

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Radicalization Leading to
Violence in Schools in Quebec:
Issues and Perspectives**



CENTRE FOR THE **PREVENTION**
OF RADICALIZATION
LEADING TO VIOLENCE

This report documents the nature of radicalization leading to violence as observed in Quebec schools in recent years. Its primary aim is to provide a better understanding of the context, mechanisms and factors that have caused a dozen students from Collège de Maisonneuve since 2012–2013—as well as several dozen other young Quebecers—to develop the desire to go to Syria and possibly join jihadist groups there.

The broad lines of the report’s analysis and the resulting recommendations are presented in the following table.

INTRODUCTION	
Topics Covered in the Analytical Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radicalization leading to violence associated with jihadism and the situation in Syria • The extent of the phenomenon in Quebec • The radicalization of certain Collège de Maisonneuve students as well as of other young people counselled by the CPRLV • Strategies for preventing radicalization leading to violence in Quebec schools.
1. JIHADISM AROUND THE WORLD (SINCE 2013)	
Internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts in Syria and the Middle East: a fertile breeding ground for violent extremist radicalization • Over 30 000 foreign nationals have joined jihadist groups in Syria (particularly the armed group known as the Islamic State).
Canada and Quebec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 130 and 250 Canadians have gone to Syria. • Between 20 and 30 Quebecers have gone to Syria.
2. METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	
2.1. Primary Sources of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collected by the CPRLV through its daily activities. • Interviews with individuals having left or attempted to leave Quebec, their family and friends, and school staff members.
2.2. Secondary Sources of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and confidential sources • Scientific literature and expertise report
2.3. Ethical Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed consent from all individuals consulted • Confidentiality of data • Anonymity of persons cited
3. RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE: EXPLORATORY OVERVIEW	
3.1. Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process whereby people adopt extremist belief systems—including the willingness to use, encourage or facilitate violence—with the aim of promoting an ideology, political project or cause as a means of social transformation.

3. RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE: EXPLORATORY OVERVIEW

<p>3.2. Distinction between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violent radicalization: radical viewpoints legitimizing violence • Non-violent radicalization: plays a positive role in social progress
<p>3.3. Factors and Mechanisms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse factors: social vulnerability, family problems, discrimination, feeling marginalized, exposure to extremist ideologies • No single cause • Gradual, multifarious process • Paths to radicalization not uniform
<p>3.4. Mapping the Process of Radicalization Leading to Violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The radicalization process is a combination of circumstances and personal choices. • All individuals have their own personal protective factors with regard to radicalization, but may also have characteristics that make them more susceptible to the phenomenon. • The radicalization process can be prevented or reversed by strengthening protective factors and reducing the impact of vulnerability factors.

4. BREEDING GROUNDS FOR RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE: THE SITUATION IN QUEBEC

<p>4.1. The International Situation: The Plight of the Muslim World and The Syrian Conflict as Causes for Indignation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indignation caused by the deterioration of the Syrian conflict and growing media coverage of atrocities committed by Bashar el-Assad’s regime. • Frustration with Western nations’ perceived policies of inaction concerning the Syrian crisis • Sense of abandonment, victimization and identity stigmatization
<p>4.2. The Situation in Quebec: Societal Debates Around Islam and Muslims</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two societal debates in particular have polarized public discourse around Islam and Muslims: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The debate on reasonable accommodation ▪ The debate around the “Charter of Quebec Values”
<p>4.3. Radicalization Agents: Shady Charismatic Figures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive to young people in search of answers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alternative, provocative discourse ▪ Provide recognition • Strengthen the attraction of «pure Islam»: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exploitation of young Muslims’ malaise about their place in society ▪ Idealized vision of Islam ▪ Encouragement to break ties with family, friends, and community.
<p>4.4. Desire for Identity Affirmation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radicalization trajectory that is more a process of identity affirmation than a spiritual journey
<p>4.5. The Rigidification of Identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty affirming personal identity as a Quebec Muslim • Lack of tolerance for different opinions • Solidarity with other Muslim populations around the world undergoing similar experiences of stigmatization

5. RADICALIZATION OF A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE COLLÈGE DE MAISONNEUVE: UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON

<p>5.1. Schools and Radicalization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are affected by the phenomenon of radicalization more than other settings are because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They gather together young people who are in the process of building their social and personal identities; ▪ They serve as venues for contact and interaction among young people; • However, they are also front-line players in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prevention with young people; ▪ Monitoring potential instances of radicalization that could lead to violence.
<p>5.2. From Europe to Quebec: A Comparative Profile of Radicalized Youth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affected individuals are much younger than in the past; ▪ Extremely diverse personal radicalization profiles. • Differences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quebec’s radicalization model is associated with highly integrated individuals from middle- or upper-class backgrounds.
<p>5.3. Characteristics of Youth Receiving Counselling from the CPRLV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerabilities regarding conversion • Family conflict • Personal fragility
<p>5.4. Characteristics of the Radicalized Students from Collège de Maisonneuve</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant number of young women; ▪ Contains several couples; ▪ Young people aged 18 and 19 years old; ▪ Academically successful; ▪ Moderate religious practices.
<p>5.5. Contextual Aspects of Radicalization in Schools: Why the Collège de Maisonneuve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to religion issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meditation space transformed into venue for ideological preaching; ▪ Tensions around granting of a room for Friday prayers. • Deterioration of the climate of mutual respect and tolerance (the promise of togetherness): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intolerance and bullying by more militant students; ▪ Outside influence of radicalization agents; ▪ Rigidification of prejudice; ▪ Destabilization due to series of departures for Syria.
<p>5.6. Influence of Peers and The Bandwagon Effect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The radicalization process is reinforced inside the parameters of an existing network as a result of the solidarity and trust that gradually develops among its members. • Internal ties play a more important role than ideological factors in the decision to put ideas into action and leave for Syria.

5. RADICALIZATION OF A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE COLLÈGE DE MAISONNEUVE: UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON

<p>5.7. The Gradual Slide into Radicalization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distancing behaviours: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gradual encapsulation of self-segregation; ▪ Sudden changes in friendships; ▪ Dropping out of classes; ▪ Moral validation of extremist or violent discourse;
<p>5.8. Leaving for Syria: The Only Possible Outcome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For many of the Collège de Maisonneuve students, the ultimate aim of the radicalization process was not so much violent action as their planned departure for Syria. • There were a variety of reasons for leaving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He need to experience «pure Islam»; ▪ Altruistic motivations; ▪ Escaping conditions in Quebec; ▪ In a small number of cases, a narrower interpretation of the Islamic concept of ‘jihad’ and its application.
<p>5.9. How to Go to Syria: An Introductory Course</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of a natural leader • Direct contact with international terrorist groups • Carefully planning the departure • Diverse sources of funding
<p>5.10. The Departure of Children—The Suffering of Parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents’ bewilderment • Disenchantment • Impression of being judged by the rest of society
<p>5.11. Intensive Media Attention Concerning the Collège de Maisonneuve</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deterioration of the already complicated climate within the school due to intense media pressure generated by the public revelation of the first wave of departures of students from the college for Syria.

6. RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS IN QUEBEC: PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

<p>6.1. Intervention with Young People in Schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention strategies over repression: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preventive vigilance, avoiding stigmatization; ▪ Building the skills of school professionals.
<p>6.2. Responding to Religious Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing the question of religious accommodation requests
<p>6.3. Intervention by Public Institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing interference of personal beliefs • Basing intervention on scientific and clinical observations • Encouraging the use of an approach centred around psychosocial prevention • Involving imams in prevention and the development of a counter-discourse

RECOMMENDATIONS (SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO VARIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND MINISTRIES)

- Ensure the implementation of preventive measures and intervention strategies for dealing with instances of radicalization inside—and outside—schools.
- Develop a better understanding of young people’s demands and hopes and provide them with constructive solutions in order to prevent youth from viewing radical discourse and violence as the only solution to their malaise.
- Foster a positive and inclusive atmosphere in schools, creating forums for peaceful debate and intercultural contact.
- Exercise vigilance and ensure increased involvement with young people who are at risk of or undergoing radicalization



**BY ADOPTING AN ATTENTIVE AND COMPASSIONATE ATTITUDE,
EACH OF US CAN MAKE A PROFOUND CONTRIBUTION TO THE
SAFETY OF OUR COMMUNITIES WHILE HELPING SAFEGUARD
THE PROMISE OF TOGETHERNESS IN QUEBEC SOCIETY.**

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