



Rapport de recherche

PROGRAMME ACTIONS CONCERTÉES

Afraid of What? Violent Extremism in Quebec and the Media Landscape

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On peut visionner la visioconférence présentant le rapport final du 7 février 2020, en cliquant ici : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bseINpxyW&feature=youtu.be>

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Section 1: Promotional Article

Afraid of What? Violent Extremism in Quebec and the Media Landscape

Extremists who commit violent acts are generally characterized by a difficult personal history, and even real or perceived discrimination against themselves or the group with which they identify. This history is sometimes reinterpreted on the basis of new ideologies, which take the form of a conspiracy theory. Extremist groups or individuals exploit this distress on social media and in other ways (online and offline). They actually seek out vulnerable people, especially youth who are searching for meaning, identity and belonging. These youth often develop a hostile relationship toward mass media, in which they lose confidence. A majority of Quebecers feel that violent extremism is a real issue in Quebec, but not everyone is concerned about the same types of extremism, and they explain it differently based on the identity of the suspect. These are some of the conclusions reached by an interdisciplinary group of university researchers mandated by the Quebec government, after just over two years of work. The team held, more specifically, interviews with over 70 extremist individuals and people close to them, performed an analysis of media content, surveys and experiments about perceptions of media, and held focus groups with media professionals. The interviews dealt with right, left and Islamic extremism, but the other studies also included anti-immigrant, antifeminist and environmental extremism.



A majority of Quebecers feel that violent extremism is a real issue in Quebec, but not everyone is concerned about the same types of extremism.

Several of the extremists in the study had an obsessive and passionate relationship with the entire experience of ideological radicalization. This is the case with social media which they consume disproportionately, particularly within the extreme right and radical Islamism. Their emotions and their worldviews tended to be undivided, the world appeared to them to be all black or all white with no nuances. The extreme left relied more on printed ideological materials, and its violent acts, which are mostly perpetrated against businesses and public property, are less subject to preventive action. Generally, mass media have a modest impact on violent extremism, but social media can be an important driver.

According to our surveys and experiments, Quebecers believe that violent extremism can better be explained by individual factors than by social factors, but their interpretation is influenced by the identity of the suspect. When the suspect has a Francophone name rather than an Arab-sounding name, respondents are more likely to attribute the violent act to a mental health problem and less to terrorism. Media coverage associated with the act also associates mental health issues with murderers whose name identifies them with the majority demographic group. One of the surveys shows that it is Islamist extremism that most concerns Quebecers, but this fear decreased during the period under study (2017–2019), while fear of anti-immigrant and environmental extremists increased. These perceptions vary depending on sociodemographic characteristics and media consumption patterns. Media professionals noticed the polarization of opinions from the sometimes violent comments from their audience, who seemed to have difficulty differentiating between types of journalism. One of the experiments about perceptions of media revealed that for many people, comments on social media take the place of traditional news. It was found that among the various types of extremism, antifeminist ideology is little recognized or considered as a form of violence.

When it comes to intervention approaches, despite the importance of social media in people's lives, especially young people, the researchers noted insufficient attention on its role, as well as its impact on education and family life. It is also important to provide education about the use of mass media, its role, and types of journalism. Finally, at the heart of prevention is the need to offer alternative paths to involvement in extremist ideologies by offering sensible, pragmatic initiatives that address young people's problems, anchor them in reality, and thwart conspiratorial logic that can lead them to an impasse.

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Section 2: Summary

Title: Afraid of What? Violent Extremism in Quebec and the Media Landscape

1. Main Question

The research clearly establishes that mass and social media play a role in forming public opinion about violent extremism (VE) and even in individual trajectories toward VE. But how and to what extent? This project examines this role, particularly in Quebec (and partly in Morocco), from two main perspectives: What is the role of mass and social media on Quebecers' perceptions of VE? What is their role in the individual or collective dynamic of VE? In order to answer these questions, the research team conducted three types of *quantitative* inquiries (1 two-stage survey, 2 experiments, 4 analyses of mass and social media databases); and five types of *qualitative* inquiries (biographical interviews and questionnaires with extremists or ex-extremists, with people close to them or practitioners; participant observations; analyses of media content; focus groups with media professionals).

2. Project Context and Background

Quebec has created a transversal prevention plan for radicalization leading to violence, entitled *La radicalisation au Québec : agir, prévenir, détecter et vivre ensemble* (2015) [Radicalization in Quebec: Acting, Preventing, Detecting and Living Together]. Within this framework, the FRQSC and its partner MIFI launched a call for proposals during the summer of 2016 for a Concerted Action. Our team received funding in May 2017. Our report mainly addresses violent extremism, because our research results revealed that while the concept of radicalization is useful for researchers, it is not well understood by the population or by media professionals. One of the main concerns of the major financial partner of the project, the *Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration* (MIFI) [Ministry of Immigration, Francization and Integration], which was also a concern for us, was to avoid exclusively targeting violent Islamism, a form of VE which has been especially feared in Canada

over the last couple of decades, as it has been in other contexts. The results of the quantitative inquiries indeed confirmed the continuation of this perception of a higher threat related to Islamist VE, in spite of a significant increase in impact and visibility of the extreme right. This is why we decided to include various types of VE, from the extreme right, the extreme left, and all other types of VE originating from an ideological posture, more or less visible in Canada. Another important contextual element is that from the beginning of the project, several well-informed sources confided to us that in Quebec, there are very few extremely radicalized people in comparison with the United States and several European countries. For all of these reasons, for this project we created a broad definition of violence: using violence against people or property, or inciting others to do so, with the goal of defending a cause or making known a viewpoint. Focus groups with media professionals drew attention to another type of ideologically motivated violence, namely, verbal and written violence expressed on social media.

The project progressed amidst related earthshaking developments causing agitation in the media. In 2016–2017, violent Islamism dominated news related to VE, in the context of the war in Syria which resulted in the departure of many young Canadians from the country. However, the beginning of a large wave of the extreme right was already being felt. Then, on January 29, 2017, an armed attack was perpetrated at a mosque in Quebec City, by an individual who has since been convicted of first-degree murder and attempted murder, having left six people dead and five seriously injured. On April 23, 2018, a ram-raiding attack left 10 people dead and 14 injured in Toronto. The man accused of first-degree murder and attempted murder in this attack had previously identified himself with the Incel Rebellion (“involuntarily celibate”) on social media, an extremist movement which advocates the use of violence, particularly against women. The extreme left had also been active, engaging in several acts of vandalism against stores in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood in Montreal and companies involved in a detention center project for migrants in Laval, not to mention the violence observed during annual demonstrations against police brutality. According to news accounts, the connection to social media in this regard seems less significant, and our research supports this conclusion. The day before the end of the data collection for the second stage of the survey on the perceptions of the Quebec population with regard to VE, a young

Australian accused of terrorism was responsible for a massacre in two New Zealand mosques, killing 50 people and injuring 50 others; the first part of the attack was livestreamed on Facebook.

Major movements also emerged on social media giants (particularly Facebook, Google, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube). Their use to disseminate messages glorifying VE became undeniable and their popularity unfortunately facilitated the spread of these messages. In the face of hate speech and attempts at ideological manipulation, these giants now regularly try to implement new measures to curtail these problems.

3. Main Results and Potential Solutions

According to our inquiries conducted about perceptions of VE among the population, the concept of *radicalization leading to violence* seems to pose comprehension problems, while the terms *extremism* and *terrorism* are better understood. The two-stage survey reveals that Quebeckers feel that VE can better be explained by individual factors than by social factors. Overall, the inquiries reveal that Quebeckers and media primarily associate VE with violent acts connected to Islam. According to the analysis of media databases, individuals most often mentioned in the framework of news about VE are politicians, whose public statements are reported in this context. Our experimental research shows that the way in which Quebeckers interpret an act of VE varies particularly by the identity of the suspect. When the suspect has a Francophone name (ex. Alexis) rather than an Arab-sounding name (ex. Yasin), a larger proportion of respondents attribute the violent act to a mental health problem and less to extremism. They are also more likely to believe a suspect acted alone and less likely to consider the act as a terrorist attack. In addition, a comparative analysis was conducted between media treatment of four different attacks. In both French and English media, reference to mental health is sometimes associated with attacks perpetrated by individuals from the majority demographic, but this occurs much less frequently in connection with an Islamic individual. Also, it was noticeable that English media use the term “terrorism” more often than French media do.

Incidentally, the second stage of the survey reveals that the level of worry about Islamist extremism slightly decreased between 2018 and 2019, while worry about anti-immigrant extremists slightly

increased, followed by worry about the extreme right. According to sociodemographic characteristics, Quebeckers are not worried about the same forms of extremism. Overall, however, gender, age group, and cultural and religious affiliation only account for a very small portion of variance in Quebeckers' perceptions of VE. Mass and social media also have a modest, but significant, impact on Quebeckers' perceptions. Be that as it may, in several areas, pre-existing attitudes regarding Muslims, immigration, capitalism and environmental protection, as well as sociodemographic factors, have a greater influence on these perceptions. However, these differences cannot be solely explained by selective exposure of Quebeckers to news media based on their political attitudes; the scrutiny of these attitudes in the multivariate analyses and the panel design of our survey make it more probable that it is a question of the influence of different political tendencies conveyed by diverse media companies. Such companies would seem to position themselves by aligning part of their content based on political preferences of a certain population segment.

From one of our qualitative inquiries, we found that some media professionals we interviewed feel that the treatment of news has an effect on VE and state that they take precautions so their treatment will be balanced. It is very difficult to control the reception of their content, whose unpredictability is exacerbated by the acceleration of media coverage and social media. They notice the polarization of opinions in the sometimes violent comments of their audience, who incidentally have difficulty differentiating between types of journalism (information, columns, opinion letters, etc.). Finally, according to our interviews with extremist participants and our analysis of the media they consult, social media are not the sole factor leading to VE. A link exists between personal factors, offline activities and social media use.

The analysis of the trajectories of extremist respondents allowed us to identify the following elements, which are present in varying degrees: online and offline, they are in search of meaning or identity, a need for belonging; and these are consistent with existing studies. We also noticed that some have a passionate rapport with the whole ideological experience of extremism, which is particularly expressed by intensive use (8 to 12 hours, day or night) of social media associated with their ideology (especially extreme right and violent

Islamism). They have a voracious appetite for contact with their peers, the content, and figureheads of their movement. A passionate type of commitment also expresses itself in several participants by the presence of extreme effects, fluctuating between love and hate. Finally, the passionate nature of the VE process manifests itself in most participants by an experience of being overtaken, which leads them to express their conviction of having discovered, in the ideology of their choice, the Truth.

The analysis also revealed a personal history of pain, of real or perceived discrimination against themselves or the group with which they identify. In some cases, this serves as the basis of a reinterpretation of their experience according to the new ideology. This includes various theories of persecution, of which several are connected to 'conspiracy theories', the type of theories that are efficiently disseminated on social media. The extreme right and violent Islamism display a similar propaganda strategy based on extensive use of social media. In the case of the extreme right, which was very visible in the news throughout this project, content producers mainly aim at desensitizing the public by making shocking content acceptable or even humorous. In the case of Islamism, the strategy is particularly to disseminate mysticism about radical Islamism that exploits the feeling that Muslims are persecuted in the world, and this is even more effective when this feeling resonates in a local context. These messages are designed according to the subcultures of the target audience (for example, comic strips and music for youth). The extreme left uses more literary methods, but some factions use social media, especially to flush out individuals associated with the extreme right ("doxing"). None of the participants were heavily influenced by mass media in their shift toward VE, most of them holding a rather critical, even hostile, position toward mass media. However, all respondents spend several hours daily consulting various social media, often finding there a reinterpretation of the news that is interpreted in mass media, but in a form that solidifies and feeds their ideology.

Section 3: Complete Research Report

Afraid of What? Violent Extremism in Quebec and the Media Landscape

PART A — RESEARCH CONTEXT

1. Problem

Media play a role in trajectories toward violent extremism (VE) and in the perception of VE within the population. The influence of mass media and social media on the perceptions of VE, on one hand, and on the process leading to VE, on the other hand, is certainly an emerging issue with a strong contextual component; however, it has given rise to very few qualitative and quantitative studies.

1.1 Quantitative Studies

(Questionnaires, experiments, media databases)

Media influences public opinion and plays a fundamental role in the formation of citizens' attitudes, through three types of effects: agenda-setting, priming, and framing (Ivengar 1990; Scheufele 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007). Agenda-setting refers to the selection of issues that media cover, issues that citizens then tend to consider as more important. These issues can then have a priming role on how citizens evaluate, for example, the performance of a government. Framing relates rather to the coverage viewpoint, such as the angle used to present and discuss the issue, encouraging certain interpretative frameworks for understanding problems, and consequently, certain solutions rather than others.

A major survey administered in two waves within the population was conducted based on the following problem: Media could have a general impact on perceptions of radicalization that goes beyond covering extremist acts in themselves and is rather connected to the way certain groups are presented by different media. That being said, divergences between media companies are rarely taken into consideration in empirical analyses of the effects of media consumption. The surveys used strategies to address this aspect. The study, furthermore, explored the following questions, which are explored in an analysis of media content. What place does violence and extremism occupy in media in relation to other news topics? Which people and organizations are identified as extremists in the corpus, and what media space do they occupy? What types of VE emerge from the analyses? Are all forms of VE identified as such in the media or are they characterized as deeds committed by people with mental disorders?

The two online experiments draw on the complex role of framing (the way of presenting news) and its impact. Certain studies focus on the framing of terrorism and extremist acts, as well as its impact on public perceptions (Greenberg 2002; Davis and Silver 2004; Awan et al. 2011; Woods 2011). In keeping with this supporting literature, these experiments took into consideration the opposition between a frame which evokes “Islamic terrorism” and a “lone wolf” frame. Ethnocultural affiliation, which acts as a cognitive shortcut toward these frames, therefore played a central role in the design of the data manipulations. As well, in line with the questions addressed in this project, the second experiment measured the specific effects, or the lack thereof, of traditional media and social media platforms on perceptions of VE.

1.2 Qualitative Studies

(Biographical interviews and/or questionnaires with those who are, or have been radicalized; with people close to them or with practitioners; analyses of media content; online questionnaire; participant observations; focus groups with media professionals; targeted analyses of media database)

As emphasized by Archetti (2015), all effective narrative within the framework of ideological recruiting is socially constructed and situated. According to her, hate propaganda first relies on social context and does not exist solely in social media. This clearly shows some of the issues of research on the links between mass and social media and violent extremism (VE), and emphasizes how any thorough study must first adhere to contextual approaches, but also procedural ones since it involves a complex problem where influences of various natures interact. This is why recourse to qualitative methodology is necessary in order to address a set of questions, including those concerning the third objective, which is to better understand the role played by mass and social media in the dynamic leading to VE and, more precisely, to better grasp: a) its influence in the shift toward VE; b) its intensification characteristics; and c) its role in the formation of radicalization networks.

Through in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with persons who are or have been radicalized, with people close to them and with practitioners, this research sought to account for the complex processes that contribute to addressing these questions (Tanner et Campana 2014; Pauwels 2014; Vidino 2010). Thus, interviews conducted with participants who are or have been radicalized allowed for the identification of radicalization trajectories where the question of links between mass and social media and a shift toward VE, for example, can be examined simultaneously from a contextual, procedural and dynamic perspective. The tipping point can therefore be studied by taking into consideration aspects of the personal, social, and media pathway of each participant, which allows for the development of a useful model of the role played by mass and social media in the dynamic of VE. Information gathered from an online questionnaire helps to complete the portrait that emerges from this process. Within the framework of this project, media professionals were also interviewed, with a focus on ethical norms and criteria that are specific to each media, or that differ from one type of professional to another, as well as on their understanding of the relationship between media and VE.

2. Main Research Questions

The research questions are taken from the FRQSC call for proposals, and they have proved to be very fruitful. Question groups 1 and 2 were mainly studied through quantitative studies, and the third group of questions particularly through qualitative studies. This report primarily adopts the concept of violent extremism (VE) since, according to a large number of our questionnaire respondents, it is clearer and deals less with the concept of radicalization leading to violence¹.

¹ The prevention plan defines radicalization in this way: “The word radicalization can refer to a set of actions identified as ‘extreme’ or that result from a more literal interpretation of the principles of a political, religious, cultural or economic system” (Gouvernement du Québec. Midi 2015: 9; UNESCO 2018). [our translation]

Question 1: Within the Quebec population, what are the perceptions of the phenomenon of *violent extremism (VE)*?

- 1.1 How are these perceptions distributed according to gender, age group, and cultural and religious affiliation?
- 1.2 What influence do these characteristics have on the nature of these perceptions?
- 1.3 What factors can explain differences in the perceptions of the phenomenon?

Question 2: What influence do media (mass and social) have on Quebecers' perceptions of VE?

- 2.1 What messages are conveyed, and what events are recounted and shared, that shape these perceptions?
- 2.2 Which types of media coverage or communication methods influence the perception of VE?

Question 3: What is the role of mass and social media in the dynamic leading to VE?

- 3.1 What is their influence on the shift toward VE?
- 3.2 What are the characteristics of VE intensification?
- 3.3 What role do mass and social media play in the formation of VE networks?

3. Objectives

In addition to using evidence-based data to answer the questions formulated above, this project had two other objectives: to contribute to the understanding of the process leading to violent extremism (VE) and to its prevention in scientific, political, educational and social spheres, as well as within the general population. Since this is a *Concerted Action* project with several government and social partners, it is important to approach these objectives diligently.

- 1.1 Understand in order to inform prevention *practices*;
- 1.2 Understand in order to inform prevention *policies*;
- 1.3 Better understand in order to inform *public prevention programs*.

PART B — POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS CONNECTED TO THE RESULTS, IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

1. To which types of audiences (decision makers, managers, practitioners, etc.) does this research apply?

Since radicalization leading to violence is a mainstream issue for which the Quebec government wishes to develop prevention strategies, our results affect a large number of audience types. Some ministries and decision makers are especially affected: those responsible for immigration and inclusion, education, public safety, culture and communication, family, and public health. As for managers and practitioners, those in the education, social services and health services are especially affected. News media also represents a target audience.

2. What could the conclusions of this research mean to decision makers, managers or practitioners?

The knowledge gained will allow for the development of new prevention strategies for practitioners and families from diverse backgrounds, and to create prevention tools especially for children, which are currently being very limited. Our results can inform prevention practices and ethical reflection, by way of:

- Knowledge acquired about differentiated perceptions according to types of VE, which can potentially influence public communications and prevention strategies.
- Knowledge acquired about the types of impact mass and social media have on individuals.
- Knowledge of the role played by various types of media and media productions on the pathway leading to VE and in the creation of radicalized networks.
- Knowledge acquired about specific challenges of media professionals, which can potentially influence current reflection on the support of mass media, and on the ethical reflections involved.
- Knowledge acquired about issues posed by social media.
- Knowledge acquired about socio-psychological dimensions of the relationship to extremist content and ideological aspects which incite violence.

Our results can inform prevention policies, by way of:

- Knowledge acquired in the form of important factual information allowing a portrait to be sketched of the population's perceptions, for example based on gender, age, level of education and income, place of birth and residence, ethnic origin, and religious affiliation; and thus to contribute to the development of policies for different segments of the population, policies that are more based on research and more cognizant of each group's needs in terms of information and prevention.
- Knowledge acquired about ethnocentric aspects of perceptions of VE, of radicalized persons who have shifted into violence, and of their victims, in order to help develop more effective prevention policies that deconstruct prejudice; and thus to contribute to the development of reception and integration policies for immigrants and refugees in general, and Muslim populations in particular; as well, to help develop policies which can potentially limit the presence of prejudice, hate speech and the increase of extremism of groups toward each other.

Our results can inform public prevention programs, by way of:

- Knowledge acquired that allows a more refined understanding of the dynamic between mass and social media and VE, and of the processes that lead to radicalization without violence and to a shift and intensification toward violent forms of radicalization, and thereby: contribute to the improvement of public programs (schools, CLSC, CEGEP, universities) which participate in deconstructing prejudice and promote awareness of its impact on people and society; shed light on the impact of contemporary media on families, individual trajectories and populations; educate families and practitioners about the indicators of radicalization and better equip them, particularly in regard to media use.

3. What will be the immediate or expected social, economic, political, cultural or technological impact of this research?

We will devote the next few months to creating specific educational tools, and we are willing to collaborate with partners desiring to refine their VE prevention strategies.

4. What are the limits, or the level of generalization, of the results of this research?

As for the two-wave questionnaire, it is important to note that, in spite of using a panel questionnaire and integrating multiple variables in order to control the factors of media consumption, certain threats to causality (endogeneity) remain. Therefore, the results must be carefully interpreted. Of course, the number of interviews with participants with a radicalized profile is limited, and such trajectories develop very rapidly, mirroring rapid advances in the social media sphere. Nevertheless, this research has captured some key dynamics. The Moroccan sample contributes to the confirmation of certain data about radical Islamism.

5. What key messages should be formulated according to the types of target audiences?

Families, schools, social environments: A. It is important to consider the fact that media is a very influential sphere of life for individuals, and that media constitutes a challenge in education, as in other life dimensions. B. It is important to try to understand the harmful function of certain extremist ideologies that present themselves in an acceptable way, so that they can be deconstructed and circumvented. C. Questions of equality before the law between different sexual tendencies, and between men and women, are often at the heart of Islamic, antifeminist and extreme right extremist ideologies. As issues of equality are persistently promoted, the fact that some segments of the population still do not adhere to them, and harbour deep resentment in this regard, must not be overlooked.

Decision makers and media: The challenges confronting mass media are significant, not only because of their influence, but also due to the development of social media as sometimes misleading alternative discourse. It is important to pursue ethical reflection on VE and media, to clarify the rules, and to attain greater control of the deregulated zone of social media.

6. What are the main potential solutions according to the types of target audiences?

- Integrate our new knowledge in academic and continuing education of practitioners and educators.
- Teach students of all ages the ethical use of social and alternative media, emphasizing principles regarding respect of privacy and peaceful use of media; inform them of issues connected to the disclosure of personal information and to the excessive use of social media.
- Establish a follow-up committee at the government level, in regard to the development of social media and its influence.
- Offer training tools to social practitioners in relation to the radicalization process, and the role of various factors (personal, social, event, media, etc.) in this process.
- Promote the production of professional-quality information, namely information which is reliable and independent, in order to offer an alternative to mystifying ideological discourse.
- Support research on cognitive and behavioural radicalization in all its aspects, from elements likely to attract people toward a radicalization trajectory, to those likely to strengthen such a trajectory and encourage a shift to violent action.
- Encourage international cooperation related to the sharing of knowledge about VE and mass and social media, and about strategies for prevention and for assistance in extricating oneself from VE.

PART C — METHODOLOGY

1. Description and justification of the methodological approach that was chosen

In order to carry out the analysis of perceptions, the team conducted quantitative and qualitative studies, with the goal of addressing all the research questions. As these questions target very different subjects, several types of methodological approaches were required. This project is unique in that it combines several methodologies and studies to approach the broad theme of mass and social media, and of VE. It uses a powerful triangulated approach to a subject that is not accessible by following a single path of inquiry.

2. Description and justification of methods of data and sample collection, and analysis strategies

Three major quantitative inquiries. While the team itself established a questionnaire for the two-wave survey (and the experiments), the market research firm SOM was retained to administer the questionnaire, for the sake of representativeness of the Quebec population². The steps were: pretest; first stage of survey (Spring 2018; 1,740 participants by phone and internet); and second stage of survey (Winter 2019; 1174 participants). An analysis of the first stage of the survey enabled research Q1 (perception and distribution) to be addressed and Q2 (effects of media consumption on perceptions) to be addressed to some extent. An analysis of the second stage of the survey enabled the question about the effects of mass and social media on the development of perceptions during a given period (from Spring 2018 to Winter 2019) to be addressed³.

The media data corpus collection tool gathered, coded and analyzed all Quebec media output on the internet in French and in English (1,385,688 articles in mass and social media, alternative media and community media; from January 12, 2017, to December 31, 2018). A series of automated text analyses were conducted using NLP, *Natural Language Processing* (language used, classification of content, tracking of semantic entities, extraction from the pertinent corpus). The analysis of this corpus enabled Question 2.1 (mass and social media that shape perceptions of VE) to be addressed³.

² To evaluate the degree to which various radical movements worry Quebecers, several categories of groups were selected for the list in the questionnaire, while allowing respondents to indicate other groups. It was desired that the selected groups have a good chance of being known by the general public — and consequently, that respondents have a reaction to them — and that they reflect a diversity of ideologies. The response categories, presented in random order, were: anti-immigrant extremists, extreme right groups, Muslim extremists, extreme left groups, environmental extremists, another group (specify), and none of these groups. It is important to note that following the terrorist attack in Toronto in 2018, associated with an extremist movement advocating recourse to violence especially toward women, the experimental research included antifeminist extremism.

³ In French, content was used from the four media companies most often consulted by French respondents to a survey conducted in 2017 by the *Centre d'études sur les médias* and Reuters Institute, namely: *TVA Nouvelles/LCN*; *Radio-Canada/RDI*; *Journal de Montréal/Journal de Québec*; and *La Presse*. The same survey showed that CTV News, Global News and CBC News were the three most consulted sources by English Canadians, as well as their local newspaper; the *Montreal Gazette* was therefore added.

Finally, *the experimental method* (Q1 and Q2) allowed for the study of the role that agenda-setting and types of framing plays in regard to perceptions. The goal of Experiment 1 was to understand how the content of an article influences the public's perception toward VE (data collected by Qualtrics, an online survey platform; January 23 to February 4, 2019; 1,256 respondents). Experiment 2 included a news article disseminated by both a traditional and a social media entity, as well as processing of comments (data collected from August 9 to 13, 2019; 1,351 respondents).

Six major types of qualitative studies. In order to address Question 3 (3.1 shift toward VE; 3.2 intensification; 3.3. formation of networks) concerning individual dynamics of VE and media, the following strategies were used: biographical and semi-directed interview as well as online or paper questionnaires (extremists or ex-extremists, people close to them, practitioners), analyses of media content consulted by extremists, participant observations and focus groups with media professionals. For the *interviews*, recruiting was done using the snowball method, with a very strong guarantee of anonymity (over 70 participants), with persons of the extreme right, the extreme left, and with violent Islamist tendencies. The analysis themes emerging from the interviews were: mass and social media during childhood, education, family, friends, networks of influence, beliefs/ideology, use of social media, important events, trigger events.

The group interviews with media professionals (covering research questions 1, 2 and 3) were conducted by a professional from the SOM firm, with people working within mass or social media. In the interest of representativeness, beside journalists, people representing editorial authority were included, news editors, editors-in-chief, and directors. The sample includes twelve focus groups (nearly 50 professionals) from four Quebec cities. Recruiting was done using invitations addressed to managers of the main Quebec media companies. The sixth type of qualitative inquiry produced targeted analyses of the large media corpus.

PART D — RESULTS

1. What are the main results obtained?

1.1 Quantitative studies

The following addresses research question groups 1 and 2 individually.

Q1—Within the Quebec population, what are the perceptions of the phenomenon of violent extremism (VE)?

The concept of radicalization leading to violence seems to pose comprehension problems, while the terms extremism and terrorism are better understood. For this reason, this report primarily uses the concept of violent extremism (VE). The questionnaire reveals that Quebeckers believe that VE can be better explained by individual factors than social factors. Overall, the studies show that Quebeckers and media mainly associate VE with violent expressions connected to Islam. In fact, the data gathered that Quebeckers associate VE more with religious and politico-religious phenomena, especially those connected to the Muslim religion and to Islamist extremism, than with other types of movements or causes. For example, the experimental data indicates that an act of VE presented as having been committed in the name of an antifeminist ideology is less likely to be associated with extremism, terrorism and indoctrination than an identical act that is said to be committed in the name of the Koran. In parallel, the data from the analysis of media databases reveal that certain keywords associated with concepts, groups and events connected to the Muslim religion, such as Islam, Arab, Ramadan, or to Islamist extremists, such as the Islamic State army, *Al-Qaïda* or even the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks are among the words most often mentioned in news related to VE.

In spite of all that, the second stage of the survey reveals that the level of worry about violent Islamist VE slightly decreased between 2018 and 2019, while fears related to anti-immigrant extremists slightly increased, followed by fears about the extreme right.

Q1.1 How are these perceptions distributed according to gender, age group, and cultural and religious affiliation?

According to the survey, a slight majority of Quebeckers overestimate the number of deaths caused by terrorism in the province over the last ten years. Women do this more than men, and they also prove to be more worried about anti-immigrant extremists. Men are more preoccupied with extreme left groups. Christians fear Muslim extremism more than do non-religious and young people. Anti-immigration extremism worries younger generations, while older generations mainly fear extreme right groups and environmental extremists. Immigrants from recent generations and non-Francophones are more worried about anti-immigrant extremists.

Q1.2 What influence do these characteristics have on the nature of these perceptions?

Also, according to this questionnaire, not all Quebeckers are worried about the same forms of VE. Overall, however, gender, age group and cultural and religious affiliation only account for a very small proportion of variance in Quebeckers' perceptions about VE.

Q1.3 What factors can explain the differences in perceptions of this phenomenon?

The first online experiment shows that the way in which Quebeckers interpret an act of VE varies, especially based on the identity of the suspect. When the suspect has a Francophone name (ex. Alexis) rather than an Arab-sounding name (ex. Yasin), a larger proportion of respondents attributes the violent act to a mental health problem and less to extremism. They are also more likely to believe a suspect acted alone and less likely to consider the act as a terrorist attack. In addition, a comparative analysis was conducted between media treatment of four events, namely the attack against Muslims at the grand mosque in Quebec City, the Islamist suicide bombing in Manchester Arena, the ram-raiding attack in Toronto perpetrated mainly against women, and the mass shooting in Las Vegas. In both French and English media, reference to mental health is sometimes associated with the Toronto and Las Vegas attacks, but definitely not with the Manchester attack by an Islamist. As well, the fact emerged that English media make greater use of the term "terrorism" (in 89.9% of articles), while French media only use it in 53.1% of articles. In this regard, the attack in Quebec City had a surprising result: 90.1% of English articles used terrorist terminology, as opposed to half as many French articles (45.85%).

Q2 – What influence do media (mass and social) have on Quebeckers' perceptions of the VE phenomenon?

Mass and social media have a modest influence on Quebeckers' perceptions, especially when pre-existing attitudes regarding Muslims, immigration, capitalism, and environmental protection, as well as sociodemographic factors are taken into consideration.

Q2.1 What messages are conveyed, and what events are recounted and shared, that shape these perceptions?

Quebeckers seem to react to events and to the way in which they are covered in the news. Between spring 2018 (a few weeks after the trial of the accused murderer at the mosque in Quebec City) and winter 2019, a decrease in the level of worry about Muslim extremists was observed, between the two waves of the survey. This could be a reflection of the lower incidence of Muslim extremist groups in the news leading up to the second stage, as well as the impact of the announcement of American troops withdrawing from Syria. However, perceptions regarding radicalization developed differently based on consultation, or the lack thereof, of certain media. Therefore,

there seems to also be an influence exerted on perceptions by messages and different framing. In fact, it is significant that the level of worry about Muslim extremists was more likely to decrease in those who regularly followed *Radio-Canada* broadcasts or read *La Presse*, while this decrease was much less noticeable in those who frequently consulted the *Journal de Montréal* or the *Journal de Québec*. The development of perceptions regarding anti-immigrant extremists also went in opposite directions based on listening to *Radio-Canada* (greater increase) or reading the *Journal de Montréal* or the *Journal de Québec* (lesser increase). Finally, listening to *Radio-Canada* is connected to a greater increase in worries about the extreme right and, in some cases, a greater decrease in worries about the extreme left. Inversely, the tendency to worry about the extreme left was more likely to increase in those who frequently consulted the *Journal de Montréal* or the *Journal de Québec*.

These results seem to demonstrate a response pattern whereby Quebecor group media (*TVA Nouvelles* and *Le Journal de Montréal/Le Journal de Québec*) on one side, and *Radio-Canada* and *La Presse* on the other side, are connected in a differentiated way to population groups which are distinct on the basis of their perceptions toward certain forms of extremism. Since it was conducted in two stages, the survey allowed for the examination of a *change* in perceptions and consequently reduces the probability that the difference could be solely explained by selective exposure of Quebecers to news media based on their political attitudes. The survey design makes it more probable that it is a question of influence by different content disseminated by these media companies. Such companies would seem to position themselves by aligning part of their content based on the political preferences of a certain population segment .

⁴ This result corroborates the recently-formed hypothesis of Nechushtai (2018), who asserts that in the American context, there is an emergence of a “polarized liberal” media system where a growing number of news media seek to position themselves by aligning part of their content based on the political preferences of a certain population segment. In Quebec, a polemical discourse exists that associates media with the defense of certain political ideas, particularly Quebecor group media, some private radio stations in the Quebec City region, *La Presse* and *CBC/Radio-Canada* (ex. Gaulin 2014; Payette 2019). This discourse partly relies on university analyses, particularly those of Potvin (2008) about the reasonable accommodations crisis, and the work of Vincent, Turbide and Laforest (2008) about private radio stations in Quebec City.

Q2.2 Which types of media coverage or transmission methods influence the perception of the VE phenomenon?

According to the survey, while the information transmission method generally has little influence on perceptions regarding VE, the action of informing oneself mainly by radio, as compared to using printed newspapers, is connected to a decrease in the level of worry about extreme right groups. Exposure to news on social media also has repercussions on the development of perceptions. On one hand, the level of agreement with statements that VE is a real issue and extremist groups constitute a threat to public security was less likely to decrease in those exposed to news on social media. Their level of worry regarding Muslim extremists decreased less, and at the same time, their level of worry about left-wing extremism and anti-immigrant extremism increased.

Experiment 2 provided confirmation that the presence of comments under a news item extract in social media had a significant impact: when provided only the first few lines of a news story without any comments, readers were 20 percentage points more likely to click a link to read the full article. When comments are present, people were more likely to simply consume the comments without seeking the formal news story. Finally, the analysis of the media databases, while it does not measure the impact on perceptions, allowed for the identification of the individuals appearing in the corpus and the space that they occupy. It demonstrated that in most cases, this involved politicians. When an attack happens, the name of the perpetrator will be in the headlines for a short period, but it is primarily from the discourse of politicians that the connection to terrorism and extremism is evoked.

1.2 Qualitative Studies

The qualitative studies primarily examine question group 3, focusing on the role of mass and social media in the dynamic leading individuals toward VE. However, the interviews conducted with media professionals concentrate more on perceptions (question groups 2 and 3). The following section first presents this inquiry, then the subsequent section synthesizes the results regarding extremists.

1.2.1 Interviews with media professionals

While media professionals believe that the treatment of news has an effect on perceptions of VE, they explained that they take multiple precautions so their treatment will be balanced. However, they recognize they cannot control the reception of their content, whose unpredictability is exacerbated by the acceleration of media coverage. They notice the polarization of opinions from the sometimes violent comments of their audience, and observe that their audience seems to have difficulty differentiating between types of journalism (information, columns, opinion letters, etc.).

Professionals find it quite difficult to define radicalization leading to violence (the initial concept used in the project), but, as is the case with the general population, Islam is more associated with this phenomenon. They do not connect it to other subjects that could incite violence, such as identity issues or animal rights. The *ethical dilemma* is omnipresent in daily editorial decision-making. One way it manifests itself is when deciding whether or not to cover a demonstration, to name an accused person, to establish a profile, or even to publish photos. Participants seem to find themselves at the heart of a tension between their defense of the public's right to know, on one hand, and, on the other, the precautions taken to avoid glorifying, intensifying, shocking or supplying a platform ("Self-censorship is incompatible with the profession . . . you will not fight what does not exist"). The important thing is to give space for different viewpoints, without censoring any of them. In media, ethics guidelines are applied on a case-by-case basis, in light of the urgency of circulating a news item, while journalists lack time to verify information. Media companies can find themselves manipulated by violent extremists: "The way we covered execution videos, photos, interviews with Western terrorists . . . we do not circulate [those] anymore . . . however, we did in the beginning."

These interviews revealed as *central the issue of the violence and potential polarization of comments, as well as hostility* to which the journalistic profession is subjected, which is largely attributable to social networks. Some acknowledged that it has become difficult to deal with sensitive subjects and that the management of comments on digital platforms represents an increasingly burdensome part of information processing. Islamophobia and the influence of Donald Trump's remarks are troubling: "Anything related to the massacre at the Quebec City mosque or to Islamophobia, I no longer post anything on Facebook . . . because you completely lose control."

It seems to be difficult for them to evaluate *the impact of journalistic treatment on VE*. The vulnerability of individuals is often put forward as the primary explanation for taking action, and participants point the finger at other media who follow different journalistic standards. Social networks are perceived as being the driving force of VE to the extent that they allow for growth in the number of adherents to extremist groups by connecting web users with similar ideas who see social media groups as a platform for expression: "They self-consume, they self-feed, they self-inform among themselves." Regarding their potential role in deradicalization or prevention, participants had mixed reactions and a tendency to refocus the discussion on their role as "watchdogs", on their responsibility to inform. They are convinced that they owe the truth to the public, which represents the essence of their profession, particularly by fighting false information that polarizes people: "I think that media still help deconstruct somewhat how radicalization happens . . . how groups use social networks for recruiting . . . at least, it's exposed."

1.2.2 Trajectories of VE and media

According to Q3, the issue is to better understand the role of mass and social media in the dynamic leading to VE, by: a) understanding their influence on the shift toward VE; b) identifying the characteristics of intensification; and c) determining their role in the formation of extremist networks. It should be pointed out that social media are rarely the sole cause of VE. Our data confirm a well-accepted conclusion that a link exists between personal factors, offline activities and social media use. A familial situation that is conducive (frustrations, listening to media sometimes extremist or other), the impact of national and international news, as well as offline interactions with peers or thought leaders often proved to be decisive. In addition, to varying degrees, different forms of VE observed in this study find support in segments of the larger population. For example, within a family or surrounding environment that is supportive of extremist ideas, it was found that children who are accustomed to listening to media with their family go farther to “solve problems” of which they were made aware. As well, verbal abuse, which is often expressed in comments exchanged by the public by way of various electronic sites and platforms, illustrates the fact that the ideological source of different types of VE is not unrelated to broader values and political opinions that manifest themselves within the population as a whole. Basically, this involves resentment about migratory waves and demographic changes (extreme right), indignation motivated by difficulties encountered by certain Muslim minorities in the world (violent Islamism), or even by poverty and income disparities (extreme left).

a. Psychosociological and ideological dimensions

Online or offline, a need to belong

The interpersonal relationships that form both online and offline, by helping intensify involvement in a radicalization process, meet certain needs of participants. One of the major needs identified in participants with the three tendencies studied here is that of belonging. This need seems to lead most participants to seek a feeling of sharing in a group or fraternity. A certain identity quest is involved in this need to belong, that manifests itself differently in participants according to the characteristics unique to their respective ideologies.

A passionate rapport with the ideology and the group, intensified by social media

All of the candidates interviewed manifested a process toward VE of the “passionate” type, in the sense that they are heated, even consumed, by their ideological commitment; it is like they are “obsessed” by the desire to always know more, consume more, and be even more involved. In the wake of this, intensive use of social media (“thousands of hours”, confided individuals from the extreme right and radical Islamists, and some from the extreme left), can have an addictive effect and help create a state whereby individuals are fully consumed by their commitment, somewhat similar to that experienced by a person who falls in love. In their narratives, some participants speak of an increase in social media use before taking action. They are therefore completely

wrapped up in a “project” and committed to carrying it out. Social media can help reduce resistance to taking action or convince someone of the merits of doing so. Individuals from the extreme right often pour themselves into the production of media content. In particular, participants from the extreme right and Islamism seem to have difficulty keeping a distance from social media and spend hours watching videos, discovering new sites and posts, participating in forums and chatrooms, listening to or reading opinions. It is as if they had a voracious appetite for contact with their peers and figureheads of their movement. A passionate type of commitment also expressed itself in several participants by the presence of extreme effects. In this case, a love-hate dialectic characterizes their interpersonal relationships and colours their worldview. Their emotions tend to be complete and not nuanced: tender love becomes passionate love, and anger directly becomes hate. Finally, the passionate nature of the process leading to VE manifests itself in most participants by an experience of being overtaken, which leads them to express their conviction of having discovered, in the ideology of their choice, the Truth as well as a cause greater than themselves. They commit their life to it and desire nothing else but to devote themselves to it completely.

VE fueled by theories of persecution or conspiracy

For individuals interviewed whose families often experienced discrimination, injustice, even persecution, the extremist ideology to which they adhere often offers a greater, even grandiose, framework of interpretation for these painful experiences. The ideology intensifies the significance of these experiences and provides simplistic explanations. VE is fueled by frameworks which have characteristics connecting them to “conspiracy theories”, particularly including outrageous generalization whereby all the representatives of a certain group constitute a serious threat to the person in question and his or her own group, Manicheism between good and bad people, paranoid attitudes facilitating taking action, strong ideology forming a system and congruence, but which proves to be partly constructed with quantities of disparate and scattered information. This “framework” which is efficiently disseminated by social media, contributes to the intensification of the issue, then to a shift. The extreme left benefits from more structured ideological resources, notably Marxist, but in which the conspiracy theme is not completely absent.

b. Characteristics of the connection between media and extremists

Social Media

The extreme right and radical Islamism display a similar propaganda strategy based on extensive use of social media. Since 2016, extreme right propaganda has dominated the news and the web, as has been the case for violent Islamism at the height of the war, particularly in Syria. The extreme left also makes use of social media, but differently and in a diverse manner, the anti-fascist subgroup using online propaganda to “dox” people affiliated with the extreme right. Other extreme left groups stand by classic approaches, educating themselves from traditional Marxist books and using

posters and pamphlets. All of the extreme right respondents describe social media as the preferred method of communicating their ideology and their opinions about news. All participants explain that they learned about extreme right ideas and main issues by way of social media, using it as a classroom, that is to say it helped them progress in their knowledge of the movement. The extreme right includes a large diversity of ideologies, but rejecting immigration based on the fear of white genocide is a unifying theory. The importance of their commitment to the values, beliefs, objectives, methods and strategies advocated by this ideology has grown because of social media. Moreover, some invest in the production of media content, which for the extreme right involves the goal of propaganda. Even though Western Islamist recruitment is less in the news, some respondents testify to the fact that a small number of youth vulnerable to being radicalized have access to propaganda in French (speeches, comics, songs) which intensify their feeling of being discriminated against as Muslims.

Critical relationship with mass media

None of the participants were heavily influenced by mass media in their shift toward VE. However, all respondents spend several hours daily consulting various social media, some of which are devoted to a reinterpretation of the news according to the ideology in question, as they are presented in mass media. Several profiles do not reject mass media, in particular radical Islamists and the extreme left, but they rather hold a critical, even hostile, position toward them, which requires an in-depth knowledge of the content in question or a piecemeal reading shaped by the alternative ideology. In regard to the Islamist movement, the Moroccan sample further emphasizes an important aspect, namely that the Moroccan youth interviewed, just like Quebec youth who were interviewed, have the impression that mass media in their country discriminates against them. The potentially violent radical Islamist ideology offered to them on social media is therefore presented as an alternative in several types of sociocultural contents, and not only in a migratory context. All the participants associated with extreme right ideologies felt that mass media is biased, unreliable and associated with values they call “left-wing”. They deem this “liberal” political positioning not only as being outdated and naive, but especially as leading toward a civilizational crisis. They do not lend any credibility to mass media and adopt an attitude of generalized contempt toward what they describe as “*fake news*”.

Practitioners and people close to extremists

In most cases, those close to radicalized people are largely incapable of noticing extremist ideologies and supervising the use of social media. Moreover, youth practitioners said that, in general, they do not consider the use of social media in their professional relationship with youth. Ideologically speaking, regarding Islam, they feel some apprehension that causes them to exclude this dimension from interventions, while they confess that in someone’s trajectory, they are not able to distinguish potentially positive resources this religion may have (as do all others) from toxic resources connected to an extremist path. More specialized practitioners caution against Salafist logic, which is potentially radicalizing. The rare practitioners familiar with these ideologies prove to be valuable intermediaries in the field.

2. In light of the research results, what are the conclusions and potential solutions?

Governmental level (public and parapublic)

1. Become aware of the limits, in public communications, of the concept of radicalization leading to violence.

Even though the expressions "violent radicalization", "violent extremism" and "terrorism" are not identical, the latter two should be encouraged in public communication under appropriate circumstances. They are actually expressions that seem to hold more meaning for a greater part of the population than does the first expression. Focus groups showed that the term "radicalization" posed a comprehension issue for media professionals as well.

2. Take into consideration, in communication campaigns, differentiated perceptions of VE according to various characteristics.

Public communication campaigns whose goal is to reduce Quebeckers' worries about VE must take into consideration the differentiated nature of concerns according to certain sociodemographic characteristics. For example, women are more worried than men. On the other hand, youth, the elderly and immigrants are not really worried about the same types of extremism.

3. Measure differentiated perceptions of extremist acts, according to the ideology in question.

When a murderous violent act is committed for ideological reasons, it is important to identify it as such. Our results show that antifeminist extremism has not been well recognized up until now as an ideological source of violence, and murderers in the majority demographic group are more associated with a mental health problem. Violent Islamism is more easily identified, while the extreme right could be better identified; incidentally, the attack committed at the grand mosque in Quebec City was only prosecuted as multiple first-degree murders.

4. Raise awareness, in intervention, educational, community and family settings, of various types of violent extremism.

In most cases, practitioners and parents were not very familiar with the content of extremist ideology or the use of social media which disseminates it. It is important to effectively communicate information about the various dangerous ideologies in question. In particular, Islam is rapidly becoming associated with these dangerous ideologies, even though it can represent a source of life meaning for most youth who adhere to it.

5. Integrate the issue of media as an educational objective in schools.

Education about media should be integrated into the curriculum at every stage, in a transversal way (because media relates to all types of knowledge). In a broader sense, information must be disseminated about types of journalistic content, ethics rules governing journalism, and risks of social media. Even if a general area of training deals with the media issue, its actual place in teaching must be better clarified, as well as the learning objectives to be encouraged according to the age of children and the various disciplines.

6. In schools, address the question of violent extremism from the viewpoint of social polarization.

If schools are disheartened by the attention they receive in regard to violent extremism, the issue of prevention should be addressed in terms of social polarization. In this way, schools can overcome resistance to tools or preventive training that can be offered in these environments.

7. Pursue the governmental desire to establish an efficient independent student protection service.

In order to avoid youth becoming isolated in their perception of an injustice or discrimination that could lead them to extremist viewpoints, the student protection service could be amended and consolidated. It is important that complaints be heard and dealt with more rapidly, independently of schools and school boards.

8. Continue to promote various types of equality.

Since issues of equality, before the law, between different sexual tendencies and between men and women are often at the heart of Islamist extremist, antifeminist and extreme right ideologies, the government must work indefatigably to raise awareness and promote these issues.

9. Build on the Ethics and Religious Culture program.

Especially in connection with the debates about the Ethics and Religious Culture program, rather than rigidly disqualifying all religion in regard to various types of equality, it is equally important to give a place to reformist, moderate and critical voices coming from religions themselves. It is useful to remember that radical disqualification of religion by public authorities contributes to social polarization and therefore cannot help to promote equality in a constructive way. This aspect proves to be even more important when adherence to conspiracy theories masks a lack of reflection about faith. A tool could be developed in this regard for the Religious Culture segment. Dialoguing skills are at the core of the program, and these could be developed both online and offline.

10. In an intervention context, take into consideration the use of media by youth.

Professional practitioners for the youth interviewed (both children and adolescents), and for their families, should be aware of the factor of media consultation as an important area to take into consideration in the trajectories of the people they are working with.

11. Develop preventive strategies in connection with the use of social media use by extremists.

Social media use appears to have become an important part of the strategy used by leaders of violent extremist ideas. Until now, the major media companies have most often reacted after a violent event (waiting for a crime on the scale of Christchurch in New Zealand, in particular, to respond); they should develop approaches that are much more proactive. Furthermore, while giants such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are at the forefront of ethical debates, the radicalized persons interviewed consulted other platforms, such as Vimeo and 4chan (8chan).

12. Encourage mobilization of constructive projects for prevention in connection with extremist ideologies.

The world of youth is always sensitive to injustice, so it is appropriate to help them state and confront their viewpoints, and if necessary, bring them out of isolation and encourage their involvement in constructive projects that are well grounded in reality.

Media professionals

13. There is a need for mass media to develop concrete measures to regulate the treatment of VE.

While what emerges from this research is that mass media are accessories to VE, they can still become aware of the fact that their coverage of violent extremist events can transmit stereotypes and/or contribute to “glorifying” the perpetrators and their ideologies. In mass media, reflection needs to begin about this issue so that concrete measures can be identified in order to regulate the treatment of these subjects, particularly to avoid indirectly promoting violent extremists and their ideas.

14. Focus on the role of mass media in education and clarification.

The large media companies should also focus on their role of education on behalf of the public interest regarding the VE phenomenon, especially on their websites since these mainly reach the youth audience. They could also expand their work in exposing, deconstructing and refuting false news and other beliefs serving as the basis for hate propaganda and the recruiting of violent extremist groups, especially supremacists and other racists, and continuously investigate these; they should proceed similarly for the underlying conspiracy theories.

15. Draw on the initiative “#30SEC To Check It Out”.

Mass media — by joining together, or by/with the *Conseil de presse* or the *Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec* — could also draw on the initiative “#30SEC to check it out — Fighting fake news” (<https://30secondes.org/en>) to directly counteract hate propaganda and antisocial behaviours on social media, and more generally, promote citizenship. This initiative, which originated with journalists, is implemented within the school system.

Others

16. The impact of the extreme left should not be overlooked.

Currently, the extreme left does not seem to be adequately perceived as a source of danger, partly because victims, which are often businesses, do not wish negative publicity. Not much information is available about the atmosphere of intimidation to which they are subjected or about the fear of vandalism. Violence against property seems to escape public outcry, perhaps because of ignorance of its consequences on the victims who stay silent.

17. Refine public discourse within the framework of VE events.

The fact that the ethnicity of the accused has a direct impact on the perception of the nature of the crime could encourage reflection by actors in media, political and police environments who, in the short term, immediately after the event, are called on to comment or use certain investigative strategies. Does not closely associating terrorism with certain ethnicities, rather than with the manifestation of a mental illness, indicate a form of racism? Inversely, does not diminishing the importance of an attack by attributing it to something other than a murderous ideology mask certain forms of VE?

3. What are the main contributions of this research in terms of advancing knowledge?

- a. The major survey conducted in two waves within the population was based on the following problem: Media could have a more general effect on perceptions of extremism, which goes beyond the coverage of violent acts in itself and is rather connected to the way in which certain groups are presented by various media. That being said, the differences between media companies are rarely taken into consideration in empirical analyses of the effects of media consumption. This research provided an opportunity to address a new subject by examining how exposure to each of the main Quebec media companies contributed to the creation of a differentiated evolution of perceptions of extremism, due to the different content they may present.

- b. A small number of empirical studies examine the non-linear pathways toward VE of individuals and groups, as well as their connections with mass and social media. It is rare to find analyses as detailed as the one in this research on the effects and processes of individual reception of mass and social media, and there are few comparisons between various types of VE in this regard. In connection with these processes, theoretical angles related to ‘passionate’ relationships, as well as the perspective of the ‘persecution or conspiracy theory’, are rarely addressed comprehensively in the literature.
- c. To the best of our knowledge, no other study addresses the interrelated aspects of the issue of relationships between media and VE: perceptions of the population, media coverage, individual dynamics, and practices of media professionals.

PART E — AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- a. While the surveys represent an appropriate way of studying Quebeckers’ perceptions by obtaining data that can be generalized to the population as a whole, this method has certain limits. The survey — but also the focus groups with media professionals and the analysis of media data — particularly shows that the theme of radicalization leading to violence poses certain comprehension issues and that it is polysemous. Focus groups with citizens would no doubt allow for the collection of more substantial qualitative information about the understanding Quebeckers have of this phenomenon and the words used to identify it, the types of radicalization that cause them worry, or concrete manifestations of these worries.
- b. Our data show the existence of connections between certain media companies to which Quebeckers turn to be informed about news, and their worry about certain forms of extremism. However, it is difficult to precisely identify which content is connected to these attitudes. For example, are articles that cover the news responsible or is it rather opinion-based texts and programs broadcast by these media companies? Focus groups conducted with consumers of these media companies could prove pertinent for delineating how types of content are related to these findings.
- c. The integration of a perspective regarding healthy and wise use of social media in various types of interventions is a new avenue of research.
- d. In particular, cutting-edge research should be developed about the function and impact of conspiracy theories on individuals, groups and society.
- e. Training of practitioners and educators in regard to different violent extremist ideologies, in connection with media use, represents a new perspective, which will require follow-up or analytical monitoring.

- f. A research question arising from this research involves the need to better understand the roles played by news, personal events and media use as experienced by individuals in the process leading to violent extremism.
- g. Analyses of news treatment and their extremist ideological reinterpretations should be pursued, in order to develop educational strategies that allow for the prevention of vulnerability to news manipulation.
- h. Knowledge of the elements that attract youth to cognitive and behavioural radicalization proves to be fragmented. An important research goal would be to better understand the appealing elements of propaganda disseminated on social media, as well as the role played in this process by real-time interactions, online and offline.
- i. In a context where the violence of messages disseminated online has been considered as a phenomenon that is both new and concerning, the relevance of obtaining high-quality empirical results is crucial. An important and innovative research goal would involve mapping and following the types of violent and conspiracy-driven content that are available on social media. This should be conducted particularly according to their nature, the writers, the forums where they are disseminated and their ideological foundations, and would also permit a better understanding of their effect on cognitive and behavioural radicalization. Conducting research on the interactions of individuals with these types of content is necessary in order to create thorough prevention practices.

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