

In December 2024 I was humbled to learn that I was awarded Pardee's Gilman Grant which afforded me the extraordinary opportunity to embark on an intensive thesis research opportunity. During my time in the Netherlands and Belgium, I was humbled to connect with numerous career professionals from various international organizations, governmental bodies, and think tanks who focus on issues ranging from counter-terrorism, counter-radicalization, youth radicalization prevention, online recruitment prevention, and dynamics of far-right and jihadist movements in Europe. My research was particularly focused on how Europe has addressed and handled these various issues both at the state and international levels, transnational reach of these movements and how they are interconnected across borders.

The research I conducted was profoundly impacted by my travels, both in terms of the data I was able to collect and the perspectives I gained. The grant supported me in conducting seven in-depth interviews with a total of ten individuals, each providing extensive and unique experience and experiences. These interviews were established through cold emailing individuals from organizations of interest. The reception I received was tremendous, and I was humbled by the excitement and eagerness of these groups to connect during my times in their cities. With any aspect of an extensive, detailed trip, minor disruptions did occur. Remembering to remain flexible and understanding, two of my potential interviews were cancelled, one due to a work emergency, and the other from a gentleman who simply never responded back even after setting an interview. This, however, came full circle with references to other experts and colleagues by those I did interview. Since coming back, I have two more professionals I have spoken with.

Engaging in face-to-face interviews with professionals who deal directly with issues such as counterterrorism and radicalization was an enriching experience. These experts provided nuanced insights into the specific challenges facing their respective countries, the regional dynamics at play, and the policies that have been most effective in combating radicalization. One of the most striking aspects of my travels was understanding the stark differences in how European countries address issues of youth radicalization through an online law enforcement presence, as well as a three-tiered community-based intervention plan. The variation in policy approaches became much clearer when I could see firsthand the local context in which they were implemented. In this way, my research was not only informed by the data I collected but also by the real-world application of theories and policies in different European settings. This enriched my ability to evaluate the efficacy of various strategies in combating radicalization.

While I had expected to encounter well-established institutions and governmental agencies, I was surprised by the breadth of the civil society groups, local non-profits, and

grassroots organizations involved in counter-radicalization efforts. Many of these entities work in the background, often without the same level of attention or funding as larger, more visible organizations. Yet their work proved to be crucial in preventing radicalization at the community level. I would not have learned the importance of this aspect of counterterrorism had I relied solely on larger-scale institutional perspectives. Visiting these cities allowed me to understand the complex socio-political landscape that shapes the way counter-radicalization efforts are tailored to specific communities. The transnational nature of both far-right and Jihadi movements, and the cultural contexts in which they operate, became much clearer to me through these interactions.

Reflecting on the research process, if I were to undertake this travel and research again, I would consider spending more time observing counter-radicalization programs in action. While my interviews were highly insightful, there is only so much that can be conveyed through verbal testimony. Witnessing these programs directly would have allowed me to see their implementation and effectiveness in real time. This firsthand observation could have offered invaluable qualitative data that would complement the insights I gathered through interviews. This opportunity, however, was limited due to time constraints.

Beyond the academic and professional growth I experienced, this research journey had a profound impact on me as an individual. Traveling to different European countries and speaking with experts from diverse backgrounds deepened my understanding of global interconnectedness. The issues of radicalization and terrorism are not isolated to one country or culture, but are instead shaped by global dynamics, historical legacies, and shared challenges. And while we may face shared challenges, the reasons for addressing each and the societal impact drastically differ from the approach in the United States. This realization expanded my worldview and allowed me to better appreciate the complexities of international security. Talking with individuals outside of my interviews likewise greatly informed how the United States is perceived by the general public of these countries, and inspires me to want and expect more from my country.

In conclusion, my travels and the research I conducted with the support of the Gilman Grant have not only enriched my academic pursuits but also broadened my personal perspective. The knowledge I gained through my interviews and my interactions with individuals from different backgrounds has fundamentally shaped my understanding of counterterrorism and radicalization. This research has not only prepared me for future academic work but has also reinforced my commitment to contributing to solutions for some of the most pressing global challenges of our time.