

**Title:** A review of the Preventing Radicalization to Extremism in Australia handbook, challenges between policy and practice.

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**Research Question:**

(1) What are some of the key issues and challenges that emerged following the release of the *Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Australia* (PVERA) handbook? (2) What lessons that can be drawn from the content and public reception of the PVERA handbook?

**Importance:**

Schools and community organizations have recently become an important focus of the Australian Government's "soft" counter-terrorism strategy to counter violent extremism (CVE). It is thought that in these settings individuals who might be on a trajectory toward violent extremism can be identified, and violent extremism prevented. Governments have been developing curriculum and toolkits to support teachers and community leaders working with young people, to "spot the signs" of a radicalizing young person and to provide a formal language for talking about extremist violence and radicalization. The PVERA handbook is a useful example for exploring some of the challenges associated with talking about radicalization and violent extremism.

**Research Findings:**

The PVERA handbook uses a diverse set of case studies to demonstrate different kinds of violent extremism. It tries to avoid an exclusive focus on groups like ISIS and al'Qaeda. However the handbook is undermined by a lack of consistency with national policy and strategy, a tokenistic assemblage of case studies, and failure to distinguish between key concepts: radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism. The PVERA provides useful and accessible detail around anti-terrorism legislation and associated police powers. Ultimately though the PVERA handbook's utility is reduced by its public reception, and the prolific public and social media mocking of one of the case studies — Karen, a radicalized environmentalist. It is suggested the PVERA is thus useful only if set within a critical conversation that includes the media fallout following its public release, under a rights-based education model.

**Implications:**

This Australian case study serves as a cautionary tale, and the PVERA handbook is a useful example for exploring some of the challenges associated with talking about radicalization and violent extremism. Research shows that there are significant risks associated with "getting it wrong," perpetuating the very conditions that could lead an individual to radicalize to extremist violence. Conceptual and language consistency across national security strategy and education resources is pivotal. A critical education approach that could empower youth and foster resilience against violent extremism requires nuanced communication that speaks to the diversity of pathways to and forms of violent extremism. Education resources require careful attention to language and a critically reflexive approach that can foster productive dialogue, counteract harmful and alienating suspect profiles, and support constructive learning opportunities.