

'Not a priority': An analysis of terrorism prevention in Portugal


'No es una prioridad': Un análisis de la prevención del terrorismo en Portugal

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to understand the mechanisms behind counter-terrorism operations in Portugal, focusing particularly on their prevention framework. The choice of this case study was motivated by the fact that despite having escaped major terrorist attacks in the period following 9/11, Portugal nonetheless, has to uphold its own counter-terrorism strategy due to its membership of the European Union. In this sense, elite interviews have been conducted in order to determine the components of the Portuguese preventative framework when it comes to terrorism, how it is aligned with European Union standards, and how it has prevented different forms of terrorism. The main findings of this study demonstrate that there is negligible effort in Portugal in terms of preventing terrorism, which is justified by the unimportance of the terrorist threat in Portugal, but also by the excessive securitization of this issue. This study offers reflections for both research and practice.

Keywords: Portugal; Counter-terrorism; Prevention; Radicalization; Elite interviews.

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio es comprender los mecanismos subyacentes a las operaciones de lucha contra el terrorismo en Portugal, destacando su situación de prevención. La elección de este estudio de caso fue motivada por el hecho de que Portugal, a pesar de haber escapado a grandes ataques terroristas en el período posterior al 11 de septiembre, tuvo que defender su propia estrategia de combate al terrorismo debido al hecho de ser miembro de la Unión Europea. En este sentido, se realizaron entrevistas de élite con el objetivo de determinar los componentes de la situación preventiva portuguesa en lo que respecta al terrorismo, cómo estar de acuerdo con los estándares de la Unión Europea y cómo ha prevenido diferentes formas de terrorismo. Las principales conclusiones de este estudio demuestran que existe un esfuerzo insignificante en Portugal en la prevención del terrorismo, lo que se justifica por la poca importancia de la amenaza terrorista en Portugal, pero también por la excesiva titulización de esta cuestión. Este estudio ofrece reflexiones tanto para la investigación como para la práctica.

Palabras clave: Portugal; Contraterrorismo; Prevención. Radicalización; Entrevistas de élite.

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1 Introduction

The factors which drive a nation's approach to counter-terrorism are highly debated. Counter-terrorism studies is a recent field with a small academic research base and it is characterized by its known issues in defining widely acceptable concepts and functions in a world fueled by secrets and speculation. It has been described as a field composed of experts without proper qualification who produce research based on conjectures (STAMPNITZKY, 2010). In this vein Hoffman has characterized counter-terrorism studies as a "huge and ill-defined subject [that] has probably been responsible for more incompetent and unnecessary books than any other outside the field of sociology" (HOFFMAN, 1992, p. 25). However, Stampnitzky (2010) considers that despite it being impossible to obtain a consensus in this field, particularly in defining what counter-terrorism is, this should not mean that the field ought to be abandoned but rather analyzed from an out of the box perspective. Counter-terrorism is a political matter and as such it is necessary to study and understand the context and the actors related to it.

This study focuses on Portugal, a nation mostly unaffected by terrorism when compared to some of its European counterparts. However, in line with Skleparis and Knudsen's (2020) approach in their study of counter-terrorism policies in Greece, it is necessary to comprehend what has differentiated Portugal from other contexts. To achieve this, it is essential to study the Portuguese counter-terrorism effort, its policies, and the requirements the nation must meet, and how it has chosen to do so, as a member state of the European Union, who is obliged to fulfil certain directives, regardless of the existence of a high or low terrorism threat at the national level.

Despite its initial impression of imperviousness, Portugal has contended with terrorism both before and after 9/11 (DA SILVA, 2019). In 2020, the prosecution of eight Portuguese nationals linked to Daesh proved the effectiveness of the national counter-terrorism legislation (also known as CT law) by convicting for crimes of supporting and collaborating with a terrorist organization. Although these individuals all presented the same path, which was the emigration and consequent radicalization outside of national territory, there is an alert to the presence of potential push and pull radicalization factors (EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S EXPERT GROUP ON VIOLENT RADICALIZATION, 2012) in Portugal. In this vein, we consider it important to question what exactly is being done in terms of preventing radicalization towards terrorism in this country.

Additionally, following what has been happening in other countries, Portugal has been witnessing a surge of extreme right-wing (ERW) inspired violence and threats, which has been traced to the rise of a far-right political party, whose racist and xenophobic discourse has encouraged attacks against Roma and colored people in Portugal (EUROPEAN NETWORK AGAINST RACISM, 2020). The radicalization of ERW actors in Portugal has also been flagged in relation to the nation's measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent social and economic difficulties observed during this time, as lockdown brought about a 60% increase in discrimination-related crimes (SISTEMA DE SEGURANÇA INTERNA, 2020). With this scenario in mind, this study, which was carried out in the context of an MA disser-

tation, aims to explore how counter-terrorism policies and strategies, particularly preventative ones, have been applied in the post 9/11 era in Portugal by posing two key research questions:

- How has counter-terrorism legislation been applied in Portugal in the pre-criminal space since 9/11?
- What are the efforts put into place in Portugal in terms of preventing and countering terrorism in the pre-criminal space?

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

From the eight participants in this study, six are academics and two are police officers. Four of the six academics have a PhD degree and have conducted academic research on the topic of counter-terrorism; the other two are about to finish their PhD degrees. Out of these six interviewees, two come from the psychology field and have extensively studied radicalization processes towards terrorism; two others have studied the 2015 Portuguese counter-terrorism strategy, one of them having directly contributed to its development and the other studying it from a critical studies perspective. The remaining two are currently developing studies on counter-terrorism development as a part of their PhD dissertations. The two police officers have decades of experience of working on terrorism prevention.

2.2 Interview procedure

A semi-structured interview schedule was used where the questions encouraged the narration of participants' experiences and perspectives on counter-terrorism in Portugal, enabled probing for more information and clarification of answers, and allowed participants to elaborate on areas of particular interest. The interviews took place via Skype due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were able to talk for as long as they wished, with the interviews lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded, fully transcribed, and anonymized with participant consent.

2.3 Data analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using NVIVO 12 software. A thematic analysis approach was used when analyzing the results. Clarke and Braun (2016) describe thematic analysis as a methodology that permits the researcher to organize and identify patterns and key topics throughout the data, thus allowing the researcher to recognize collec-

tive experiences. In other words, it helps in identifying what are the common topics referred to by the interviewees. This method of analysis allowed to search for common denominators across the entire data field and their association with key teams to provide answers to the research question.

3 The essentials of counter-terrorism

After 9/11 various states began to realize that their perception of the terrorist threat did not match the seriousness of the issue at hand. Therefore, in the early 2000's different states began to develop prevention programs and carry out amendments in their legislations. This offered them the necessary tools and the legislative flexibility deemed necessary to convict perpetrators and investigate potential threats.

To address the phenomena of terrorism and extremism it is necessary to first define these much-debated concepts with reference to the existing literature. Lindalh (2020) defines terrorism as the premeditated use, or threat of use, of physical force to address a political statement relating to a current issue in time. As an example, the attacks in Madrid in 2004 were a response to the Spanish deployment of troops into Iraq in 2003. This same author defines extremism as the process that leads an individual to identify with an ideology or system of beliefs which is employed by violent organizations and, in some cases, may also lead to engagement in violent actions (LINDAHL, 2020).

Smith, Stohl and Al-Gharbi (2018), in turn, define counter-terrorism as the set of policies and actions created to attain a goal that must be broader than simply addressing terrorist violence. To this effect, these authors believe that counter-terrorism must also be involved in a communication process due to the fundamental role of the media in disseminating the terrorist message. Thus, counter-terrorism must address public unrest and create the perception that people are secure, and their way of life is not under direct threat, countering the main goal of terrorism which is to spread fear (SMITH et al., 2018). In addition, counter-terrorism must also be about preventing, identifying, and addressing the factors that led to radicalization in the first place (GIELEN, 2017).

When discussing counter-terrorism strategies there are two areas in which a government may invest: counter-terrorism legislation and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programs. The first pertains to a nation's legislative powers; in other words, to the methods that intelligence services may use to gather information, to the actions that police forces may take in capturing and detaining suspects, and to the way the judiciary system can process perpetrators. After 9/11, there was increased pressure to create such legislation and a demand for tougher legislative reforms. The second available tool at the disposal of counter-terrorism efforts are the preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programs. At the heart of such programs is the anticipation of the terrorist threat, which comprises "a non-coercive attempt to reduce involvement in terrorism" (VAN DE WEERT; EIJKMAN, 2020, p. 492). As radicalization is seen as the process preceding terrorist violence (KUNDNANI; HAYES, 2018), such policies are based,

according to Skleparis and Knudsen (2020, p. 5), on three basic “truths” about radicalization: 1) “radicalisation is a risk that can lead to terrorism”; 2) “terrorism can be stopped by re-routing or reversing radicalisation at an early stage”; and 3) “radicalisation is measurable”. In this scenario, detecting signs of radicalization (or, in other words, ‘at risk’ individuals) is key within P/CVE efforts. In most countries, the responsibility of such detection has fallen not only on the security apparatus, but also on frontline practitioners working at the local level (CRONE, 2016).

Despite being viewed as a collective effort, particularly in the case of EU member states which must comply with European mandates, counter-terrorism did not always work in this way. Countries such as Spain or the UK have faced terrorist threats using their own efforts and strategies, particularly because such countries had already dealt with their own specific threats – Spain dealt with ETA¹ while the UK dealt with the IRA². Bearing in mind these threats, some countries began to follow an approach of securitization to counter-terrorism. Floyd (2020) defines securitization as establishing security as a political process whose issues represent security threats, which in turn means that governments approach the so-called threat urgently as they see it as possibly impacting their own existence. This narrative allows for measures which may be seen as unorthodox but justified as necessary to address the issue (FLOYD, 2020). One of the challenges faced by securitization is that the idea of what is considered as a security matter becomes ill-defined and may encompass various sectors of society (CHARRET, 2009). This not only reinforces surveillance mechanisms but also severely limits the information available on the subject as most matters are deemed as a security risk (CHARRET, 2009).

Due to what some described as scrutiny, through the actions of various prevention programs towards certain communities, particularly Muslim communities, critical scholars have questioned whether counter-terrorism policies make an impact to diminish the threat or whether a more political and societal approach is needed to address this issue (GUNNING, 2007). Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier (2019) also recognize this fundamental issue shared by Jackson (2016) and Gunning (2007) that P/CVE policies have influenced the stereotyping of Muslim communities and the labelling of certain levels of the population as ‘possibly dangerous’.

Through the analysis of some of the measures currently implemented in Western societies, it becomes clear that theoretically, P/CVE policies work towards the promotion of a non-violent nation and the increase in tolerance, societal values and developing a sense of empathy towards the victims of these attacks. However, this is not necessarily the case. Jackson (2017) describes the current anti-terrorism framework employed by most Western nations as outdated and primitive. He states that choosing to respond to acts of extreme violence with violence will do nothing more than promote the endless cycle of terrorism (JACKSON, 2017). This author presents evidence

1 Euskadi Ta Askatasuna.

2 Irish Republican Army.

that violent counter-terrorism can slow the number of terrorist incidences. However, this is only on a temporary basis (JACKSON, 2017). In the end, such operations cannot solve the grievances that led to the creation of terrorist organizations; therefore, it cannot be expected to solve the issue (JACKSON, 2017).

Jackson (2015) argues that after 9/11, what was known as old terrorism, mostly based on political motivation and its related research, began to be seen by many as something which could not be used to understand what is now known as the new terrorism, motivated by religious factors. This means that previously identified patterns could no longer be used to study the phenomena. However, this new form of thinking did not bring anything new to counter-terrorism studies (JACKSON, 2015). In this vein, Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) scholars have been focusing on documenting and studying the nature of the threat and have highlighted the fact that after 9/11, counter-terrorism brought dire consequences with the exaggeration of the War on Terror, which led to a consequent increase in surveillance (JACKSON, 2015). In this regard the CTS approach has provided criticism on how political leaders describe the War on Terror and even how the media portrays it (JACKSON, 2015).

Jackson (2016) suggests that this demonstrates an epistemological crisis in counter-terrorism, precisely through this observable lack of knowledge of what terrorism actually is, ultimately describing it as unpredictable. The author provides a simple example which highlights this issue. The death of Osama Bin Laden presumedly marked a stepping stone in the fight against terrorism with many believing it would be the end of Al-Qaeda but there were no programs that ended, no funding that was terminated, nor any laws that were no longer applicable (JACKSON, 2016). In fact, in the short years after Bin Laden's death, the counter-terrorism effort intensified and in the face of this incongruence, the CTS, non-violence framework, as a methodology, questions the known methods and enriches P/CVE prevention by suggesting an approach that promotes community-based ideals and not one that tightens surveillance and increases discrimination on what are considered to be communities at risk of being radicalized (JACKSON, 2016).

Even though these programs have been growing steadily in the post 9/11 era, evaluation of these programs is virtually non-existent and so their success could be a matter for much debate (GIELEN, 2017). Bearing in mind this lack of program evaluation, it can still be stated that there is no common approach to prevention. Each country is a specific case and in Crone and Nasser's work (2018) of their comparative analysis of the Danish and Lebanese preventative framework, it is observed that the Danish strategy, mostly based on welfare state, cannot be applicable to the Lebanese example, whose strategy mainly depends on security with high levels of securitization. In this regard, each nation defines its road to prevention, and it is important to state that there is not universally appropriate scenario. In this vein, we now explain the methods behind our study of counter-terrorism operations in Portugal, focusing particularly on its prevention framework.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Post 9/11 counter-terrorism legislation

When discussing the Portuguese approach to counter-terrorism, the majority of interviewees displayed some form of knowledge about what constitutes the existing policies in this area. Interviewee 8 demonstrated that the legislation does not only impact his daily work, but that he has extensive knowledge of the changes that were introduced post 9/11 and is in a position where he can influence possible future changes. This interviewee was involved in the first instance of conviction of an ETA member arrested in Portugal, in accordance with Portuguese CT Law (also known as law 52). As such, Interviewee 8 described law 52 by stating: “Law 52 is inspired in the European Union’s decision of July 2002, where countries such as Portugal who did not yet have a specific legislation for combating terrorism started to use this one”.

Whether discussing terrorism on a domestic or an international level, it became quite clear that the EU reality and demands must always be taken into consideration. In this vein, various interviewees mentioned the 2017 EU notification to Portugal regarding the fact that its terrorism legislation did not match EU directives. In this context, six participants believed this notification to be justifiable and one believed that this merited action from the Portuguese side. Only two interviewees claimed that the existing legislation was robust enough to comply with EU regulation and be used to convict crimes of terrorism. Interviewee 1 believed that it was crucial to keep abreast of European policies, an opinion shared with Interviewee 2, who mentioned that the best way to combat terrorism is for Portugal to transpose EU policies into its own policies in this area. Interviewee 5 mentioned that in response to the EU’s 2017 notification, the Portuguese parliament began to approve new measures in haste. However, four years later, nothing palpable has been observed in terms of actions and plans. Most interviewees also believed that change would not occur soon due to this issue not being prioritized in Portugal, particularly when it must deal with the extenuating circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, which have greatly shifted the government’s focus and priorities (a phenomenon also observed in other EU member states).

In contrast, two interviewees believed this EU notification was not problematic as it was also sent to other countries, not only to Portugal. Interviewee 3 went a step further and described this action as a political obligation, not meaning that Portugal has not been delivering with its counter-terrorism legislation. This interviewee believed that in this aspect, Portugal deserves merit for keeping an up-to-date legislation in comparison to other EU countries in the post 9/11 period.

Considering the results mentioned above, in what concerns that application of Portuguese counter-terrorism legislation in the post 9/11 era, there have been few opportunities to observe it in practice. It is mainly believed by Portuguese counter-terrorism actors that the legislative framework is well structured and robust and seems to have been positively

applied in the few opportunities that appeared in the post 9/11 era, such as the convictions of the Portuguese foreign fighters who joined Daesh. This is an observation previously shared by De Faria Costa (2015) upon his conclusion that Portugal does possess the proper legislative capacity to process a terrorist threat. From a European perspective, though, Portugal seems to have lagged behind on its compliance with European regulation. However, this is mostly seen as formality due to the country's involvement within the European Union and is thus not considered as a failure in counter-terrorism.

4.2 A abordagem portuguesa à prevenção do terrorismo

4.2.1 *Diminished threat consideration*

Portugal's positioning within the EU and the fact that it is a gateway into Schengen Space was considered a key factor to be taken into account in counter-terrorism discussions. Bearing this in mind, the public perception remains that thus far Portugal has been able to elude the terrorism threat.

Three of this study's participants considered the terrorism threat as real, although one specified that this occurs on a very small scale, but equally related this threat to the country's involvement in the European Union. The five remaining participants referred to Portugal as a marginal country in the affairs of terrorism, particularly Al-Qaeda/Daesh-motivated terrorism. Two participants believed that Portugal was able to evade this kind of threat, with one referring to the fact that the issue does not concern him deeply, since Portugal is not the same as Spain or France, purely because we have a much smaller Islamic community and also due to the fact that Portugal has not had a terrorist event in recent years. However, despite these claims, this interviewee stated that in any case vigilance must remain due to the nation's involvement with the EU. Two other participants believed that terrorism is not an issue of public concern and one referred to the fact that the national coverage of this topic, in comparison with other EU member states, has aided in creating a sense of non-urgency. Interviewee 5 added an interesting remark by stating:

Portugal has faced terrorism, both from extreme right and extreme left in the last 50 years, and this domestic terrorism is not a part of our collective memory, they are not present to the public or in the academic population, so it seems like we have deleted this from our collective memory, so this is even an additional point that adds to the population not being concerned about this topic.

This statement was, however, countered by interviewee 6 who stated:

[...] after the 2015 attacks from Daesh, there was a survey done to measure the feeling of insecurity and we realized that the Portuguese have a disproportionate fear of something happening here in comparison with other countries that have suffered from terrorism, [...].

Only one interviewee believed that most of the Portuguese population recognizes the country is not immune to terrorism. Opinions diverge immensely on this topic and a consensus is difficult to obtain. However, seven of the eight interviewees all referred to the same point, which is the recent rise of ERW extremism both on a European and a national level. These same seven interviewees considered the threat as one that needs to be and must be monitored, and the possible radicalization of individuals towards violence addressed via a preventative framework. In this regard, a couple of interviewees observed:

I think we need to take the threat of the extreme right seriously and this is not easy as we now have a party in parliament, and they have neo-Nazi militants and it's difficult to condemn this. But this should be taken more seriously, fighting it on a more political level³.

Recently there have been increasing concerns about radicalized right-wing individuals, and in Portugal too. In fact, just last week there was a report which stated that, Portugal has had the 6th biggest increase of this phenomenon in the EU and there should be a focus on more preventative programs which address this type of radicalization⁴.

The rise of the ERW phenomena has clearly shown itself to be one of the largest common denominators in this study. The socio-economic struggles associated with the COVID-19 pandemic seem to have fed this phenomenon, which has seen a growing tendency in Portugal, particularly in younger age groups who can easily access online content related to this extremist ideology.

4.2.2 Secrecy and information sharing gaps

Secrecy was always expected to be a part of counter-terrorism operations and as such it was important to comprehend the road Portugal has chosen and its level of transparency, not only towards society in general, but amid counter-terrorism experts and even amid those employed by the security services. For this study, it was imperative to determine

³ Interviewee 6.

⁴ Interviewee 4.

the existing P/CVE policies in Portugal and secrecy seems to play a major role in determining the community's know-how and the efficiency of inter-agency collaboration.

From the interviewee sample, six of the eight interviewees were not able to name the existing prevention policies in Portugal, including a current member of a security force. All six interviewees attributed this to the secrecy surrounding counter-terrorism affairs, despite their efforts to investigate this matter on a deeper basis. Two of these participants believed that the secrecy is needed in order not to alarm the public unnecessarily, while the other four considered this lack of information as an issue and the disclosure of further information as a necessary step. Interviewee 6 stated:

[...] the people need to know what is happening, they need to be informed. Most of the population believes that the government does not do anything to the benefit of the population and in this case it would be very important for the Portuguese citizens to know about this and that something is being done to prevent terrorism.

Interviewee 4 also provided an interesting remark, mentioning that due to the secrecy surrounding the topic, there is an increased difficulty in evaluating our preventative capacities by stating:

Proving what is done on the prevention side is difficult. If it is done correctly then we cannot prove it because nothing happened. That is the thing with prevention plans. The fact that nothing has happened so far in Portugal may be because our preventative work has been outstanding. We really have no way of knowing.

Secrecy also proved to be a factor in the interviewees' ability to name the services that operate in a preventative capacity in Portugal. Three interviewees were not aware of any branch or service that acts on this basis. Three other interviewees pointed to the PJ⁵ as instrumental in the prevention of terrorism but once again were not able to describe their activities towards prevention of terrorism. The remaining participants attributed this responsibility to various branches. Interviewee 7 claimed it is a part of all security forces in Portugal, including the PSP⁶ and the GNR⁷ who patrol the streets daily, which is an act of prevention. Interviewee 8 attributed this to a collaboration between the PJ who works on criminal prevention, the Portuguese services (SIS⁸, SIRP⁹ and former SEF¹⁰) who investigate and monitor for potential cases of radicalization, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which acts on the reports of these entities.

5 *Polícia Judiciária* [Judiciary Police].

6 *Polícia Segurança Pública* [Public Security Police].

7 *Guarda Nacional Republicana* [National Republican Guard].

8 *Sistemas de Informação de Segurança* [Information Security Systems].

9 *Sistemas de Informações da República Portuguesa* [Portuguese Republic Information Systems].

10 *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* [Foreigners and Border Service].

Various interviewees referred to the 2015 national strategy for combating terrorism, which was created precisely to further enhance the nation's preventative framework. However, six of these eight interviewees had no information on this strategy's implementation. The remaining interviewees who did possess knowledge of this strategy believed that what was developed is sufficient. However, opinions differed once again. On the one hand, interviewee 3 affirmed that the strategy is already in place, even though most people working in this field are not aware of this fact. This interviewee went to great lengths to describe the strategy and the pillars it contains: Detecting, Protection, Pursuing and Response – thus mirroring what is the existing EU counter-terrorism strategy. On the other hand, Interviewee 8 claimed on the 2015 national strategy: “[...] it is not a priority. The national strategy for counter-terrorism was left alone for six years. It remains in the ‘basket’ for now”.

Instead, interviewee 8 described a set of activities performed by the PJ as the only organism in place that handles criminal terrorism investigations. These activities consisted in strategic communication to deconstruct the messages passed by terrorist organizations, several programs to aid victims and families of actors who have become radicalized and, in 2014, an awareness session with the civil sectors to inform all relevant actors of what to do if confronted by a potential case of radicalization (including teachers, doctors, psychologists, and civil servants).

The information appears to surround a very particular set of individuals and even so, opinions diverge. It was necessary then to ascertain how the information flows between the individuals and agencies that do possess it. All participants referred in this regard to UCAT¹¹. UCAT is not an organism or an entity itself but a place where representatives from all security services in Portugal can share relevant information concerning terrorist activities. This unit was created after 9/11 but it is not without its flaws. A few interviewees shared:

“I interviewed a secretary of state who was involved in the organization of the Euro championship in Portugal in 2003, around the time of the creation of UCAT and he was unanimous on their struggles, the sharing of information”¹².

“UCAT was born with some issues, but I believe the issue in Portugal is due to the excess of entities and not the lack of entities. We have too many entities and what we need to urgently improve is the coordination of the units”¹³.

Out of the totality of the interviewees, only one believed that information was properly shared between the various services. The remaining ones identified issues behind this procedure but recognized the necessity of having such an information sharing system. Two of these interviewees emphasized this aspect by referring to the fact that the sharing of information is a central axis on which preventing and combating terrorism turns. These individuals believed that steps must be taken to fix these issues. However, Interviewee 3 believed that this will not be possible as this issue is deeply enrooted in the Portuguese security forces. Interviewee 3 referred that one

11 *Unidade Combate Anti-Terrorismo* [Anti-Terrorism Combat Unit].

12 Entrevistado 3.

13 Entrevistado 5.

of the issues is the fact that each service responds to a different entity. Therefore, each of these services will hold the information until they deem it necessary to share with the others. This is a practice that has been occurring for decades and, therefore, can be very difficult to alter.

As seen above, secrecy is undoubtedly the largest point to consider in this study. It divided interviewee opinion and seemed to be focused on a very particular set of individuals demonstrating that securitization pervades counter-terrorism efforts in Portugal. Proof of this is that most academic interviewees in this study were not able to describe in detail the 2015 national strategy against terrorism, its current implementation state or even the P/CVE programs currently in practice. Only one participant demonstrated specific knowledge of the implementation of the 2015 national strategy to combat terrorism because his research led to direct contact with policymakers who claim that this strategy is successfully implemented. However, this is directly opposed by the information provided by one of the most experienced individuals in the field of counter-terrorism in the country: a person who operates within this field on a daily basis and who possesses no knowledge or evidence of the implementation of this strategy. Information appears to be limited to the academic population, which proves to be a constraint in developing studies and research in this field, a factor which has also been observed in the study conducted by Charret (2009) on securitization. As for the strategy itself, comprised of five pillars – Detect, Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Respond – it appears to present various similarities to the EU's approach to P/CVE and was praised for the inclusion of the extra pillar *Detecting*. However, this was the extent of the information possessed by the interviewees.

As mentioned previously, in the work of Crone and Nasser (2018), it is possible to see that the Danish welfare state strategy could not be applied to the Lebanese case, which was mostly due to the much higher securitization of the latter context. This is another factor to take into consideration. As it was ascertained that securitization can also be observed in Portugal, this means that the Portuguese strategy cannot be the same as the one observed in the UK or Germany, for instance. These nations focus on the employment of the public sector to carry out P/CVE programs. However, this could be hardly applied to Portugal, as both Portuguese citizens and the academic community are mostly unaware of the nation's counter-terrorism approach and would find it difficult to work in such a secretive environment.

The exclusiveness of the information surrounding counter-terrorism activities also creates a difficulty in evaluating the country's efficiency in combating terrorism. It is the opinion of several academics that this focus does not exist or not as much as it should. Nevertheless, security actors do provide examples of various programs deployed at the EU level to further develop prevention. However, they also justify the secrecy as necessary so as not to unduly alarm the population. Although this approach has shown itself to be sound throughout the years, this precisely fits Floyd's (2020) definition of securitization. It is this author's belief that too much prevention can also be a bad thing as it can not only create an incorrect perception of the threat, but it can also create a space where maladjusted individuals can take this as an opportunity to investigate extremist ideals and

even reach a point of radicalization where they may search for alternatives and ideals where they believe they may fit in.

4.2.3 Losing the focus on radicalization

Radicalization was one of the key themes during the interviews, particularly the role that prisons play in this area. Interviewee 3 concurred that prisons are fundamental in radicalization and that working towards prevention in this setting must be of paramount importance and that Portugal can learn an immense amount from the examples of countries like the UK or France.

Interviewee 8 once again referred to the PJ's work in this sector, in initiating the appropriate actors into how to react when faced with radicalized individuals. There is a belief that all management within prisons is aware of how to handle this, and the interviewee even mentioned that there is a hotline created specifically to report this phenomenon. The remaining interviewees presented a different opinion. Four interviewees were not aware of the existence of radicalization strategies in prison and interviewee 1 considered this to be a failure in the prevention of terrorism. Interviewee 6 shared an interesting example of the identification of an inmate who was displaying signs of radicalization but when reported internally, no action was taken:

I have a colleague who works in a prison, and she knows nothing of terrorism in there. Three years ago, she told me she was speaking with a client who said that once he got out, he was going to join Daesh. My colleague had already flagged that case to the prison's director, but the director chose to ignore it.

Two other interviewees ultimately classified this matter as one that needs urgent action to improve our preventative framework, with the creation of training and content which can be equally accessible to all prison related staff.

It is agreed that prisons can be places of terrorist recruitment and several countries have developed programs to address radicalization under these circumstances (KORN, 2016). This is something that is not found in the Portuguese prison system, which demonstrates virtually no approach to inmate radicalization. Once again, in this study, there are those who confirm that these approaches exist and those who deny such claims. It remains unclear what the actual situation is, but the testimonies of this studies' interviewees support the idea that this information is only shared on a hierarchical level. Prison directors appear to be informed but the same cannot be said of the guards who observe these inmates and sit in a privileged position where they can identify possible radicalization factors. This lack of focus can be mentioned as one of the nation's biggest gaps in counter-terrorism prevention and one whose results directly support Ferreira Mairos and Machado's (2018) findings on their study of the Portuguese approach towards inmate radicalization. As mentioned by the authors, this study also found that there is no active planning, nor any training provided to the professionals of these institutions on possible radicalization signs or what to do in such instances.

Beyond prison related matters, radicalization also took a key place in the discussions on daily prevention, particularly since it is public knowledge that there have been Portuguese nationals who became radicalized and went on to fight for the ranks of terrorist organizations. The radicalization of ERW actors is also a factor to consider. Two interviewees possessed no knowledge of existing radicalization programs but shared an equal opinion on the importance of addressing this phenomenon.

The remaining participants have, at some point, studied these processes and pointed to the SIS, PJ and former SEF as actors in this process. Interviewee 8 explained that all known foreign fighters, for example, were radicalized outside of Portuguese borders and all of them were accounted for, except for one individual who is presumed dead. Despite demonstrating knowledge on work towards radicalization, several participants believed a more structured approach would bring added benefit to the preventative framework. Interviewee 3 believed there are guidelines on how to handle radicalization but mentions that Portugal would benefit from adding this in the form of a legal diploma. Interviewee 4 has studied the protection of the Portuguese society in the face of violent radicalization, particularly the process of youth radicalization and ERW extremism. This interviewee believed that the creation of programs and added funding for these investigations depends on the relevance of this topic, and at this moment, the topic is not considered as relevant, despite a steady increase of ERW radicalism.

Bearing in mind the information analyzed above, it can be said that Portugal displays a solid security framework in place, with various actors performing roles in criminal prevention and the monitorization of radicalized individuals and with the PJ having once again a key role in this regard. Lack of actors is not a problem, and some academics even state that the security sector would benefit from a better organization and a smaller number of actors with clearly defined roles. However, there are other limitations to consider regarding the Portuguese radicalization approach.

The employment of civil society organizations in prevention can be a way to address radicalization, as many countries have demonstrated. However, as observed previously in this study, there has been no concrete evidence of the employment of this sector in the prevention of radicalization. As it stands, securitization and the overall necessity of secrecy hinder this approach towards radicalization in Portugal.

Despite the existence of a few programs, dating back a few years, the preventative framework would benefit greatly from the employment of those who are in positions that can identify individuals who display extremist radicalization traits. In this regard, there is a desire to increase the focus on the youth sector and programs which are extended nationwide to all schools, not just the areas where problems are known to exist, which could prove to be an asset in the future. It is important not only to train these individuals to detect but to explain how they aim to separate these potentially radicalized individuals from their extremist ideologies, focusing the solution at the root of the issue.

Despite this lack of focus on employing the general public, this does come with a benefit. Portugal seems to have evaded the fundamental issues detected by Jackson (2016) regarding the stigmatization of minorities, which has been detected in the case of the Netherlands towards

the Moroccan community (VERMEULEN, 2013) and in the UK towards Muslim communities (ABBAS, 2017; HEATH-KELLY, 2013; MARTIN, 2018).

4.2.4 Addressing prevention gaps

The final key theme identified in these interviews was a lack of focus on engaging terrorism in the pre-criminal space which can be associated with the gaps in the preventative framework. Four of the interviewees, including a member of a security force, believed that focus on preventing violent extremism in the pre-criminal space is not sufficient as it stands.

Interviewees 7 and 8, both believed that prevention comes first and foremost from the daily activities of the security forces, particularly from the PJ. Their criminal prevention activities ensure that focus is turned onto the pre-criminal space, however there is room for improvement. Funding comes into play in this field, and as already said, funding depends on the relevance and priority of the topic. If Portugal is viewed as a marginal nation outside of the various terrorist organizations scope, then funding naturally diminishes.

The participants laid out a series of best practices that should be followed in order to address this gap in the pre-criminal space. Interviewee 5 was of the opinion that the 2015 national strategy for combating terrorism, already laid out, is positive and would successfully aid our preventative framework if implemented by stating: “This strategy would be enough. It is a heading that is defined and as a course of action for the country it seems appropriate”.

This input was shared by three other participants who attributed the same importance to this strategy. One interviewee believed that by following what are known European best practices, Portugal could share the same level of efficiency as the UK or Spain. Two other interviewees believed there should be an increased focus on youth prevention and not only on the most troublesome regions. Interviewee 1 stated: “There should be a focus on creating programs for youth radicalization and online content by extending existing programs on cyber bullying and crimes of sexual nature”.

Interviewee 3, who studied the 2015 strategy at great lengths, gave a different opinion, believing this focus is real, confirming that: “[...] it exists, and I have been in the middle of it. It’s being done and in very good hands, but I also know that the population do not know what is being done but it is being done, that I can assure you”.

However, as mentioned before, the lack of focus on civil society prevention was once again identified as this interviewee highlighted the positive work done in France in involving the general public in the active moral responsibility to prevent terrorism and urged us to follow the same thought process.

Ultimately, it can be stated that Portuguese pre-criminal prevention does exist, particularly in the action of the PJ. However, it is scarce, and it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the few programs that do exist. As it stands, it cannot be stated that Portuguese P/CVE programs fit within the scope of combating terrorism effectively in the pre-criminal space. It remains unclear whether we will ever be able to witness the implementation of a national stra-

tegy or an increase in civil prevention awareness. At this stage in time, the focus seems to have shifted to the COVID-19 pandemic and is not expected to change in the foreseeable future.

5 Conclusion

This study aims to understand how counter-terrorism legislation has been applied in the post 9/11 era in Portugal. The main findings demonstrate that the largest issue is keeping up with European requirements, a necessity due to the nation's EU membership, but that neither hinders nor diminishes the strength of the existing legislation. Additionally, this study's purpose is to understand the effort made in Portugal in terms of preventing and countering terrorism. Throughout this study it was possible to comprehend that the Portuguese P/CVE strategy is mostly non-existent. Several limitations have been encountered in this domain, most noticeably securitization and a lack of focus on prison radicalization. The current Portuguese strategy appears flawed, which is not much different from other contexts where neither strategy nor framework have been able to address the fundamental issues that led to terrorism in the first instance.

Portugal does not present P/CVE strategies, but it has managed nonetheless to maintain a very low terrorist threat and it is important to reflect on why a nation with seemingly no approaches, can be successful in preventing terrorism. Undoubtedly, the fact that Portugal is a marginal country plays a part here, just as mentioned by most participants in this study. Another potential factor can be that Portugal plays a small role in the international arena as it has not been involved in any major conflicts in decades.

Even though Portugal lacks P/CVE approach, it certainly does compensate with its legislative capacity. Portugal seems to maintain a very low profile of interest regarding Al-Qaeda/*Daesh* motivated terrorism. Additionally, the terrorism cases that went through the criminal justice system have been effectively criminalized, which also discourages such activities. However, one must still bear in mind the fact that ERW extremism has been increasing throughout Europe, and Portugal is no exception. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on individuals who have been presenting themselves as discontented with government-mandated isolation and the social and economic struggles that have surfaced consequently. It is of fundamental importance to dedicate efforts towards this phenomenon, as Portuguese preventative strategies could have a ripple effect in increasing extremism if not done properly.

Authorship Collaborations

All authors participated equally in the elaboration of the article.

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