Government of the Netherlands

Promote, Protect, Combat

National Extremism Strategy for 2024-2029

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Foreword

Our democracy is to be cherished. More than 17 million people of diverse backgrounds live side by side in freedom in the Netherlands. Our form of society is possible because it is underpinned by the rule of law and rules on how we interact with each other. For example, everybody is free to believe whatever they want, citizens can influence the way our country is governed by exercising their right to vote, and we treat each other with respect. Our form of society is a great good, but at the same time it requires attention: it doesn't just happen of its own accord.

Extremists undermine both our form of society and the rule of law, which collectively are referred to as the democratic legal order. Although the government is doing everything it can to counter extremism, extremist ideas will always exist in an open society. Our society and the rule of law in our country are robust and can handle a certain level of threat. However, if extremism is not properly identified, or society is unable to deal with it effectively, the threat to our democratic legal order will increase.

Our task is to combat the threat of extremism, whether active or latent, in order to protect what we hold dear. With that in mind, the government hereby presents its inaugural National Extremism Strategy for 2024-2029.

The fact that this is an inaugural strategy does not mean that this is the first time we are addressing this phenomenon. On the contrary, for many years countless people have dedicated themselves to countering, tackling and preventing extremism. It is a misconception to think that this can be achieved only by taking firm action and combating manifestations of extremism. Working together to promote our open society and protect our democratic processes is the true game-changer. This broad approach is vital to our ability to resist that which might harm us. In other words, firm action and cooperation go hand in hand.

Structure of the strategy

1. This strategy explains the phenomenon of extremism and outlines the challenge we face as a society;
2. it provides a framework for our efforts, and;
3. finally, it describes our current activities in this area.

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Part I: Extremism as a societal challenge

1. Introduction

The Netherlands' open and free society is a precious asset that should never be taken for granted. We live in a country where laws and decisions are adopted democratically. A country where we are protected by the institutions of the rule of law and where the rule of law protects citizens from the government, through rules designed to prevent arbitrariness in procedures and in the exercise of power. The institutions of the rule of law allow room for dissent and criticism. Both the government and the public need to actively protect, maintain and cherish these democratic principles and our form of society. After all, although the democratic legal order is robust and resilient, it can also be undermined or threatened in various ways,[1] for example by extremism.[2] To counter this threat, the government has drawn up this inaugural National Extremism Strategy, which establishes a framework for the efforts of relevant actors in 2024-2029.

A democratic society thrives in a free and safe social climate – in the classroom, the workplace and the social sphere, in political discussions and online. When we have norms on how to disagree and interact with each other respectfully. When there is a basic loyalty towards the public institutions that protect this freedom and safety. Criticism aimed at institutions is permissible and necessary; public officials must be both accountable and willing to look in the mirror.

Ideologically inspired behaviour becomes problematic when it undermines the democratic legal order. In this strategy, extremism is therefore defined as an **ideologically inspired willingness to engage in violent and/or non-violent activities that undermine the democratic legal order**.[3] This can take many forms, including religious extremism, anti-institutional extremism and extremism relating to a specific policy issue, such as migration.

Examples of non-violent manifestations of extremism include hate speech and dehumanising others because of their opinions, origin, skin colour, religion or sexual orientation. People with extremist views may also seek to impose their will on others by means of threats or intimidation, or to systematically promote distrust of institutions such as the scientific establishment, the judiciary or the media. Examples of deliberate violent conduct or the preaching of violence in pursuit of an ideology include assault, arson and physical intimidation. The use of violence can become increasingly severe and may ultimately lead to terrorism. Terrorism, which is not covered in the present strategy,[4] involves the planning or perpetration of acts of potentially lethal violence against people or of acts intended to cause substantial property damage or calculated to result in social disruption, for the explicit purpose of creating a climate of fear among the general public, or sections thereof. Not all extremist violence qualifies as terrorism.

Unlawful expressions of extremism require a different approach than lawful ones. While violent extremism and violations of the law will be met with firm action, efforts must also be made to reduce the breeding ground for extremism in society. It helps to have a foundation of socioeconomic security and wellbeing, to have a sense of being a full member of society. Broad, proactive efforts within the social domain (welfare, healthcare, education and youth) and within society itself help promote a resilience. Tackling non-violent extremism in society also requires other measures, such as a willingness to challenge each other, dialogue on conflicting values and skilful conflict management, pedagogical interventions with minors, and psychosocial support aimed at preventing escalation towards violence. This inevitably raises several dilemmas. The rule of law exists primarily to protect citizens from the government. After all, we also enjoy rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion. Awareness and competent management of (conflicting) fundamental rights and similar dilemmas should therefore be part and parcel of any effort to counter extremism. However, there are also people who threaten the rule of law itself.

1 'Undermining' is defined as the development of activities whose intended objectives, chosen means and/or tangible effects weaken, delegitimise, subvert, sabotage, directly endanger or seriously impede the functioning of all or part of the democratic legal order as a political system and/or a form of society in the short or long term.

2 Other types of activities aimed at undermining or threatening the democratic legal order can include undesirable interference by foreign state actors or large-scale criminal activity that undermines society.

3 Depending on their specific sphere of activity, implementation partners can use a definition of extremism that is compatible with their own tasks and powers.

4 Terrorism and extremism that poses a terrorist threat are the focus of the National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026. See National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 (May 2022).

The strategy

The challenges that extremism poses for our democracy and our society both now and in the years ahead are not new. For many years, partners in the security and social domains have been working to help prevent and counter extremism.[5] The present strategy consolidates this approach into an integrated vision that they can use to jointly tackle extremism, and identifies areas where additional effort or innovation is required.

The aim of the strategy is to provide a framework that enhances the ability of the democratic legal order to withstand extremism.

The strategy is based on three pillars:

1. **Promote** a resilient open society through broad action on a wide range of issues that can help reduce breeding grounds for extremism. In contrast to pillars 2 and 3, the focus here is not on extremism but on society as a whole.

2. **Protect** the democratic legal order and enhance the government's ability to resist short- and long-term efforts by extremist agitators and their supporters to undermine it.

3. **Combat** manifestations of extremism to ensure they do not go unanswered, keep them under control and prevent impunity. Curtail efforts by extremist agitators to undermine the democratic legal order, and tackle their extremist actions (or incitement thereto).

Many actors have a role to play in implementing this strategy: the government, national and local government partners, politicians and – in some areas – other actors in society, such as civil society organisations, the private sector, associations, religious institutions, schools and local community organisations.[6] Most of these parties are not primarily – or only tangentially – involved in countering extremism. Nevertheless, together they all have a part to play in safeguarding the democratic legal order. Democracy in the Netherlands is robust, but cannot be taken for granted. It is up to all of us to strengthen the democratic ethos and help foster the resilience and stability of our society. Democracy, resilience and stability are prerequisites for and bastions of the democratic legal order that can help reduce breeding grounds for extremism.

5 The way in which extremism undermines the democratic legal order is explained in detail in Annexe 1: The broad approach to the democratic legal order and extremism.

6 It is important to emphasise that the description of the many roles of other actors in society should not be understood to imply that schools or local community organisations, for example, should play a direct role in identifying and tackling extremism.

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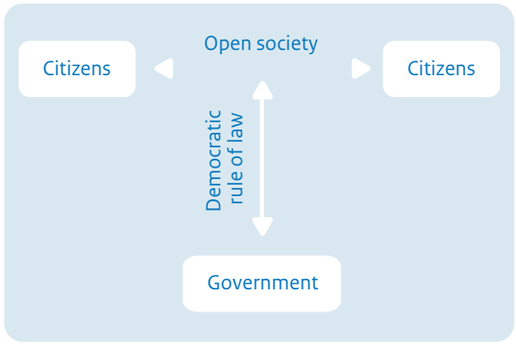
Part I: Extremism as a societal challenge

2. Dealing with extremism as a societal challenge

The present strategy focuses on all forms of extremism that harm our democratic legal order. An open and democratic society has laws and rules on how we coexist as members of society and on the relationship between citizens and government. Together these rules form the democratic legal order.[7] This is obviously a dynamic construct, as laws, rules and even unwritten norms change over time.

Focus on the democratic legal order

The democratic legal order consists of two parts: the democratic rule of law (encompassing a political system and a judicial system based on a separation of powers and a system of checks and balances) and a form of society (an open society). These two parts are also referred to as the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the democratic legal order. The functioning of the democratic legal order is determined by the operation of both dimensions and by the interaction between them. For this reason, local and central government and citizens both bear responsibility for the functioning of the democratic legal order.



A democratic legal order functions through the combination of essential structural elements and necessary process conditions. The essential structural elements include the proper functioning of the institutions of the democratic legal order, such as the separation of powers. The process conditions include the level of trust, cohesion, solidarity, tolerance and respect for diversity within society. In addition, they encompass the necessary conditions for open, public debate and the possibility to disagree and engage in fierce debate without dehumanising one's opponents.

Erosion of the democratic legal order in the Netherlands

If essential structural elements or key process conditions are systematically eroded, the democratic legal order will be undermined. Extremists can achieve this by disseminating messages aimed at delegitimising institutions, our open society or the way people interact with each other. Or they may demonise institutions or people, sow doubt about matters on which there is little disagreement within the scientific community or reject the legitimacy, say, of politicians or the police on the basis of a given ideology. The large-scale dissemination of conspiracy theories can also lead to a loss of the perceived legitimacy of the rule of law among certain parts of the population. This can damage both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the democratic legal order. The actions and messages of extremists can thus undermine the functioning of democratic institutions, as well as people's trust in each other. Based on various case studies, the National Security Analysts Network further notes that people can become susceptible to extremist narratives when they are deeply frustrated about the government's policy and/or approach, and activism makes little to no difference in their experience.[8]

In order to protect society, it is important to protect the democratic legal order and be able to resist the threat of extremism. A corollary of this is the notion that the law must be enforced when extremists exceed the boundaries of what we can accept as a society, as laid down in our laws and rules. When public figures and ordinary individuals are threatened, when agitators incite others or encourage them to break the law, or when extremists commit violent crimes, firm action must be taken.

7 This section is based on AIVD, 'Anti-institutional extremism in the Netherlands: A serious threat to the democratic legal order?' (May 2023), chapter 1: 'The Democratic Legal Order'. See also AIVD, 'From dawa to jihad: The various threats from radical Islam to the democratic legal order (2004). See also the definition of 'democratic legal order' in the glossary in annexe 4.

8 National Security Analysts Network, 'Special Report on Extremism' (October 2023), pp. 19 and 52 (in Dutch).

Extremism versus activism

This strategy emphatically is not concerned with all people who are critical of democratic institutions, other population groups, people of other faiths or people with different views. People will always disagree about something. Criticism is permitted under our democratic rules, for example through demonstrations, as long as it is not part of an attempt to overthrow the current democracy. Extremism is thus something different from activism. Independent thought and dissenting voices are vital to the functioning of the democratic legal order. It is important to ensure that such criticism is not labelled as extremism. Designating an activity as extremist is a painstaking process.

Activism involves forms of criticism, aimed at institutions or policies, that do not go against the principles of the democratic legal order. Activism can also be inspired by ideological motives, but in contrast to extremism it contributes to the democratic legal order rather than harming it. The behaviour of activists is sometimes mischievous, sometimes annoying or provocative, and sometimes illegal, but at its core it is not designed – in purpose or effect – to undermine the democratic legal order. Extremism is about engaging, on the basis of an extremist narrative, in violent or non-violent activities that go against the principles of the democratic legal order. This may, but does not always, involve the commission of criminal offences. Some expressions of extremism are not illegal but may nevertheless be undesirable, for example because they undermine the democratic legal order by normalising extremist ideas. In exceptional cases, they may inspire people to actually commit criminal offences. When this occurs, the National Police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee can take action on the basis of their statutory police tasks, under the authority of the public prosecutor. In the case of public order offences, such action falls under the authority of the local mayor.

In practice, it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear line between what does and does not constitute extremism. The context and situation matter. It is therefore important that the government adopt a careful and restrained approach when classifying utterances and/or behaviour as extremist.[9] The table on the next page lists several types of behaviour that can be classified as extremist. Each one must involve an ideological motive combined with an act of violence or behaviour that systematically and deliberately undermines the democratic legal order. The following examples also appear in annexe 1 of the National Security Analysts Network's Special Report on Extremism.

Violent	Non-violent
• Attack • Murder • Violent occupation/storming • Assault • Kidnapping and hostage-taking • Vandalism/arson/bombings • Calls to violence (offline and online) • Offline threats and intimidation, such as 'home visits' • Online threats and intimidation, such as doxing	• Disseminating extremist theories, such as replacement theory • Hate speech • Systematically delegitimising the democratic rule of law • Establishing parallel institutions • Spreading and normalising extremist ideas or hostile attitudes • Incitement • Spreading disinformation

Examples of extremist behaviour. In order to determine whether a particular action or utterance is extremist, it is never considered in isolation but always in the context of whether it is inspired by an ideological motive and accompanied by violence or behaviour that systematically and deliberately undermines the democratic legal order.

9 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 692.

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Extremism versus terrorism

In addition to being different from activism, extremism also differs fundamentally from terrorism.[10] Although extremism and terrorism both undermine the democratic legal order and can ultimately endanger national security, terrorism involves a more severe level of (potentially lethal) violence against people or damage to property that results in social disruption and is intended to have a more serious impact. Extremist violence does not reach the threshold of 'terrorism'. Furthermore, the Criminal Code defines what qualifies as a terrorist offence or terrorist intent. It is a criminal offence to be a member of a terrorist organisation or to disseminate terrorist messages, and it is up to the courts to determine what constitutes terrorist content or a terrorist organisation. Even though extremist acts are often criminal, such as arson or violent disorder, extremism is not a legal concept in itself and does not appear in the Criminal Code. This means that the far-reaching measures regulating people's private lives and the primarily criminal law-oriented approach of the National Counterterrorism Strategy are often not appropriate when dealing with extremism.

The online dimension and the normalisation of extremist ideas

In the Netherlands, public trust in institutions such as the judiciary and the police remains stable and high. However, there has been a loss of trust in the functioning of some parts of the democratic system. There is currently less public confidence in the ability of politicians to solve problems. There have also been scandals, disputes and other concerns. Examples include the serious failings in the childcare benefits system and the handling of the damage caused by gas drilling in the north of the Netherlands. Such scandals can increase distrust and may cause parts of the population to disengage from society, or put them at risk of doing so.[11] The National Security Analysts Network sees a connection between high levels of social distrust and extremism, and notes that trust can come under pressure when people personally experience injustice or see it affecting others, for example as a – real or perceived – consequence of government policy or experience of discrimination.[12] Across society, there are concerns about tensions between population groups, which are particularly evident in the media and in politics.[13]

At the same time, there have been various developments on the world stage that affect us all, such as the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. These developments undermine our (sense of) security and have a socioeconomic impact that people feel in their wallets. The Netherlands is dealing with major problems and challenges, and extremist agitators are exploiting this situation. The widespread dissemination and – in some cases – normalisation of extremist narratives gives cause for concern. Examples include the growing group of Dutch people who falsely believe that a malevolent elite is intent on oppressing the population.[14]

Extremism has always existed, and extremist ideas can always be found in society. Nevertheless, extremism is currently manifesting itself in a different way than it did 10 or 20 years ago. The online domain plays a key role in enabling malicious actors to stoke extremism and, in exceptional cases, incite terrorism.[15] Anybody can publish and share extremist views that undermine the democratic legal order in real time, through words and images, and with tremendous reach. Close-knit national and transnational communities of like-minded people can develop quickly and easily on the internet.

People who are susceptible to extremist ideas are exposed to problematic messaging more quickly than they were in the past. In the wide range of ideological views on offer, it can be precisely those elements that vindicate an individual's own discontent that resonate most strongly.[16] In short, it has become easier to access extremist ideas and come into contact with extremist agitators, even across national borders. Thanks to the internet, people are becoming radicalised at an increasingly young age, attracted in part by memes and disinformation. Developments abroad, such as the storming of the US Capitol and Brazil's Congress, or the strategy of normalising extremist utterances, serve as a source of inspiration in this regard.

The online world does not exist in a vacuum: a fertile breeding ground is needed to make people susceptible to extremism. Sensitivity to extremist messages often goes hand in hand with personal grievances, a lack of socioeconomic security, negative experiences with the government or society and psychological problems.[17] Such factors can make certain people more susceptible to extremist ideas. The intertwining of bursts of ideology and feelings of resentment or personal problems makes it harder to identify extremism and predict behaviour.[18] According to the National Security Analysts Network, experiencing problems with the government can make a person more susceptible to extremist narratives.[19] The functioning and actions of the government should therefore also be treated as a factor: when trust in the government's actions comes under pressure, extremist agitators can exploit this to gain a foothold.[20]

Tackling the undermining effect of extremism from multiple angles

The undermining effect of extremism on the democratic legal order forms the main focus of this strategy, which approaches the issue from three angles: 'promote', 'protect' and 'combat' – these are the three pillars of the strategy. It is worth noting at the outset that many parties in the Netherlands are actively involved in promoting a resilient open society, with a focus on such issues as welfare (especially youth work), youth and adult care, and education. Actions under the first pillar are not intended to counter extremism but can help reduce the breeding ground for extremist messages in society. Nobody is born an extremist.
The descent into extremism is preceded by a formative process in which the social context plays an important role. Measures are needed to prevent people from becoming susceptible to extremist messages. We need to build up knowledge and learn more about the breeding grounds, the risk factors and protective factors that determine whether or not people will fall under the spell of extremist ideas.

The second pillar addresses how, as a government and a society, we can protect our democratic legal order and institutions against extremism. Among other tasks, the focus here is on containing extremist influences and protecting fundamental rights. The third pillar is concerned with how the government can effectively combat manifestations of extremism, such as extremist agitators who systematically promote intimidation, dehumanisation or incitement, and individuals or groups that engage in activities such as home visits, kidnapping, vandalism or arson.

According to this approach, countering extremism is not only a task for the social domain but also for the care, education and security domains.

10 See annexe 2: Extremism: definitions and scope.
11 Josse de Voogd and René Cuperus, 'Atlas van Afgehaakt Nederland. Over buitenstaanders en gevestigden' [Atlas of disengagement in the Netherlands: outsiders and locals] (December 2021) and National Commission on the Parliamentary System, 'Lage drempels, hoge dijken' [Low thresholds, tall dikes] (2018).
12 National Security Analysts Network, 'Special Report on Extremism' (October 2023), p. 52 (in Dutch) and Radar Advies, 'Vatbare individuen en vatbare omgevingen' [Susceptible individuals and susceptible environments] (September 2022), p. 14.
13 I&O Research, 'Risk and crisis barometer' (Autumn 2023, in Dutch).
14 AIVD, 'Anti-institutional extremism in the Netherlands: A serious threat to the democratic legal order?' (May 2023).
15 See also Letter to Parliament outlining the Enhanced Approach Online to extremist and terrorist content, Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 708.
16 NCTV, Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 58 (May 2023), p. 40, annexe to Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 678.
17 Radar Advies, 'Vatbare individuen en vatbare omgevingen' [Susceptible individuals and susceptible environments] (September 2022).
18 Radar Advies, 'Vatbare individuen en vatbare omgevingen' [Susceptible individuals and susceptible environments] (September 2022).
19 National Security Analysts Network, 'Special Report on Extremism' (October 2023), p. 19 (in Dutch).
20 National Security Analysts Network, 'Special Report on Extremism' (October 2023), p. 52 (in Dutch).

Part I: Extremism as a societal challenge

3. Strategic context and principles

The present strategy to prevent the democratic legal order from being undermined by extremism is compatible with the Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (hereinafter, the Security Strategy).[21] It fulfils one of the three main objectives of the Security Strategy, namely to enhance the resistance of our democratic legal order, with a focus on two lines of action described in the Security Strategy. The first is to prevent and combat extremism.

In this context, the present extremism strategy also complements the National Counterterrorism Strategy (NCTS) for 2022-2026, which focuses on terrorism and violent extremism that poses a terrorist threat. Violent extremism that poses a terrorist threat[22] does not fall within the scope of the present strategy. Nevertheless, there are similarities: some of the actions described in the NCTS are relevant to the measures outlined in the extremism strategy:

- The individual-oriented approach will continue to be applied to persons who exhibit worrying signs of radicalisation towards violent extremism that poses a terrorist threat.
- Examples of this include measures to deal with lone actors with a potential for violence and the assessment of risks using the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment – Version 2 (Revised) (VERA-2R) tool. These measures are aimed at cou tering terrorism but can also help meet the objectives of the extremism strategy.
- Modification of the Surveillance and Protection System based on the recommendations of the Bos Committee.
- Measures to combat recruitment and radicalisation in prisons.
- Using disruptive administrative measures and measures under immigration law.
- Measures to detect and disrupt travel movements.

The second line of action from the Security Strategy – increasing social stability – is relevant to the present strategy in the context of programmes such as the Agenda for a Resilient and Robust Society of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and efforts to promote, protect and renew the democratic legal order within the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. Examples of this include efforts aimed at ensuring children grow up in a healthy and safe environment, supporting people in vulnerable situations, protecting fundamental rights, citizenship education, preventing the spread of social unrest and disinformation, and enhancing the government's ability to resist extremism.

Strategic principles

The following strategic principles underpin all aspects of the present strategy.

All movements

The extremism strategy encompasses all extremist movements that damage our democratic legal order, regardless of whether they are inspired by religious, political or other beliefs, and it therefore applies to a range of ideological motives. It covers the entire spectrum, from non-violent to violent extremism. The lawful and unlawful expressions of extremism described in the framework of the three pillars – promote, protect and combat – require different approaches. This is clarified in the detailed explanation of the strategy.

Acting on the basis of legal foundations

Measures in the framework of the approach can be either preventive, and aimed towards society at large in order to enhance its ability to resist extremist agitators, or reactive, and aimed at the agitators themselves. Measures must focus on preventing efforts to undermine the democratic legal order (threat-oriented action), be proportionate and have a firm basis in law. The various partners in this approach act in accordance with the statutory frameworks that apply to them.

Cooperating on the basis of different perspectives

The broad approach to extremism requires cooperation on the basis of three perspectives: promoting a resilient open society, protecting the democratic rule of law and combating manifestations of extremism. The emphasis here is on cooperation at international, national and local level, and within various domains, from healthcare, welfare and education to security, government, civil society organisations and members of the public. The purpose is to ensure that the most effective intervention – or combination of interventions – can be deployed.

21 Central Government, Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (2023).
22 NCTV, National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 (May 2022).

Contemplating dilemmas and multiple perspectives

Questions such as whether something amounts to extremism or what type of behaviour specifically undermines the democratic legal order – and from what perspective (social issues and/or security threats) – is highly context-dependent. Professionals in the social and security domains are constantly called upon to make assessments in which they must take into account a wide range of perspectives. As part of this process, they must expertly examine dilemmas that arise and be able to justify their decisions to all concerned.[23]

Importance of criticism, protest and fundamental rights

The right to criticise and protest against government action is vital to the proper functioning of the democratic legal order. Freedom of expression is a great good. It is ultimately up to the courts to determine whether or not such criticism or protests are protected by the right to freedom of expression or other fundamental rights.

Public authorities do not decide what constitutes disinformation

Disinformation is the deliberate, often covert, dissemination of misleading information for the purpose of undermining public debate, democratic processes, the open, knowledge-based economy or public health. It is often difficult to establish the malicious intent of those spreading such information, and it is therefore not primarily up to the authorities to determine what information should be classified as disinformation. Independent media, fact-checkers and researchers or scientists play an important role in this regard. However, when national security, public health and social and/or economic stability are at stake, the government can refute incorrect or misleading information based on its own expertise in such matters.[24]

23 See also WODC, 'Een onderzoek naar de totstandkoming en kwaliteit van, het toezicht op, en beroepsmogelijkheden tegen ideologische duidingen' [Study on the creation, quality and regulation of, and judicial remedies against, ideological designations] (2023) and Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2022-2023, 29 279, no. 806.

24 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2022-2023, 30 821, no. 173.

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Part II: Strategic framework

4. Three pillars for a robust democratic legal order

The main objective of the present strategy is to create a strategic framework to enhance the ability of the democratic legal order to withstand and contain the undermining effects of extremism. In order to achieve this, we will work with an array of actors from government and civil society at international, national and local level, on the basis of three pillars.

The three pillars:

Addressing society as a whole:

1. **Promote** a resilient open society

Addressing extremism:

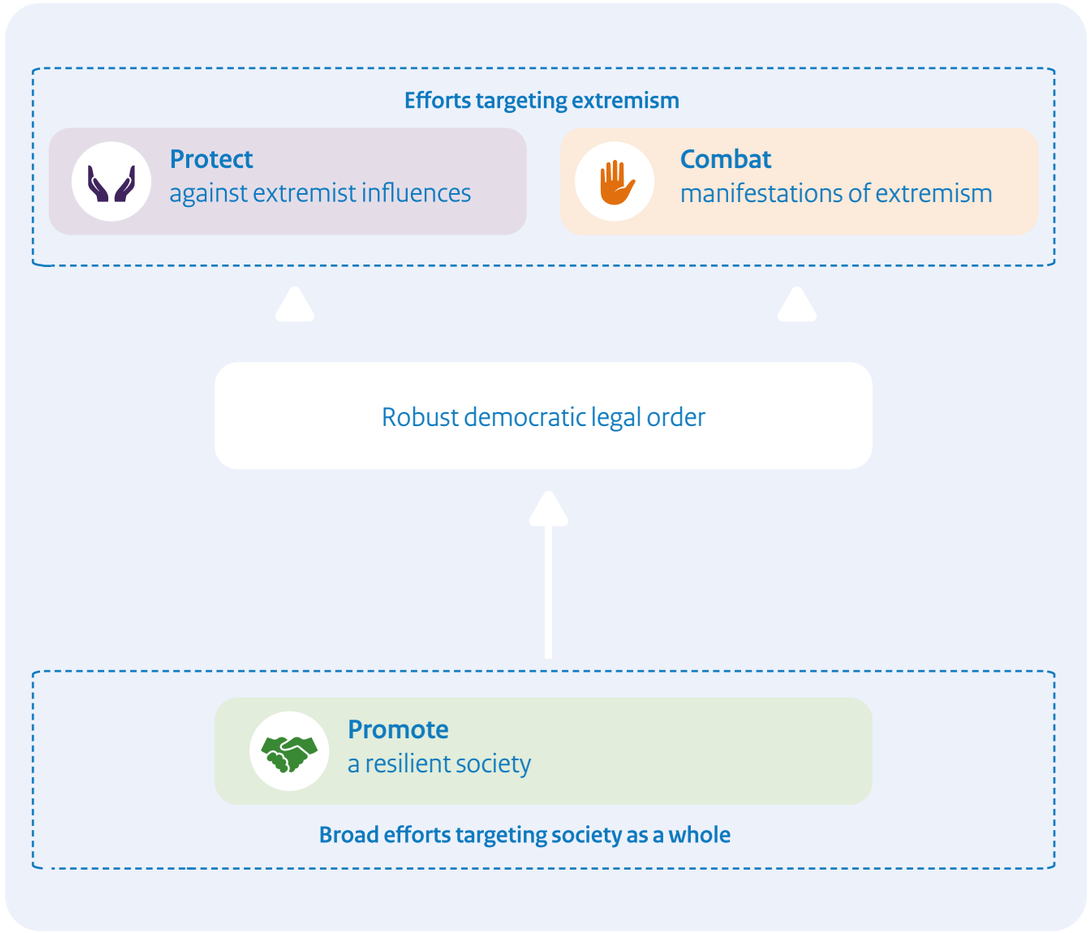
2. **Protect** the democratic legal order against extremist influences
3. **Combat** manifestations of extremism

A resilient open society is one of the foundations of a robust democratic legal order. It plays a key role in reducing breeding grounds for extremism, minimising susceptibility to it and enhancing people's resistance and resilience. Efforts to achieve this will not focus specifically on extremism or other types of behaviour that undermine the democratic legal order. Instead, the emphasis is on broad policies deployed throughout society. Extremism has less chance of taking hold in a democratic society where people are able to cope in difficult circumstances (with or without government assistance) and are aware of their rights and obligations.

In contrast, the second and third pillars are concerned with protecting the democratic legal order against extremist influences, on the one hand, and combating manifestations of extremism, on the other. Wherever extremism arises, it requires a targeted response.

The three pillars complement each other. Countless measures can be deployed against extremism, but without the foundation of a resilient open society the breeding grounds will remain and our ability to resist extremist efforts to undermine the democratic legal order will be limited. At the same time, measures to combat manifestations of extremism are also necessary, as extremist ideas and utterances call for a context-dependent approach that is tailored to the narrative concerned.

The following chapters describe the three pillars in greater detail and set out the government's priorities in its efforts to combat extremism.



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Part II: Strategic framework

5. Promote a resilient open society – pillar 1

The government is developing and implementing various policies and activities with a view to promoting a resilient open society. It approaches this task from various perspectives, including social and economic factors, education and healthcare. In practice, they are the basis for ensuring that society as a whole – and individual citizens – can withstand a few knocks. Efforts aimed at social cohesion, prevention, dialogue and raising awareness will also help reduce breeding grounds for extremism. This is because the extent to which people are susceptible or resistant to extremist messages is determined by the interplay between various issues, including domestic social stability, general breeding grounds and specific risk factors and protective factors, at both individual and group level.[25] Recent studies by the Scientific Council for Government Policy[26] and the Advisory Committee on Enhancing the Resilience of the Democratic Legal Order[27] point out that a sense of socioeconomic security – and of individual agency in this regard – contributes to people's well-being, leading them to experience lower levels of discontent. This pillar covers the government's broad efforts to promote a resilient open society and preventive policies focusing on tensions, polarisation and radicalisation.

A foundation of resilience

The government is working to foster an open and resilient society by ensuring that all people have continual access to basic conditions and services. Education, the labour market, the housing market and the care sector must be accessible to all people, and everyone should have equal opportunities. This broad approach is assured by various government ministries and programmes. Examples include the equal opportunities policy (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), the Work Agenda on greater integration in the labour market (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment), the liveability and safety programme (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations), the strategy on crime that undermines society (Ministry of Justice and Security), the strategy on discrimination and racism (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations) and the strategy on harmful practices (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport). Such programmes all contribute to our open resilient society.

When it comes to increasing social stability in the Netherlands, the authorities are pursuing a broad, integrated policy to address various socioeconomic issues, promote democratic values and citizenship, and reduce tensions and undesirable polarisation. This policy focuses primarily on enhancing resilience within the Netherlands' open society and has the added benefit of increasing our resistance to extremist ideas. It is important to note that social tensions are part and parcel of a healthy democracy: one of the key characteristics of an open society is that there is room for different perspectives and opinions, and thus for dissent and criticism. Society and the institutions of the democratic rule of law provide channels for expressing criticism and frameworks for managing conflicts. Problems arise, for example, when people with diverging views are dehumanised, when institutions are delegitimised or when people feel frustrated, discriminated against, disadvantaged or unfairly treated. In extreme cases, serious manifestations of tension and polarisation can erode social and political stability and create a potential breeding ground for extremism. Such manifestations call for a broad and integrated approach to socioeconomic challenges, social stability and efforts to tackle social tensions and undesirable polarisation.

Broad measures

Among other initiatives, the government supports activities in the first pillar through its Agenda for a Resilient and Robust Society,[28] which aims to provide municipalities, professionals and civil society organisations with knowledge and tools to enhance the resilience and robustness of individuals and groups. The focus is on strengthening protective factors that help insulate against developments that could erode social

25 Radar Advies, 'Vatbare individuen en vatbare omgevingen' [Susceptible individuals and susceptible environments] (September 2022).

26 Scientific Council for Government Policy, 'Grip. Het maatschappelijk belang van persoonlijke controle' [Grip: the social importance of personal control] (2023).

27 Advisory Committee on Enhancing the Resilience of the Democratic Legal Order, 'Koester de Democratie! Een dringende oproep om de democratische rechtsorde weer voor iedereen te laten werken' [Cherish democracy! An urgent call to make the democratic legal order work for everyone again] (2023).

28 Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Agenda for a Resilient and Robust Society (July 2023, in Dutch) and Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2022-2023, 36 200-XV no. 96.

stability, including radicalisation and extremism, undesirable polarisation, discrimination and racism, and a lack of personal autonomy. Another example is the intragovernmental Social Unrest Support Network (OMO), which supports local and central government efforts to tackle discontent, polarisation and unrest. Partners provide expertise on areas such as conflict management, the right to demonstrate and dialogue on thorny topics. They contribute knowledge and advice to prevent escalation on the streets and help find better outlets for discontent within our democracy.

Education also plays a vital role in promoting a resilient open society. Schools are required by law to promote active citizenship and social cohesion. All students in primary and secondary education learn about the basic values of the democratic rule of law, such as freedom, equality and democracy. In addition, schools are expected to teach their students how to relate to people with different views and deal with differences between people in a respectful manner. From a care perspective, attention is paid to improving children's immediate living environment and social skills, and appropriate assistance is provided where necessary. The Solid Start programme focuses on providing better support to the most vulnerable families, for example through intensive parenting support.

Finally, the government itself also has a responsibility to be effective and reliable. It is important that democracy works for everyone. Since this is not always the case, attention must be paid to continuously improving the institutions of the democratic rule of law. This requires new working methods to facilitate systematic reflection on the wider social impact of government policy. Measures to improve the expertise of public administrators and civil servants are also needed to ensure that they act in a manner commensurate with the authority they hold. That means being knowledgeable, trustworthy and sympathetic to public perceptions.[29]

In order to gain insight into the resilience and robustness of society, it is necessary to look not only at threats but also at positive developments that enhance social stability. For this purpose, it is important to gain more insight into the various dimensions of social stability and how they develop and relate to each other. For example, susceptibility to extremism can be reduced by increasing people's knowledge of this phenomenon.

Preventive measures

In addition to its broad measures promoting a resilient and open society, the government is implementing specific preventive policies. These policies are aimed at supporting the resilience of groups and individuals who may be more susceptible to extremist ideas due to their specific circumstances. Collaboration between the social domain, for example in the areas of education, welfare and care, and the security domain is crucial in this regard. This calls for awareness, expertise and a shared language to recognise signals and address concerns.

Efforts to enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors can be carried out at various levels: the individual (such as promoting critical thinking, self-confidence and psychological health), the family, school, friendships, physical and online networks, and the broader social context (place of residence and sense of social inclusion).[30] Different interventions can be deployed at each level, but it is important above all to ensure a coherent approach. It is therefore good to have a clear picture of what is already happening at local level (such as youth work in the context of the preventive neighbourhood-based approach) and what initiatives can be tapped into in order to tackle extremism. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is supporting efforts by youth workers and other professionals, communities and authorities at local and national level to prevent and address social tensions, polarisation and radicalisation.

29 Council for Public Administration, 'Gezag herwinnen: over de gezagswaardigheid van het openbaar bestuur' [Restoring authority: on the authoritativeness of public administration] (November 2022).

30 Paul Mutsaers and Sibel Demir, 'Handen ineen voor meer veerkracht bij jongeren' [Joining forces to enhance resilience among young people] (April 2020) and Radar Advies, 'Vatbare individuen en vatbare omgevingen' [Susceptible individuals and susceptible environments] (September 2022).

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It is important in this regard to provide these actors with customised advice and practical knowledge and bring them into contact with each other. The prevention classification model[31] differentiates between three types of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. The efforts of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in this area are focused on primary prevention, which includes enhancing the resilience of vulnerable individuals and groups, raising awareness, and giving municipalities, professionals and communities, together with families, peers and group members (in accordance with the social pedagogical approach), the resources they need.

31 Sociale Stabiliteit, 'Een concreet model om radicalisering te voorkomen' [A practical model for preventing radicalisation] (October 2020).

Part II: Strategic framework

6. Protect the democratic legal order – pillar 2

To maintain a strong democratic legal order, it is not enough to promote the resilience of individuals and society in general. The core democratic processes and institutions of the rule of law need to be protected against extremist influences by identifying those influences as early as possible and preventing radicalisation processes that lead to extremism. Society and the government both have a role to play in protecting the democratic legal order. After all, a pluralistic and open society is based not only on legislation that articulates the rule of law but also on norms and values regarding how we interact with each other, which we develop together as a society. Professionals in the security and social domains help protect the democratic legal order in various ways, for example by limiting the impact of extremist messages, supporting dialogue and ensuring people are able to participate safely in the public debate.

1. Digital resilience and limiting the impact of extremist messages

Extremists can undermine the democratic legal order both online and offline.[32] Their messages can take different forms and embrace both legal and illegal content. It is firstly important to enhance digital resilience in order to prevent and reduce susceptibility to online extremism. This can be achieved, for example, by encouraging critical thinking, teaching people to recognise disinformation and promoting understanding of how social media works. Together with municipalities and professionals, the government is formulating potential courses of action to support them in their efforts to enhance digital resilience with a view to preventing extremism and other problematic behaviour.

Illegal content must be removed and may give rise to prosecution. However, there is also content that, while not illegal, is potentially harmful to society. One example of this is content that normalises extremist ideas. Countering the negative effects of borderline or legal-yet-harmful content is a complex task because the right to freedom of expression also applies to utterances that are legal simply because they are unregulated.

An oft-cited example of borderline content is disinformation. The government-wide strategy against disinformation prioritises freedom of expression and freedom of the press but also notes that the government can challenge disinformation in certain situations, for example when national security or social stability is at stake.[33] The measures outlined in the government-wide strategy, which are designed to make citizens less vulnerable to disinformation, are also useful against disinformation of an extremist nature. Public communication platforms, such as the website www.isdatechtzo.nl, explain to users how fake news works and how to recognise whether a report is trustworthy. In addition, the government-wide strategy contains measures to increase awareness of disinformation within government and non-government organisations and measures in support of EU regulation of online platforms.

The Netherlands is ambitious when it comes to international efforts to combat online extremism and terrorism. It is forming coalitions, for example, to promote new initiatives and interventions. Internationally, the Netherlands plays a leading role in the dialogue with the internet sector and where possible collaborates with like-minded countries and coalitions. After all, the internet sector transcends national borders while still bearing an important responsibility in regard to ensuring the safety of the online environment and combating the dissemination of content that undermines the security of citizens and institutions.[34] The Netherlands also contributes to the joint European approach to borderline content, which for example includes content that contains disinformation or seeks to normalise extremist ideas, which is not illegal but still harmful. The challenge is to make people aware of these tactics and protect open debate.

32 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 708.
33 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2022-2023, 30 821, no. 173
34 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 708.

2. The importance of dialogue and social norm-setting

Asking people about the concerns or experiences that have led them to adopt certain beliefs; talking about the ways in which discrimination and hostile attitudes can affect people; and setting limits on behaviour that puts pressure on our open form of society, for example in the classroom or within an association. These are all examples of ways to engage in dialogue with each other as a society. Such dialogue is important. It is about striking a balance between curiosity and constraint, while allowing scope for self-reflection concerning one's own beliefs and actions. Individual citizens and government officials can both make a difference here.

The government supports these efforts by providing guidance on dialogue and conflict management. People in public positions play a crucial role in this regard by setting a good example for others. Self-reflection on the moral dimensions of one's own actions is likewise crucial in this regard. As noted above, the internet sector also has an important role to play. This is more than just a legal responsibility. Children and young people in particular have a right to protection against increasingly extreme content. The government is engaged in a dialogue with the internet sector on how to counter the frequent dissemination of extremist and borderline content. It is also important to learn from each other at international level and explore areas in which we can collaborate with like-minded countries.[35]

It is particularly challenging to engage in dialogue and establish norms when dealing with people who are deeply distrustful towards the government and other institutions of the democratic rule of law, often of as a result of negative experiences. Some people even deny the legitimacy of these institutions, as in the case of self-proclaimed 'sovereign citizens'. In order to ensure that these people do not disengage from society and democracy, it is important to restore connection and trust.[36] This calls for a human approach based on empathy, a willingness to acknowledge mistakes and a specific focus on exercising due care in the management of processes and treatment of people. This must be balanced by authoritative action against behaviour that undermines democracy. Boundaries must be set in a way that does not alienate people further.[37] None of this is easy, and it often requires a fundamental change in thinking and behaviour within organisations. Nevertheless, there is a lot of good will, with government partners providing relevant support to public administrators, civil servants and professionals (such as police officers and teachers).

3. Ensuring people are able to participate in the public debate and perform public tasks in safety

Professionals in certain sectors of the public domain – and journalists, too – are frequently the target of threats, violence and aggression. Such threats can be extremist in nature if they are expressions of a particular ideology. Examples of this include judges, scientists, journalists or politicians being accused – without valid evidence – of wanting to oppress or even murder people. These professionals are vital to the functioning of our democratic legal order, and many different actors have to work hard to ensure that they are able to carry out their work in safety. This applies not only to tangible publications and statements; attention should also be paid to the latent undermining of the democratic legal order that occurs when journalists no longer dare to speak out, scientists prefer not to publish anything controversial and politicians are too scared to make difficult decisions. This must not be allowed to happen. We will fight tooth and nail to defend our public debate and those who perform public tasks.

Employers bear primary responsibility for creating a safe working environment in this regard. The new Stop Aggression Together standard helps them set clear, uniform boundaries when it comes to aggression and violence.[38] In recent years, moreover, various successful initiatives have made a meaningful contribution to efforts to tackle aggression and violence against people who perform public tasks. In the implementation of these initiatives, the government is also working with the police and the Public Prosecution Service, organisations such as PersVeilig (Press Safe), the Robust Governance programme, the task force on the safety of care providers and emergency workers and the Safe Public Services programme. Employers and employees can turn to these initiatives for advice and assistance.

4. Overhaul of the Surveillance and Protection System

When individuals face an extremist threat that they themselves or the organisation they work for are unable to counter, the government can take additional measures. The Surveillance and Protection System is an important tool for protecting the democratic rule of law and guaranteeing the safety of those concerned. Enhancements initiated on the basis of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on a future-proof Surveillance and Protection System have been continued, and for the most part have been incorporated in the revised 2023 Surveillance and Protection Guidelines.[39] At the same time, the Surveillance and Protection System is being fundamentally overhauled, resulting in a new system for the protection of persons. In this context, the government has started the process of transferring responsibility for persons at risk to central authority, developed a new methodology for the integrated analysis of threats and allocated financial resources to enhance the capacity of the implementing organisations.

Priorities under pillar 2:

1. Focus on protecting the public debate by enhancing the public's ability to resist disinformation of an extremist nature and limiting the impact of extremist utterances.
2. Support local and central government and society in the areas of dialogue, conflict management and social norm-setting.
3. Protect people who perform public tasks to ensure they can do their work safely.
4. Update the Surveillance and Protection System.

35 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 708.
36 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 701.
37 Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 'Stop Agressie Samen' [Stop aggression together] (2023).
38 Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 'Stop Agressie Samen' [Stop aggression together] (2023).
39 Advisory Committee on a Future-proof Surveillance and Protection System (October 2021).

Part II: Strategic framework

7. Combat manifestations of extremism – pillar 3

It is not enough to promote societal resilience and protect the democratic legal order. Extremist groups, agitators and perpetrators engage in systematic incitement and dehumanisation, or resort to extremist acts that actively undermine the democratic legal order. When extremist action cannot be prevented or mitigated, it is important to limit the impact and work to combat the phenomenon, so as to minimise the support it attracts in society at large. The government's approach under this pillar is aimed at increasing knowledge and expertise, tackling extremist agitators, preventing the normalisation of extremist ideas and enforcing the law in response to extremist violence and other illegal behaviour.

1. Increasing knowledge and expertise on extremism among professionals

Professionals in the security and social domains need specialist knowledge in order to identify and tackle a range of extremist utterances and behaviours as early as possible. The National Government Training Institute for the Prevention of Radicalisation (ROR) offers a wide range of training courses that are constantly updated to reflect new phenomena and provide tools for dealing with real-life situations. The National Support Centre for Extremism (LSE) offers advice from a care and security perspective, with a specific focus on dealing with people who are involved in extremism. At international level too, the Netherlands is embracing partnerships and information exchange as part of broader efforts to prevent radicalisation and extremism. EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation enables frontline professionals, policymakers and researchers to share knowledge and experiences. The Netherlands plays a leading role in this regard.

In cases where people exhibit signs of violent extremism that could pose a terrorist threat, the individual-oriented approach to counterterrorism can be applied. This approach is described in the National Counterterrorism Strategy (NCTS).[40] Within the NCTS and in practice, the early detection of radicalisation has for many years been done in the framework of an integrated local approach to counterterrorism, underpinned by cooperation between the security and social domains.[41] In order to respond to new threats and associated risks, the existing approach is fine-tuned where necessary. In the coming period, the government will review the guidelines for this local approach, which set out the framework for cooperation between local government, partners in the system and other professionals, with an emphasis on violent and non-violent forms of extremism. The guidelines thus also offer potential courses of action for situations in which violence or illegal acts have not yet occurred.

2. Tackling extremist agitators

Extremist agitators spread malicious narratives in various ways, including via social media. They sometimes glorify or call for violence – in some cases openly, in others more covertly. They may deliberately incite their followers to violence or promote distrust of democratic institutions or certain groups in society. Such messages can pose a threat to the democratic legal order, even if they do not directly incite violence or violate the law.

Depending on the expression of the extremist message, criminal law measures may be appropriate. Where this is not the case, there will be a stronger focus on targeted information and knowledge sharing in order to optimise the identification and assessment of the violent or non-violent extremist threat. In most cases, this will involve a case-specific approach in which factors such as the reach of the message and the effect of the behaviour play a key role. However, the purpose of these measures is unequivocally clear: limiting the growth of extremist groups, preventing them from spreading, and thereby countering the threat to the democratic legal order. The severity of the threat will determine what measures are taken. In addition to tackling agitators who spread extremist messages, activities within this pillar are also highly dependent on activities under pillars 1 (promote) and 2 (protect). After all, when there is no 'demand' or fertile soil for extremism, the reach of the 'supply' will also decrease.

40 NCTV, National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 (May 2022).

41 In this context, it is important to understand that early detection and designation are two different things. In the case of early detection, if a person (including someone operating in a professional capacity) suspects that radicalisation is taking place, they can report this to the appropriate person or framework, for example a dedicated forum at local government level. The report is then discussed in the forum, where a multidisciplinary assessment is made to determine whether radicalisation is taking place (or could potentially take place). Early detection thus only concerns the identification of possible signs of radicalisation and their referral to the correct person or framework.

3. Preventing the normalisation of extremist views

In order to combat manifestations of extremism, it is important to increase the knowledge and potential courses of action available to professionals. This will help prevent the normalisation of extremist ideas. For example, extremist messages in the public domain, such as laser projections of slogans, need to be tackled in order to prevent them from resonating in society. Professionals who may encounter extremism must be able to identify such messages, which are sometimes buried in cryptic sentences or innocent-looking memes. In order to help them recognise and interpret extremist symbols (including those associated with right-wing extremism), the Ministry of Justice and Security has launched a symbols database. Professionals who may encounter such symbols in the course of their work can apply for an account here.

Many activities fall under the responsibility of local authorities. In each case, the competent authority will have to consider what measures are appropriate based on the local situation. When a criminal offence is committed, the National Police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee can take action on the basis of their statutory police tasks, under the authority of the public prosecutor. Where possible, extremist orators who incite hatred and violence are barred from the Netherlands.[42] Such persons can be denied entry if they pose a threat to public order or national security.[43] This helps prevent foreign nationals who incite hatred, spread disinformation or reject legislation from promoting their radical ideas in the Netherlands.[44] The extension of invitations to such speakers is also discouraged.

4. Enforcing the law in response to illegal acts

Where a criminal offence has been committed, the Public Prosecution Service will take action, if appropriate. This applies to systematic hate speech, incitement, calls to violence and certain types of intimidation or threats, including when they are inspired by extremist ideas. The adoption of the Use of Personal Data for Intimidatory Purposes (Criminalisation) Bill addresses the phenomenon of doxing. [45]

The Uniform National Agreements are a set of specific agreements on criminal law measures to tackle violence and aggression against professionals who perform public tasks.[46] They provide, for example, that the police and the Public Prosecution Service will prioritise the handling of complaints relating to criminal offences targeting people who perform public tasks, and that the Public Prosecution Service should where possible apply a policy of on-the-spot sanctions. The Press Safety Protocol sets out similar agreements on criminal law measures to tackle offences against journalists.[47]

Finally, there are various legal instruments that help promote a safer internet. At present, this applies primarily to terrorist content, which must always be removed after a take-down order has been issued.[48] Given the difficulty of defining the boundaries of extremist content and the fundamental importance of the right to freedom of expression, the government is exploring, in consultation with academic and legal experts, the scope for creating an assessment framework for borderline or legal-yet-harmful content (including extremist content).[49]

42 This is possible in the case of third country nationals and EU citizens.

43 This concerns national security in a broad sense, as described in Central Government, Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (2023).

44 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 694.

45 Doxing refers to the collection and subsequent dissemination of people's personal details for the purpose of intimidating them.

46 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2019-2020, 28 684, no. 596.

47 PersVeilig (Press Safe), 'Press Safety Protocol' (October 2019).

48 See also Letter to Parliament outlining the Enhanced Approach Online to extremist and terrorist content, Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 708.

49 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2023-2024, 29 754, no. 708.

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Priorities under pillar 3:

1. Support local authorities and professionals in theimplementation of the integrated local approach to new threats and risks.
2. Enhance efforts to tackle online extremism and examine the feasibility of creating an assessment framework for extremist content.
3. Reinforce measures to deny extremist foreign nationals entry to the Netherlands.
4. Tackle extremist agitators.

Prerequisites

In order to promote a resilient society, protect the democratic legal order and combat manifestations of extremism, certain prerequisites need to be in place. The most important of these are operationalisation frameworks, knowledge, quality monitoring, sufficient capacity and a sense of urgency.

Understanding the importance of protecting the democratic legal order

It is important that everyone who is part of our society understands the importance of the democratic legal order, knows what it entails and actively contributes to it. Everyone needs to know what types of behaviour promote – and undermine – a strong democracy. 'Classic' fundamental rights and fundamental social rights play a crucial role in this regard, along with the awareness that the rights of one person may conflict with those of another, and that government and citizens alike should both handle these rights with care.

Operationalisation frameworks and quality monitoring

The present strategy provides several points of departure for the coming years. Underlying agendas and approaches offer concrete tools for its operationalisation. Examples include the Enhanced Approach Online to extremist and terrorist content, the Local Approach guidelines and the catalogue of tried and tested interventions arising from the Agenda for a Resilient and Robust Society. Periodic evaluations and impact measurements relating to these and other elements of the overall approach will produce frameworks that should ensure higher quality standards.

Knowledge and analysis

In the years ahead, anticipating and responding to diverse and dynamic manifestations of extremism will remain a challenge. In order to deal with this challenge correctly, it is important to continue sharing knowledge about developments, trends and experiences at local, national and international level.

Capacity and urgency

Various programmes and policy tracks can help counter the spread of extremist ideas. It is important that partners have sufficient capacity at their disposal and feel a shared sense of urgency.

Annexes

Annexe 1 The broad approach to the democratic legal order and extremism

The present strategy is based on a broad approach to the democratic legal order and, by extension, a broad approach to extremism.

A. The broad approach to the democratic legal order means that it is regarded both as a political system and as a form of society.

- **The democratic legal order as a political system** is shaped by the principles, procedures and institutions of the democratic rule of law (the vertical dimension of the democratic legal order). It encompasses the relationship between the government and the public, which is based, inter alia, on the constitutional rights and freedoms of the people. The focus here is on fundamental political rights (often referred to as 'classic' fundamental rights, namely the rights to equality, freedom and participation) and fundamental social rights (the right to social services, including healthcare, education, etc.). On the one hand, fundamental rights are designed to limit the government's use of power towards its citizens, that is, to protect citizens from the government. This is the purpose of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to participate in free elections. On the other hand, fundamental rights also constitute the basic principles underpinning the government's role in safeguarding the democratic rule of law. The government not only needs to respect the constitutional rights and freedoms of its citizens in its own relationship with them; it is also responsible for ensuring that its citizens are protected against interference with or threats to the exercise of their fundamental rights by other individuals or groups (for example, those that assert their own right to freedom of expression but interfere with or threaten the exercise of this right by others).

- **The democratic legal order as a form of society** is shaped by relations between individuals in a free and open society (the horizontal dimension of the democratic legal order). This means that, in their interactions with each other, people should act in accordance with democratic norms and values such as tolerance, respect for diversity and pluralism, recognise the value of listening to other people's opinions, participate in peaceful public debate that may be fierce but in which nobody is demonised or dehumanised, etc.

B. The broad approach to extremism means that the focus is on both violent and non-violent forms of extremism that could potentially undermine the democratic legal order as a political system and/or a form of society in the short or long term.

The present strategy focuses on all violent and non-violent forms of extremism that undermine our democratic legal order but do not (currently) pose a terrorist threat.[50] Depending on their specific sphere of activity, partners are free to employ alternative versions of the definition of extremism that are compatible with their own tasks and powers in the implementation of this strategy.

- **Extremism takes many forms,** including religious extremism, anti-institutional extremism or extremism concerning a specific political or social issue. What all forms have in common is that they are accompanied by ideologically inspired behaviour that is detrimental to our free form of society and undermines the democratic legal order.

- **Non-violent extremism** occurs, for example, when people with extremist views incite hatred or dehumanise others because of their opinions, origin, skin colour, religion or sexual orientation. People with extremist views may also seek to impose their will on others through intimidation or threats, thus depriving them of their rights and freedoms. Inspired by ideological motives, moreover, people with extremist views may systematically encourage others to fundamentally distrust or reject institutions such as the scientific community, the judiciary or the media.[51]

- **Extremists may also purposefully engage in violence or preach violence** in pursuit of their ideology, for example through assault, arson or physical intimidation. The use of violence may become increasingly severe, and may ultimately lead to terrorism.

- **Violent extremism does not always amount to terrorism.** In this strategy, we clearly differentiate between extremism that is accompanied by ideologically inspired violence, on the one hand, and terrorism, on the other. Terrorism involves the planning or perpetration of acts of potentially lethal violence against people, or of acts intended to cause substantial property damage and calculated to result in social disruption, for the explicit purpose of creating a climate of fear among the general public. Not all extremist violence qualifies as terrorism. Terrorism and extremism that poses a terrorist threat are the focus of the National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026.[53] See annexe 2 for a detailed glossary of relevant terms.

- **It is important to draw a clear distinction between activism and extremism.** Activism remains within the boundaries of the democratic legal order, while extremism goes against the principles of that order. It is worth emphasising that activism, which can include heated debates, vocal criticism, mass demonstrations and so forth, is part and parcel of the democratic legal order, even if it leads to social unrest, tension or divisions. The democratic legal order must be able to tolerate a certain amount of dissent. In some cases, activism may push or even exceed the boundaries of the law. For example, activists who enter restricted areas, such as airports or business premises, or block major roads in violation of local ordinances are breaking the law and are therefore criminally liable. However, this does not make them extremists.

50 The National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 focuses on terrorism and extremism that poses a terrorist threat. NCTV, National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 (May 2022).
51 Bureau Beke, 'Niet-strafbare problematische gedragingen' [Non-criminal problematic behaviour].
52 The National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 focuses on terrorism and extremism that poses a terrorist threat. NCTV, National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 (May 2022).

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- **Extremism is not an extension of activism but something essentially different.** One should be careful not to draw a direct causal link between the two on the assumption that social unrest and various forms of activism could ultimately lead to extremism. The goals of extremists and the means by which they pursue them are inherently anti-democratic and undemocratic. This is not the case with activists.

- **Activism.** In a democratic legal order, people must be free to exercise their fundamental rights at all times, even if this is inconvenient for the government or other parts of society. In practice, this often leads to a clash of fundamental rights, where the exercise of a right by one person or group conflicts – or appears to conflict – with a right of another person or group. However, fundamental rights are not absolute. The Constitution and treaties such as the European Convention on Human Rights stipulate that such rights may, under certain conditions, be restricted in favour of a more compelling goal in the public interest. For reasons of public interest, there are laws that limit the right to freedom of expression, such as the ban on discrimination or the ban on hate speech or incitement. Moreover, when it comes to such clashes of fundamental rights, a contextual constitutional test (by the courts) is sometimes required in order to determine which right has priority over other rights in the case in question.

- **Extremism may be aimed at – or have the effect of – seriously interfering with or threatening the fundamental rights of others.** Extremism is not just about the conflict that results when people try to ensure their own views prevail at the expense of other people's fundamental rights. It is about denying, and taking action aimed at seriously interfering with or threatening, the fundamental rights of others, whether by means of the objectives pursued, the methods employed or the resulting effects. Examples of this include systematically advocating the creation of a white ethnostate, actively spreading the conspiracy theory of 'replacement' and inciting hatred against non-white population groups. In these cases, the ultimate aim is to deny the non-white population of their fundamental rights and ensure that those groups are no longer able to participate in the democratic legal order.

- **Extremism involves ideologically inspired activities** aimed at undermining the democratic legal order. In order to differentiate between extremism and other types of activities that undermine the democratic legal order, the above definition notes that extremism is inspired by 'ideological motives'. Such motives do not apply in the case of the crimes that undermine society, for example, which are about financial gain. An ideology is a more or less coherent narrative regarding a particular political or social issue that includes specific views and opinions on its causes and on how it could be solved. As such, an ideology may have the effect of undermining the democratic legal order if the proposed solution to the narrative in question is to partially or entirely reject the democratic legal order, the principles, procedures and institutions of the democratic rule of law and/or the values and norms of our free and open society.

- **Extremism can involve illegal activities but also activities that, though not illegal, are undesirable from the perspective of the democratic legal order.** The broad approach to extremism focuses on violent and non-violent extremism. Although it may be mostly legal, non-violent extremism is undesirable from the perspective of the democratic legal order because of the objectives pursued (e.g. a white ethnostate in which 'black' minorities are not welcome), the methods employed (e.g. spreading conspiracy theories about ethnic or bicultural minorities) and/or the resulting effects (e.g. causing a significant part of the population to lose trust in the democratic legal order). Extremism undermines the democratic legal order. The boundaries of the democratic legal order are narrower than the boundaries of the law. Although non-violent extremism is not always illegal by definition, it goes against the principles of the democratic legal order. In many cases, this can involve activities that, while not illegal, are undesirable from the perspective of the democratic legal order (see 'problematic behaviour', i.e. behaviour aimed at undermining democracy, in the annexe on definitions and concepts).

Annexe 2 Extremism: definitions and scope[53]

Extremism is an ideologically inspired willingness to engage in violent and/or non-violent activities that undermine the democratic legal order.

Examples of non-violent methods include:
- systematically inciting hatred;
- creating a climate of fear;
- deliberately spreading disinformation;
- demonising and intimidating opponents;
- rejecting the law;
- attempting to establish a parallel power structure and legal system that rejects the authority of the Dutch government and legal system.

Examples of violent methods include:
- violent disorder;
- assault; or
- more serious forms of violence.

Depending on their specific sphere of activity, partners are free to employ a definition of extremism derived from this overarching definition that is compatible with their own tasks and powers when implementing this strategy.

There are many degrees of extremist violence. In its most extreme form, it amounts to **terrorism**; that is, the planning or perpetration of ideologically inspired acts of potentially lethal violence against people or of acts intended to cause property damage and calculated to result in social disruption, in order to create a climate of fear among the general public, effect social change and/or influence political decision-making.[54] Extremist violence does not reach the threshold of 'terrorism'. Instead, it may encompass violence against people, such as assault, kidnapping or abduction, or the storming or occupation of buildings. Other examples include acts of digital or physical vandalism. The common denominator is that the violence is inspired by an ideological motive and that it could undermine the democratic legal order. Threatening, glorifying or calling for violence can also be classified as violent extremism. [55]

Activism can also be inspired by ideological motives, but in contrast to extremism it contributes to the democratic legal order rather than harming it. Activists contribute to the public debate by convincing others of a position in a way that does not go against the principles of the democratic legal order. In addition, activists often criticise specific government policies, and generally do so by invoking democratic rights, such as the right to protest or the right of petition. Their actions sometimes involve far-reaching forms of civil disobedience or provocation, as in the case of political cartoons. However, the actions of activists are not specifically aimed at undermining the democratic legal order and therefore cannot be classified as extremist. In certain far-reaching cases, activism may involve acts of law-breaking, such as blocking motorways. The police can take action against such acts under the authority of the public prosecutor.

In the context of the democratic legal order, **problematic behaviour**[56] refers to actions by individuals or groups that fall largely within the boundaries of the law but may nevertheless damage or undermine the democratic legal order. Certain forms of problematic behaviour can be classified as non-violent extremism. Problematic behaviour and non-violent extremism overlap in cases involving deliberate and systematic activities aimed at establishing a separate social or sociopolitical order and, in the most extreme cases, harming society and the rule of law by adopting a separate set of norms, values, rules and laws that are at odds with the basic principles of an open democratic legal order. Examples of such non-violent extremism include establishing a parallel legal structure that rejects the authority of the Dutch government and legal system, or creating a climate of fear and intimidation. Finally, it should be noted that the democratic legal order can also be undermined by forces other than extremism. Examples include the **actions of state actors or criminals**. This falls outside the scope of the present strategy.

53 Based on AIVD, Annual Report 2022; NCTV, Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 58 (May 2023) and National Security Analysts Network, 'Special Report on Extremism' (October 2023), pp. 12-14 (in Dutch). It should be noted that is not always possible to make clear-cut distinctions between the concepts discussed below.
54 NCTV, National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 (May 2022).
55 National Security Analysts Network, 'Special Report on Extremism' (October 2023), pp. 19-20 (in Dutch).
56 Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives, 2020-2021, 35 228, no. 33.

Annexe 3 Examples of different forms of extremism[57]

Form	Example
Right-wing extremism	Right-wing extremism is characterised by xenophobia, ultranationalism or hatred of foreign cultural elements. Its supporters often regard the government as a puppet of a 'Jewish conspiracy' that deliberately seeks to replace – or mix – the white population of Western countries with migrants from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. According to 'replacement theory', these immigrants have more children on average and have a lower IQ. This supposedly is weakening the white population, after which the 'Jewish elite' will be able to control it effortlessly. Some right-wing extremists accuse left-wing parties, feminists and the LGBTQIA+ community of contributing to this perceived development. Some of them want to incite a race war by carrying out attacks. Right-wing extremists try to normalise such ideas by making them part of the public debate, for example by projecting texts on public buildings or distributing stickers. On the internet, they actively disseminate these ideas among individuals who may be susceptible to them due to personal grievances against the government or certain population groups, for example via memes and in broader discussions in public chat rooms. Extremist and sometimes terrorist content is shared via private channels. This normalisation, and the violence potentially resulting from it, can interfere with the fundamental rights of religious and ethnic minorities and threaten our form of society.
Left-wing extremism	Left-wing extremism can be divided into various categories. Anarchists oppose the government and private companies as part of the 'capitalist authoritarian system'. Anti-fascists oppose right-wing extremist ideas. Other people, inspired by left-wing extremist motives, may focus on climate change or animal rights.
Animal rights extremism	A movement that openly or covertly carries out violent and non-violent actions in support of animal welfare. Due to the undemocratic nature of their actions, animal rights extremists pose a threat to the democratic legal order.
Religious extremism	In the case of religious extremism, religious belief serves as the basis – and as a justification – for action. In the Netherlands, we are familiar with this chiefly in the context of Islamic extremism. In its most extreme form, Islamic extremism can lead to jihadism, which falls under the definition of terrorism and is therefore not covered in this strategy. In exceptional cases, however, certain behaviour inspired by religious beliefs can be characterised as extremist. Examples of this include the dissemination and propagation of messages promoting hostility towards people of different faiths (or no faith) and discouraging participation in society.
Anti-institutional extremism	These extremists believe in the existence of a malevolent elite that wants to turn the Netherlands into a totalitarian state. This elite allegedly controls the government, the media, the judiciary and the scientific community in order to oppress or even exterminate the 'native' population. Because new issues and developments are easily folded into this narrative, the movement constantly receives fresh oxygen, extending its survival for a long time. Examples include the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the protests against the Dutch government's policy on nitrogen emissions. This constant demonisation process may encourage some of the movement's supporters to resort to extremist violence, not least because they believe that they are at war with the 'elite'. The continuous dissemination of untruthful hostile messaging can cause so much distrust in politicians, judges, police officers, journalists and scientists and the legitimacy thereof that it interferes with their activities. Together with widespread distrust and public disengagement, this undermining of democratic institutions threatens the existence of the democratic legal order. Parts of the anti-institutional movement refuse to acknowledge the authority of these institutions. They isolate themselves, disregard the law and no longer respect the authorities. Some even aspire to the establishment of a parallel legal order and society of their own.

57 Based on AIVD, Annual Report 2022; NCTV, Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 58 (May 2023) and National Security Analysts Network, 'Special Report on Extremism' (October 2023), pp. 12-14 (in Dutch).

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Annexe 4 Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Anti-institutional extremism	Anti-institutional extremism is a phenomenon whereby individuals and groups specifically target democratic institutions and processes for ideological reasons and are prepared to engage in violent or non-violent activities that undermine the democratic legal order.
Protective factors and risk factors	Protective factors enhance resistance to extremist attitudes and behaviour, and focus on reinforcing positive factors. Risk factors are individual or social characteristics that predict an increased risk of negative developments such as radicalisation towards violence or extremism. In addition to factors that influence the individual, they specifically encompass factors that influence the individual's environment. Examples of risk factors include identity formation, the influence of family and friends, and experiences of injustice or discrimination.
Conspiracy theory	A specific form of disinformation or misinformation that causes people to believe that certain events or situations have been secretly manipulated behind the scenes by powerful groups with bad intentions.
Democratic rule of law	A political system based on the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution. This includes rules that the government must adhere to in order to guarantee the rights and freedoms of its citizens. Under these conditions, the population entrusts the government with power, on the understanding that this power will in principle be used in the interests of all and that it will be controlled by elected representatives. An associated principle is the conviction that it is in the common interest to have independent judges, scientists and journalists who are able to act freely.
Democratic legal order	A term describing the combination of democracy as a political system and as a form of society. The political system – the vertical dimension of the democratic legal order – refers to the specific way in which the relationship between a country's government and citizens is regulated. This is also known as the 'democratic rule of law', which is based on the classic fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution (such as the rights to equality, freedom and participation) that specify how the government should behave towards the public. The form of society – the horizontal dimension of the democratic legal order – refers to the specific way in which people interact with each other. This is the 'open society', in which people interact with each other on the basis of democratic values and norms. It is about accepting that all people are equal while simultaneously respecting the differences between them.

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Term	Definition
Disinformation	Disinformation is the deliberate, often covert, dissemination of misleading information for the purpose of undermining public debate, democratic processes, the open knowledge-based economy or public health. As a result, it can also have an impact on national security. It is a form of harmful, but often legal, behaviour. Disinformation does not always have to be incorrect information. It may combine factual, inaccurate or partially inaccurate information, but always or the purpose of misleading or causing harm.
Narrative	Based on the Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands for 2023-2029, the term 'national security' can be described as follows: 'National security involves the safeguarding of six vital interests: territorial security, physical security, economic security, ecological security, social and political stability, and the international legal order. Threats to national security arise when these interests are undermined by natural or man-made threats.'
National security	Based on the Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands for 2023-2029, the term 'national security' can be described as follows: 'National security involves the safeguarding of six vital interests: territorial security, physical security, economic security, ecological security, social and political stability, and the international legal order. Threats to national security arise when these interests are undermined by natural or man-made threats.'
Open society	This term describes the way in which people interact with each other on the basis of democratic values and norms. It is about accepting that all people are equal while simultaneously respecting the differences between them. In this context, it is important that people believe that we can live side by side in the Netherlands despite major differences and disagreements, as long as we make the right kind of agreements with each other.
Polarisation	The accentuation of differences in society, causing groups to grow further apart and tensions to increase.
Radicalisation	A process of increasing willingness to accept the most extreme consequences of a particular way of thinking and translate them into action. This increasing willingness can lead to behaviour that is deeply hurtful to others or infringes their freedom, can cause individuals or groups to turn away from society, and can result in the use of violence.
Social stability	Social stability refers to the dynamic balance of social relationships and social structures within society. It encompasses the ability of an ever-changing society to prevent, resolve or manage social conflicts and provide people with a sense of security, trust and cohesion. The term social stability also serves as a constant reminder of its opposite: disorder, chaos, violence, riots, unrest and uprisings. Such tensions may arise as a result of economic inequality, political discontent, social injustice, ethnic tensions or other social issues that erode social stability. Together, social stability and social tensions form a social order continuum. A society in which social stability prevails has a higher level of cohesion, harmony and consensus than one in which social tensions are predominant.

Term	Definition
Surveillance and Protection System	The guiding principle of the Surveillance and Protection System is that responsibility for one's own safety lies primarily with the individual, the organisation to which they belong and the decentralised authorities. Supplementary to this, central government bears a special responsibility for a specific group of people (including politicians), objects (including the International Criminal Court) and services (including civil aviation) that fall within its domain. The NCTV is tasked with coordinating the security of these persons, objects and services, and uses threat information from services such as the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) for this purpose.
Terrorism	The planning or perpetration of ideologically inspired acts of potentially lethal violence against people or of acts intended to cause property damage and calculated to result in social disruption, in order to undermine and destabilise society, create a climate of fear among the general public or influence political decision-making.
Resilience	Resilience concerns enhancing and stimulating opportunities and positive developments. It enables people to withstand and confront difficult circumstances so that they can learn from them, develop self-confidence and find their way in society.
Breeding ground	A term that describes a set of (interacting) personal and contextual factors that help determine whether or not a person is susceptible to radical or extremist messaging and manipulation. It includes personality traits and social factors, such as a person's family circumstances, inner circle and social status within the group. Feelings or experiences of social marginalisation in relation to others, such as discrimination, can also fester in the breeding grounds for radicalisation.
Resistance	The ability to withstand or protect against threats by reducing the likelihood of their occurrence, limiting the damage if they do occur and facilitating effective recovery.

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Annexe 5 Reports and strategies previously submitted to the House of Representatives

Strategy / Letter to Parliament	Coordination	Date of submission	Relationship to the Extremism Strategy	Link
Letter to Parliament outlining the Enhanced Approach Online to extremist and terrorist content	Minister of Justice and Security	12 December 2023	Protect and Combat	Letter to Parliament outlining the Enhanced Approach Online to extremist and terrorist content | Parliamentary Paper | Rijksoverheid.nl
Anti-institutional extremism in the Netherlands: A serious threat to the democratic legal order?	Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations	25 May 2023	Promote, Protect and Combat	Letter to Parliament presenting the AIVD's report on anti-institutional extremism
Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Enhancing the Resilience of the Democratic Legal Order	Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations	01 November 2023	Promote, Protect and Combat	Letter to Parliament on the Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Enhancing the Resilience of the Democratic Legal Order | Parliamentary Paper | Rijksoverheid.nl
Letter to Parliament on the Special Report on Extremism	Minister of Justice and Security	17 October 2023	Promote, Protect and Combat	Letter to Parliament on the Special Report on Extremism | Parliamentary Paper | Rijksoverheid.nl
Agenda for a Resilient and Robust Society (2023-2025)	Minister of Social Affairs and Employment	07 July 2023	Promote	Agenda for a Resilient and Robust Society (2023-2025) | Publication | Rijksoverheid.nl
Letter to Parliament presenting the government's response to 'Atlas of Disengagement in the Netherlands: Outsiders and Locals'	Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations	10 October 2022	Promote	Letter to Parliament presenting the government's response to 'Atlas of Disengagement in the Netherlands'

Strategy / Letter to Parliament	Coordination	Date of submission	Relationship to the Extremism Strategy	Link
Report of the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) ideological assessments	Minister of Justice and Security	05 July 2023	Combat	Report of the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) on ideological assessments | Parliamentary Paper | Rijksoverheid.nl
Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands	Minister of Justice and Security	03 April 2023	Promote, Protect and Combat	Security Strategy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Report) | Publication | Rijksoverheid.nl
Government-wide strategy on effectively tackling disinformation	Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations	23 December 2022	Promote and Protect	Letter to Parliament on the government-wide strategy on effectively tackling disinformation | Parliamentary Paper | Rijksoverheid.nl
Study on susceptible individuals and susceptible environments	Minister of Social Affairs and Employment	06 December 2022	Promote	Study on susceptible individuals and susceptible environments | Report | Rijksoverheid.nl
Letter to Parliament on tackling right-wing extremism and terrorism and other forms of extremism in the Netherlands	Minister of Justice and Security	07 November 2022	Combat	Letter to Parliament on tackling right-wing extremism and terrorism and other forms of extremism in the Netherlands | Parliamentary Paper | Rijksoverheid.nl
Work Plan of the National Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism (NCAB)	Minister of Justice and Security	06 October 2022	Protect and Combat	Work Plan on Combating Antisemitism 2022-2025 | Report | Rijksoverheid.nl
National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026	Minister of Justice and Security	20 May 2022	Combat	National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026 | Report summary | Rijksoverheid.nl

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