

Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization

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In this article, we review the literature and present a model of radicalization and de-radicalization. In this model, we distinguish three phases in radicalization: (1) a sensitivity phase, (2) a group membership phase and (3) an action phase. We describe the micro-level, meso-level and macro-level factors that influence the radicalization process in these three phases. However, not all people become increasingly radical — they may also de-radicalize. We specify the micro-level, meso-level and macro-level factors in de-radicalization. We highlight the importance of the role of group membership and intergroup relations in the radicalization process.

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Introduction

Terrorism¹ is an act of violence (domestic or international), usually committed against non-combatants, and aimed to achieve behavioral change and political objectives by creating fear in a larger population. We argue that group membership plays a crucial role in understanding why people opt for this violence. Indeed, most terrorists' attacks (>95%) are planned and executed in groups [1]. Sporadically, a single person may commit a terrorist attack [2]. Generally, however, terrorism (like other forms of violence, see (AW Kruglanski *et al.*, unpublished data)) is very much a group phenomenon, because in groups, it is easier to prepare an attack and people in groups are more

motivated to actually commit the attack, rather than to bail out at the last moment.

The study of terrorism is important because terrorism poses a serious physical threat to the security of citizens and to the Open Society [3]. Indirectly, the induction of fear can have further deleterious effects increasing polarization along ethnic, religious and national lines, promoting conflict among different segments of society.

An important aim of early terrorism research was to find a clear psychological profile of 'the terrorist'. As has been the case with the studies on former high-ranking Nazis [4], it turned out that 'the terrorist' does not deviate from the general population in terms of psychopathology [5,6]. Thus, terrorists are not 'crazy' and maybe 'there is a terrorist hidden in everyone' [7].

In this review, as a consequence of the failure to find a clear terrorist profile, we start with examining the role of radicalization as a process that might lead to terrorism. We then focus on the idea that although it is possible to distinguish different types of radical groups, these groups do share relevant characteristics. In the present article, we distinguish and discuss three phases of radicalization: (1) Sensitivity; (2) Group membership; and (3) Action. Not all people become increasingly radical—they may also de-radicalize.

Radicalization

Radicalization is a process through which people become increasingly motivated to use violent means against members of an out-group or symbolic targets to achieve behavioral change and political goals. In Figure 1, we outline a model of radicalization (and de-radicalization). Inspired by the 'staircase model to terrorism' [8], this model distinguishes three phases. Phase 1 is characterized by a sensitivity to a radical ideology. In Phase 2, an individual becomes a member of a radical group. Finally, in Phase 3, this person is ready to act on behalf of the group's ideology, for example by planning an attack.

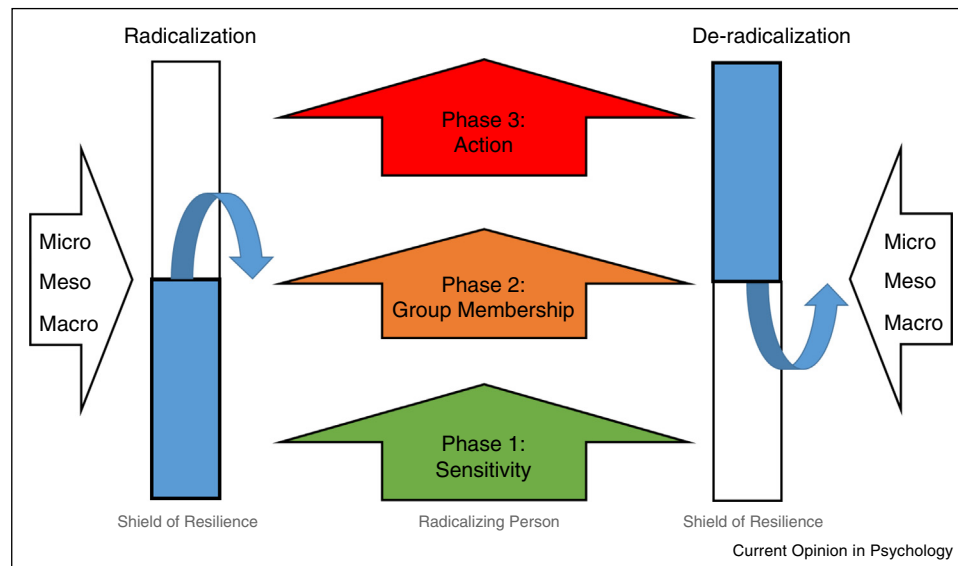
There are 5 types of radical groups that can be distinguished. In Table 1 we describe these types and indicate what their main concerns are.

Characteristics of radical groups

The different types of radical groups share common elements [9,10]. First, all radical groups perceive a serious problem in society. This problem or grievance is

¹ We realize that terrorism is a politically motivated term. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. In addition, in some cases, in people's perceptions, a 'terrorist' can be transformed in a 'freedom fighter' (e.g., Nelson Mandela).

Figure 1



The (de)radicalization process and its determinants. From Doosje, De Wolf, Mann and Feddes [18].

different for each radical group — see Table 1 for examples.

Second, radical groups are strongly dissatisfied with the manner in which the current institutions (particularly police/politicians) deal with their problem. They may argue that the institutions do not pay enough attention to their grievance, or they may think that the institutions do not do enough to handle their grievance [8^{*}]. This creates a low institutional trust and a perception that authorities are not legitimate [11^{*}].

An important third characteristic of radical groups is that they consider their own group's norms and values as

superior to those of other groups. This creates a strong us versus them distinction, which might form the foundation of the use of violence [12].

The fourth characteristic of radical groups is particularly important: most such groups embrace an ideology that legitimizes violence to address their concerns, and this violence is often directed at an out-group viewed as the culprit responsible for creating the grievance. This is most clearly articulated in the application of social identity theory to radicalization [13], in which identification with the in-group combined with dis-identification with the out-group are related to the use of violence against out-group members.

Table 1

Different types of radical groups, their main concern and examples.

Type	Main concern	Examples
1. Nationalistic or Separatist Groups	Secure a territory for the own group	ETA (Spain), IRA (Ireland), Palestine/Israel, PKK (Turkey), Tamil Tigers (Sri Lanka), ISIS (Syria & Iraq)
2. Extreme Right-Wing Groups	To safe-guard the high status position of the 'white race' that is perceived to be threatened by immigrants	Klu Klux Klan (U.S.), Pegida (Germany)
3. Extreme Left-Wing Groups	Achieve a just distribution of wealth and perceive capitalism as the main source of evil	FARC (Colombia), Baader-Meinhof Group/'Red Army Fraction' (Germany), the Red Brigade (Italy), the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front' (Turkey)
4. Single Issue Groups	Their main concern focuses on one particular topic (not an extensive ideology), such as the environment, animal rights or abortion	'Earth Liberation Front' (U.K.), 'Animal Liberation Front' (several countries), 'Army of God' (Anti-Abortion, U.S.)
5. Religiously motivated Groups	They adhere to a very strict interpretation of their religion to justify violence against 'infidels'	ISIS (Syria/& Iraq), Al Qaida (several countries), 'Army of God' (U.S.)

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