grievance against one's group, a culprit presumed responsible for the perpetrated grievance, and a morally warranted and effective method of removing the dishonor created by the injustices and other grievances: terrorism and violence. As such, religion and ideology can act as a moral neutralization of violence, justifying its use against the source of the strains or grievances suffered by the followers of the ideology (Kruglanski et al., 2014, pp. 76-79; Nivette, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2017, pp. 6-7; Sageman, 2004, 2008). Religion with radical and violent extremist narratives as well as other ideologies that share its traits can therefore act as a mobilizing element brought about through a shared ideology (Kruglanski et al., 2014, pp. 76-77; UNESCO, 2016, pp. 12-13).

The mobilizing element is strengthened by the emotional element which links to Lindner's argument about the impact of emotion when combined with grievances and the impact of a perceived lack of significance. However, it is important to emphasize that there must be real grievances, or the real perception of grievances, for the religion or ideological group or community to utilize said grievances for recruitment and mobilization purposes. In other words, the radical group cannot simply invent grievances out of thin air, or use grievances that their audience does not perceive to be legitimate or relevant.

Ideology acting as a justification for terrorism and violence can also be related to the fact that religion or ideologies in general, are potentially dichotomous, differentiating between the community that identifies itself through the norms and ideas created by the discourse and practices of the group, the in-group, and the people that are not adhering to the practice and discourse of the group, the out-group. The out-group is, as mentioned, often portrayed through negative traits and stereotypes. This creation of diametrically opposed groups with an unequal relationship results in othering and a feeling of injustice (Schwalbe, 2000, p. 777). This will be examined in more detail later in this chapter, when talking about group dynamics.

### 3.1.6 *Social Movement Theory*

Another theory that is helpful for understanding radicalization processes and violent extremism, is Social Movement Theory. According to Social Movement Theory, there are movements that arise from opinions and beliefs in a population that expresses preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution in a given society. Early contributions to the theory focused on how strained environmental conditions could produce an extensive collective feeling of discontent leading people to join in a social movement as they passively buckled under the strains of the abovementioned social forces. This is the equivalent to what in sociology is called “strain theory” (Agnew, 2010; Borum, 2011, pp. 16-17; Nivette et al., 2017). This also links to how socio-economic factors, including corruption, can create conditions that make violent extremism and radicalized narratives more attractive for individuals.

Contemporary theories within the Social Movement theory tradition have focused more on the presence of rational and strategic processes within social movements, and the importance of recruitment and membership for the survival of a social movement. Social movements must actively seek mobilization potential, form and motivate recruitment networks, arouse the motivation to participate in the movement, and remove the barriers to participation in the movement in order to ensure the survival of the movement. Following rational choice theory, recruiters to social movements are likely to seek out individuals that are most likely to agree to act in accordance with the movement, and this is done by attaining information on prospective recruits and by persuasion of said recruits. Strong social bonds and relationships are important in the recruitment process, and understanding the relationships between prospective members of the violent extremist groups and the recruiters is important to have in mind in order to understand how the recruitment process works (Borum, 2011, p. 17; Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 1999; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987).

Another important aspect within Social Movement Theory Research is *Framing Theory* which focuses on how movements and social collectives construct, produce and disseminate meaning. The individual members of the movement responsible for creating and modifying ideas and narratives, try to frame messages in such a way that it resonates the strongest with the attitudes, beliefs and interests of potential members of the group/movement. When people accept this frame of reference the identification with the movement is cumulatively strengthened. According to framing theory, actors trying to start a social movement and change the status



quo, must first identify a social ill or issue, and attribute the cause for this social ill to a particular source (Borum, 2011, p. 18; Cederman et al., 2013, p. 42).

Social movement theory emphasizes both the importance of analyzing the grievances and incentives of radicalized individuals, as well as how violent extremist groups are able to effectively identify and remove barriers to participation. Because of this, Social Movement theory can be a valuable addition to the theoretical discourse on radicalization and violent extremism as it highlights the duality of the process of radicalization into violent extremism, and emphasizes that it is not only about the individuals that becomes radicalized, but also about how radical and violent extremist groups are able to pull people into their group/social movement (Borum, 2011, p. 20). How the dynamics and social networks of the group facilitate the radicalization process will be further examined below.

### *3.1.7 The Role of Group Dynamics*

Group dynamics and intergroup relations are applicable in the context of how individuals become radicalized and part of radicalized community. In comparison to previous intergroup theories such as those promoted by pioneer social psychologist Muzafer Sherif, in which perceived goal incompatibility- and goal disparity between social groups are the main source of intergroup conflict, Social Identity theory promotes the view that social categorization itself can be the source of intergroup discrimination and the source of potential conflict (Hewstone & Cairns, 2001; Sherif, 1966). This can happen in two, often simultaneous and complementary ways.

First, a threat towards one's group that leaves the members of the group feeling like their social identity is hurt or threatened, or in danger of being abolished completely, can motivate members of the group to engage in behavior that otherwise might be categorized as irrational or pointless (Hewstone & Cairns, 2001, p. 323). The potential for conflict can be strengthened further through the process of "othering" which is the construction of diametrically opposed groups by accentuating the negative traits of the out-group, while the in-group retains positive attributes as mentioned in the first part of this chapter (Schwalbe, 2000, p. 777).

Second, group dynamics can have several effects on individual behavior, making radicalization more likely. It can, for example, cultivate more extreme opinions and attitudes than those held by the individual members of the group (Borum, 2011, pp. 20-22). This phenomenon is called "group polarization" and is considered by some social psychologists as an important reason for radicalized behavior. This links to the elements of risk and the dilemmas a radicalized

individual has to face. According to Group Polarization Theory, by conferring with other members of the group about the risks involved in engaging in Violent Extremist activities, a radicalized individual may become more willing to take higher risks than they otherwise would do by themselves. If the majority of the group expresses their willingness to take the risks, and put forwards more arguments in favor of taking these risks than not, the individual can get increasingly convinced about the correctness of the risky choice. The more an individual identifies with the group, the more prone they are to social influence and peer pressure through these groups (Cederman et al., 2013, pp. 39-40; den Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008, p. 137; van Vugt, 2015). The group context also colors the perceptions of its members, and individuals tend to classify the behavior of fellow in-group members as more positive, while people outside the group are more likely to be attributed with more negative traits and behaviors. The group also facilitates radical behavior through norms and values, (Borum, 2011, pp. 20-22) By providing such a context and community, the Violent Extremist group creates an environment of radicalization that can escalate into violent extremist behavior.

A pertinent example of the role of group dynamics in action can be examined when examining groups formed on an ideology such as religion. Bruce Lincoln's definition of religion also include a *community*- that creates and defines their identity through the religious discourses and practices. It is also an *institution* that reproduces, adjusts or modifies both discourse, practice and community, as well as affirm the transcendent value and validate the religious itself (Lincoln, 2003, pp. 5-7). An adherence to the discourse and practices of a religion can therefore be seen as a form of group formation. As explained earlier in this chapter, religion and ideology can act as a form of group formation and a source of social identity. This has two effects. First, it creates an echo chamber where the ideology of religion is affirmed and strengthened. Second, it creates a clear dichotomy between those that share the ideology and those that do not, creating a clear in- and out-group.

### 3.1.8 *Summarizing Theories on the Process of Radicalization into Violent Extremism*

Although theories regarding the role of ideology, social psychology and social movements provide relevant and interesting contributions to the discourse and research of violent extremism and radicalization, it is also important to be aware of the potential weaknesses in their analysis and interpretations. The search for significance and the perceived loss of significance and humiliation, as well as the role of identity and group formation are important theories that can provide insights into the dynamics and processes of radicalization into violent extremism. However, it can be easy to overemphasize the connection between radical ideology

that promotes violent extremism, and violent extremist action. While the abovementioned elements can explain the formation and mobilization of groups with a certain radical ideology, the connection between ideology, and violent extremism in action, is not necessarily as clear, as explained earlier in this chapter (Klandermans, 1997; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017, pp. 211-212).

As this chapter so far has pointed out, the process of radicalization into violent extremism seems to be based on two main elements or drivers, Motivational Factors and Group Dynamics, while ideology provides input to both. In other words, there are individual *motivations* such as humiliation, a search for identity or grievances based on personal or structural factors or strains, then there are *group dynamics*, which expose potential radical individuals to likeminded people, increasing the probability of radical action, and also validating the ideology and the legitimacy of the use of violence. Ideology acts as a motivator by providing narratives that identify the perpetrator(s) of grievances, dehumanize the perpetrator(s) and promote violence as a legitimate and morally justifiable goal. Ideology also provides a social network of people that share this ideology. This enables group dynamics that expose individuals to radical ideas and increases the potential of radicalization (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018, pp. 132-133). The separation of thought and action, the role of emotions, humiliation, lack of self-realization and opportunities, and group dynamics are therefore important aspects that all play a role in the phenomena of radicalization into violent extremism.

### *3.2 Identifying the Main Drivers of Radicalization into Violent Extremism in Kosovo*

#### *3.2.1 Overview*

Following the end of the 1998-1999 war, a number of foreign faith-based charities, many of which were funded by Saudi Arabia, started working in Kosovo. While they provided vital relief by building schools, hospitals, orphanages, community centers, and other forms of humanitarian aid, they also opened Wahhabi mosques and provided financial support for families that agreed to have their females wear a hijab. Over a hundred unlicensed mosques were built throughout Kosovo in this period, outside the control of the Kosovo Islamic Community. In rural areas, students lacking alternative educational opportunities were given scholarships to Middle Eastern Islamic education, resulting in many of the graduates returning as hardline clerics promoting radical and extremist narratives. All of the dozen Imams that were arrested in August and September of 2014 on the suspicion of preaching extremism and recruiting jihadist were educated in the Middle East. (Shtuni, 2015a, p. 463). However, this view of Saudi Arabia as a key source of radicalization in Kosovo is contested by research done

by the KCSS, which suggests that imams from the Republic of Macedonia played a larger role in spreading extremist ideology in Kosovo (Kursani, 2015; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 35-36).

When the Syrian armed conflict began in 2011, it became a catalyst for violent extremism and radicalization among Sunni Muslims across Europe, including ethnic Albanians. Relative to its population of 1.8 million, Kosovo was by far the largest source of European jihadists in Syria and Iraq per capita, with a rate of over sixteen fighters per 100.000 nationals. In other words, Kosovo has a rate that is over 8 times that of France, one of Europe's largest contributor of jihadists to Syria and Iraq (Shtuni, 2015a, p. 464; 2016). According to data from September 2017, official numbers from Kosovo Police show that a total of 360 Kosovo citizens have travelled to Syria and Iraq, including women and children. Out of this, 255 are men that have joined violent extremist groups such as ISIS, Jabhat Al Nusrah and Ansar al Sham. It is estimated that 72 of these men have died in the conflict zone. This being said, it is important to put these figures into perspective. Many of those who travelled to areas controlled by the Islamic State cannot be categorized as fighters. Out of the total of 360 people travelling to Syria and Iraq, 48 were women and 57 were children (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 7-8, n3). Additionally, while Kosovo ranks high compared to other European countries when looking at foreign fighters per capita, some researchers such as representatives from the Kosovo Center for Security Studies (KCSS), argue that the official figures and the proportion of foreign fighters should be measured in terms of a country's Muslim population rather than the population as a whole. As 95% of the Kosovo population identify themselves as Muslim, this would put Kosovo far below countries such as Finland, Norway or Sweden which would be on top of such a list (Knudsen, 2017, pp. 6-7). However, this view is contested by researchers on radicalization and violent extremism such as Adrian Shtuni, who argues that one should measure the rate of foreign fighters per capita instead of per Muslim, as a considerable proportion of foreign fighters originating from countries in the EU were recent converts to Islam (Knudsen, 2017, p. 7).

Looking at the demographics and geographical origins of the fighters that left Kosovo for Syria and Iraq, it becomes clear that virtually all of the twenty-seven municipalities with a majority of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo have been affected by the phenomenon. While demographic data confirms that Kosovar recruits predominately originate from Pristina and Prizren, representing 25 percent of known recruits, these are also the most populous areas of Kosovo, home to 20 percent of the national population, so in relation to their population, their contribution is fairly proportional. In contrast, five of the municipalities have a mobilization

rate that is disproportionate, with over two foreign fighters per ten thousand residents, making up over one third of the overall contingent of foreign fighters. These municipalities are: Hani I Elezit, Kaçanik, Mitrovice, Gjilan and Viti, which accounts for 14 percent of the Kosovo population (Shtuni, 2016, p. 4; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8, 19).

Although the severity of the problem differs depending on the methodology and perspective used, the challenge of radicalization and violent extremism is present in Kosovo. But why are Kosovars becoming radicalized into violent extremism?

Both the UNDP and various researchers have analyzed what drive radicalized individuals from Kosovo to travel to Syria and Iraq. A primary way of studying this phenomenon is conducting interviews with these individuals (Shtuni, 2015a, 2016; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 7). According to the resulting reports, there are several factors that directly or indirectly affects how Kosovar citizens willingly or forcibly gets involved in violent extremism. The two main elements of the radicalization process mentioned in the theory part of this chapter: motivational factors and group dynamics, are present in the findings of these reports (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 7).

### *3.2.2 Motivations and Narratives*

As mentioned in the theory part of this chapter, the quest for significance and the search for, or defense of, individual and collective social identity and significance, are commonly used to explain the motivation of people who radicalize into violent extremism. Collective grievances stemming from the loss or the threat of losing significance and identity can be used by recruiters to strengthen narratives of victimization and exploit ideologies, religious belief or ethnic sentiments in order to legitimize and sanitize violent action.

In Kosovo, interviews with foreign fighters and non-combatants that have returned from Syria has revealed that a majority of the interviewees had moral or religious justifications for travelling to fight in Syria. Religion was an integral part of their identity, worldview and interpretation of the different aspects of life, including their actions and the socialization processes in which they became radicalized (Shtuni, 2015a, pp. 466-467; USAID, 2015, p. 6; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 9, 45).

The role of religion as a motivational factor is exemplified by a narrative that was dominant among the fighters being interviewed: the perception of Islam being under attack, heavily linked to the conflict in Syria and what is seen as the persecution of Muslims there. Fighters

perceived that they had a religious and moral obligation to defend against their persecutors. Many of those interviewed said that they were motivated to become fighters by the view that Muslims in Syria were fighting jihad, and that they could play a role in that fight. This gave them a cause and a sense of belonging, alongside other Kosovars who had joined the ranks of ISIS. There is also a humanitarian dimension related to motivations regarding the defense of Muslims against atrocities in Syria, which was expressed by several foreign fighters (Shtuni, 2015a, pp. 466-468; USAID, 2015, pp. 5-6; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 45-46).

The narrative of Islam being under threat is further strengthened by a perception of widespread Islamophobia that leads to societal alienation. Interviews with returning foreign fighters have confirmed how this perceived islamophobia have led individuals and groups in society to feel increasingly isolated and alienated from the rest of society at large, making them more vulnerable to radicalization. This feeling of significance-loss is the result of threats against their social identity as Muslim, and is according to interviews with returning Kosovar foreign fighters, caused by discrimination in the labor market, misrepresentation in the media and by civil society. These grievances are then utilized by extremist groups and recruiters that share a more fundamentalist strain of Islam than what's traditionally been practiced in Kosovo, as mentioned earlier in this chapter (USAID, 2015, pp. 5-6; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8, 29-31, 45-46).

Ideology can therefore be said to have played an important role in their decision to become fighters. Islam is used by recruiters and violent extremist groups such as ISIS to present and frame this as a personally religious obligation, tapping into a feeling of joint victimhood among Muslims, and a calling for a fight for survival and support of fellow Muslim brothers suffering in Syria and Iraq, branding the caliphate and Sharia law as the ultimate protector of Muslims worldwide. Other returning fighters have specifically mentioned how their determination to achieve the status of "Shaheed", or martyr, were of central importance for their motivation to go fight in Syria and Iraq, stating that they went there to become martyrs in the name of Allah (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 46-47). As explained in the theory part of this chapter, an ideology can promote narratives that legitimize violence as a just means to achieve a higher goal. Serving in a holy war for a higher cause of protecting Islam and fellow Muslims, or the goal of promoting sharia law and the caliphate, were mentioned by some of the fighters and reflect how a terror-justifying ideology helps to facilitate and legitimize violent extremism.

However, it is important to note that in general, Kosovo's Muslims have a history of secularism and are mainly non-practicing. The majority of Kosovars that are more religious inclined, traditionally adhere to a very different, moderate strain of Islam compared to the radical version the Islamic State claims to represent. This is underlined by studies done by the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), which state that Kosovo has strong secular traditions. Following this perspective, it could be said that people that see themselves as religious could be categorized as converts, and those who nominally identify as Muslim as non-religious. However, it is also important not to understate the religious element and how it might be used for recruitment purposes. Although it may primarily be on the cultural level, Kosovars may identify more with fellow Muslims, and this could be a motivational factor (Demijaha & Peci, 2016; Knudsen, 2017, p. 7; Shtuni, 2015a, pp. 461-462).

Narratives that tap into Albanian identity, the 1999 conflict, and the historical struggles of Albanians are also used in the recruitment of Kosovars. Interviewees mention how Imams and recruiters to violent extremist groups used examples from history to emphasize how Albanians greatly contributed to Islam during the Ottoman Empire. They also stressed that they currently have an obligation to defend Islam. Recruiters also promoted the idea of that Albanian fighters are among the fiercest, and drew parallels between the 1999 conflict, which was described as defensive Jihad, and the Syria conflict. A feeling of continuation of past struggles was further evoked by the idea of KLA founder Adem Jashari, that was killed by Serbian security forces during the Kosovo war and considered a national hero, as a martyr in the Jihad. Even ideas that Russians and Serbs were fighting among Assad's forces, helped to give a perspective of continuation of the interethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians, providing an opportunity for the generation that did not fight in that war, to fight for a cause in a similar conflict (Shtuni, 2015a, pp. 467-468; USAID, 2015, pp. 6-7; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 50-51).

Interviews also suggests that recruits were motivated by a romanticism of the conflict, the idea of pursuing a mission to defend a people and a community. This gave a sense of meaning and purpose, as well as the feeling of empowerment. Recruiters also promised a search for adventure and a legacy. Individuals who felt that they have no purpose or role to play in the society they live in, for example, young people who are chronically unemployed or underemployed, may have been more vulnerable to this call (*Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015, p. 12; USAID, 2015, pp. 6-7; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 52-53).

Shtuni proposes that the recent history of Kosovo, is one of the most relevant drivers of radicalization into violent extremism. In contrast, he considers things like poor quality of education and other forms of socio-economic deprivation to be unimportant in comparison. He argues that the most important drivers and dynamics that leads to radicalization include the recent interethnic conflict with religious undertones, segregation, and victimization, as well as a social reality that is marked by popular perceptions of failed leadership efforts and unmet expectations, strengthened by an inflow of different identities, in a country that struggles to define itself (Shtuni, 2016, p. 12). Shtuni further argues that a search for identity and a sense of belonging as well as frustrations as a result of unmet expectations, along with the rise of political Islam as a core part of the identity of some social circles, are seemingly the most important drivers for why individuals in Kosovo become radicalized and violent extremist. The radicalization process is further facilitated by group dynamics (Shtuni, 2015a; 2016, p. 1). These drivers are also mentioned by an informant in this research project:

There is a lot of reasons and motivations why people want to join violent extremist organizations, but in the context of Kosovo, I would say that lack of identity, lack of hope, a feeling of hopelessness in Kosovo, lack of information on Islam...for me these are the primary motivations for why people would want to join violent extremist organizations (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

As this subchapter has shown, there are numerous motivations behind why Kosovars became radicalized. However, some commonalities can be found in the motivations of Kosovar foreign fighters and the narratives used by radicalized groups. These include ideological motives, narratives that tap into Albanian identity, and a search for meaning, belonging and opportunities. This also links to unmet expectations, frustration and lack of hope which are mentioned by several researchers on the topic. As this thesis will argue, the lack of quality education, employment and economic opportunities, and the lack of social trust in the government and public institutions contributes to the frustrations and feeling of hopelessness, making people more vulnerable to narratives promising opportunities, meaning and community. These vulnerabilities will be examined in more detail in chapter four.



### 3.2.3 *Group Dynamics*

Having established some of the main motivational factors and narratives, and establishing the role of ideology, it is now possible to examine how group dynamics and social movement affect radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo. According to statements from returned fighters, there is a well-developed network of recruitment which seems to have been instrumental for radicalization in Kosovo. The combination of charismatic Imams, coordinators working at the grassroots-level as well as ethnic Albanians foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, has facilitated radicalization in local communities. Religious leaders helped reinforce radical narratives and encouraged local religious communities to engage with extremist organizations. The recruitment networks are characterized by social ties strengthened by emotional bonds. Kinship and close friendship also facilitated radicalization, as most of the interviewees heard about the opportunity to go to Syria through friends, family or close relatives. There were also several fighters who described how they travelled to Syria as a group of childhood friends from the same village, or that they were in contact with a close friend that already had gone to Syria who motivated them to go (USAID, 2015, p. 6; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 32-37).

Furthermore, the majority of communication undertaken by the fighters took place within a close network of friends and relatives, which helped to reinforce the religious and ethical convictions, including narratives of Islam under attack, and the need to take action to defend Muslims and Islam. Statements from returning fighters suggest that the extensive recruitment network is a tight-knit community in which imams, foreign fighters and associates engaged with each other in the process of indoctrination of their community members as well as in the coordination of the journey to the theatre of conflict (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 36,45). In other words, the findings from Kosovo reinforce what is proposed in the theory part of this chapter, as group dynamics and social interaction within the network serves to reinforce and strengthen convictions, and facilitates the radicalization process.

The internet and social media also amplify radical views and facilitate communication within the recruitment networks and between radicalized individuals. Internet and social media facilitate the whole process of radicalization into violent extremism through the dissemination of information and propaganda and reinforcement of violent extremist views (Alava, Frau-Meigs, & Hassan, 2017, p. 6; USAID, 2015, p. 7; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 53-57).

#### 3.2.4 *Conclusion of Findings from the Kosovo Case*

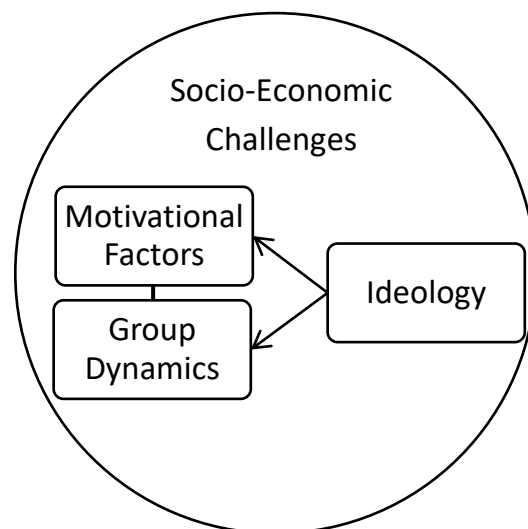
By examining the drivers of radicalization into violent extremism in Kosovo, this sub-chapter has answered the sub-question of the first research question: “*How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism in the case of Kosovo?*”. This sub-chapter has shown that the main drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo reflect theories laid out in the first part of this chapter. Motivation for radicalization into violent extremism through narratives that justify violence and resonate with the audience by tapping into identity, expressed either through ethnicity or religion, and a search for meaning, community and opportunities. Group dynamics and social networks such as family and kinship ties facilitate the communication and socialization into the violent extremist groups. But an important question remains, what creates the environment that makes these individuals vulnerable to violent extremist narratives in the first place?

#### 4. WHAT FACTORS MAKE INDIVIDUALS MORE VULNERABLE TO THE RADICALIZATION PROCESS?

As examined in the previous chapter, the process of radicalization into violent extremism seems to be based on two main elements or drivers: Motivational Factors and Group Dynamics, while ideology provides input to both (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018, pp. 132-133). However, it is also important to understand what shapes the environment in which the process of radicalization into violent extremism occurs. To answer the second research question:

*“What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process?”*

this thesis will analyze an element that affects the society in which the process of radicalization takes place: socio-economic challenges such as poor quality of education, unemployment and lacking economic opportunities, and a lack of social trust. Critically, as this thesis argues, these socio-economic challenges can make individuals vulnerable to radicalization into violent extremism. The first part of this chapter will develop these theories of vulnerability by examining these challenges, which are here called “vulnerability factors”, and how these vulnerability factors facilitate the processes of radicalization in a society.



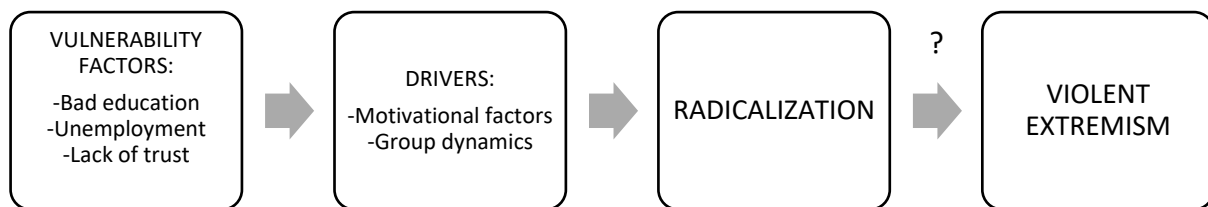
**Fig. 3 Socio-economic Challenges and the main elements in the radicalization process**

##### 4.1 Vulnerability Factors – Examining the Theories

There is some debate regarding the extent to which socio-economic issues play a role in making a country more prone to radicalization and violent extremism. Some researchers on radicalization and violent extremism such as Adrian Shtuni (Shtuni, 2016) downplay the importance of socio-economic factors, emphasizing other factors, such as the recent trauma of a violent conflict with religious undertones. On the other hand, the United Nations Secretary General’s report, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism”, indicates how a lack of socio-

economic opportunities such as a failed effort by a country to create sustainable levels of growth, to create decent jobs for youth, reduce poverty and unemployment, improve equality, reduce and control corruption as well as the intergroup relations and human rights, makes a country more prone to violent extremism (Shtuni, 2016; UN, 2015).

To clarify how socio-economic challenges, shape the environment in which the process of radicalization and violent extremism occurs and impact the very process of radicalization, this thesis will examine the phenomena of radicalization into violent extremism by looking at *Vulnerability Factors*. Vulnerability factors predispose individuals, that is, make them more vulnerable, towards radicalized narratives, thereby increasing the likelihood of these vulnerable individuals becoming radicalized and joining radical and/or violent extremist groups. This theory is shown in the figure below.



**Fig. 4 Vulnerability factors and the process of radicalization**

Instead of only focusing on individual motivations and grievances of radicalized individuals, this thesis will examine three vulnerability factors: poor quality education, unemployment and lack of social trust. First, this thesis will explain how these socio-economic factors make people vulnerable towards radicalized narratives and the group dynamics of radical and violent extremist groups. This thesis will then in chapter five examine how corruption impacts these “vulnerability factors”, and examine these dynamics in the context of Kosovo.

Acknowledging that there are other factors that also could provide valuable insights, the three vulnerability factors selected in this thesis (lack of quality education, unemployment and economic opportunities, and lack of social trust), have been chosen because they are often mentioned in strategies and reports on radicalization and violent extremism, such as the United Nations Secretary General’s report, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism” (UN, 2015). These factors are also mentioned in studies on Kosovar foreign fighters as well as in the Kosovo Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020, where factors such as economic and social challenges are outed as the main driving factors of radicalization (*Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and*

*Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015). For this reason, this thesis will focus on these three factors

#### 4.1.1 *The Education Sector*

Findings from research on the role of education in the process of radicalization into violent extremism seem to indicate a mix of viewpoints. There is some empirical evidence pointing out that the level of education does not have a strong impact on the process of radicalization, illustrated by the fact that there is a mix of both well-educated individuals as well as those with lower education among persons being radicalized (Krueger & Malečková, 2003; Silke, 2008). However, there are reasons to believe that this evidence is not conclusive. The first reason is that some research shows how a lack of education correlates with a lack of employment and opportunities, frustration and loss of hope, leading people to seek opportunities elsewhere such as in violent extremist groups (Xharra & Gojani, 2017). Moreover, there is evidence pointing towards the importance of *quality* of education. Research conducted by other scholars such as Pels and de Ruyter, argue that it is not just the level of academic training, but also the content and style in which parents and teachers educate their children and youth, which might have a bigger impact on the radicalization process than just the level of education obtained (Pels & de Ruyter, 2012; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 25). This is also reflected in the statements from returned foreign fighters from Kosovo, which highlighted how a lack of good quality of education and critical thinking led individuals to accept violent extremist narratives more easily (Xharra & Gojani, 2017). In other words, there is reason to believe that education and especially the quality of education plays a significant role in making people vulnerable to radicalization.

#### 4.1.2 *Employment and Economic Opportunities*

Regarding employment, economy and terrorism, several scholars (Blomberg, Hess, & Weerapana, 2004a, 2004b) link poor economic performance to the occurrence of violent extremism in the form of terrorism. By utilizing statistical data from over 100 countries from 1968 to 1991, they find that periods of economic weakness increase the likelihood of terrorist activities (Blomberg et al., 2004a, 2004b). Studies done by researchers such as Henrik Urdal (2012), also show that countries or territories with so-called “youth bulges”, or disproportionately large populations of youth (individuals between 15 and 24 years of age), are more susceptible to armed conflict, social unrest and radicalization. The potential for conflict and radical behavior is further strengthened if there is a lack of jobs to accommodate the incoming flow of young workers, and heightened expectations among job seekers. Studies also show that religion can serve as an alternative force for social mobility when there is a large

population of idle youth, including more radical ideas that challenges older forms of authority (Beehner, 2017, pp. 3-4; Leahy, Engelman, Vogel, Haddock, & Preston, 2007; Shtuni, 2015a, pp. 464-466). Reports and interviews with foreign fighters further exemplify how a lack of opportunities, unemployment and a feeling of hopelessness, disappointment and frustrated expectations make people more susceptible to radicalized groups that utilizes these vulnerabilities in their narratives and recruitment (USAID, 2015, pp. 3-4; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8, 24-28). In contrast to the lack of opportunities and employment faced by these individuals, radicalized groups offer promises of adventure, financial gains and opportunities, to recruit individuals (*Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015; USAID, 2015, pp. 3-4; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8,24-28). Because of how unemployment links to a search for opportunities and frustrated expectations, it can be seen as a vital vulnerability factor.

#### 4.1.3 *Social Trust*

Another area that affects people's vulnerability towards radicalized narratives is a lack of trust in state institutions and society at large, what can be broadly referred to as "social trust" (Rothstein & Eek, 2009, p. 82). A lack of social trust is mentioned as a reason for discontent and lack of hope in the future both in reports and in interviews with foreign fighters. As mentioned earlier, on the topic of significance loss and the inability of the state to provide opportunities, a lack of social trust between social groups and between state institutions and the population also increases the chance for perceived relative deprivation and significance loss. These grievances can then be utilized by radical groups to pull in vulnerable frustrated individuals (Denoux & Carter, 2009, pp. Vi, 38-40; Durkheim, 1984; Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 75; USAID, 2015, pp. 3-7; Xharra & Gojani, 2017). Of course, social trust in a society is not located in a vacuum. This is illustrated by how terrorist acts abroad and the media coverage of groups like ISIS have shaped public opinion regarding Muslims and people that use symbols associated with more radical forms of religious expression, such as longer beards or the hijab. Foreign fighters mention in interviews that perceived islamophobia and distrust, and discrimination in employment and education because of this, led them to seek community in radicalized groups (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8,29-31). This further emphasizes the importance of education, employment and social and economic opportunities.

#### 4.1.4 *Summarizing Theories on Vulnerability Factors*

This chapter has so far established how socio-economic challenges or “vulnerability factors” make individuals more vulnerable to radicalized narratives and the group dynamics of radical and violent extremist groups. A lack of quality education makes individuals less critical towards radicalized narratives and makes it more difficult for youth to find opportunities and employment. Unemployment and lack of economic opportunities contributes to a feeling of hopelessness, disappointment and frustrated expectations that make people more susceptible to radicalized groups that utilizes these vulnerabilities in their narratives. A lack of social trust also facilitates the radicalization process by making individuals seek alternative means for opportunities, community and meaning, as the state is perceived to be unable to provide for its citizens. The next part of this chapter will examine these vulnerability factors on the case of Kosovo.

#### 4.2 *Vulnerability Factors – Examining the Case of Kosovo*

The next parts of this chapter seek to answer the sub-question to the second research question:

*“What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process in Kosovo?”*

by applying the concept of “vulnerability factors” as presented in the theory part of this chapter, to the case of Kosovo society, looking at how these vulnerability factors increases vulnerability to radicalization into violent extremism. The vulnerability factors I will look at are poor quality education, unemployment, lack of social trust and frustrated expectations.

##### 4.2.1 *The Education Sector*

The poor state of education in Kosovo is affirmed by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA, test from 2015 which suggests that a staggering 77 percent of 15-year old students in Kosovo are functionally illiterate, meaning that they are able to both read and write, but are unable to apply these skills in a meaningful way at school or work. These further limits their opportunity for obtaining a job, as they lack the skills that are demanded in the labor market (OECD, 2018; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 25). This is exemplified by a 2015 labor force survey by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, that suggests that unemployment rates among Kosovars is far higher among those that have lower education than those with post-secondary education. 59.5 percent of Kosovars with secondary level education are unemployed according to the same survey (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 28-29). One informant for this research project also notes the poor quality of Kosovo’s education system:

It is also poor education, lack of good education. Because what we find, is that statistically, most of the people from Kosovo that decided to go to Syria and Iraq are quite well educated... the average level of education in Kosovo. Still they decided to go to Syria and Iraq. I think the problem is the type and the quality of education that we receive in Kosovo, it is not the level of education, it is the quality, which is not so good, maybe you have heard about the PISA results (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Poor quality of education seems to facilitate radicalization into violent extremism. A UNDP report from 2017, suggests that a lack of opportunities and a poor standard of education could have contributed to an environment in which Kosovars became more susceptible to propaganda from extremist groups. A low educational attainment level and an inability to accept alternative worldviews was observed among foreign fighters being interviewed by the UNDP. In fact, according to one foreign fighter interviewee, a high-ranking member of ISIS had asked recruiters not to send educated people to ISIS. More critical than just the level of education received is the quality of that education. As previously mentioned, a lack of critical thinking can make people more vulnerable towards narratives and ideologies that leads to terrorism because of a lack of critical perspectives towards such violent extremist narratives (USAID, 2015, pp. 4-5; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 28-29). In summary, poor quality of education and lack of critical thinking not only seem to increase the vulnerability towards radicalized narratives in Kosovo, but it also affects employment and economic opportunities.

#### *4.2.2 Employment and Economic Opportunities*

Unemployment and poverty are also vulnerability factors. Over 76 percent of the adult men and women that travelled or attempted to travel to Syria stated that they were unemployed, according to statistics from the Kosovo Police database. Although not a direct reason for radicalization, the lack of opportunities resulting from unemployment and poverty, as well as being underemployed or not being employed in the field of one's study, seemingly contributes to a feeling of hopelessness. This is reflected in statements from foreign fighters interviewed by the UNDP. Some of the foreign fighters reported that they felt a sense of hopelessness and disappointment as a result of not getting the job that they studied for. They also commented on how the dire employment situation in Kosovo affected this. Numerous fighters also stated that they were motivated to travel to Syria and Iraq by the search for opportunities and a better life abroad. Half of the interviewees in the 2017 UNDP study, reported having previously sought



asylum or worked abroad in Western Europe (USAID, 2015, pp. 3-4; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8, 24-28).

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this chapter, research has shown that states or territories with a disproportionate number of youth can increase susceptibility to conflict and radical behavior especially when coupled with unemployment and lack of opportunities (Urdal, 2012). Kosovo is an example of this, with 44% of its population below twenty-five years of age, making it the youngest population in Europe. With a sex-ratio of 1.1 males per female, there is also a disproportionate growth of the young male population. In 2013, the unemployment rate for youth, aged 15 to 24 was 56%, and in 2015 it was estimated to be 57.7%, while 30.000 young adults are added to the job market every year, which is five times more than the market can absorb. As a result, youth employment is likely to worsen in the coming years (CIA, 2018a; Shtuni, 2015a, pp. 464-466). In short, the vulnerability to radicalization originating from lack of employment and economic opportunities, could be further exacerbated by the disproportionately large number of youth which translates to high levels of youth unemployment (Beehner, 2017, pp. 3-4; Leahy, Engelman, Vogel, Haddock, & Preston, 2007; Shtuni, 2015a, pp. 464-466; Urdal, 2012).

#### 4.2.3 *Social Trust*

A key point regarding socio-economic challenges seems to be how they contribute to, and links with, frustrated expectations and diminishing social trust stemming from slow economic development, dissatisfaction with the economic and political direction of their country, a lack of faith in political elites and state institutions, freedom of travel that is severely restricted within the region, and the lack of integration into the international community. This lack of opportunities, frustrated expectations, social trust and resulting hopelessness increases the feeling of isolation and making the individual seek out meaning and purpose elsewhere. Interviewees in a USAID study on Violent extremism in Kosovo even describe Kosovo as a “ghetto”. The lack of opportunities, frustrated expectations and feeling of hopelessness make individuals vulnerable to the promise of opportunities offered by violent extremist groups. Although unemployment and poverty are not to be considered direct causes, they contribute to create an environment that is conducive to radicalization, making people more susceptible and vulnerable towards violent extremist narratives and ideologies (USAID, 2015, pp. 3-5; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8, 24-28).

#### 4.2.4 *Conclusion of Kosovo-Case*

This chapter has answered the second research question and its sub-question: “*What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process in Kosovo?*”. As examined in this chapter, both theory and empirical evidence from Kosovo suggest that poor quality education, unemployment and economic opportunities, and lack of trust in state institutions and public officials, create an environment in which individuals becomes more vulnerable toward violent extremist narratives and ideologies that justify and legitimize violence as well as the group dynamics of the radicalized groups that utilizes said narratives. Acknowledging that other individual or collective grievances also play a role in making individuals vulnerable to radicalization, this thesis will in the next chapter examine how corruption affects the three vulnerability factors so far discussed.

## 5. EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF CORRUPTION

As the findings in the previous chapter suggest, vulnerability factors such as poor quality of education, unemployment and lack of economic opportunities, and lack of social trust, make people more vulnerable to radicalization into violent extremism. This thesis will now build upon the previous chapters and examine how corruption affect these vulnerability factors. In order to answer the third research question:

*“How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors?”*

the first part of this chapter will define corruption and then examine theories on how it affects the three vulnerability factors: education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust. The second part of this chapter will use the theories laid out in the chapter’s first part, as a basis to answer the sub-question on how corruption affect the vulnerability factors in Kosovo.

### 5.1 *The Impact of Corruption - Theoretical framework*

#### 5.1.1 *Defining Corruption*

Before answering the third and final research question: *“How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors?”* it is important to understand what corruption is. Corruption as a concept can be seen as quite abstract and subjective, without any universally applicable definition. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, corruption is “perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties by bribery or favor” (Tay, Herian, & Diener, 2014, p. 751). International organizations that study and measures corruption such as Transparency International have different definitions of corruption. Transparency International defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, and identifies three classifications: grand, petty or political corruption depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs. Grand corruption is acts committed at a high level of government that distort policies or the central functioning of the state, enabling leaders to benefit at the expensive of the public good. According to Transparency International’s definition, political corruption is the manipulation of policies, rules of procedure and institutions in the allocation of resources and financing by political decisionmakers. Petty corruption describes everyday abuse of entrusted power by public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens who are trying to access basic services or goods. This type of corruption can take place in public institutions such as schools, hospitals or police departments (*How do you define Corruption?*, 2017; *Anti-Corruption Glossary - Grand Corruption*, 2018; *Petty Corruption*, 2018).

In Academia, other common definitions of political corruption describe it as deviant or deceitful behavior by officials that diverges from actions that are in the public interest. However, this public-interest-centered definition has been criticized for lacking clarity and specificity. How can we establish what is in the public interest? Societies often have a variety of social groups which have differing interests and goals, making such an assessment difficult. Another definition that is commonly used is public-office-centered and defines corruption as behavior deviating from normal duties of a public role because of private-regarding, fiscal or status gains, or violating the rules that are in place to safeguard against the exercise of such activities. This definition has been criticized for being too narrow, and the fact that not all illegal acts are corrupt and not all corrupt acts are illegal. Some scholars argue that the breach of not only legal-, but also normative rules count as deviating (corrupt) behavior. However, problems arise when encountering cases where public opinion is divided or ambiguous (Azfar, Lee, & Swamy, 2001; Hellman, 2013; Lancaster & Montinola, 1997, pp. 44-45; 2001).

As difficult as it is to define what corruption is on a broad level, it can be even harder to identify which specific acts can be considered corrupt. Examples of this are Nepotism or Cronyism which are forms of favoritism based on familiar relationships or acquaintances and associates, where someone in an official position exploits his or her power or authority to provide a job or favor to a family member or friend, even though he or she may not be qualified or deserving of said job or favor. This also links to the concept of clientelism which refers to a system where resources and favors are exchanged in an exploitative relationship between a powerful and/or richer patron, and a weaker and less wealthy client (*How do you define Corruption?*, 2017; *Clientilism*, 2018; *Nepotism*, 2018). In this thesis, the term nepotism will be used exclusively to cover the abovementioned acts of favoritism to avoid confusion.

However, there are some challenges to defining what constitute nepotism because of the subjective understandings of what constitutes nepotism, or if an action is a form of pragmatism rather than actual corrupt behavior. This subjectivity can be expressed through cultural contingency or cultural relativism, meaning that there are different understandings of a phenomena or concept based on the cultural context of the individual or group, as explained in chapter two (Azfar et al., 2001, pp. 44-45; Spiro, 1986, pp. 259-263).

An example of cultural relativism and local understandings of corrupt practices that is relevant for this research project is the importance of kinship structures and mutual obligations in Kosovo. According to research on norms and integrity building in Kosovo municipalities

conducted by scholar David Jackson, kinship ties in Kosovo are very strong and obligations to the kin community matter. Kin community is defined as kinship-structures and immediate neighborhood or village ties that go beyond the extended families and encompass members of the immediate community. Requesting special favors from kin-community members or using kin-community connections to help with a problem is normal, and when prioritizing the kin-community cannot be served through the formal channels, these formal rules and procedures are often brushed aside. Furthermore, there is a widespread acceptance of these practices as legitimate or acceptable if they serve or benefit one's immediate kin community. In other words, obligations based on the social norm of preserving one's kin-community are seen as acceptable or beneficial although the practices could be considered corruption (Jackson, 2018). This example clearly shows that culture, social norms and kinship can shape the perceptions on what constitutes corruption and what is considered pragmatic, acceptable or legitimate.

The widespread disagreement over what constitutes corrupt behavior makes it difficult to establish one universal definition of what corruption entails. It may be for this reason that many of the organizations that measure corruption comparatively on the macro level, such as Transparency International, utilizes surveys and other means of data collection that focus on the perception of corruption rather than measuring the actual corrupt behavior itself, as mentioned earlier. This focus on the perception of corruption instead of actual corrupt behavior as well as the subjective understandings of corruption can have methodological consequences as discussed in chapter two on Methodology. To narrow down this broad and complex situation, this thesis will focus on what Transparency International calls grand-, political- and petty corruption and corruption within procurement as well as nepotism. However, it is important to note that these forms of corruption are situated in a larger context where other forms of corrupt behavior, perceived or real, are present.

### *5.1.2 What Creates Corruption?*

As explained earlier in this chapter, there are numerous difficulties with finding one set definition of corruption that is universally applicable for all types and variations of corrupt behavior. As a result, many scholars and watchdog institutions use the subjective or streamlined definitions of corruption, either based on perception of corruption or on a set of standards based on the function and role of the specific institution or official through which corrupt behavior is measured up against, although this approach has been criticized for being too narrow in its focus, as mentioned previously (Hellman, 2013; Lancaster & Montinola, 1997, 2001). Nevertheless, the reasons for, and the impact of corruption, is relevant to explore further to

assess possible links and facilitating factors between corruption and radicalization and violent extremism.

Research done on the reasons for corrupt behavior and the mechanisms behind corruption growth in organizations has often centered itself around three main areas: Individual factors, organizational factor and environmental factors. Although earlier research often studies these factors separately, some researchers such as Niki den Nieuwenboer and Muel Kaptein argue that the process of corruption is organic and that the different areas are highly interdependent (den Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008, p. 133). Scholar on organized crime, Donald Cressey, in his theory on trust violations, proposes that there are three relevant factors to analyze when untrustworthy behavior is committed: rationalization of the behavior, pressure to commit the behavior and opportunity to act. By looking at these three factors, Nieuwenboer and Kaptein argue that there are downward spirals of behavior reflecting each factor respectively: spirals of divergent norms, spirals of pressures and spirals of opportunity (den Nieuwenboer & Kaptein, 2008). This reflects what other researchers have put forward as reasons for corrupt behavior, including other factors such as lack of transparency which makes the risk of corrupt behavior lower (Azfar et al., 2001, pp. 51-53).

Empirically, a number of large-scale international studies have identified economic, social and cultural factors associated with corruption, and found that societies characterized by low economic development, strong traditional group cleavages, high income inequality and hierarchal social role systems are typically more corrupt. At the same time, these studies highlight how corruption has extensive negative effects on the well-being of individuals and societies through the waste of resources that otherwise could have contributed to fight poverty and malnutrition and increase the quality of life of a vast number of people (Azfar et al., 2001, pp. 46-51, 53-54; Fischer, Ferreira, Milfont, & Pilati, 2014, pp. 1594-1595). The impact corrupt behavior has on individuals and society is important to investigate as it affects the environment in which radicalization and violent extremism happens.

### *5.1.3 How Does Corruption Impact the Vulnerability Factors?*

As mentioned above, there has been extensive research on how corrupt behavior affects societies, institutions, groups and individuals, and the effect of corruption is something that this thesis will explore in more detail in this subchapter. This thesis will now present theory that examine how corruption affects the three vulnerability factors presented earlier: education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust (Rothstein & Eek, 2009, p. 82).

### *Corruption in the Education sector*

Education is of vital importance in a society as it provides important resources, critical thinking skills and opportunities for employment. A lack of quality education is seen by some scholars to increase the chance of radicalization and violent extremism by making individuals less critical towards radicalized narratives as well as making them less able to get employment. For this reason, lack of quality education is in this thesis considered a vulnerability factor. Because of its importance, education is often one of the largest items on the state budget, and opportunities for corrupt practices are extensive (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006). Corruption syphons money away from the education system. Critically, the amount of money spent on education effects the quality of education. Studies in the US have shown that on average, more spending per pupil is associated with higher or improved student outcomes, although the positive effect is larger in some studies than others. Furthermore, the positive effect of additional funding appears to matter to a larger degree for some students compared to others. Although other factors also impact how funding affects student outcomes, such as how the money is spent, there seems to be a link between money spent and student outcomes. School resources and funding are therefore important when it comes to how well students are performing (Baker, 2016). Corruption in education can also lead to high drop-out rates. Data suggests that these drop-out rates increases at high levels of poverty, and low quality of teaching that leads to poor achievement. Corruption also creates an educational system that is more prone to adverse political, religious and ethnic influence, as well as deepened inequality between rich and poor, potentially preventing entire generations from achieving a meaningful future and opportunities (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006).

Corruption in the education sector can occur both at the central ministry level through grand corruption, as well as at the administrative level and classroom level. At the ministry level, grand corruption often takes the form of diversion of funds from procurement and construction, and through siphoning funds for educational institutions at the administrative and political level by corrupt administrators, public officials and politicians even before they reach the schools. At school and administrative level, paying of bribes to ensure school access, good grades and graduation, as well as corruption in teacher recruitment and promotion are also common (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006, pp. 3-4). This thesis will now present five common forms or areas of corruption in the school sector: *Planning and school management*, *Procurement*, *School accreditation*, *Student admission and examinations*, and *Teacher*

*management and professional conduct*, which later will be used when looking at corruption in the Kosovo educational system.

Corruption in *planning and school management*, often relates to decisions on government funding for new and existing schools, leading to, among other things, unnecessary building projects that are selected for personal and political reasons, disregarding the real needs. Corruption in *Procurement* affects the acquisition of educational material such as textbooks, library stock, the development of the curriculum itself, as well as school buildings and equipment. As the level of sales often is guaranteed in these types of acquisitions, the bidders for tenders pay bribes to secure the high profit. In the instances where textbooks and other supplies are monopolized by the state and bidding procedures are irregular, poor quality products become the norm and contracts are also frequently obtained by unprofessional agents (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006, pp. 4-5). A third form of corruption, relates to *school accreditation*. New institutions and degrees must be recognized through the proper accreditation process, traditionally managed by the relevant ministry. Public and private schools may pay bribes in order to obtain the necessary authorizations, and accreditation corruption is widespread. The results of this is that graduates from these schools, enter into the labor market with potentially poor professional qualifications. *Student admissions and examinations* is a fourth form of corruption which commonly includes selling entrance exam papers to high-paying candidates in advance, corrupt practices around examinations, favoritism and nepotism. Instances of teachers that only teach half the curriculum while the other half requires payment is also reported. The fifth and last common form of corruption in the educational sector, relates to *teacher management and professional conduct*. Examples of corrupt practices include bypassing recruitment criteria, appointing unqualified personnel, bribing administration in order to avoid unpopular teaching posts or assignments, bribing promotion committees or the promotion of friends or colleagues that are not qualified (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006, pp. 4-6). In other words, there is a range of corrupt practices that is found in the education sector throughout the world. This thesis will later utilize four out of these five main forms or areas of corruption, to analyze corruption in the Kosovo educational sector.

Finally, it is important to note that exposure to these corrupt practices during youth and adolescence at schools and universities, makes it almost impossible for the education sector to provide new generations with ethical values and behavior, which is arguably one of its central



roles. This further normalizes corrupt practices, resulting in corruption becoming the norm at all levels of society. (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006).

#### *Corruption and its Impact on Employment and Economic Opportunities*

There has been some disagreement within academic literature on the effect of corruption on economic growth. Some researchers, such as Samuel Huntington, Nathaniel H. Leff, Thierry Verdier and Daron Acemoglu, suggest that corruption can be positive as it gives corrupt civil servants incentives to do a service when they otherwise would be engaged in delaying tactics. Following this argument, corruption could induce a more efficient provision of government services. Corruption could also give leeway for entrepreneurs to bypass inefficient regulations, which ultimately raises the efficiency of the economy (Ali & Hodan, 2003, pp. 450-451; Mo, 2001). However, there are many counter-arguments to this, and the prevailing view is that corruption is harmful to economic growth (Mauro, 1995) with a range of scholars arguing for the adverse effects corruption has on both bureaucratic efficiency, investment and economic growth (Bardhan, 1997; Mauro, 1995; Mo, 2001; Shleifer & Vishny, 1993).

By using a dataset from a large sample of countries, Mauro finds that corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency correlates negatively with economic growth. Other scholars argue that corruption distorts the incentives of entrepreneurs through the necessities of bribing in order to receive licenses and other necessary services. For example, instead of competing for contracts by trying to be the most efficient company or by complying with safety practices to get a license, companies need only to bribe the right government official to get ahead. Corruption also creates uncertainties about the expected benefits of economic activities. On the higher level, corruption in government bureaucracy encourages rent-seeking and competition for economic power which in turn affect the capacity of public institutions to provide services (Ali & Hodan, 2003; Bardhan, 1997). In other words, when public resources that were meant to be allocated for building infrastructure that would enhance productivity, are diverted for politicians or elite's private consumption, growth rates will inevitably be affected negatively. The negative correlation between corruption and economic growth is also found in a cross-country comparison study on economic corruption (Ali & Hodan, 2003) which seem to support the result of researchers such as Mauro, demonstrating that corruption causes lower economic growth and not vice versa (Mauro, 1995). However, it is important to note that the findings of the study are not conclusive as a result of its limited sample size.

An area that is affected by corruption but also deemed important for job creation as well as economic growth and opportunity is foreign direct investment (FDI). FDI is generally recognized as having a positive impact on the economic growth of the host country. Foreign investment inflows can also positively influence employment and be an important source of technology advancement in the host country as well as having positive spillover effects on the local economy. FDI can also facilitate economic growth in the host country by increasing savings and investment. Because of these positive effects, developing countries often compete intensely to attract investors and multi-national enterprises often have multiple choices in regard to investment country. The host country therefore typically wants to develop incentives to attract FDI, such as providing good market size and growth potential, good investment attributes through strong institutions and regulations that are investor friendly as well as generally good business opportunities. However, it is also important to be aware that multi-national companies also can exploit the local host economy for short term benefit, and that the net effect FDI has on employment is not easy to assert (Hornberger, Battat, & Kusek, 2011; Klein, Aaron, & Hadjimichael, 2001; Pula, Loxha, & Elshani, 2017, pp. 7-11).

Corruption can negatively affect FDI by impacting the business environment and the bureaucratic procedures needed in order to do business, and can cause foreign investors to be reluctant to invest in a country, which in turn can have a negative impact on economic opportunities (Habib & Zurawicki, 2001, 2010; Voyer & Beamish, 2004). However, there is also research that suggest that this might not happen in all cases and with all types of FDI (Brouthers, Gao, & McNicol, 2008; Habib & Zurawicki, 2010).

Other forms of corruption such as nepotism and clientelism can also negatively affect employment and economic opportunities. Widespread nepotism and non-merit employment may lead to institutions and businesses having unqualified or less qualified staff which could negatively impact the productivity, provision of public services and economic development as well as increasing the vulnerability of unemployed, marginalized and young people (UNDP, 2012a, pp. 89-94).

Additionally, corruption can also deepen economic inequality. In a corrupt social system, individuals who have a higher income will have greater latitudes in their behaviors and decisions than the poor, as a high income enables them to purchase freedoms and conveniences. As a result of this, inequalities also become more apparent, and those who are poor are more likely to be oppressed (Tay et al., 2014, p. 758). This can engender grievances among the

economically disadvantaged, feelings of injustice, significance and lack of self-realization which all are connected to radicalization and violent extremism as discussed earlier (Denoux & Carter, 2009; Jiang, 2017, pp. 22-23).

#### *Corruption and its Impact on Social Trust*

Research shows that corruption has a negative impact on social trust. Comparative research done on Sweden and Romania reveals that social trust correlates positively with several political, social and economic conditions, such as a higher level of economic growth and more democratic societies. The study also reveals that corrupt and deceitful behavior by public authorities can not only result in a loss of trust in the authorities, but it also leads to a belief that a people in general in general are less trustworthy. This belief is present regardless of whether people had been brought up in a high-trust/low corruption culture such as Sweden or low-trust/high corruption culture such as Romania (Rothstein & Eek, 2009). Furthermore, studies on life satisfaction and social well-being among residents in societies with higher levels of corruption, as a result of perceived injustices or experiences of corruption, are shown to be lower than in individuals that have no such experience or perception, or who do not reside in societies where the perception of corruption is lower (Tay et al., 2014, p. 758; Zúñiga, 2017). In other words, corruption or a widespread perception of rampant corruption seemingly diminishes social trust in society both between people and between people and public institutions. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this chapter and in the theory part of chapter three, a lack of trust in that the state are able to provide opportunities for its citizens can also make individuals more vulnerable to groups that use narratives that promises an alternative future without corruption as well as promises of economic opportunities. This is exemplified by several studies on the terrorist group Boko Haram in Nigeria that show how they use grievances related to the lack of social trust in government and public institutions, and the inadequacy of these institutions to provide opportunities in their recruitment narratives. (Anaedozie, 2015; Chayes, 2015, pp. 172-183; Hendrix, 2016, pp. 2-9; Onuoha, 2014). The case of Boko Haram and the implications of corruption on conflict and violent extremism will be examined further in the next sub-chapter.

#### *5.1.4 Corruption and its Impact on Conflict and Violent Extremism*

It is clearly established that corruption creates or exacerbates political instability, wastes public resources and decreases foreign investment and trust in state institutions, and perpetuates and exacerbates inequalities (Jiang, 2017, pp. 22-23). Corruption also has security implications. Some scholars argue that inequality itself can have an effect on violent conflict, especially if

the inequality is “horizontal inequality” at the group level. Horizontal inequality means that, on balance, two groups are perceived as unequal. This inequality can be seen by the group as a form of exclusion and potentially trigger strong grievances that can lead to intergroup conflict and violence. However, it is important to be mindful that not all inequalities necessarily produce grievances and not all grievances triggers violence (Cederman et al., 2013, pp. 11-40). Other empirical research has also shown how corruption strengthen the potential for conflict and how corruption helps prolong conflict by eroding trust in, and the legitimacy of, state institutions, diminishing rule of law and weakening security institutions further destabilizing the situation. (Chayes, 2015; Le Billion, 2003, pp. 413, 417-420,421-424; Wheatland, 2015).

Furthermore, corruption can potentially also be seen as an indirect source of justification of violence through *legal neutralization* of violence. As explored previously, ideology and religion can be seen as a *moral neutralization* of violence by redefining the harmful conduct or acts as honorable through the utilization of moral justification, exonerating social comparison and sanitizing language, as presented by Albert Bandura’s moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 2002, p. 102; Nivette et al., 2017, p. 7). Similarly, persistent experiences of injustice and corruption, disadvantage and alienation can lead to what is called legal cynicism. This legal cynicism denies the binding nature of laws, and legitimizes acts that are outside the law and social norms of society. By framing the way individuals interpret the law, legal cynicism serves as a mechanism to delegitimize legal sanctions against violent behaviors, something that is backed up by evidence that legal cynicism is correlated with crime and violence (Nivette et al., 2017, p. 7). Furthermore, legal cynicism can be connected to a lack of social trust, as mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, as the lack of trust in the legal and normative laws of society can lead to legal cynicism and help justify violent extremist behavior.

This also links to research done on terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, where grand corruption by the state institutions has contributed to severe socio-economic deprivation, including a lack of provision in healthcare, infrastructure, education, security and electricity, as well as opportunities for socio-economic gain. This has given the terrorist group a tool for mobilization, as they promise potential supporters and recruits that they will address the grievances individuals have as a result of the corruption in institutions of the state and by public officials (Anaedozie, 2015; Chayes, 2015, pp. 172-183; Hendrix, 2016, pp. 2-9; Onuoha, 2014). In other words, widespread corrupt behavior in the public sector can lead to socio-economic deprivation, increased vulnerability, and can be used by violent extremist groups, facilitating and increasing the potential for anti-secular, violent extremist narratives to find a receptive

audience. Because the corruption itself also can contribute to socio-economic challenges such as poor education, unemployment and inequality, it has the potential to further strengthen perceived grievances, diminish critical thinking and thereby increase the impact these narratives have on individuals in society as will be examined later in this thesis.

### 5.1.5 Summarizing Theories on the Impact of Corruption on the Vulnerability Factors

Based on the theory laid out so far in this chapter and shown below in figure 5, this thesis presents an assumption on how corruption can impact radicalization and violent extremism. By affecting vulnerability factors in society, corruption makes individuals or groups more vulnerable towards drivers of radicalization, making them susceptible towards radicalized and violent extremist narratives that use grievances and ideology as tools for recruitment and mobilization, as well as the group dynamics of radicalized groups.



**Fig. 5 The impact of corruption on vulnerability towards radicalization**

Corruption affects these vulnerability factors in a number of ways. First, corruption contributes to a situation where funds that should be allocated to important social projects such as education and employment, get reallocated elsewhere or are wasted. This in turn leads to a lack of quality education, lack of economic development, lack of employment and economic opportunities, increased inequality and a greater potential for grievances, crime and conflict. Furthermore, corruption weakens social trust by damaging the trust in state institutions and between people. This can also lead to legal cynicism and a feeling of isolation and insignificance. This can be used by radical and violent extremist groups and organizations to recruit and mobilize fighters and supporters (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Rothstein & Eek, 2009; Tay et al., 2014, pp. 751-752). Corruption can therefore be seen as a facilitator of radicalization into violent extremism because of how it impacts the environment in which the process of radicalization into violent extremism takes place (Agnew, 2010; Nivette et al., 2017). By focusing on the impact of corruption on the quality of education, employment and economic opportunities and social trust, this thesis will examine how corruption impacts radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo.

## 5.2 Kosovo – *The Impact of Corruption on the Vulnerability Factors*

Having answered the first two research questions, and established the process of radicalization into violent extremism, how vulnerability factors make individuals more vulnerable to radicalization, and presented theory on how corruption affect the vulnerability factors, this thesis will now answer the sub-question to the third and final research question:

*“How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors in Kosovo”.*

To answer this sub-question, this sub-chapter will specifically look at how corruption has an impact on the three vulnerability factors: education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust in Kosovo, and how this further links to failed expectations and a lack of socio-economic opportunities as well as societal polarization, and increased isolation leading to increased vulnerability towards radicalized narratives and the group dynamics of radicalized and violent extremist groups.

This thesis argues that the socio-economic challenges in Kosovo, especially the quality of education, unemployment levels, and a lack of social trust, make people more vulnerable to radicalized and violent extremist narratives and the group dynamics of radical and violent extremist groups. Critically, the main argument of this thesis is that corruption plays a role in exacerbating these problems that makes people more vulnerable.

According to the theoretical parts of this chapter, the impact of corruption on social and economic deprivation is clear. Theoretical and empirical evidence demonstrates that widespread corruption leads to lack of quality education, increased unemployment, and a loss of social trust and increased potential for conflict (Serhati et al., 2016).

While it is difficult to measure the prevalence of corruption, it is estimated that corruption in the Balkans is endemic (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006). This perception is reflected by the low score Kosovo has on the Transparency International’s corruption perception index (Kosovo, 2018). According to the CPI for 2017, Kosovo is ranked 85 out of a total of 180 countries and with a score of only 39 out of a 100, where 0 is most corrupt and 100 least corrupt (*Corruption Perception Index 2017*, 2018; Kosovo, 2018). This being the case, there has been a slow but steady improvement as Kosovo ranked 111 in 2013 and 103 in 2015 (Serhati et al., 2016, p. 29). However, according to a 2017 public pulse survey conducted by UNDP and USAID in Kosovo, people perceive unemployment, corruption and poverty to be the three most important problems in Kosovo. Although the percentage of respondents that deem corruption

a major problem has fluctuated during the reports from 2011 to 2017, the perception that unemployment, poverty and corruption are some of the most important challenges, has remained unchanged (UNDP, 2011, pp. 19-24; 2012a, pp. 89-94; 2012b, pp. 9-12; 2014b; 2015b, pp. 8-10; 2017, pp. 11-16). Freedom House also states in their annual report for 2017 that rampant corruption has given rise to deep public distrust in the government of Kosovo (Freedom House, 2018). The 2016 assessment of corruption in Kosovo by the Riinvest Institute, states that an estimated 27% of the population reported that they have experienced corruption pressure from public officials, while 22% of the population were involved in some type of corrupt practice themselves, with the practice of bribing occurring as a response to corruption pressures made by corrupt public officials (Serhati et al., 2016, p. 31; Spector, Winbourne, & Beck, 2003, pp. 7-8).

The study further reveals the attitudes towards corruption, which affects the likelihood of the responders to partake or engage in corrupt behavior by assessing the factors of acceptability, awareness and susceptibility. Looking at the respondents' acceptance of corruption, revealed that half of Kosovar society would accept engaging in some sort of corrupt activity in the future. Additionally, many citizens are not aware of what actually constitutes corrupt behavior. This awareness is especially low compared to other states in the region. Surveys and reports from USAID further suggests that there are high expectations of and a high tolerance for corruption within the general population. This allows the corrupt practices to thrive. Although the susceptibility and tolerance towards corruption among the respondents in Riinvest Institute's 2016 report shows that the share of those willing to engage in corruption to solve a major problem has decreased since 2014, it is still a challenge of great relevance (Serhati et al., 2016, p. 31; Spector et al., 2003, pp. 7-8).

The severity of the corruption problem is also expressed by several of the informants in this research project. For example, A1, worker in an anti-corruption NGO, argues that: "If there is one problem that we seem to have been suffering as a society, it is the presence of corruption...I'm not only talking about bribes, it's corruption on so many levels" (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017). Another informant adds that:

...corruption in Kosovo at least, the way I see it, is not only on the top level, not only in the government and the central level. To me, corruption in Kosovo goes down to the local level very much, on the community level, and then it relates very much with nepotism, because you

find it a lot in schools and in hospitals, so it's spread out (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

An example of the extent of corruption in Kosovo can be found within public procurement which is marred by corruption, with corrupted public officials misusing public funds for their own financial gains. High levels of politicization and widespread critique for the lack of transparency and accountability is also present. There is also a problem with the general lack of legislative implementation, publication of expenditure reports, budgetary transparency and procurement plan from the government of Kosovo. According to the European Commission's 2015 progress report for Kosovo, Kosovo has problems with the enforcement of legal sanctions on corruption and fraudulent practices, and the high level of corruption remains a vital concern within public procurement. Furthermore, the report directs persistent critique towards the failure of respective institutions to implement appropriate disciplinary practices. Many NGOs have also identified abuses of the law in public procurement to award public tenders to businessmen close to politicians (Serhati et al., 2016, pp. 27-28). The prevalence of corruption within public procurement is also expressed by one informant:

What is happening is that all those high officials that hold an office, they use public procurement to send money to their channels. And that means that they either have a business that they want to favor, which then gives a percentage to those officials, or it is someone directly related to them in a long chain (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

In summary, corruption is a serious problem in Kosovo. Lack of transparency in the allocation of budgets, the access of official data, financing of political parties and the use of public funds and procurement also remains a challenge. Most citizens are aware of this corruption, and this is reflected in a loss of faith that it is possible to reduce or eradicate corruption. The initiatives by the government and legislative bodies have shown little success. The judiciary is perceived as corrupted and the appointment of judges and court staff has been politicized (Serhati et al., 2016). As a result, there is a lack of indictments and convictions of corruption cases in Kosovo. This makes measuring the extent of actual corrupt practices difficult. However, that does not mean that corruption is not present (*State of the State - indicators Based Performance: Spring review 2011*, 2011, pp. 44-53). The negative impact of corruption and how it increases cleavages in society is also expressed by informants in this research project: "Misuse of public funds leads to a gap between the "high class" and vulnerable groups...it leads to more isolation and vulnerable groups are affected the most" (A2, personal communication, August 31, 2017).



...when you engage in [corruption], the money that goes into corruption, to pay the minister etc. it has to be cut off from the real investment. So then, we have very poor quality of work, which instead of lasting twenty years it lasts two or three years, and then after three years, you have to invest in it again (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

In short, corruption takes resources away from projects that can improve society, and decreases the quality of the services already provided. It also increases inequality and the cleavages in society, as mentioned in the theory part of this chapter. Having examined the level of corruption in Kosovo and its impact on socio-economic issues in general, this thesis will now study how corruption affects the three chosen vulnerability factors: education, employment and economic opportunities and social trust.

### *5.2.1 Corruption in Kosovo's Educational System*

This subchapter will analyze corruption in the Kosovo educational system by using the examples of corrupt practices in education previously mentioned in the theoretical theory part of this chapter. These examples highlight what the EU Commission and other bodies have identified as high levels of corruption in the Kosovo educational sector. Importantly, reports show that there is a clear difference between the official narrative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, showing a positive planning and legal framework regarding the development of Kosovar higher education and the counter-narrative of other stakeholders, that highlights major issues and concerns including issues regarding quality and integrity. This disparity is something that will be examined further later in this chapter ("European experts concerned about 'vulgar corruption' in higher education in Kosovo," 2017; Serhati et al., 2016, pp. 26-27; Smith & Hamilton, 2017; UNDP, 2015a; Zogiani & Bajrami, 2014).

#### *Planning and School Management*

When it comes to corruption in planning and school management there is little evidence of corrupt practices to be found. However, the lack of indictments does not mean that corrupt practices do not occur, as reports on corruption from the UNDP and the EU Commission show (Smith & Hamilton, 2017; UNDP, 2015a). Misuse of public money in education already took place during the 1990s with the fund that was designated to pay salaries for teachers and other expenses during the period when the LDK organized the "parallel" educational system. A lump sum of money collected through the fund to preserve Albanian autonomy in Kosovo, "Fondi 3%", was paid for this purpose through the organization The League of Albanian Educators (LASH). This organization was led by an official of LDK who later became Minister of Education, Rexhep Osmani. Investigations by the newspaper Zëri showed that Osmani had

misused more than one million Euros. This led to diminished credibility of the fund as well as expectations that the leader of LDK, Ibrahim Rugova, would dismiss Osmani as the head of LASH. Instead Osmani got promoted to Rugova's personal advisor on Education, and later became the Minister of Education after the conflict. This example also highlights a culture of impunity in corruption cases, and helps explain why Kosovo, as one of the most corrupted countries in the region, has almost no significant cases of corruption prosecuted as mentioned earlier (*Kosovo*, 2018; Zogiani & Bajrami, 2014, pp. 9-10).

As explained in the theory part of this chapter, the amount of funding being allocated to education, has an impact on how well students are performing, as it allows for higher quality education, better teacher training, better education facilities and overall resources (Baker, 2016). Considering the poor state of the quality of education in Kosovo, highlighted by the low score on the 2015 OECD PISA test and the importance of budgetary expenditure on education in regard to the quality of education, the examples of misuse of funds in the education sector can therefore lead to lower quality of education (Halili, 2016; OECD, 2018). However, another form of corruption that have a more direct link to the quality of curriculum and educational facilities, procurement corruption, will be presented in the next sub-chapter.

### *Procurement*

Corruption within public procurement is also a problem in the educational sector in Kosovo. According to reports from local NGO's and the UNDP, there are several worrying trends in procurement both when it comes to building of schools and school facilities as well as acquiring textbooks. An example of this is how companies that have had their licenses revoked by the Kosovo Committee on Constructions and Licenses at the Ministry of Trade and Industry due to the failure of these companies to meet the minimum technical criteria, have been awarded with tenders from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) to construct and reconstruct schools. According to the law on construction, a company with suspended or revoked licenses cannot be awarded a public bid, but regardless of clear legal prohibitions on paper, in practice, several companies have been awarded with bids to construct schools (Demhasaj, 2015, pp. 37-39). According to a 2015 UNDP report on corruption in the education sector, the procurement process leaves room for corrupt practices, and procurement officers can come under a lot of pressure during call for tenders. One interviewee in the report claims that procurement officers are threatened or intimidated for large contracts above 125.000 Euros, though for contracts above 500.000 Euros this is less of an issue as such contracts needs

to be signed by both the general secretary and the Minister alleviating pressure on the officers (UNDP, 2015a, pp. 22-23).

The results of this corruption are clear. A school facilities assessment conducted in 2010 by the Department for Infrastructure and the World Bank revealed many infringements. These infringements include misappropriation of resources and postponement of the building of new schools. Most of the school directors interviewed in the UNDP report were very unhappy with how construction and renovation were undertaken, complaining that the schools were not functional and of a low quality, with inadequate heating, bad acoustics, lack of open space for sports and play etc. Learning time was also stated as shortened by approximately five hours per week due to power failures and lack of heating (UNDP, 2015a, pp. 22-28).

In regard to textbooks and curriculum, there are several ways corrupt practices can influence the quality of education. Before 2009, the schools themselves were in charge of selecting textbooks, but because publishers would put pressure on schools and teachers regarding the selection of books, it was decided that MEST would select and purchase schoolbooks for grades one through nine. Although the textbooks are supposed to be provided to the students free of charge every year, and returned by the students after use, few books are actually returned by the students because they are often of such poor quality that they are easily damaged. As a consequence, the industry that produces textbooks has become a so-called “secure market”, where three million copies of school books are printed or re-printed every year. Furthermore, there is no proper open competition among the publishers of textbooks. Until the nineties, the textbook publisher “Libri Shkollor” was the only publisher in Kosovo. Since then, the market is at risk of collapse because 95% of the textbooks are published by either Libri Shkollor or Dukagjini publishing houses, and in some cases only one manuscript is submitted for review by MEST, per year. Issues relating to the fixing of prices among authors are also documented. Other issues regarding textbooks and corruption in procurement relates to the authorship and publishing of the textbooks. Complaints from schools also mentions the low quality of textbooks. Lists of the published textbooks highlight how the same authors signed several textbooks and teaching materials, with one of the authors being a ministry official according to an informant. Distribution of textbooks to schools are also problematic, with 7 schools reporting a surplus of 566 textbooks. This surplus was then sold by private companies as scrap paper according to an audit conducted in 2013 by the Auditor General in Kosovo on the request of the Oversight Committee on Public Finances (UNDP, 2015a, pp. 22-28).

### *School accreditation*

Another form of corruption in the Kosovo education system relates to school accreditation. This form of corruption can potentially impact education quality by giving accreditation to institutions that do not meet the minimum requirements of curriculum and school facilities. On paper, the process of accreditation requires between 6-12 months, with clear criteria so that the respective bodies can make a decision. However, in 2008 the government violated the legal requirements by contracting the British accreditation council to do an assessment of the private educational institutions on which MEST would decide on licensing and accreditation. This clearly oversteps the law which states that the accreditation is a mandate of the Kosova Accreditation Agency, while the licensing is a mandate of the Ministry. The British accreditation council had only 40 days to perform their assessment with no clear baseline criteria that the educational institutions had to fulfill, and as a result, no proper quality assessment procedures can be undertaken. Furthermore, the former minister of MEST, Enver Hoxhaj also intruded into the independence and integrity of the Kosova Accreditation Agency during the accreditation process of private universities. The organization for Democracy, Anti-Corruption and Dignity (ÇOHU!) states that the minister ignored the agency and was himself promoting a number of universities publicly. Interestingly, leaflets from these same universities cited him as a member of the faculty. The minister's claims about the performance of these universities were later disputed by a report by the British Accreditation Council (*The Weakest Link of Kosovo's Democracy*, 2015, pp. 75, 95-98).

In short, corruption and a lack of resources have contributed to a lack of quality control both when it comes to private educational institutions as well as public universities. This leads to an increased potential for poor quality education and a lack of critical thinking, exemplified by Kosovo receiving one of the lowest score on the 2015 PISA test (Halili, 2016; OECD, 2018; UNDP, 2015a; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 25).

### *Teacher Management and Professional Conduct*

At pre-university level, irregularities and corrupt practices when it comes to the recruitment process of school directors, especially in the form of appointments based on political affiliation, favoritism and nepotism, are well documented. The corrupt practices in the recruitment of school directors also impact the recruitment of teachers, contributing to the increased politicization of the hiring process. In 2013 there were 710 complaints regarding the teacher recruitment-process that were submitted to the official inspectors under the legislation of inspection (UNDP, 2015a, p. 19). Teacher accreditation is also problematic. In 2009, MEST

introduced a new accreditation system where teachers who want to advance their career need to renew their licenses every 5 years, a process that requires mandatory trainings. Furthermore, the schools themselves decide which teachers will attend the trainings. This opens up for competition between the teachers and the risk of pressure and favoritism. This system, when fully implemented, allows the school director to have a strategic role to play since he or she will be involved in the evaluation of teacher performance, essentially deciding which teachers should be allowed to participate in the trainings (UNDP, 2015a, p. 20). This increases the risk of biased evaluation and opens up for bribery, intimidation and nepotism, as teachers can bribe directors and directors can favor family members, friends or associates.

Although procedures for proper accreditation and qualification are in place at university level, the recruitment process for staff and lecturers is over-politicized. Kosovar media have also revealed several scandals among high-ranking university staff, which led to the resignation of several officials in February 2014, including the Dean of the University of Pristina. According to the UNDP report, interviewees stated that the University of Pristina has become a platform to employ relatives or as a tool to provide jobs to party members. There are also cases of MP's and politicians being registered as university professors, although they do not teach classes nor have the proper qualifications. Furthermore, professors are only allowed to teach in two places of work, and they should disclose which institutions they teach every year. Despite these regulations, there are cases of professors working full-time in one university and, at the same time, working full-time or part-time at another university, using replacements to enable them to work in different places. For example, a professor from the University of Pristina was also the Dean of a private university at the same time (UNDP, 2015a, p. 21).

Regarding teacher behavior and professional conduct at pre-university level, there are several concerning trends that have been recorded in Kosovo. The lack of an enforcement mechanism for punitive measures following teacher misconduct is a problem, and teachers are never expelled regardless of conduct. Furthermore, although parents can file a complaint to the municipality, the cases never reach the court and disciplinary action against teachers never reaches the Department of Inspection which has the legal competence in this regard. In other words, there is a form of teacher impunity in place. Even in a case where the teacher faced complaints because of violence, he was reinstated in his position. Teacher absenteeism is also prevalent. Although school directors keep an attendance register and teachers absent for more than one month can be replaced, statements from one school director shows that there is a legal vacuum regarding teacher absenteeism for less than one month, and for occasional

absenteeism, internal teacher substitutes are utilized (UNDP, 2015a, p. 20). In other words, a teacher could be absent for just under a month or miss every other week and still keep his or her job.

At university level, an audit conducted in two universities found that corrupt behavior was a serious problem among professors. Cases of absenteeism, and dual contracts as well as salaries drawn for staff who are no longer, or never were employed for various reasons, so called “ghost professors”, were identified. Student representatives also reported postponement of exams, blocking access to the assessment of student papers, and making it obligatory for students to purchase textbooks written by professors, especially in the faculty of economics. Furthermore, Students at the University of Pristina mention examples of professors delegating the lecturing of master level courses to recently completed Master graduates, blackmail, bribes, abuse of power, illegal passing of grades and suspicious promotions based on plagiarized or spurious publications. Cases of professors having mentored as many as 136 and 143 bachelor theses in a two-year period also highlights the lack of quality assurance of students work (*Corruption in the Education Sector*, 2006, p. 3; Limani, 2017; Smith & Hamilton, 2017, pp. 27-29; UNDP, 2015a, pp. 21-22).

Plagiarism is also a major problem among students and faculty. Media have also uncovered several scandals confirming the widespread culture of plagiarism at the University of Pristina. Among the students, plagiarism is rampant, and not only among the poor performing students. Students often copy whole articles, share materials and cheat on tests. The University lacks a proper method of rooting out plagiarism. This phenomenon is just as common among the professors. There are cases of university professors getting promoted in the university, some moving up in politics, through plagiarism and publishing spurious articles in dubious journals. The code of ethics at the university, although present on paper, can in many ways be seen as technically defunct (Limani, 2017).

Although it is not possible to prove a direct causal relationship between corruption and the poor quality of education, and while there are other factors that might play a more important role in regard to the quality of education, the examples used in this chapter show that there is a culture of corrupt behavior in the educational sector that likely contributes to the documented poor quality of education and poor student outcomes. One expert informant on corruption, elaborates on how corruption affects the education system:

...instead of using the money to finance education [...] we just keep using the money to reinvest in the investments we already made, because the money goes in the pockets of officials and the quality of work is very poor (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

In other words, mismanagement and a continuous need for reinvestment because of corruption draws resources away from improving education. Instead, money is poured into rebuilding and maintaining and as a result, the quality of education suffers.

#### *How does Corruption in Education Link to Radicalization?*

Building upon the findings made in this chapter and the previous two chapters, this sub-chapter has shown how Corruption in education contributes to increased vulnerability to radicalization into violent extremism. Corruption has contributed to a lack of quality education as well as a culture of plagiarism in higher education. The poor quality of education contributes to a lack of critical thinking. It also leads to students not learning what they are supposed to. The poor quality of education is also confirmed by the poor results in the 2015 PISA test. Interviews with foreign fighters from Kosovo as well as reports and academic works, affirms how poor quality of education and lack of critical thinking leads to greater vulnerability towards radicalized narratives that promote violent extremism (Halili, 2016; OECD, 2018; Pels & de Ruyter, 2012; USAID, 2015, pp. 4-5; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 28-29).

Furthermore, the poor quality of education does not equip students with the skills required in the labor market. The high enrollment in the universities does not correspond with the amount of jobs available and the labor market is unable to engage the vast level of youth that is added to the market every year (Shtuni, 2015a, p. 465; UNDP, 2012a, pp. 89-91). Individuals obtaining a first or second level degree within a specific field, with little chance of employment or ability to travel abroad to study, could further contribute to frustrations over lack of opportunities and unmet expectations, an important vulnerability factor towards radicalized narratives. This also links to how corruption impacts another vulnerability factor in Kosovo, unemployment and lack of economic opportunities, which will be discussed in the upcoming subchapter.

#### *5.2.2 Corruption, Economic Opportunities and Unemployment*

Corruption also affects the economy and employment in Kosovo. This includes bribery, state interference, organized crime and the informal economy. All of this negatively affects business and the local economy. Bribery occurs in both the public and private sector, not only between private companies and public officials but also between businesses themselves. An inefficient

public procurement procedure also contributes to the mismanagement of tendering procedures for companies. The European Commission's progress report from 2015 also mentions the presence of high levels of corruption in Custom and Tax administration (Serhati et al., 2016, pp. 26-27). The negative implications of corruption on the economy is also shared by an anti-corruption expert that was an informant in this research project. The informant states that the lack of an economic development strategy and a situation where the minimum wage limit is not able to sustain people, are highly problematic. But the situation is made worse by corruption, as the qualified people are not getting into the positions, and money is lost instead of properly invested because of mismanagement and corruption. The weak accountability system further results in nobody being held accountable for their mismanagement and corruption (A3, personal communication, December 5, 2017). However, it is important to mention that there are other factors that also affects the labor market, such as the lack of quality in higher education, as well as a discrepancy between what the job market needs and what it gets from universities and schools and a lack of policies that favors the creation of small and medium sized enterprises and general job creation (Haziri, 2015).

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the economic situation in Kosovo is shaped by a high level of unemployment exemplified by the estimated unemployment rate for 2016 at 34.8 percent, and youth unemployment among youth aged 15-24 at a staggering 57.7 percent. Furthermore, there is a general lack of economic opportunities, and the business sector performs poorly without any signs of improvement. Businesses note that the strong informal economy and high levels of organized crime prevent the market economy from functioning properly in Kosovo. According to assessments from the Riinvest Institute and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), when the state interferes in the business sector, businesses often have to engage in corrupt practices in order to function efficiently. For example, in order to receive municipal services, businesses are often expected to make informal payments to the relevant municipal officer (Serhati et al., 2016, pp. 26-27; UNODC, 2013, pp. 5-10).

The challenges of unemployment and corruption are also affirmed in the 2016 edition of the KCSS Security Barometer survey, as unemployment and corruption are perceived as some of the largest internal security threats in Kosovo by the respondents in the survey (*Kosovo Security Barometer*, 2016, pp. 17-18). This thesis will now look at some examples of corruption in the economy and labor market and how it contributes to unemployment and a lack of opportunities in Kosovo, all of which can make individuals more vulnerable and exposed towards radicalized narratives.



### *Nepotism and Employment*

As presented in the theory part of this chapter, nepotism is a form of corruption where someone in an official position exploits his or her power or authority to provide a job or favor to a family member, friend or associate, even though he or she may not be qualified or deserving of said job or favor (*How do you define Corruption?*, 2017; *Clientilism*, 2018; *Nepotism*, 2018). There are several reports, news articles and statements that illustrate how nepotism is prevalent and how it affects economic opportunities and employment in Kosovo. According to the 2017 Kosovo public pulse survey conducted by UNDP and USAID, 79% of respondents believe that family connections, bribes, party alliances and other non-merit based factors are most helpful in gaining employment in the public sector. Furthermore, only 22% of survey participants believe that education, professional experience and training would help them achieve employment in the public sector. The awareness of nepotism is particularly present among young people, who state that connections are more important than professional skills and education, affirming the findings in UNDP reports which shows that perceptions of family connections, bribes and other forms of non-merit based employment are prevalent. This lack of faith in merit-based employment among young Kosovars, can help explain why the respondents chose unemployment and poverty as the biggest threat to their future and Kosovo's future. Nepotism and non-merit based employment in the private sector are seen as less widespread than in the public sector, but most respondents don't think merit-based employment practices are commonly used in neither the public nor the private sector (UNDP, 2011, pp. 19-24; 2012a, pp. 89-94; 2012b, pp. 9-12; 2014b; 2015b, pp. 8-10; 2017, pp. 11-16). Corruption in the form of nepotism and non-merit based employment can therefore be seen as both prevalent and contributing to diminished opportunities for people and the economic development in Kosovo.

The negative impact of nepotism on employment and economic opportunities are also mentioned in the UNDP Kosovo Human Development Report from 2012 that focuses on employment and the private sector. The report states that widespread nepotism and the importance of networks and contacts makes access to opportunities among the young and unemployed even more difficult. Nepotism also contributes to a change of values held by employers in Kosovo, with respondents in the report often prioritizing loyalty over skills. Non-merit based hiring practices also contributes to a less skilled workforce that impacts the abilities of local businesses to grow and compete in the market (UNDP, 2012a, pp. 89-93).

The detrimental effects of corruption on employment are also reflected in the media. An article by the regional news network “Balkan Insight” highlights the problem with nepotism and employment in Kosovo. In the article, informants state that despite having top qualifications, they are often losing the selection process, while other individuals without basic knowledge of the tasks needed in the position are selected instead. This is especially prevalent in positions in public institutions. For example, an experienced TV producer stated that he applied for a job at the public broadcaster, RTK, several times, despite being highly qualified, he was passed over in the selection process by people without adequate knowledge. He was later told unofficially that the position was filled already before the selection process (Morina, 2018). As these examples show, the practice of nepotism, makes it difficult for individuals to get employed regardless of qualifications, something that can lead to a feeling of hopelessness and lack of opportunities, and the perception that corrupt practices is systematic and unavoidable, as mentioned in the research on integrity undermining behavior in Kosovo conducted by David Jackson, mentioned earlier in this thesis (Jackson, 2018).

#### *Corruption and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)*

As explained in the theory part of this chapter, FDI is often recognized as an important source for job creation as well as economic growth and opportunity. Unfortunately, given widespread corruption, it is difficult for Kosovo to attract FDI. According to an evaluation of the business climate for FDI in Kosovo, conducted in 2017 by the Kosovo-based, public policy organization, Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS), investors are often reluctant to invest in Kosovo because of negative perceptions of Kosovo and its high levels of corruption. Although other reasons are mentioned by the foreign investors that participated in the study, such as unfair treatment by local institutions, and contract enforcement problems, corrupt and unfair practices are considered a major obstacle. 87.5% of the surveyed investors from both EU and EFTA countries reported that corruption is a major obstacle for their investments in Kosovo. Investors asserted that corruption leads to unfair competition with local institutions, leading to a negative business climate. Examples of corrupt practices encountered by these investors include discriminatory practices by public institutions, unfair tendering procedures and clientelism. Furthermore 3 out of the 16 respondents in the report were subject to bribery requests. These negative perceptions and experiences, contribute to an overall perception of Kosovo among EU and EFTA foreign investors as quite poor and plagued by corruption. Around 56% of the respondents would not recommend or encourage others to invest in Kosovo, while the rest saw the need for substantial positive changes in the investment environment in

order for them to recommend Kosovo as a potential investment location (Pula et al., 2017, pp. 31-35).

*How does corruption in employment link to radicalization?*

According to the 2017 UNDP report on radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo mentioned previously in this thesis, Kosovar foreign fighters and the family members of foreign fighters mention how weak capacities of Kosovo authorities to tackle high unemployment and provide opportunities, motivated them to join radicalized groups (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 27-28). This mirrors Emile Durkheim's state of "anomie", discussed in the theory part of chapter three, and its detrimental effects on society and potential for conflict. How the failure of the state to provide opportunities has an impact on radicalization, is expressed by an informant of this research project:

...I think that the elite here has a blame on what has happened, because they were not focused on giving people opportunities, but they were just looking for themselves. And when you don't have any opportunities you take any chance you can get (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

The practice of nepotism and the lack of merit-based employment by state institutions is also mentioned by an interviewee in the UNDP report, which states that nepotism and the lack of meritocracy, create an environment that hinders growth and opportunities, causing depression and pushing people to choose unhealthy paths for themselves and their community (Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 27-28). The impact of corruption, poverty and economic deprivation is also mentioned by one of the expert informants of this research project:

Because of corruption and nepotism, the right people don't get the right jobs, and this is very much interlinked to violent extremism [...] People doesn't get enough jobs, people don't get good quality education because of nepotism [...] people don't get good healthcare, because everything comes down to if you have money to pay for the services that you are supposed to get anyway, because you pay taxes (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Unemployment and a search for opportunity seems to be a relevant factor for some of the Kosovar individuals that decided to join a radicalized group, although unemployment alone not necessarily is the main factor for joining such a group, as expressed by an informant:

We have cases of people who comes from a wealthy family who still decided to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq, so it's not necessarily that direct link between not having a job and deciding to go to Syria (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

However, employment and search for opportunities seems to be a relevant influencing factor, as several of the Kosovar foreign fighters had previously sought asylum or worked abroad in western Europe. Furthermore, according to data from the Kosovo Police from March 2017, around 72% of the men and 96% of the women that travelled to Syria and Iraq were unemployed before travel. However, it is important to mention that these statistics are affected by the respondent's definition of employment as well as the fact that respondents could have been employed in the informal sector or in employment that they didn't consider extensive enough to be called as such. These numbers far exceed the 2015 average unemployment rate in Kosovo of 31.8 percent for men and 36.6% for women. This suggests that employment and a search for opportunities and a better life elsewhere are relevant factors that made some individuals more vulnerable to radicalized groups that utilized these grievances and offered opportunities in their narratives (*Results of the Kosovo 2015 Labour Force Survey*, 2016; USAID, 2015, pp. 3-4; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8,16-17, 26-28).

As this chapter has pointed out, corruption has a negative impact on both economic opportunities and employment in Kosovo. Although a lack of employment and economic opportunities is not necessarily the main motivation for the majority of foreign fighters from Kosovo, the lack of opportunities and feeling of hopelessness and frustrated expectations mentioned by interviewees and by data both in USAID and UNDP reports, illustrates why this vulnerability factor, what creates it, and how it is used in the recruitment and radicalization process, should be studied further.

### *5.2.3 Corruption and its Impact on Social Trust, Legal Cynicism and Isolation*

As discussed in the theory part of this chapter, corruption can have a detrimental effect on social trust: the trust between groups in society and between the people and state institutions. Research by scholar David Jackson on norms and integrity building in Kosovo municipalities, highlights some interesting points regarding social trust and engagement in activities that undermines integrity, such as corruption. According to Jackson, one explanation for integrity undermining practices is that they are motivated by a descriptive norm, an expectation that everyone else is engaged in those practices, including key political agents within the municipality, political leaders and municipal officials. This expectation damages social trust in people and institutions and leads to the belief that the corrupt practices are systematic in nature, making people engage in nepotism and other corrupt practices merely to get things done. The lack of trust in the ability of politicians and the broader population to provide support, coupled with knowledge that the system is based on corrupt practice, results in people feeling trapped

in the system- This could explain why personal normative beliefs could be subverted by the descriptive norm, leading them to feel that it is necessary even when they personally don't approve of that behavior (Jackson, 2018). The widespread perception that politicians work for their own interests and not for the public good is also expressed by an informant:

You are making yourself rich and your family rich by being in an official position. That is how we translate it... that you are not there actually to serve but you are there to enrich yourself. It is no such thing that driving the public officials as the interest of the people or the service, the spirit of service, no it is just one possibility to make yourself rich, to get yourself out of poverty and use whatever you have (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

It could be argued from this, that it is indeed important to examine social trust and the perception of corruption because the perception itself reinforces and encourages the behavior. This subchapter will examine how corruption can have an impact on social trust and societal isolation by looking at how it impacts legal cynicism, visa liberalization, isolation and frustrated expectations and how that relates to vulnerability to radicalization and violent extremism.

#### *Corruption, Lack of Social Trust, and Legal Cynicism*

In Kosovo, enforcement of the law and general institutional practices are negatively affected by corruption. The judiciary system is weak and is heavily hampered by conflicts of interest, political intrusions and a lack of the resources required to exercise the law. Although there have been improvements in the legislation against corruption in recent years, there is much room for further improvement. For example, insufficient time is allotted to investigate cases of corruption by Kosovo courts, and there is a lack of accountability and efficiency in the judiciary, in particular within public procurement, and collaboration with civil society is minimal. Furthermore, as mentioned throughout this thesis, there are very few cases of corruption that are initiated that actually end up with verdicts, and there is a general lack of focus on punitive measures, as well as too much politicization, conflicts of interest and a lack of transparency (Serhati et al., 2016, pp. 25-26).

According surveys conducted by the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS), the three least trusted institutions in their 2014 Security Barometer survey were the Government, the Prosecution and the Courts. According to the respondents of this survey, these three institutions also represent the three most corrupt institutions with more than 60 percent of respondents in the survey stating that the institutions are either "corrupt" or "very corrupt". Regarding the two

institutions within the judicial sector: prosecution and the courts, trust is low, with more than half of the respondents declaring that they trust neither the prosecution (52.6% don't trust), nor the courts (50.9% don't trust), while only 21.9% and 23.7% declared trust in these two institutions respectively. Furthermore, around 50% of respondents claimed that the prosecution is corrupt, while 37.1% claimed this institution is very corrupt. Less than 16% stated that they trusted the state prosecution. Participants in the survey were even more critical towards the courts, with approximately 64% stating that the courts are corrupt, 38.4% that they are very corrupt, while only 16% perceived the institution to not be corrupt (*Kosovo Security Barometer*, 2014, pp. 6-13). Although the percentages vary slightly over time, perception of corruption within the government and the judicial sector as well as a lack of trust in these institutions also remains high in other editions of the KCSS Kosovo Security Barometer survey (*Kosovo Security Barometer*, 2015, pp. 11-17; *Kosovo Security Barometer*, 2016, pp. 13-15,17). The sever lack of trust in public institutions including judicial institutions, and the widespread perception of corruption within these institutions can lead to legal cynicism and

#### *Corruption, Isolation and Frustration – The Problem of Visa Liberalization*

Corruption also impacts isolation and influence frustrations, frustrated expectations and feelings of isolation among the Kosovars. The lack of trust in government and judicial institutions and their ability to perform their job and the perception of corruption within these institutions also contributes to disappointment and frustrated expectations regarding the performance of state institutions, among the population. These perceptions are also intertwined with frustrated expectations regarding lacking opportunities promised after Kosovo's independence, which contributes to dissatisfaction and potential vulnerability towards radicalization among frustrated individuals (Moss, 2009; USAID, 2015, pp. 3-5).

In particular, one such frustration is the lack of visa-free travel. The challenging conditions for employment and business in Kosovo and the lack of domestic employment opportunities mentioned in this thesis, often motivate individuals to seek employment and opportunities abroad. However, Kosovo lacks visa-free travel within Europe. Considered a symbol of the progress towards European integration, visa liberalization allows for visa-free travel for up to 90 days to the whole Schengen area. However, Kosovo remains the only country in the region that has not been granted visa liberalization by EU. The EU stipulated that it would not grant Kosovo's citizens visa-free travel until Kosovo could achieve better results in the fight against corruption and the provision of a better track record on the prosecution of corruption cases, a criterion that was not considered met until 2018. As mentioned throughout this thesis, the lack

of prosecuted cases and indictments is a worrying trend in Kosovo. Although visa liberalization does not provide employment and opportunities on its own, it is considered an important psychological step towards European integration. A lack of visa-free travel has contributed to the feeling of isolation and perception of Kosovo as a “ghetto”, and frustrated many Kosovars that seeks a better future abroad. These are grievances that can be utilized by radicalized groups. In contrast to this isolation, radicalized and violent extremist groups promise opportunities, responsibilities and meaning, adventure and economic gain (Lekvall, 2015; Pajaziti, 2018; *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Update on the implementation of the remaining benchmarks of the visa liberalisation roadmap by Kosovo, as outlined in the fourth report on progress of 4 May 2016*, 2018; *Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015; USAID, 2015, pp. 3-4; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, pp. 8,24-28). The importance of freedom of travel is also expressed by one of the informants in this research project:

If the people, the young generation here, doesn't have opportunities to get a job and to travel [...] as long as doors are shut, and unemployment are high and chances that you are getting a bright future are very dark, any scenario comes to your mind. And the government has a role to play, and that role is to make sure there are plenty of chances for young people to engage, even in community work, making a change. But then, who are the leaders that should do this? Those, the corrupt ones? They never cared about this... (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

As this sub-chapter has discussed, the widespread corruption in Kosovo not only contributes to a lack of social trust, it also creates isolation and frustration over unmet expectations. This is because corruption until recently has blocked the visa liberalization process, thereby severely limiting the freedom of travel. These factors could increase the vulnerability towards radicalization into violent extremism by limiting opportunities and increase the feeling of hopelessness and significance-loss, connecting to motivational factors related to opportunities as discussed in chapter three.

#### *How does Corruption's Impact on Social Trust Link to Radicalization?*

The importance of corruption is often downplayed in relation to security issues such as violent extremism and radicalization, and the presence of other factors such as the recent experience and trauma of an ethno-sectarian conflict may impact social trust more severely. However, as presented in the theory part of this chapter, alienation and lack of trust in the state and judicial institutions can increase the potential for legal cynicism, thereby provide justification for

violence. The lack of trust in the Kosovo government, and the legal and public institutions is also worrying, as research done on other violent extremist groups such as the terrorist group Boko Haram, has shown how a widespread perception of corruption and the resulting lack of trust in that the government and public institutions are able to provide opportunities, are utilized by radical or violent extremist groups that use these grievances in their narratives for mobilization and recruitment (Anaedozie, 2015; Chayes, 2015, pp. 172-183; Hendrix, 2016, pp. 2-9; Onuoha, 2014). A lack of social trust can therefore be argued to make individuals more vulnerable to these narratives. How the perception of systematic corruption and lack of social trust impact vulnerability towards radicalization is also expressed an expert informant in this research project:

It's the loss of faith in the state and the institutions, the lack of faith in accountability mechanisms, police, courts, the lack of belief in professionalism, the lack of belief in the education system. If you combine all of these and someone that is socially vulnerable, when you add these factors, they are going to find a way to get to a different point, away from their suffering (A3, personal communication, December 5, 2017).

Legal cynicism and a loss of trust in public institutions can, in other words, make vulnerable people seek out alternative solutions to their grievances and problems as a means of survival, and help justify acts that go beyond what is deemed legal in society, such as violent extremism. Another informant also mentions how the widespread perception of public office as an opportunity for providing for oneself and family rather than for the greater good of society has damaging effects:

Corruption makes people think that those in the government look after themselves and not after them. So, if they are not looking after me, why should I stay here and support democracy with no money in my pockets. But here is one organization that is helping me, it is giving me money and it is promising me a new future, a future that does not depend on these corrupt politicians or officials. So, it goes along with the brainwash, with the ideological prospects that yes, I can start living in a new world where there is no corruption and anything else (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

In short, the lack of trust in public institutions and that the state provides opportunities and takes care of its citizens because of systematic corruption, increases vulnerability to narratives that promises a new future without corruption, that provides meaning, opportunities and a community. As examined in the theory part of chapter three and earlier in this sub-chapter, research done on terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, exemplifies how the lack of social trust



can be used by radical and violent extremist groups to mobilize and recruit individuals (Anaedozie, 2015; Chayes, 2015, pp. 172-183; Hendrix, 2016, pp. 2-9; Onuoha, 2014). The fact that corruption negatively impacts social trust, legal cynicism and isolation in Kosovo, therefore further warrants a closer study of the impact corruption has on radicalization and violent extremism.

#### 5.2.4 *Conclusion of Findings from the Kosovo Case*

This chapter has answered the sub-question of the third research question: “*How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors in Kosovo?*” and established that corruption affects three critical vulnerability factors: education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust. These three vulnerability factors contribute to less opportunities and frustrated expectations. Interviews with returning foreign fighters further reveals that a lack of opportunities and frustrated expectations motivated some individuals to join violent extremist groups and go to Syria and Iraq.

The detrimental effect corruption has on the quality of education not only makes individuals less critical towards information, including radicalized narratives, it also has consequences for the employment opportunities for youth. This contributes to failed expectations and discontent, which is used by recruiters to pull vulnerable individuals into radical groups.

Lack of employment and economic opportunities is another vulnerability factor. The failure of Kosovo institutions to provide adequate economic opportunities and employment because of lack of institutional capacity and high levels of corruption, contributes to high levels of unemployment. Corruption and nepotism and non-merit based employment in particular, also contributes to frustration and lack of hope in the future. The corrupt behavior of officials and practices such as nepotism, coupled with the high unemployment and a lack of opportunities caused by poor quality of education as mentioned above, contributes to create an environment in which unemployed, frustrated individuals becomes more vulnerable towards violent extremist narratives.

Data from returning fighters as well as by researchers, suggests that increasing levels of failed expectations such as lack of opportunities and disappointment with how Kosovo institutions handle the levels of unemployment as well as the presence of nepotism and corruption, leads to frustration and diminished social trust. Corruption therefore seems to be a facilitator of radicalization into violent extremism by making individuals vulnerable towards radicalized groups that utilizes these grievances in their narratives.

As this chapter has discussed, by causing or exacerbating socio-economic deprivation, corruption facilitates radicalization, as it makes individuals more vulnerable to the narratives of radicalized groups. This is exemplified by how corruption leads to lower quality of education, less economic opportunities and unemployment, and how it contributes to decreased trust in state institutions and between individuals, social groups and communities. All of this makes them more susceptible to narratives by radicalized groups that utilize these grievances and promote violent extremism. Thus, while corruption may not be a main driver of radicalization, it is certainly a facilitator that shapes the environment in which radicalization and violent extremism takes place. In other words, corruption affects the vulnerability factors in a society that makes individuals or groups more susceptible to radicalized and violent extremist narratives.

Statements from returning fighters, the informants of this research project, as well as reports, suggest a causal link between corruption and radicalization and violent extremism, even if there is seemingly no direct connection. However, it is also important to be aware of the limitations of the assumptions made in this thesis, as presented and discussed in the methodological framework.

## 6. CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 *Do Socio-Economic Challenges Really Matter?*

Having laid out these arguments, it is important to assess whether or not these three vulnerability factors actually matter. Some researchers argue that there is no clear correlation between socio-economic deprivation and radicalization and violent extremism, but there are some potential flaws in these assessments. One of the proponents of the claim that socio-economic deprivation does not seem to have any substantial impact, is researcher on radicalization and violent extremism, Adrian Shtuni. He argues that none of the five municipalities in Kosovo with the highest rate of foreign fighter mobilization (Hani I Elezit, Kacanik, Mitrovica, Gjilan and Viti), are among the municipalities with the lowest 2014 Human Development Index (HDI) score in Kosovo (Shtuni, 2016; UNDP, 2014a, p. 92). But there are potential flaws in this assessment. The fact that this assessment is done on the municipal level rather than on the individual level, means that it does not reflect the possibility that the radicalized individuals and foreign fighters could be a victim of relative deprivation among the individuals within each municipality. Additionally, according to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (ASK) 2011 Census, two of the five municipalities that do have the lowest 2014 HDI score, Mamusha/Mamuša and Partesh/Parteš, are mostly populated by ethnic minorities such as Turkish (99.89% of population in Partesh/Parteš) and Serbian (93.12% of population in Mamusha/Mamuša) ethnicities. These groups have their own social networks and culture. Given that, according to the Kosovo Police Database, those who travelled to Syria are predominantly Kosovo Albanians. It would therefore not be expected that Mamusha/Mamuša and Partesh/Parteš would contribute a significant number of fighters ("Population by ethnic /cultural background sex and municipality 2011," 2011; Xharra & Gojani, 2017, p. 16). This is not taken into account in Shtuni's analysis.

More critically, this thesis has not claimed that socio-economic deprivation inherently leads to radicalization and violent extremism, but rather increases the vulnerability to other factors that do. In this case, while the vulnerability factors may be present, it could be that the motivational factors and group dynamics, are not. For example, narratives by radicalized groups might not target ethnic groups such as Turks and Serbs, an argument that is strengthened by the fact that most foreign fighters that travelled to Syria were primarily ethnic Albanians as explained above.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, there is a difference between thought and action, and the individuals committed to violent extremist action can be considered to be the tip of the pyramid of opinion and action. The statistical findings Shtuni uses in his research only concerns itself with the number and rate of foreign fighters, meaning those individuals that committed themselves to take action. However, this does not prove that corruption does not have any impact on the vulnerability towards radicalization of those individuals that are lower down on the pyramid of commitment, i.e. those who have not engaged in violent extremist *action*, yet are followers of violent extremist *ideas*. Although this thesis has mostly concerned itself with statements from individuals who have committed violent extremism, these statements can still provide a broader perspective on the topic. More research should therefore be conducted on the topic in order to establish more conclusive answers on how corruption and socio-economic deprivation affect the vulnerability to radicalization.

#### 6.2 *Why have there been no attacks against the corrupt themselves?*

No acts of violent extremism have yet happened in Kosovo, and the radicalized individuals rather goes abroad to fight as foreign fighters. Another relevant question to ask is therefore: why do radicalized individuals go abroad and fight instead of attacking corrupt officials at home? Scholar on terrorism, Thomas Hegghammer, argues that there are three hypothetical explanations for why foreign fighting has proved the more frequent choice of Western jihadists compared to domestic attacks. The first hypothesis argues that opportunity controls the choice, and that fighters go where it is easier to operate. Domestic constraints in the form of preemptive measures from security agencies also play a role in this. However, this hypothesis requires the underlying assumption that the jihadist does not care where he or she fights, and other factors such as a search for adventure may also have an effect on the choice of going abroad (Hegghammer, 2013, p. 6).

The second hypothesis is that jihadist recruits prefer to train abroad to increase their capability for a more destructive operation in the west later. Data presented by Hegghammer suggests that such “veterans” are more lethal domestic operatives. However, there are also arguments against this hypothesis. For one, only a small number of returning fighters stated they went for training purposes. So, although some foreign fighters may have left for training for a domestic attack, the need for training does not fully account for the popularity of foreign fighting (Hegghammer, 2013, pp. 6-7, 10-11).

A third hypothesis from Hegghammer relates to norms. According to this hypothesis, militants prefer going abroad because they view foreign fighting as more legitimate than domestic fighting. In this hypothesis, the involvement in violent extremist activity depends on perceived religious sanction. The predominant view among Islamist religious authorities is that fighting in established conflict zones is more legitimate than attacks in the West. Hegghammer argues that this hypothesis is the strongest for explaining the prevalence of foreign fighters compared to domestic attacks. However, it is also important to note that the strength of the norm against attacks outside the conflict area may vary in time and space, and be subject to individual perception, personal disposition and context. Even though there has been an increase in ideologues encouraging domestic fighting, the preference for foreign fighting remains strong (Hegghammer, 2013, pp. 7-10). More research is needed to determine to what extent these three hypotheses apply to the Kosovo case.

Other factors such as family ties and the sense of community, were also mentioned by the informants of this research project to explain why there have been no violent extremist attacks against the corrupt officials themselves, to date. As one informant said:

I don't think they will attack Kosovo because of the sense of community, we are a small community, so we mainly know each other. So, the relationship to the family plays a role. If they would commit a terrorist attack in Kosovo, they would probably end up attacking someone they know. I think that is one of the main reasons why we haven't had an attack yet by Kosovar Albanians. But that does not mean that we don't risk having an attack by someone foreign that is not from Kosovo" (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Furthermore, while corruption may facilitate radicalization, it does not necessarily direct it. That is the role of the narratives. Therefore, although corruption facilitates radicalization, if the narratives used by radicalized groups do not target violent extremist action against the corrupt themselves, there is no inherent reason that people who become radicalized would rise up against the corrupt themselves. Corruption only shapes the environment, making people more vulnerable to radicalized narratives. How corruption indirectly acts as a facilitator in making people vulnerable and susceptible to radicalization is also mentioned by one informant in this research project:

It [corruption] is just affecting their state of being [...] you have to zoom out and look for the reasons why they join these movements. So, their primary target is not corrupt politicians, but it [corruption] is affecting their chances and opportunities in life, so I'm saying that it

[corruption] is a factor more behind, that indirectly influence them in their decision making, because if they had possibilities to have a decent job, or spend their youth in youth centres and in vocational training...have a more positive life, they wouldn't think that much of joining (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

In short, corruption indirectly facilitates radicalization by shaping the society in such a way that it increases people's vulnerability to radicalized narratives and group dynamics, thereby indirectly influencing the decision-making process of radicalized or potentially radicalized individuals.

### *6.3 Do Corruption Really Matter?*

As presented throughout this thesis, while corruption may impact the three chosen vulnerability factors, it is certainly not the only thing that affect these factors. This is also expressed by an informant working in an anti-corruption NGO: "...there are so many things that push someone to join these movements, but I would say that a corrupt country is vulnerable to all kinds of isms' and radicalism is one of them" (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017). Corruption can be considered a sufficient condition for radicalization, but not a necessary one. This means that the presence of corruption can lead to radicalization and violent extremist action, but it is not a prerequisite for radicalization and potential violent extremist action to occur. In other words, in cases where rampant corruption is prevalent, there is a greater likelihood for radicalization and terrorist activities to occur. But, in cases where radicalization and violent extremist action is present, corruption is not necessarily an underlining factor. The fact that there is radicalization in countries without widespread corruption, does not negate the fact that corruption can be an important factor for facilitating radicalization. This more indirect role of corruption is also expressed by and informant of this research project:

...I wouldn't say that corruption of individuals has an impact, that an individual see that you are corrupt and then they go and join violent groups, that is not how I see it...But, because people were concentrating on corrupting themselves and making themselves rich, they didn't invest in the institutions, they didn't invest in the economy[...]so there was no employment, there were no strong institutions, there were no strong intelligence [intelligence service]...In that environment you can grow anything (A1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

In other words, it can be argued that other factors such as ideology and religion might play a more important role to create isolation and vulnerability to radicalization than corruption, or that poverty and poor economy lead to a lack of opportunities and frustration that make people

vulnerable to radicalization, not corruption. However, although Kosovo is one of the poorest countries in Europe, the already limited resources is further diminished as a result of mismanagement and corruption. This demonstrates that although other causes of radicalization are present, corruption can exacerbate these causes. The presence of other effects does not mean that the impact of corruption shouldn't be examined further.

#### 6.4 Recommendations

This thesis does not seek to establish quantifiable correlation between corruption and radicalization, but rather to explore and point out what seems to be a causal connection between corruption and vulnerability factors towards radicalization. The impact of corruption has yet to be a major focus in academic literature on the subject of radicalization and violent extremism, and strategies and papers focus on other more direct factors. This thesis suggests that corruption and its impact on the vulnerability towards radicalization, should be explored further in academic literature and in policy.

Academic literature and policy should pay more attention to the impact of corruption on vulnerability towards radicalization into violent extremism. For example, a focus on corruption should be incorporated in Kosovo's national strategy against terrorism. The National Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization leading to Terrorism is a set of strategic documents that is developed by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, and the 2018-2022 iteration is the third edition of this document. The Strategies and the accompanying action plans seek to counter extremist and radical ideologies as well as preventing terrorist activities, minimizing the risk of terrorist threats and reduce vulnerability towards these threats through "a cross-institutional, all-encompassing approach". The 2015-2020 strategy focuses on four strategic objectives: early identification of the causes, factors and target groups, prevention of violent extremism and radicalization, intervention with the aim of preventing the risk from violent radicalization, and de-radicalization and reintegration of radicalized persons (*National Strategy Against Terrorism and Action Plan 2018 - 2022*, 2017; *Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015, pp. 18-27). Counter-corruption efforts should be incorporated into the first and second strategic objectives.

Unfortunately, the strategy only mentions the topic of corruption twice. Corruption and its detrimental effects on both the institutional capacity and the vulnerability of the population, are mentioned in the strategy but only as a less important issue related to low levels of institutional integrity and capacity. And as previously mentioned, increased capacity does not

necessarily lead to an increase in quality of education or employment and economic opportunities if corrupt practices such as bribes and nepotism diminishes the effectiveness of the capacity-building initiatives of public institutions and the growth potential for local businesses. Only one of the three vulnerability factors are therefore touched upon, the issue of corruption and social trust, while the impact of corruption on the quality of education and employment are not mentioned (*National Strategy Against Terrorism and Action Plan 2018 - 2022*, 2017; *Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020*, 2015). The Strategy and accompanying action plan also received criticism from the expert on radicalization and violent extremism interviewed in this research project, for its inability to address the actual needs on the local community level:

...as with everything in Kosovo I feel like, they just want to tick the boxes and say, we done something, here is the document, but does it necessarily address the needs of the communities they are supposed to be addressing? Not so much. For example, the national action plan, one of the activities is to train local sports trainers, and if you go to Hani Elezit and Kacanik...they don't even have a sports hall (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

The expert also criticized the lack of inclusion of local voices and local ownership in the strategy and action plan: “these activities [in the action plan] are supposed to be done at a very local level, but the local level has not been consulted, no local ownership in the document itself, that is my biggest problem” (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

By including local voices and by clearly defining corruption as a security issue that affects vulnerability towards radicalization and violent extremism through its impact on education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust, as well as incorporating anti-corruption efforts into the National Strategy, a more comprehensible approach can be made, that not only targets individuals but also outline the underlying societal causes and needs on the local community level. The need to have a broader perspective of the issue of radicalization and violent extremism is also expressed by one of the informants of this research project:

I see violent extremism as a consequence of a non-functioning state and a non-functioning society, so violent extremism is a problem, but it is a symptom of a much bigger problem, and if we want to cure violent extremism, we have to tackle the root, where the problem is coming from, and as long as we don't see security holistically, as long as we don't see this spread out into other domains and broader concepts rather than just putting police and the military on the streets, we will never get anywhere we want to get [...] If we don't fight corruption first of all, and if we don't focus on the rule of law, we will always have this type of violent extremism or



another type of violent extremism, it will take another form (B1, personal communication, August 30, 2017).

Academia should also pay more attention to the impact of corruption on the vulnerability towards radicalization and violent extremism. More studies on the vulnerability factors in countries with a high rate of foreign fighters and terrorism should be undertaken. Furthermore, the possibility of creating indicators that can identify vulnerable groups and high-risk areas in a country, by looking at the vulnerability factors, and creating a vulnerability index, could enrich the academic discourse.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The terror attacks in Europe in recent years and the increase in violent extremism worldwide show that the threat of violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism is a global challenge that needs to be taken seriously. Further, it emphasizes the need to study the reasons for the phenomena and what influence it. As this thesis has discussed, a range of theories have been developed to explain the process of radicalization into violent extremism. However, although some mention has been given to socio-economic challenges and the role they play, less attention has been given in academia and policy to how corruption impacts socio-economic challenges and how it affects vulnerability to radicalization into violent extremism. Acknowledging the importance of the main theories on radicalization and violent extremism, this thesis uses the commonalities in these theories as a baseline to explore this lesser known area of research on this topic. In order to do this, three main research questions were formulated, each with a sub-question applying them to the case-study of Kosovo:

Research question 1: *How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism?*

Sub-question 1: *How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism in the case of Kosovo?*

Research question 2: *What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process?*

Sub-question 2: *What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process in Kosovo?*

Research question 3: *How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors?*

Sub-question 3: *How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors in Kosovo?*

Using secondary data and interviews with experts, this thesis chose to use Kosovo as a case-study, as it has both high levels of corruption and a high level of foreign fighters. It is also situated in Europe which made it an interesting choice in terms of geographical locality. By answering the first research question: *“How can we understand the process of radicalization into violent extremism?”* and its sub-question on Kosovo, this thesis found that the process of radicalization can be divided into motivational factors based on grievances, humiliation and significance loss, and group dynamics which provide social networks and facilitate the radicalization process. Ideology such as religion provide input to both. The motivational factors found in Kosovo include narratives that tap into religious motivations, nationalistic identity,

and a search for opportunities, meaning and community. Group dynamics and social networks also play a significant role, as family and kinship ties were important in the radicalization process according to data from returning Kosovar foreign fighters.

Regarding the second research question: “*What factors make individuals more vulnerable to the radicalization process?*”, and its sub-question on Kosovo, this thesis chose to focus on three vulnerability factors: quality of education, employment and economic opportunities, and social trust. Findings indicate that a lack of quality education and critical thinking contribute to increased vulnerability to the narratives of radical and violent extremist groups. Lack of employment and economic opportunities and social trust further facilitate the radicalization process by invoking a feeling of hopelessness and a search for opportunities and purpose, which are used by radicalized groups to recruit vulnerable individuals.

By answering the third and final research question: “*How does corruption affect these vulnerability factors?*”, along with its sub-question on Kosovo, this thesis found that corruption can impact all three factors negatively, although to a varying degree. Findings from Kosovo illustrates how corrupt practices in education have diminished the quality of education through a lack of quality assurance, accreditation of schools and professors, and awarding of tenders to ill-suited companies that produce books and build school facilities of poor quality. Corrupt practices also affect economic opportunities and employment. This has created a job market and business environment that are seen as unfit for foreign investment and considered unfair by the local labor force. This leads many people to seek opportunities abroad. Corruption also affects social trust by weakening trust in public institutions such as legal institutions, which increases the potential for legal cynicism. The lack of social trust also leads to frustrated expectations, polarization and isolation.

However, when examining the findings of this thesis on how corruption affect vulnerability to radicalization into violent extremism, it is important to note that since this thesis has focused on Kosovo and three vulnerability factors, the generalizability of the findings, are somewhat limited. Furthermore, the sometimes limited, access to data in the research process and the presence of selection bias and other challenges have also potentially impacted the findings and recommendations presented in the analysis part of this thesis. Additionally, there are counter-arguments that suggests that corruption and socio-economic challenges are less important. However, as explained in the previous chapter, the arguments used by scholars against the importance of socio-economic issues have potential flaws, and this thesis has shown that while

other factors do play an important role, corruption seems to increase the vulnerability towards radicalization by affecting the quality of education, employment and economic opportunities and social trust, regardless of other factors that also contributes to this. Corruption, although not present in other areas where radicalization is present, is seen as a sufficient condition for radicalization as it in a high-corruption environment facilitate vulnerability, but it is not a necessary condition that needs to be in place for radicalization to happen.

Furthermore, as the purpose of this thesis is not to establish quantifiable correlation between corruption and radicalization and violent extremism, but rather to highlight and explore an apparent connection between corruption and vulnerability towards radicalization, the findings made in this thesis are strong enough to warrant further research on this topic. In other words, the findings of this thesis suggest a causal link between corruption and radicalization into violent extremism, even if there's seemingly no direct connection.

These findings also generate certain recommendations for academic research and policy. These recommendations can be understood primarily as shifting the perspective from viewing corruption as a social and economic issue, to seeing it as a security threat, especially given how it contributes to vulnerability towards radicalization and violent extremism. This connection, as well as anti-corruption efforts, should therefore be implemented in policy and CVE strategies. In academia, further research on how corruption impacts the vulnerability towards radicalization and violent extremism would serve to broaden the discourse and contribute to a potentially more comprehensible approach in the struggle against terrorism and violent extremism that also incorporate an understanding of the underlying developmental causes.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS

All interviews were conducted with both written and oral consent, while names and other information regarding the interviewees, are anonymized in accordance with NSD rules.

The code used in this research project to distinguish between the informants, as well as a list of the informants, is found below.

A: Experts on corruption and anti-corruption

B: Experts on radicalization and violent extremism

A1 Project Coordinator, Anti-corruption NGO, In person, August 30, 2017

A2 Expert on Anti-Corruption, August 31, 2017

A3 Project Manager, Anti-corruption Organization, In person, December 5, 2017

B1 Expert on Radicalization and Violent Extremism, In person, August 30, 2017