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Radicalization and Political Violence – Challenges of Conceptualizing and Researching Origins, Processes and Politics of Illiberal Beliefs

Hande Abay Gaspar[i]
abay@hsfk.de
Christopher Daase[i]
daase@hsfk.de
Nicole Deitelhoff[i]
deitelhoff@hsfk.de
Julian Junk[i]
junk@hsfk.de
Manjana Sold[i]
sold@hsfk.de

[i]Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), Frankfurt

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Radicalization and Political Violence – Challenges of Conceptualizing and Researching Origins, Processes and Politics of Illiberal Beliefs

Hande Abay Gaspar[i]
Christopher Daase[i]
Nicole Deitelhoff[i]
Julian Junk[i]
Manjana Sold[i]

[i] Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), Frankfurt

Recently, radicalism and radicalization have been gaining a great deal of public attention and are considered one of many signs of political crisis. Yet, this belies the ambivalence of these terms. The present article argues for a broader understanding of radicalization in order to explore the entire spectrum of radicalization phenomena: from radicalization without violence to radicalization into violence and radicalization within violence. A broader concept helps to ensure that radicalization is not conflated with situations marked by imminent threats of violence, which too often result in the curtailment of civil liberties and forms of social and political stigmatization. In addition, a broader understanding can open a discursive and regulative space in the area of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

Keywords: radicalization, political violence, non-violent radicalization

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In recent years, we have seen more and more individuals, groups and even entire societies deviate from their democratic beliefs and turn to authoritarian, politically radical or religious fundamentalist views. In many Western countries, right-wing nationalist and populist parties have experienced a flourishing of support (Adler and Ansell 2020, 344) while social cohesion has increasingly come under threat (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Mounk 2018). In Poland, Hungary and Italy, openly illiberal governments have assumed power and are eroding trust in basic democratic liberties. The latter development can be observed in the United States, as well – the twentieth century's very role model of liberal democracy. These manifold intra-societal and international developments are often subsumed under the term "radicalization".

This development is particularly interesting if we consider that, in Europe of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, radicalism was used as a term of political orientation for the developed middle classes, whereas the adherents of political liberalism characterized themselves as radical. The fact that radicalism has today become associated with far-left and far-right extremist positions, religious fanaticism and especially political violence says a lot about the perceived crises facing our times: Liberal societies view their normative order as being under existential threat and are responding with the policies of isolation and exclusion that undermine the very core of our funda-

mental liberal values. Faced with tendencies towards political radicalization, the social discourse on radicalization is also radicalizing while the concept itself is being appropriated for political purposes (Ackermann et al. 2015). As Tenbusch (2018, 2) states, "[t]errorism and radicalisation are difficult topics" as "[t]hey represent the dark side of diverse societies which progressives want to see flourish". When considering this development, it is important to understand radicalization as a crisis phenomenon that entails more than merely the state's capacity to safeguard national security and identity. Political and social debates that address the issue of who and what counts as "radical" and how to manage "radicalization" are leading to a renegotiation of the fundamental elements of the political order and defining the community that constitutes it.

In light of this conceptual ambiguity, it is not surprising that the term radicalization has come under criticism. The predominant argument posits that it is a political concept used to signify and criminalize all kinds of objectionable phenomena. Lorenzo Vidino (2013, 11) describes the concept of radicalization as "inherently arbitrary, lacking a common definition and often simply used to negatively connote ideas one does not like". In many cases, according to Gilles Kepel (2016), the concept exposes limited analytical imagination on the part of the researcher. Some scholars have therefore called for the abandonment of the term "radicalization" and a return to alternative concepts such as "violent extremism" (Haddara 2017, 2) or "political extremism" (Backes 2006) – a shift that would not, however, resolve the issue in itself, as we will point out later.

It is not uncommon for concepts to be the subject of debate. The areas of politics and political science, in particular, deal with "essentially contested concepts" quite frequently (Gallie 1956) as these are an integral part of political struggle and, as such, connected to values and ideas – for which consensus is often impossible to achieve. Though this may render a unified understanding elusive, it is possible to narrow the definition down, allowing for scholarly analyses and establishing a political understanding on the basis of which binding decisions may be reached and critically reflected upon. Renouncing the term radicalization altogether would simply shift the political debate about its definition on to other terms. As such, the task at hand is to reconstruct the concept and add specificity to its meaning.

In the following sections, we present an overview of the contemporary debate about the concept of radicalization with an emphasis on the role of violence. We argue for a broader understanding of radicalization that includes both violent and non-violent activities. Only such an expanded understanding can provide leeway for differentiated normative-political assessments of various activities – something that the concept of extremism does not. This broader understanding also emphasizes process over outcome and offers a conceptual framework suitable for the pluralism of analytical approaches included in this volume. We build on this conceptual discussion by differentiating among three forms of radicalization: (3.1) radicalization into violence, (3.2) radicalization within violence and (3.3) radicalization without violence.

The next section one illustrates different conceptualizations of radicalization and highlights the dominance of narrow understandings of radicalization in the literature, which define radicalization as a path into violence. Consequently, in section two, we argue for a broader concept of radicalization. In section three, we introduce three different forms of radicalization and their implications for designing research in the field. The outcome of this distinction for both scholarship and politics are discussed in the fourth and final section.

1 The contested concept of radicalization

Following the attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) (Ceylan and Kiefer 2017, 31; Pisoiu 2013b, 248–249; Neumann 2017b), the term radicalization was increasingly used to refer to a process of groups or individuals leading to political violence (Malthaner 2017, 371) and direct paths towards (religious) fundamentalism (Dzhekova et al. 2016, 9) and terrorism. Although the field of radicalization research was increasingly influenced by research on social movements and political violence, it gradually developed into its own branch of research with a focus on jihadist radicalization. While group-related processes and structures were at the forefront of analyses, par-

ticularly through the influence of social movement research, the conditions for *individual* radicalization have become a core area of investigation in recent years. Above all, this has been attributed to jihadist militancy within Western societies in the last decade, which particularly accentuated individual paths to radicalization (Malthaner 2017, 369, 378). The attempt to broadly conflate the concept of radicalization with terrorism has merely solidified an understanding of radicalization that is associated with violence. Reidy (2018, 250) argues that "because the only actionable outcomes radicalization concedes to are 'terrorism' and/or 'extremism'" non-violent radicalization processes are treated as "no result" cases (section three in this article discusses literature on non-violent radicalization in greater detail).

This overly pejorative reading of radicalization is, however, a relatively recent development, one that stands in stark contrast to the historical understanding we mentioned before. Our aim is to counteract this tendency by distinguishing the concept of radicalization from extremism and terrorism and to propose a definition that captures the broad spectrum of radicalization phenomena without treating them as one.

Equating radicalization to terrorism not only takes place in the everyday parlance of politics and the media, this conflation can also be seen within radicalization research. In many studies, radicalization and terrorism frequently occur alongside each other, as one research object, and researchers fail to offer a more precise distinction between the two phenomena (see Ayanian et al. 2018). In other cases, radicalization is simply defined as "how terrorists are made" and deradicalization is defined as "how terrorists are unmade" (see Webber and Kruglanski 2017, 131). Multi-staged models of radicalization – which consider radicalization processes as sequences comprising various steps (for an overview, see Borum 2011c) – establish a direct correlation between radicalism and terrorism or jihadism (Wiktorowicz 2005; Logvinov 2017; Moghaddam 2005; Silber and Bhatt 2007). These linear models consider the use of violence as the logical outcome of radicalization that occurs if the process of radicalization has not been interrupted beforehand. However, the process of interruption is often not addressed with the same degree of analytical rigor (as also addressed in the article about deradicalization by Baaken et al. 2020 in this issue, which provides an overview of literature in this field). On the contrary, a sort of automatism culminating in the use of violence is a predominant conceptualization found among these earlier models (with more recent models often being more nuanced: see McCauley and Moskalenko 2017, which we discuss later in this text). Few researchers acknowledge that radicalization can also exist without violence (Borum 2011a; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010; Frindte et al. 2016; Clément 2014), arguing that "engaging in violent acts should not be equated to some 'end' point in the process" (Horgan 2014, 156) – also see our discussions in section three of this article. Nevertheless, many researchers doing work on social movements and terrorism (see della Porta and LaFree 2012; Moghaddam 2005; Doosje et al. 2016, 79) understand radicalization as a process that subsequently leads to violence.

By associating the term with terrorism, "radicalization" assumes an expressly negative connotation (Pisoiu 2011). The synonymous use of both terms occasionally even serves to legitimize excessive countermeasures, such as extensive surveillance of the public sphere. As such, distinguishing between these concepts is imperative from an analytical perspective. At the same time, there is no consensus on the definition of "terrorism" in political practice and among researchers (Schmid 2013, 5; Shafritz, Gibbons, and Scott 1991, 260). If we do, however, consider the theoretical definition provided by Daase and Spencer (2011, 29), which holds terrorism to be an event "in which non-state actors specifically apply violence against civilians (medium) in order to spread fear and anxiety (the aim) and to force a state to alter its policies (the purpose)" (authors' own translation), then radicalization and terrorism can be easily differentiated from one another. While terrorism is a specific means of action (violence against civilians), aimed at causing an immediate effect (to spread fear), radicalization refers to the development of specific political objectives. Accordingly, terrorism is but one possible outcome of radicalization.

Similar issues arise with the synonymous use of extremism and radicalization. When speaking of ex-

tremism, a distinction is often made between the level of beliefs – support for specific forms of religious and racist preeminence in connection with the rejection of democratic principles – and the level of (violent) action in the form of restrictions on/threats to the rights and liberties of other individuals (Böckler and Zick 2015, 101–102). In this regard, a differentiation can be made, for example, between cognitive extremism (level of beliefs) and violence-prone extremism (level of action) (Neumann 2017a, 44–45; Neumann 2013b, 3–4; Glaser, Greuel, and Hohnstein 2015, 35). Unlike radicalization, extremism describes a condition and not a process – thereby making it more similar to radicalism. Moreover, in the academic discourse, extremism is addressed within the context of democratic societies; it is understood to constitute the rejection of the democratic constitutional state, its fundamental values and codes of conduct (Backes and Jesse 1996; Kailitz 2004; Wiktorowicz 2004) while radicalization, irrespective of political systems, can be conceived as the willingness of actors to increasingly challenge the existing political order. Bötticher and Mareš (2012, 56–58) distinguish radicalization from extremism with regard to their relationship to coercion and violence: "Radicals do not force, but preach, they call upon us to do likewise to their example [...]. Violence is not relevant". In contrast, extremism "targets society as a whole and includes the consequences of coercion. Here, it is not so much a question of insight, but of submission" (authors' own translation).

Despite these obvious differences, attempts have been made to merge these two concepts (see also Backes 2006, 16). Böckler and Zick (2015, 101), for example, summarize extremism as a subcategory of radicalism. Neumann (2017b, 17; 2016; 2013b, 4), on the other hand, argues that radicalism is extremism that has not yet fully developed. Both lines of argumentation are problematic as they do not account for the emancipatory forms of radicalization. The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2017) has also acknowledged this issue and distinguishes between extremism and radicalism: whereas extremism constitutes activities "that aim to do away with the fundamental values of free democracy" (authors' own translation), radical political views can assume a legitimate role in our pluralistic social order as long as the basic principles of our constitutional order are recognized. In comparison, the European Commission is more hesitant to allow for a positive understanding of radicalization,[1] as the term is directly linked to terrorism: "Radicalisation can be understood a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism [...]."[2]

Similarly, the lines between terrorism and extremism are often blurred. Onursal and Kirkpatrick (2019, 1) argue, for example, "that there has been a recent convergence between these two concepts in British parliamentary discourse, reproducing the same signifiers and meanings for non-violent extremism as previously existed for terrorism" and "that this transformation of discourse has coincided with social practices of informal criminalization targeting non-violent extremism as if it were terrorism" which "has important policy implications as it prescribes particular counter-terrorism practices". This further emphasizes the (political) importance of conceptually differentiating the terms radicalization, extremism and terrorism.

When considering radicalization, terrorism and extremism, we may note research on terrorism and extremism draws a distinction between violent and non-violent forms of these phenomena. For example, at the individual level, some scholars distinguish between violent extremists and nonviolent extremists (Knight, Woodward, and Lancaster 2017; LaFree et al. 2018) and between violent and non-violent terrorists (Perliger, Koehler-Derrick, and Pedahzur 2016). Nevertheless, the differentiation between violent and non-violent radicalization has gained far less attention, at least empirically.

Following this brief terminological discussion, we would like to outline some observations on the use of the three terms. First, as non-violent radicalization is often implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, understood to be a phase of a not yet fully developed process towards political violence, it is not independently inves-

[1] On the contrary, in 2004, the European Commission introduced the term "radicalization" as a more neutral substitute by supplementing 'radicalization' with 'violent', talking about "violent radicalization" (European Commission 2004).

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/radicalisation_en (30.07.2019).

tigated. From an analytical perspective, this frequently leads scholars to adopt a limited view of radicalization and ignore its emancipatory potential. Second, another important set of phenomena remains unaccounted for: radicalization within violence. Since the use of violence is considered to be the result of a radicalization process, the investigation into further developments is simply omitted once violence has been applied. However, radicalization may also be observed after the initial decision to use violence – especially in terms of the expansion of the objectives to be achieved through the use of political violence. The transition from violence inflicted on objects to violence inflicted on people, or a change in strategy from attacks on individuals to attacks on crowds of people (mass-casualty terrorism), can certainly be labeled as a form of radicalization (Parachini 2001; Daase 2005). In order to better account for the phenomena of radicalization in its entirety, looking beyond paths of radicalization into violence and addressing radicalization without violence as well as the radicalization within violence, both empirically and theoretically, is an essential task.

2 An appeal for an expanded concept of radicalization

In the following, we advocate for a broader understanding of radicalization. We define radicalization as *the increasing challenge to the legitimacy of a normative order and/or the increasing willingness to fight the institutional structure of this order.* In doing so, we maneuver away from the conventional use of the concept in various regards.[3]

Normative vs. analytical concept

Based on our proposed definition, we favor an analytical concept of radicalization. Historically, radicalism and radicalization have primarily been determined normatively; hence, an individual who is not "normal" or "moderate" is considered radical (Sedgwick 2010). Within debates surrounding extremism in the 1970s and 1980s, researchers attempted to normatively differentiate the term "radicalism" from "extremism". Ossip K. Flechtheim (1978, 59) placed "radicalism" in positive terms compared to "extremism", which he claimed to be "illusionary, detached from reality and dogmatic" (authors' own translation). Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Franz Urban Pappi (1972) took a more analytical approach, defining extremism as the negation of democratic values and radicalism as the rejection of democratic methods. This distinction ultimately failed to take root and was instead used as an argument for rejecting the concept of radicalism in research and concentrating entirely on the normatively clearer concept of extremism (Backes 1989, 103). Radicalism and radicalization are, however, anything but normatively unambiguous: they are dependent on the respective normative order in place. Before we delve deeper into these differentiations, we must first establish an analytical concept of radicalization.

A narrow vs. broad concept of radicalization

Our definition also favors a broad conceptualization of radicalization. Narrower definitions use the criteria of violent acts when identifying radicalization (della Porta 2013; Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi 2015; Neumann 2016), which does indeed offer some advantages. Confining the concept to violent acts provides a clear delineation between "radical" and "non-radical" while also remaining relatively easy to operationalize due to the observability of violence.

At the same time, however, a narrow concept of radicalization tends to disregard long-term processes that occur in the stages preceding the use of violence. By focusing on the use of violence, this concept only considers one specific moment in the entire radicalization process while retrospectively treating radicalization as a teleological progression. In so doing, the concept loses the very characteristic that distinguishes it from the concept of extremism, namely its process-based orientation. Strictly speaking, radicalization once again becomes reduced to the idea of a condition: the radicalized individual is he/she who makes use of political violence.

An action-oriented vs. discursive concept of radicalization

Our definition entails both discursive and performative aspects of radicalization as well as the interrela-

[3] A similar broad definition that relates to normative orders is put forward by Kruglanski et al. (2014: 69): "Radicalization is defined as the process of supporting or engaging in activities deemed (by others) as in violation of important social norms".

tion of the two. The link between action and discourse thereby turns radicalization into an empirical matter. Recent theoretical developments within the social sciences have resulted in a growing divide between approaches based on theories of action (oriented towards observable behavior) and those based on theories of discourse (particularly speech or other non-violent acts). The first approach overlooks the fact that ideas, values and beliefs communicated through speech offer insights into processes of radicalization driven by motives and decisions. The second overlooks the fact that material and structural factors beyond mere discourse must be taken into account in order to adequately explain such processes. By challenging the legitimacy of a given normative order as well as being willing to fight its institutional structure, it is possible to link the discursive and performative aspects of radicalization (see McCauley and Moskalenko 2017). This connection also permits for analytical separation, granting the possibility that actors can be radical without acting radically or, conversely, act radically without being radical per se. The prior transpires when actors harbor ideas with the aim of overthrowing the regime, for example, yet are prevented from translating these into reality due to a lack of resources or due to effective suppression; dissidents in the former Eastern Bloc were "radical" in this sense but lacked the means of open resistance. The latter occurs when actors implement drastic or disproportionate means for aims that are not based on overthrowing the government or undermining the normative order.

A political vs. social concept of radicalization

In most cases, radicalization is understood as a mounting challenge and struggle against a political order, implying that religiously radicalized individuals and groups may also seek to the same objective. This is not, however, necessarily the case: radicalization can also be oriented towards social interrelations that only marginally affect the political order, if at all. We have therefore chosen to focus on the generic "normative order" that radicalization addresses; this order can be political, social, economic, religious or of some other nature. The decisive element is that it creates expectations through norms and institutions, which individuals increasingly reject and to which they exhibit a growing willingness to challenge.

The idea of condition vs. process

Existing "radicalism" research has focused on the idea of a static condition for identifying and assessing a certain political belief (Flechtheim 1978; Klingemann and Pappi 1972). The idea of a radicalization process appeared later and focused on the transformation of political positions. While the analytical concept of radicalism is static, the concept of radicalization is flexible. The concept of radicalization captures the various forms and access points of deradicalization by emphasizing temporality or speed, facilitating, for instance, a determination of the influences of de-radicalization measures (so-called tertiary prevention measures).

3 Three forms of radicalization

The concept of radicalization proposed here suggests the viability of distinguishing between three basic forms of radicalization: (1) the radicalization into violence, (2) radicalization within violence and (3) radicalization without violence. In the following, we situate this distinction within the literature. We demonstrate shortcomings present in the current debate and also indicate the added merit from each of the three perspectives as they direct attention to differentiated sets of research questions. In terms of radicalization into violence, the central interest is to understand the triggers that lead to crossing the threshold into violence – a line that is well-established culturally, institutionally and politically. The causes for escalation and de-escalation dynamics are key to radicalization within violence. Research into radicalization without violence may, for example, question how to stabilize the decoupling of radical thoughts from extremist or violent actions. Radicalization into violence connects discursive and action-oriented elements of radicalization. In the case of radicalization without violence, the discursive element in our definition stands at the forefront, while radicalization within violence merely represents an escalation of actions.

3.1 Radicalization into violence

Radicalization *into violence* refers to the "conventional" understanding of radicalization. Radicalization occurs when an individual or a collective expands its means for achieving political goals and ideas – no longer relying on non-violent arguments and actions. Hence, there is a declaration of violence, or at least the willingness to use it, representing a rejection of legal channels. Violence is not used as a form of self-defense but rather regarded as a political instrument for counteracting a perceived injustice. Direct physical violence, the threat of violence for the purpose of intimidation "or also property damage of a corresponding scope with the aim of exerting direct monetary pressure" are examples of "democratic-political non-legitimized forms of actions" (authors' own translation) (Balluch 2011, 260). By focusing on violence, this understanding of radicalization covers an important subsection of the radicalization phenomenon – especially in terms of security policies.

Within the existing literature, definitions abound that establish a direct connection between radicalization and the use of violence and present processes of radicalization as a development from non-violence to violence. For instance, Bosi, Demetriou and Malthaner (2014, 2) perceive "radicalization to be a process forming through strategy, structure, and conjuncture, and involving the adoption and sustained use of violent means to achieve articulated political goals". Although they mention that "violent and non-violent options" can be chosen in long-term and/or short-term strategies/tactics, they define "radicalization as a process of violence" (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014, 5). Referring to Bosi and Malthaner (2015), della Porta (2018, 462) understands radicalization to be "a process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time" or, in other words, as a "process leading towards the increased use of political violence" (della Porta and LaFree 2012, 5). Similarly, Hardy (2018: 76) defines radicalization as "a process in which a person adopts extremist views and moves towards committing a violent act". From the perspective of Framing Theory, Pisoiu (2013a, 47) defines radicalization as a "process of gradual socialization towards certain world views […], which creates a reality of attributable injustice and which demands violent action" (authors' own translation). From the socio-psychological perspective, authors such as Crossett and Spitaletta (2010, 10) understand radicalization to be a process in which "an individual, group, or mass of people undergo a transformation from participation in the political process via legal means to the use or support of violence for political purposes (radicalism)". In the Islamist context, Khosrokhavar has a similar view on radicalization, defining it as "the return of the religious into a violent form, in which the ultimate goal of the actors is death" (authors' own translation) (2016, 40). In the Handbook of Terrorism Research, Alex Schmid (2011), who would criticize the negative connections related to the concept of radicalization in a subsequent publication just two years later (2013, 6), proposed that radicalization entails the ideological socialization of young people that leads to the use of violence:

> Individual but usually group process of ideological socialisation of young people (sometimes recent converts) towards the use of violent tactics of conflict waging, sometimes including self-destruction in the process of harming political opponents (as in suicide bombings) (Schmid 2011, 678).

Though McCauley and Moskalenko's (2008, 416) definition concentrates on group dynamics, it likewise includes a connection to the use of violence: "Descriptively, radicalization means change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup".

To elucidate the radicalization process, some researchers have introduced a phase model that is also ultimately linked to the use of violence in its final stages: worth mentioning are the staircase model by Moghaddam (2005), the four-step model from the New York Police Department (NYPD) (Silber and Bhatt 2007), the four radicalization factors outlined by Sageman (2008), the fourfold dynamic mechanism analysis by della Porta (2013) and the twelve-mechanisms model by McCauley and Moskalenko (2008). In the case of social movement research, for example, these phase models have been derived inductively. In terms of theoretical formulation, however, social movement research offers a deductive model that essentially understands radicalization to be a deterministic process ending in the use of violence.

Calls for violence can involve statements that legitimate violence, the recruitment, indoctrination and mobilization of individuals (and groups) for the use of violence, and other forms of endorsing violence. The use of violence can be carried out as a direct violent act or as a financial, logistical or other organizational act in support of violence. An act of violence can vary in severity and include manifestations such as bodily harm, property damage, a terrorist attack or even an armed conflict.

The transition from non-violence to violence can have various causes (see the following four articles in this special issue that more extensively delve into the state of research on individual, group and societal radicalization and de-radicalization). It may be based upon the intensification of political or religious convictions as well as on the unsuccessful use of non-violent means of political resistance. The acquisition of technical skills (e.g., the use of certain weapons) or the experience of repression by the state can also have radicalizing effects. One example of the latter includes the youth activists in Egypt who initially pursued non-violent strategies before radicalizing into violence-prone combatants due to the acts of torture and rape they experienced while in detention (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2017).

Although the amount of available data is still insufficient to conclusively confirm clear cause-and-effect relations, several studies investigate the causes of radicalization towards violence. Empirical studies that fall into this category mainly consider violent cases (e.g. Schuurman and Horgan 2016; Helfstein 2012; Precht 2007; or studies on lone-actor terrorist attacks) or those that ensure variance in the dependent variable by including both a sample of violent and a sample of non-violent cases (Knight and Keatley 2019; Holt et al. 2018; Jasko, LaFree, and Kruglanski 2016; Bartlett and Miller 2012). Although non-violent cases are also present in such studies, they tend to represent a control group for identifying the causes of violent extremism and therefore do not constitute the actual object of research. We present studies explicitly interested in the explanation of non-violent cases under (3.3) radicalization without violence. Further analysis using comparative research is still needed to identify the extent to which similar patterns of an individual's transition from aggressive rhetoric into the concrete planning or actual act of violence also takes place in far-right or far-left radical milieus. Empirical studies by Gill et al. (2017) and Bjørgo and Gjelsvik (2017) have, for example, looked at right-wing radicals.

Along with left-wing, right-wing and religious-political groupings that advocate for an entirely different social order (see Monaghan 2000), radicalization into violence can also be observed among so-called single-issue extremism groups, such as in the areas of militant animal rights, environmental protection and pro-life activism. In the case of animal rights and environmental protection groups, we usually encounter violence directed towards property and rarely against people. Common acts include sabotage (such as tree spiking, also known as ecotage), arson, domestic harassment, stalking and freeing animals. Violence directed at people is uncommon, though there are groups, such as the Animal Rights Militia, that have drawn attention to their cause using letter bombs, such as the one addressed to Margaret Thatcher in 1982. Nevertheless, a clear distinction must be made between this repertoire of actions and that of classic acts of terrorism, which may be a reason why researchers have hardly addressed these groups in the past (Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde 2014; Monaghan 2000). Monaghan (2000) argues that ignorance about single-issue groups is an error, as history shows that such groups do not necessarily shy away from violence against people and often commit other offenses. Based on a risk analysis, Ackerman (2003) similarly posits that, in Europe, the potential for violence held by these groups is greater than often assumed. While the assessments of such groups and their designation as terrorist organizations (Loedenthal 2014; Liddick 2006) have to be treated with caution, the developments of many groups do constitute processes of radicalization into violence.

3.2 Radicalization within violence

Radicalization within violence refers to individuals or groups that already use violence and radicalize even further. This may be accompanied by an increase in the means of violence, the frequency of violent acts or the expansion of their objectives. By shifting

strategies, the individual or group may seek to escalate the conflict or garner more attention to gain adherents, support and legitimacy. Radicalization within violence is often a reaction to a strategic setback and an attempt to reclaim military initiative.

As opposed to the transition into violence, radicalization within violence has been researched to a much lesser degree. Studies by Schmid have presented some initial approaches to this issue, describing developments based on various means of violence (Schmid 2013, 24; Morrow 2017). Empirical studies that fall into this category mainly come from terrorism research. This is not surprising as radicalization within violence often occurs in the context of terrorism. As an example, we may mention a study by Martens et al. (2014). The authors examine "whether the activity of terrorist groups escalates–both in the number of people killed per attack and in the frequency of attacks–leading up to highly lethal attacks" and they find evidence for both types of escalation leading to such attacks (Martens et al. 2014, 1). An increase in means can also occur due to competition among different terrorist groups that share the same ideology. In her empirical study, Farrell (2019) investigates the effects of this competition for additional resources and recruits on the quantity and severity of Salafi-jihadist groups' attacks, finding that the "effect is particularly evident among groups that pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda or ISIS". She also notes that "increased competition among groups results in more attacks and a selection of more severe targets and types of attacks" (Farrell 2019, 1).

A change in strategy as a reaction to external dynamics can be observed among various terrorist groups. With regard to far-left extremist radicalization, the "escalation spiral of isolation and radicalization" (authors' own translation) proposed by Peter Waldmann (1998, 163) had very different outcomes for the Red Army Fraction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, or RAF, in German) than it did for the Revolutionary Cells (*Revolutionäre Zellen*, or RZ, in German). In the case of the RAF, it led to a strategy of international cooperation through which the RAF increasingly lost its own capacity to act and made itself organizationally vulnerable, while the RZ abandoned international attacks in the wake of the events in Entebbe (during which two founders of RZ were killed) and shifted to bomb attacks.

One important question that arises when considering the expansion of the means and the extent of violence is the debate about the willingness of terrorist groups to make use of weapons of mass destruction (Daase 2005; Quillen 2016; Volders and Sauer 2016; Sauer 2007). Although the acquisition and use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons is relatively unlikely on account of the greater technical hurdles and strict international monitoring (Neuneck 2002), weapons of mass destruction are particularly destructive and therefore also especially "effective" political weapons. Hence, it is not surprising that many terrorist groups have attempted to acquire such weapons in the past. On the contrary, the accusation that non-state actors seek weapons of mass destruction or are using them serves state actors by politically discrediting their opponents. The Iraqi army, for example, accused ISIS of having used chemical weapons (Naß 2016); had this accusation been internationally confirmed, it could have constituted a radicalization into violence due to the sharp increase in the extent using violence for fighting against a normative order. Troops under the Bashar al-Assad regime and its associated militias were also accused of using chemical weapons and, in so doing, augmented their means of violence (Winter 2017).

A distinction must be drawn between an expansion of the means of violence and an extension of the targets of violence. We can also speak of radicalization when a transition is made from fighting military targets to attacking civilians or when the sphere of action is broadened from the national to the global arena (the latter course was taken by Al-Qaeda as well as ISIS) (Stepanova 2014). There are countless examples of expansions of violent struggle, from representatives of the enemy state to the civilian population, such as the willingness of the RAF to accept innocent bystanders as victims, the extension of violent activities carried out by the Kurdish worker's party (PKK) on tourist destinations in the Mediterranean or the expansion of targeted killings of civilians by Hezbollah or Al-Qaeda (Ritzmann 2011).

3.3 Radicalization without violence

Within empirical radicalization research, the process of radicalization *without violence* has received equally little attention as radicalization within violence, despite the fact that this form of radical action has a long trajectory under the heading of civil disobedience in the tradition of Thoreau and Gandhi and Martin Luther King (Scheuerman 2018; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). This category refers to individuals and collectives that attempt to achieve their objectives explicitly through non-violent means but intentionally violate the given framework of the applicable legal system to express their increasing tendency to reject the existing order.

A broad understanding of radicalization, which encompasses radicalization without violence, has rarely been proposed by research on radicalization, with definitions that clearly include direct violence dominating the field. With the exception of a handful of isolated studies, non-violent processes of radicalization, which can certainly be observed in our society (Sarma 2017, 279), have received far less consideration than processes of radicalization into violence or radicalization within violence (Bjørgo and Gjelsvik 2017, 1). To some extent, this is due to the fact that security policies and the measures undertaken by security authorities are often concerned with acute threats. A recent and noteworthy study by Busher, Holbrook and Macklin (2019) identifies that most groups commit less violence than they are capable of, leading the authors to analyze the processes of non- or limited escalation. By using three case studies from different phenomena – namely jihadi, right-wing and single-issue extremism – they identify five underlying rationalities on the basis of which internal "brakes" operate: strategic, moral, ego maintenance, outgroup definition and organizational. They conclude that "the distribution and prominence of the brakes varied across and within the case studies" (Busher, Holbrook, and Macklin 2019, 20). Notable progress in empirically recording non-violent radicalization has also been provided by the database "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States" (PIRUS). The dataset "contains identified individual-level information on the backgrounds, attributes, and radicalization processes of over 2,100 violent and non-violent extremists who adhere to far right, far left, Islamist, or single issue ideologies in the United States covering 1948-2017".[4] "Indicators of radicalization within the scope of the PIRUS dataset consist of arrests, indictments, and/or convictions for engaging in, or planning to engage in, ideologically motivated unlawful behavior, or membership in a designated terrorist organization or a violent extremist group",[5] in short: both violent and non-violent cases.

Radicalization without violence may be conceded wherever a distinction is made between the level of attitudes and level of actions. One example is the conceptual difference between "cognitive radicalization" and "violent radicalization" (Vidino 2013, 11–12) or "behavioral radicalization" (Neumann 2013a, 873; 2017a, 46–47). Fishman (2010, 10) also differentiates between radical beliefs and radical actions: "Subscribing to a radical belief does not necessitate engaging in radical actions" (see Bartlett, Birdwell, and King 2010, 10). Borum likewise refers to the necessary distinction between the levels of belief and action: "Radicalization – the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs – needs to be distinguished from action pathways – the process of engaging in terrorism or violent extremist actions" (Borum 2011b, 30).

Similarly, in the context of terrorism, Horgan et al. (2016, 1235) stress that "adopting an attack-centric focus for the analysis of terrorist behavior will continue to limit our understanding of the behavioral aspects of terrorism." At this level, we can find differentiations made between non-violent and violent radicalization, to the extent that cognitive radicalization – even if it exhibits a spiritual willingness to use violence – is understood as (still) non-violent while behavioral radicalization is described as a violent form. One shortcoming of this classification, however, is that the level of action (violent/behavioral radicalization) continues to be understood as violent while the non-violent form is considered a precursor to violent radicalization. This understanding also excludes radicalization processes that, besides taking place at a cognitive level, also express themselves in the non-violent actions of their actors. Neumann (2013b, 1) has criticized

[4] https://www.start.umd.edu/data-tools/profiles-individual-radicalization-united-states-pirus

[5] https://www.start.umd.edu/pirus-frequently-asked-questions#q4

this conceptual differentiation as it is the main source of discord surrounding the definition of radicalization. Furthermore, a strict separation of the levels implies that they are independent of one another. The relationship between "cognitive radicalization" and "behavioral radicalization" is, however, still unclear (Reichardt 2017, 69), and scholars studying terrorism remain divided by the question of whether cognitive extremism leads to violent extremism. Assuming that cognitive radicalization is a precondition for behavioral radicalization, differentiating between these levels does not allow us to conceptualize one level as being non-violent and the other as violent, for "if a non-violent ideology is culpable for terrorism in some way then it ceases to be non-violent" (Richards 2015, 371).

Some researchers do allow for the possibility of non-violent radicalization through the conceptual differentiation between "violent radicalization" and "non-violent radicalization" (Bartlett and Miller 2012). Dalgaard-Nielsen attempted to draw a distinction between "radicalization" and "violent radicalization" early on, thereby promoting a broader understanding of radicalization compared to the authors cited above:

> [R]adicalization is understood as a growing readiness to pursue and support far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a direct threat to, the existing order […] violent radicalization [is] a process in which radical ideas are accompanied by the development of a willingness to directly support or engage in violent acts (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, 798).

A number of other definitions exist that likewise describe radicalization as a non-violent process, with the exception of the definitions and models forwarded by social psychology –though these only investigate the cognitive level and not the action level. The COM-B model is one such model for understanding behavior. According to this model, individuals need to be capable (C) and have the opportunity (O) to both act and be motivated (M). If one of the three necessary conditions is absent, behavior (B) cannot/will not be executed (Michie, van Stralen, and West 2011). From a political perspective, non-violent developments might not relevant for security policies (Biene et al. 2016a). At the same time, researchers investigating non-violent milieus recognize the danger of promoting stigmatization (Hummel et al. 2016) – through a consideration of reference groups, through grey zones when investigating the transition from activism to radicalism, or through an awareness of the vital roles that radicalism can assume in a pluralist social order. Consequently, this disregards a significant part of radicalization.

In summary, a limited number of definitions provide theoretical space for non-violent radicalization by differentiating between the level of beliefs and the level of action (cognitive/behavioral radicalization) or between the concepts (radicalization/violent radicalization). Nevertheless, though some researchers do provide theoretical space for non-violent radicalization, this phenomenon is rarely subject to empirical investigations on its own.

In many cases, non-violent actions are completely legal and legitimate. They can express themselves as political activities that are directed inwards (group-building, self-organization, meetings, etc.) or outwards (recruitment of supporters, demonstrations, etc.). Besides such lawful and non-violent forms of action, non-violent radicalization may encompass illegal actions when certain criteria are met.

Non-violent radicalization can be recognized, for example, within transnational social movements that solidify their positions and actions in their confrontation with international institutions or transnational corporations. Studies such as those about alter-globalization movements demonstrate that confrontations with large global financial institutions in the early 2000s led to the radicalization of some segments of the movement, which shifted from peaceful protests to disruptive tactics, increasingly rejecting direct interactions with their adversaries and resorting to civil disobedience (Daase and Deitelhoff 2014 and 2017; Sullivan 2005; Veltmeyer 2004). Forms of non-violent radicalization are also apparent among animal welfare and environmental protection movements. In this case, we are mainly dealing with clandestine group structures, whose actions operate outside of legal bounds yet who also expressly commit to the rejection of violent means. This applies to well-known groups such as the *Animal Liberation Front*, the *Earth Liberation Front* and many other groupings.

Multinational corporations are frequently the target of actions carried out by environmental protection and animal welfare groups. Voluntary guidelines placed on company policies or changes to existing

laws can often only be achieved by engaging in conflict that stands opposed to the interests of the corporation. As challenging multinational corporations is particularly difficult and costly, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) frequently adopt the strategy of slow escalation: over time, they demand changes to company policies with ever-greater urgency. The higher the level of escalation, the more pointed the actions of the NGOs become (occupations, blockades, etc.), until they ultimately succeed in entering into negotiations with the company and reaching a compromise. Confrontational campaigns waged to achieve systemic change are another example of non-violent radicalization (Balluch 2009), such as the radicalization of the disarmament debate (Meier 2015).

Distinguishing among three forms of radicalization by approaching the question of violence in a differentiated manner clearly exposes the shortcomings in existing research while also providing opportunities for linking various branches of research and empirical studies. This broader definitory access to radicalization turns phenomena into empirical questions that would have otherwise remained concealed. As previously suggested, narrowing the concept of radicalization, especially by focusing on violence, has been common in both research and in practice. In the following concluding section, we identify a number of implications that a broader concept of radicalization can have for scholarship as well as practice.

4 By the way of conclusion: Implications for scholarship and practice

Relying on a narrow understanding of radicalization has numerous consequences for scholarship as well as policymaking, public administration, civil society and the media. Reducing the concept of radicalization to the level of violence tends to neglect several crucial questions surrounding the causes of radicalization and the reasons why non-violent radicalism sometimes remains non-violent. Broadening the scope of the phenomenon can offer new insights and options for actions, which we briefly highlight in the following.

Scholarship

Narrow definitions of radicalization rely on the use of violence in order to distinguish radicalization from other political processes. This is a straightforward solution for addressing various methodological problems. Such definitions (ostensibly) create clear boundaries between what is radical and what is not – and distinctive boundaries make the object of investigation easier to operationalize. The specific forms that violence can assume are of secondary concern. Once the concept of violence has been defined – often as physical force – it becomes simple to use the distinction of violence/non-violence as a distinction for radicalization/non-radicalization.

At the same time, this limited concept of radicalization creates a number of challenges. The greatest disadvantage of a violence-based understanding is that the phenomena of radicalization without violence and radicalization once violence has been used remain neglected. Processes of radicalization that can be understood as an extension of the means of violence or those that remain absolutely free of violence are often considered preliminary or subsequent phases of the narrowly defined processes of radicalization and, as such, receive little attention.

A narrow understanding implies that radicalization is a one-way street while, at the same time, paired with the consensus that radicalization is a reversible process prone to discontinuation. Previous research has not extensively focused on this reversibility or on the various speeds at which the process can progress; instead, focus has been placed on the moment at which the threshold of violence is exceeded. This narrow understanding of radicalization overlooks processes that occur in the run-up to a possible (but not inevitable) use of violence. The processes that occur at the outset of a radicalization process and prior to the actual use of violence are also of interest; these may provide insights about indicators that facilitate radicalization (see for instance Pisoiu et al. 2020; Borum 2014, 290-291). Simultaneously, they may serve as reference points that shed light on the origin of a process of radicalization and in which area it has predominantly developed – such as in the virtual or in the real world. This type of knowledge is necessary for creating potential prevention measures, for better un-

derstanding the motivations of other individuals who may be in danger of radicalizing, and for retracing opportunity structures.

Focusing on the actual use of violence also results in a neglect of virtual processes of radicalization unless they manifest in the real world (Weimann and von Knop 2008), such as through the real-world activities of the internet users. Working with a narrow definition of radicalization disregards possibilities of intervention through primary prevention, questions of structural discrimination and opportunities for altering the design of the educational system.

A broad understanding of radicalization allows us to recognize the underlying factors and different degrees of radicalization. Such findings can be used to develop intervention strategies early on – including the creation of a comprehensive prevention strategy that includes primary, secondary and tertiary measures in equal part. A broad concept of radicalization therefore provides space for identifying and evaluating prevention measures that are wider in scope. In terms of tertiary prevention, this encompasses deradicalization measures that include all complex constitutional considerations, even if the retraction, abandonment or adaptation of the means of violence represents success in terms of deradicalization, and not merely undertaken to prevent or explain acts of violence.

While researchers would do well to significantly expand the object of investigation and preserve their own independence vis-à-vis politicized discourses (on the need for challenges in the transfer of knowledge, see Biene and Junk 2017; Biene, Gertheiss, and Junk 2016; and Daase et al. 2016), there is also a need for adaptation within the research landscape in order to be able to address these research interests in the first place. There has been a tendency to consider research on radicalization as a part of security research, with the side effect that the focus remains on acute threat scenarios and the associated monitoring and repression measures. Hence, the questions of prevention following conceptual and theoretical work, as well as of the social consequences of radicalization often play a secondary role. Past research supports the idea that building upon a broader concept of radicalization requires multi- or even interdisciplinary research programs. Moreover, we are often dealing with transnational phenomena, rendering it necessary to take greater efforts to establish internationally integrated research projects that operate beyond mere comparisons. We must also more critically review security institutions and their measures across various departments and administrative entities.

Practice

Within this area of research, numerous consequences also arise from the underlying understanding of radicalization for policymaking, security authorities, civil society and the media.

A narrow understanding of radicalization largely reflects the political discourse and is thus seemingly easier to communicate publicly. The idea of radicalization has come to be equated with matters of security (e.g., as an imminent threat) with ever greater frequency in the context of discussions in the media and politics. Designating something as “radical” has developed into a warning sign in the vocabulary adopted by politicians and journalists, referring to the need for control and combat; repressive security measures also receive little consideration as compared to the tendencies towards escalation and stigmatization dynamics that can be associated with them. Equating radicalization to the use of violence not only results in the concept being misunderstood and politically charged, it can also lead authorities to enhance and implement additional regulatory (especially repressive) security measures with greater frequency; this not only results in more rapid limitations being placed on the liberties enjoyed by civil society, it also has a counterproductive effect in that it accelerates the radicalization of the affected minorities.

Another repercussion of adopting a narrow definition of the concept of radicalization lies in the fact that, when violence is used, no differentiation is made in the type of violence applied. Accordingly, the discourse can take people throwing stones at a demonstration to be just as radical as terrorists who could use explosives to inflict a much greater degree of devastation – depending on the definition of violence. Moreover, the narrow idea of radicalization does not always consider that people can be radical in their thoughts, ideas and beliefs yet not act with radical means. It is often an issue of political communication

in which the fast pace of news reporting frequently grants no room for nuance. A differentiated concept of radicalization could also lead to more differentiated policies.

Hence, political and media communication are faced with a dilemma. First, a neutral and broader concept of radicalization could garner less attention and be forced to quantitatively and qualitatively justify more costly and complex measures. Second, it might do more justice to the phenomenon of radicalization and allow for a more effective, sustainable prevention agenda that would have to be comprehensive, implemented early on, and also interconnect numerous actors – from the educational sector as well as from the security authorities and the field of social work. Such an agenda would not operate on the basis of short-term, fragmented projects. It would have to allow for a certain degree of error tolerance in order to permit, evaluate and test out numerous approaches equally. Above all, this agenda would have to bear in mind that radicalism is not a political evil in itself and that radicalization does not necessarily lead to political violence. Democratic societies must learn to cope with radicalism in a way that allows them to maintain their capacities for innovation. At the same time, they must apply preventative measures wherever radicalization comes at the cost of plurality, democracy and human dignity. All of these considerations may not be easy to fit into a comprehensive political message; the results may only be observable in the long-term and the operating mechanisms may be difficult to measure. The resources that would need to be allocated for this may be disproportionately great. Ultimately, however, the phenomenon of radicalization and the long-term stability of the liberal social order could very well most benefit from such a broad analytical approach.

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