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A Threat to Open Societies? Conceptualizing the Radicalization of Society

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Which are the factors that favor societal radicalization? Few studies in international and national radicalization research have been directly interested in investigating the societal level and discussing the impact of radicalized groups, milieus and strata on society and its potential radicalization. This article provides on overview of current research and discusses factors favoring the radicalization of societies. The latter arises when the legitimacy of the political system is called into question and a society witnesses a departure from prevailing social norms in political dealings, especially if the use of political violence is no longer rejected. All in all, radicalized individuals, groups, milieus or strata can hold the potential for radicalizing societies. Increasing and incremental socio-political changes can lead to decreasing social cohesion. In view of this possibility, the authors call for strengthening social resilience and civilizing the public debate.

Keywords: radicalization of society, polarization, populism

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To some, developments such as the challenges to freedom of the press in Hungary or the independence of the judiciary in Poland, Brexit, the heated rhetoric in US-American political discourse or violent demonstrations such as those by right-wing extremists in Charlottesville, USA, or Chemnitz, Germany, are a sign of the accelerating transformation of European societies. Some observers associate these developments with the concept of radicalization and speak of "radicalized societ[ies]" (see Maaßen 2016; Lantemann 2016).

Taking up this train of thought, the present article assesses current societal developments through the lens of the radicalization concept. In using the term radicalization, however, we are not attempting to be alarmist (Backes 2013) nor affirm the claims of already radicalized societies cited above. Rather, by describing current dynamics and factors that are considered to foster the radicalization of society, we aim to advance the various attempts that have been made to conceptualize mass or macro-level radicalization.

At the same time, we do not deny that processes of radicalization – whether politically or religiously motivated – are posing major challenges to societies. When (ever) more people begin casting doubt on the legitimacy of the dominant order, increasingly turn their backs on prevailing norms, and/or when members of society use anti-democratic means, especially violence, to advance their objectives, democratic and open societies will find themselves under threat (see Abay Gaspar et al. 2020). This is what we understand as radicalization: a process through which beliefs and behavior change in directions that increasingly justify violence (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 416).

Yet, when considering radicalization at the level of society, the question of beliefs and behavior assumes a different angle. While the field of "radicalization-studies" appears to have been surging in recent years, a number of scholars have expressed their dissatisfaction with the term. Authors such as Horgan (2008), Bjørgo (Bjørgo and Horgan 2009) and Borum (2011a) question the notion as being primarily about cognitive and ideological processes. They, and others, criticize the concept further on account of

> its excessive focus on the individual level of analysis and its tendency to de-contextualize the phenomenon, and [we are] calling for greater attention to be given to the meso-level of radical movements and milieus and the role of the wider societal and political environment (Malthaner 2017: 370).[1]

Though many studies acknowledge the role of certain social and spatial environments, these have not been very well conceptualized due to the methodological focus on individuals or groups. At the same time, within the steadily growing body of interdisciplinary research on radicalization, many scholars agree that radicalization can occur at different levels, i.e. that entire societies have the potential to radicalize (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 417). In such processes of societal or "mass radicalization", as McCauley and Moskalenko called it (2008; 2011), not every member of a society will radicalize; instead, individuals may develop a growing affinity for repressive, anti-pluralist and discriminatory values, structures and actions, which, above all else, can jeopardize the viability of an open society. Accordingly, when thinking about the radicalization of society, we ask how the radicalization of individuals and groups can affect society as a whole and potentially lead to mass radicalization.

With this in mind, we offer an outline for how the "radicalization of society" can be conceptualized. This outline draws from a review of current research, from political and religious processes of radicalization as well as from conceptualizations of mass radicalization. We then expand our focus to literature beyond radicalization research in order to identify factors and dynamics that are deemed to enable the radicalization of society. We conclude by identifying, inter alia, polarization as an important factor and provide possible options for action. Our main contribution here is to offer a conceptualization of the "radicalization of society" by identifying and analyzing factors conducive to this process. We have therefore not included factors that are detrimental to such a development. While we are addressing the question of radicalization of society from a general perspective, in order to avoid being too abstract, we highlight how specific processes play out in individual societies by providing a specific focus on Germany to illustrate just what is at stake. We would like to note that our review is by no means exhaustive in covering all literature on radicalization. Given the ever-growing size of the field, this would be way beyond the scope of our article.[2]

1 Conceptualizing the "radicalization of society"

Nailing down an object of study as broad and multifaceted as "society" obviously makes the task of conceptualizing a process like the radicalization of society difficult. Methodologically speaking, there are different ways to proceed. By asking how the radicalization of individuals and groups affects society as a whole and potentially leads to mass radicalization, we took a bottom-up approach. In light of the difficulty of conceptualizing the radicalization of society, this approach offers the advantage of incorporating empirically driven literature about radicalization. We first take a closer look at research on different types of radicalization (such as right- or left-wing extremism) in the context of liberal democracies, providing our conceptualization with some empirical grounding and highlighting the diversity of the process of radicalization. Moreover, proceeding in a bottom-up fashion al-

[1] See also Horgan 2008; Kundnani 2012: 5; Schmid 2013: 3-4.

[2] For overviews cf. Borum (2011b; 2011c), Schmid (2013).

lows us to uncover the areas in which additional factors – not generated at the individual or group level – need to be addressed as well as identify the factors and elements in the process of mass radicalization that can specifically be attributed to the societal level. As mentioned above, it is highly likely that polarization is conducive to mass radicalization.

Using a set of keywords (e.g. "radicalization of society" and "mass radicalization"), we conducted a systematic review of current literature in relevant scientific databases.[3] In the period from 2000 to 2019, we identified 103 works that deal with the question of radicalization of society in different ways. The majority of these were empirical or theoretical models or typologies aiming to uncover different steps within radicalization processes, followed by a second group grounded on theoretical models that explain radicalization processes in general.

2 Political and religious processes of radicalization

As we emphasized above, radicalization is a process within which beliefs, feelings and behaviors become successively extreme. This ideological-behavioral distinction is important to bear in mind when asking the question of how the radicalization of individuals and groups affects society as a whole and potentially leads to mass radicalization.

In liberal democracies, radicalization is a process through which social concepts at odds with liberal democracy become hegemonic. Within the political debate, such positions have been designated as extremist, though the term extremism is, in itself, problematic. Semantically, at least, the term implies that a political center exists as a protected space, one surrounded by left-wing and right-wing extremes that distance themselves from it in somewhat equal measure. However, empirical findings from the case of Germany (see below) have demonstrated that certain parts of this middle ground are prone to adopting extreme-right positions. Moreover, it has proven difficult to define left-wing extremists at all. The term "left-wing extremism" is heavily contested, as it runs the risk of conflating the views of left-wing extremists with those of the democratic left (Teune 2018). These considerations illustrate just how inadequate the term extremism is. Yet, as existing literature primarily relies on this term, we have chosen to keep it and offer differentiated viewpoints any time we deem the term to be obviously lacking.

2.1 Islamism and left-wing extremism

Few studies have been conducted addressing the radicalizing effects that far-left extremist or Islamist individuals, groups, milieus and layers can have on a society. To start with, Kundnani (2012: 22) refers to the idea that radicalization arises via interactions between the state and the individual/group. He recommends including a critical viewpoint on anti-terrorism and anti-violence measures, primarily carried out by Western states, within a macro-level analysis. A study by O'Duffy (2008) also shows that views young Muslims hold about Britain's foreign policies are closely related to social, economic and cultural sources of dissatisfaction. As Ranstorp (2016: 4) argues, polarization is a "push factor" for radicalization. Drawing on the example of French and German efforts to combat terrorism since September 11, 2001, Mucha (2017: 231) identifies a causal connection between polarization and radicalization, asserting that "polarization and stigmatization breed radicalization". Here, polarization is conceptualized as a factor that is conducive to radicalization.

Research on the role of deprivation, disintegration and socio-economic factors provides insights into the inner workings of societies in relation to radicalization. The explanatory power of social disintegration and deprivation (due to poverty, injustice, exploitation and a lack of education) as a source of radicalization remains contested (Goli and Rezaei 2012; Maurer 2017). Research addressing the level of society includes theoretically informed empirical studies (cf. Malthaner and Waldmann 2014) that utilize the concept of milieus to create a bridge between groups and society. However, meritorious attempts such as these have been few and far between.

A similar picture arises with regard to left-wing extremism (Pfahl-Traughber 2014, 2017; Bergsdorf and van Hüllen 2011; Deutz-Schroeder and Schroeder 2016; Schroeder and Deutz-Schroeder 2015), with existing literature seriously struggling with the concep-

[3] Google Scholar, Web of Science, Pollux and WISO (one of the largest German-language compilations of literature references and full texts on economics and social sciences).

tualization of left-wing extremism. Can the use of violence be taken as the differentiating factor? Or is it the rejection of democracy and the existence of ideological differences within the left-wing spectrum? In the context of Germany, for example, existing studies work with the concept of "societal (or social) left-wing extremism" (Pfahl-Traughber 2014: 11), which is said to be a sounding board for the actions of left-wing extremist groups. This concept underlines the acceptance of the corresponding mentalities among the population, holding the potential for mobilizing the population. Yet, this is by no means limited to Germany. South-Western-Europe (Spain, Italy and Greece), in particular, have seen a rise of left-wing extremism in its variant of anarchist extremisms (focusing on violent anti-capitalist acts). For many, socio-economic instability combined with a rise in immigration, jihadi terrorism and reactions from right-wing extremist groups has led to an increase in anarchist extremism (Koch 2018). While this bespeaks what Eatwell called "cumulative extremism" (i.e., when one form of political extremism mobilizes against another), this assessment does not directly address how individual and group radicalization may effect society. That being said, it is also clear that ongoing and expanding cumulative extremism is likely to have some societal effect.

At the same time, we are at a lack for studies that can serve as a basis for analyzing the acceptance of left-wing extremist views within society (Pfahl-Traughber 2014: 1). While studies by Schroeder and Deutz-Schroeder (2015; 2016) have attempted to fill this gap, the reach of their findings is restricted by the difficulty of incorporating the vast diversity of the left-wing spectrum into a single denominator.

This mere handful of studies claim that radicalized views from the left side of the political spectrum do, indeed, find resonance among the population, especially within the political and social discourse (e.g., large segments of the population also take a position against racism). However, these results must be considered in relation to problems associated with the definition of the concept itself. Consequently, compared to studies about the "center", scholarship on "left-wing extremism" and "Islamism" include few, if any, studies that analyze the overall societal relevance of extremist views and their potential for radicalizing society.

2.2 Right-wing extremism

Globally, the research community in Germany boasts the longest tradition of research about right-wing extremism, with the greatest number of studies that have made use of a macro-analytical approach. In the German academic context, a so-called "consensus definition" (Decker et al. 2013; Kreis 2007: 5) has established itself, defining right-wing extremist views as a radicalized ideology of inequality. This can manifest itself in six areas: support for dictators, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Social Darwinism and the trivialization of National Socialism. Based on this, a questionnaire was developed for measuring right-wing extremist views (Decker et al. 2013).[4] A research group headed by Oliver Decker and Elmar Brähler makes use of this questionnaire every two years (the Leipzig "Mitte" Studies) to measure the spread of right-wing extremism in Germany. Drawing from Critical Theory, they work with the underlying assumption of secondary authoritarianism acting at the level of society, emerging in the form of authoritarian aggression at the level of the individual (Decker 2015). The key element of this assumption is that identification with power and strength does not, in fact, have to do with authority (a "*Führer*") but rather with a "strong economy". This element does, however, function in a comparable manner: like a *Führer*, it may demand submission; and though it compensates some forms of subjugation through an identification with a powerful economy, certain release valves must also be provided, such the devaluation of others.

A related concept is the syndrome of "group-related misanthropy". This concept was introduced by researchers in Bielefeld, Germany, to provide an explanation for the occurrence of right-wing extremist views on the basis of socio-cognitive social psychology. This syndrome is also taken to be a "core element of right-wing extremist views" (Küpper and Zick 2015) and it is based on the fundamental ideology of inequality. A longitudinal study (2002-2012) demonstrated that variations of group-related misanthropy

[4] The consensus definition does not incorporate the aspect of violence, and, as such, it can only make statements about the views held by right-wing extremists.

are widespread among German society and around "80 percent of respondents signalized at least one element of agreement" (Küpper and Zick 2015).

Numerous authors have emphasized the significance of the level of society considering that many currents of right-wing extremism are governed by historical and social transformations, embedded within an overarching societal framework (see Butterwegge 2006; Decker, Kiess, and Brähler 2013). Studies by Heitmeyer (1992, 2002) investigating the effects that social modernization and increasing individualization have on processes of social disintegration provide a case in point. A similar path is taken, albeit a contested one, by studies that identify relative deprivation and/or socio-economic disadvantages as catalysts of right-wing extremist radicalization (Stöss 2007; Steininger and Rotte 2009). Butterwegge places particular emphasis on the significance of society, arguing that right-wing extremism is "not to be removed from the respective social conditions" (Butterwegge 2006: 16). As opposed to many other authors, he deems right-wing extremism to be a problem that arises out of macro-societal processes.

In the research series about group-related misanthropy titled "German Conditions" (*Deutsche Zustände* 2002-2011), studies by Leipzig-based authors led by Oliver Decker (since 2002, last study from 2016) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (2006-2012, in cooperation with the Leipzig team, and, since 2014, with a team headed by Andreas Zick from Bielefeld) investigated whether populist and/or extremist views are represented at the center of society. The assumption here is that the "'center' [is] not the protective realm of democracy" (Decker, Kiess, and Brähler 2016: 15); rather, it contains a "reservoir of hostile and right-wing populist ideologies, from which right-wing populist as well as right-wing extremist milieus can draw" (Zick and Küpper 2015). In this context, "center" refers to the center of the political-ideological spectrum. The reasons for this are complex and anything but monocausal. Adherents of group-related misanthropy syndrome identify the syndrome as a "hinge" that connects extremist views with the center of society. The danger lurking below the surface of this syndrome, according to this argument, lies in the connection between right-wing extremism and alleged normality. Group-related misanthropy "prescribes normality, in that it claims that inequality is normal" (Zick et al. 2016: 81). At the same time, the authors of the Leipzig study series describe the societal center as itself being fragile, drawing from the concept of the authoritarian character and from Lipset's concept of the extremism of the center mentioned above (Decker, Kiess, and Brähler 2016). A perceived threat along with a sense of political powerlessness and an inclination towards authoritarianism all appear to play a significant role (Decker 2015; Küpper and Zick 2015).

A more recent study in this context (Decker, Kiess, and Brähler 2016) has investigated the contemporary state of affairs within German society over an extended period of time. Using socio-demographic indicators and quantitative methods, this research compares the political views held by various population groups representative of the overall German populace. In order to determine the groups within the population, the authors use data from the Leipzig studies on the socio-political center from the years 2006 and 2016. The comparison reveals two different results: first, they indicate a strengthening of the ideological center, which can be seen as a positive development. At the same time, the study identifies signs of polarization and radicalization over a period of ten years, demonstrating that some segments of German society clearly harbor right-wing extremist views, giving rise to processes of polarization in confrontation with believers in democracy and anti-democrats. The establishment of independent defense leagues (such as "Gruppe Freital" in Germany or the "English Defence League" in the UK) or individual acts are telling of the consequences that can arise from this form of confrontational polarization.

We should emphasize that this comparative consideration of various types of extremism should not be taken as an attempt to portray them as equal. In each national context, research has focused on different types of extremism, accordingly the state of affairs is different. A consideration of these three types of extremism does, at least, show that processes of political polarization nurtured by extremist positions are, indeed, able to advance societal radicalization. Such comparisons are, however, always subject to the cy-

cles of public attention related to the contemporary relevance granted to varying extremisms.

3 Conceptual reflections on the process of a radicalization of society

Moving away from these empirical findings, conceptual literature on radicalization has shown us that past research has primarily considered the individual and group levels when discussing the role of social structures within the context of individual and group-specific processes of radicalization (Kjøk et al. 2003; Midlarsky 2011; Hegghammer 2013). Few studies focusing on the societal level investigate the effects on society originating from radicalized individuals and groups (Malthaner 2017: 388).

As mentioned above, we are unable to provide an exhaustive overview of recent literature and instead focus on the bodies of literature that came up in our database searches (see p. 3). Three branches are particularly interesting in this context. First, one crucial insight from social movement literature (cf. della Porta and Tarrow 1986; della Porta 1995) shows us that radicalization is embedded in a social and political context as well as broader processes of contention. Second, this insight is in line with studies on political violence: both branches analytically embed radical movements and violent groups within a field populated by different actors involved in the conflict. In his seminal work, Tilly (1978) illustrated how processes of modernization and nation-building changed the actions adopted by movements as these developments provided for new targets and new opportunity structures (cf. also Traugott 1995). In recent times, we must add globalization and the Internet as crucial external influences on radical movements and groups (Winter et al. 2020, in this focus section). In both fields, authors are attentive to the "social environments and spatial settings, such as micromobilization settings in the form of countercultural milieus, radical milieus, or radical networks emerging at the fringes of social movements as well as movement safe spaces" (Malthaner 2017: 376; cf. also della Porta 1995; Malthaner 2014; Cross and Snow 2011; Malthaner and Waldmann 2014).

Third, the studies by McCauley and Moskalenko (2008; 2011) are highly instructive, with their consideration of collective processes of radicalization and, particularly the concept of mass radicalization, being particularly telling. In their view, mass radicalization occurs in conflict with other states or other political groups (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 418). For instance, "a state and its citizens are radicalized in the run-up to interstate conflicts and war, and, as evident in the U.S. after the attacks of September 11, 2001, in state response to terrorism as well" (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 416). They identify three mechanisms that are relevant to mass radicalization: jujitsu politics, hate and martyrdom. Jujitsu politics consists of "using the enemy's strength against him" (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 427), as external attacks produce mass radicalization. Following an attack, calls for cohesion are replaced by calls for nationalism, patriotism, etc., whereas terrorist sympathizers might now mobilize due to the reaction to the attack on the part of the general public. Hate as mechanism of mass radicalization comes into play when negative perceptions of conflict parties become extreme, potentially leading to the dehumanization of the other group (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 427). Martyrdom can have radicalizing effects as giving one's life for a cause exerts strong powers of persuasion, convincing others of the rightfulness and trustfulness of a group's motives and ideology (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 428).

For collective radicalization, one finding offered by these different studies and their focus on processes of contention, populated social environments, hate and action-reaction mechanisms is the increase in hostile encounters between different individuals and groups within a society. Mechanisms of group-polarization and general dynamics of polarization loom large when attempting to conceptualize societal or mass radicalization (see McCauley and Moskalenko 2011; della Porta and LaFree 2011; Schmid 2013: 18; Mucha 2017). Eatwell's concept of "cumulative extremism" encompasses such processes of polarization leading to radicalization, with reference to "the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms" (Eatwell 2006: 205).

Political polarization is taken to be a "process in which a dichotomy (increasingly) emerges" (Schmidt 2010: 601), though it is not necessarily a matter of

only one type of dichotomy. Polarization exemplifies the relations between civil society groups and minorities as well as how they interact with one another. Politically polarized relations among social actors may manifest though a largely hostile or confrontational approach. Tilly (2003) advances the argument that polarization is one of the mechanisms that explain the form and incidence of collective violence: "Polarization generally promotes collective violence because it makes the us-them boundary more salient, hollows out the uncommitted middle, intensifies conflicts across the boundary, raises the stakes of winning or losing, and enhances opportunities for leaders to initiate action against their enemies" (Tilly 2003: 21-22).

International literature on radicalization assumes that processes of radicalization are primarily reflected in the polarizing tendencies of public opinion (McCauley and Moskalenko 2011: 259; Schmid 2013: 4). This may occur, for example, as happened in the context of Germany when right-wing populist views on "migration" polarized the center of society and made use of derogatory, hostile portrayals of refugees. Such views establish themselves as an antithesis to various civil society groups that assist refugees and advocate for diversity (Zick and Küpper 2015: 10). Moreover, when those affected draw comparisons to refugee groups or migrant communities, a perception of subjective disadvantage can arise, with polarizing effects. Generally speaking, such comparisons are not necessarily motivated by objective factors of unfairness in relation to other social groups. Social psychology researchers, in contrast, use Social Identity Theory, Terror Management Theory and authoritarianism to discuss subjective needs (e.g., for recognition and status) that function as motivators for making social comparisons (Endrikat et al. 2002; Greenberg, Pyszczinski, and Solomon 1986).

However, the professed democratic belief in pluralism and the right to express opposition does not inevitably contradict polarized political confrontation. In representative democracies, "a certain degree of polarization between competing groups in their striving to gain democratically legitimate power can be seen as a constitutive element of this type of system" (Helms 2017: 64). Polarization is not negative, per se, but democratic cohesion and stability depend on "how, despite all divergences and differences among groups, equality, especially that of its social minorities, is protected and strengthened" (Zick 2016: 204). In addition, stability is also determined by democracy's defensive potential in the face of extreme orientations seeking to contest or replace it.

We can conclude by saying that the radicalization of individuals or groups may bring about the radicalization of society as a whole (see Decker and Joppke 2018). The point at which society can be considered radicalized is ultimately a normative question; however, siding with Tilly's argument on polarization being a catalyst for collective violence, we conclude that polarized situations promote processes of radicalization.

4 Radicalizing factors within society

In this section, we broaden our view and consider factors in the context of socio-political manifestations such as populism and anti-Semitism, arguing that numerous factors operating together, rather than single factors alone, are what fosters the radicalization of a society. Such factors are able to politically polarize society to the extent that individuals or groups come to stand in hostile opposition to a broad segment of the populace, leading to ruptures within society and jeopardizing social cohesion. These include the rise of populism and populist parties, the public approach to migration and Islamophobia, factors involved in re-nationalization/ ethnicizing, and changes in the socio-political discourse. Anti-Semitism rounds off this group and exhibits parallels across the three forms of extremism depicted above.

4.1 Populism in the 21st century

The successful Brexit referendum and the victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 United States presidential elections marked a breakthrough for populism within Western societies, which had gained a West European visage through parties such as the Front National in France and movements such as Pegida in Germany. The potential for populism to radicalize society as a whole was perhaps most vividly expressed in the "elephant chart" created by former World Bank economist Milanovic (2012). In a single stroke, the chart visualized the social significance of globalization, its

Figure 1: Changes in real income between 1998 and 2008 across various percentiles of global income distribution

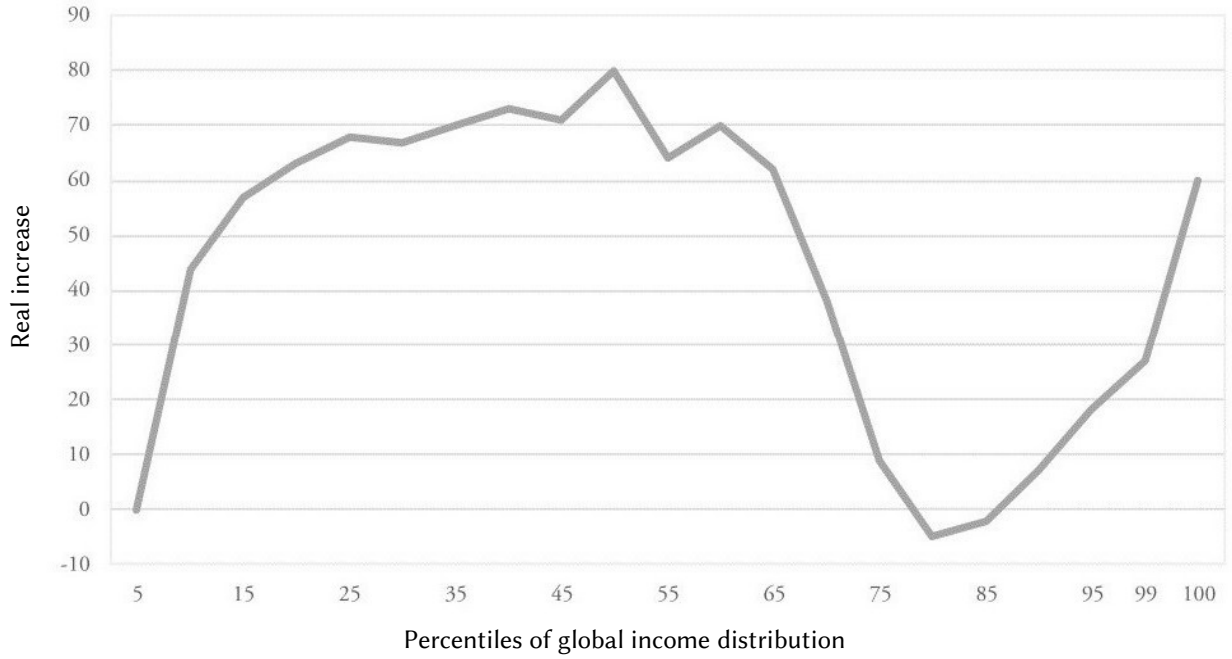

Image based on Milanovic (2012: 13).

winners and losers, and highlighted the polarizing developments taking place in Western societies. The chart shows the development of global income growth from 1988 to 2008, with growth initially rising rapidly from the lower to mid income brackets (indicating significant income growth) followed by a sharp decline in the upper brackets before rising once again in the very top bracket – the upper "trunk" of the elephant.

Three key messages can be taken from this. First, the poorest 5% of the world's population (around one billion people) are just as poor as they were before the onset of globalization; these are the individuals excluded from globalization, especially in Africa. Second, even more than the new middles classes in China and India, the actual winners of globalization are the wealthiest one percent of the population, which still accounts for some 60 million people. The third message from the chart, and the core finding, is that the actual losers of globalization are those groups that can still be labeled as the "upper middle class" – though they are ranked no higher than the lower middle class in developed OECD countries. Their income level has either stagnated or even shrunk in the last three decades. They hold the potential for populist movements and parties, without necessarily being economically deprived. It would be possible to characterize the experiences of this class as "a negative balance of acknowledgment" (Endrikat et a. 2002) and apply the broad concept of recognition to it. Apart from economic factors, the absence of interpersonal recognition, the rejection of civic recognition and the dismantling of so-called "industrial citizenship" also contribute to this negative balance (Honneth 1992; Brinkmann and Nachtwey 2017).

The wrath of this class is not directed against the grotesquely expanded wealth of the ultra-rich, but rather against immigrants, who are the most visible expression of the rising internationalization and individualization of market society – one which is no longer able to offer people the same degree of purpose and security that the national welfare state once could. Their wrath is also directed at the "liberal elites" who have supposedly turned their backs on nation and tradition and even seek to eliminate these values.

Existing literature often draws a distinction between economic and cultural explanations for new populist movements. Inglehart and Norris (2016: 2), for example, differentiate between "economic insecurity" and "cultural backlash" to account for the rising strength

of populist right-wing parties. However, this is an erroneous depiction precisely because populism is not an economic class movement but rather an imagined popular movement that claims to advocate the common good, while, in reality, only referring to a specific group. This may, as an example, include the possibility of "being and remaining German" and maintaining the "traditional family as a model", just to cite the political program promoted by the German AfD party (Alternative for Germany) (AfD 2016: 6, 40).

Populism is more about appearance than content; it is a versatile political style that can be used on the right as well as on the left, one which must be filled and made more tangible with additional content. In Western and Eastern Europe, nationalism usually serves as a filler (though not in left-wing populist Southern Europe). The nationalist variant of populism sees itself as a protest of the "pure nation" against a "corrupt elite" (Mudde 2004). Added to this is the conception of a homogeneous populace, which today sees itself as under threat from migration and refugees. Both of these coalesce within nationalistic populism, which blames the "liberal" elites for the ostensible policies of open borders and uncontrolled immigration. As international comparative studies (see Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Mudde 2007) have demonstrated, these are the two dominant issues on the agendas of right-wing populist parties in Europe: a rejection of the European Union and a rejection of immigration.

When it comes to political polarization, political scientists have been particularly interested in the polarizing effects that political party systems have on governmental systems. Some political scientists consider "cartel parties" (Mair 2015) to be the ideologically leveling, increasingly pragmatic majority parties of the neoliberal world order that have been absorbed by the state apparatus and that have served as the reason for the rise of populist parties. In response, parties such as AfD, the Front National or Ukip have formed as a radical alternative and polarization is often attributed to their emergence (Bergfeld and Fischer 2017; Hövermann and Groß 2016). The development of the AfD from a relatively moderate right-wing populist party (when compared to its counterparts across Europe) to a party with strong tendency for right-wing extremist views is instructive. A brief comparison of their platforms in 2016 and 2017[5] shows a clear radicalization of the party platform. The roots of this change are obvious: the international success of the populists in Great Britain and the United States in 2016 clearly bolstered the position of right-wing elements within AfD. But this has also had to do with the endogenous polarization and radicalization of the political discourse following the surprising breakthrough of Western populism in the wake of the refugee movement in 2015 – a historically exceptional event marked by what was likely the greatest thrust of international migration that any European country had experience over the last 70 years. Considering the singularity of this event, we may presume that further radicalization of the political party discourse will soon reach its limits. How other parties will interact with AfD will depend on the extent to which a growing openness towards repressive, anti-pluralist and discriminatory structures and actions solidifies.

4.2 Migration, Islamophobia and shifts in the socio-political discourse

The way in which migration is handled has not only played a role in strengthening populist parties and populism, it has also been central to the issue of self-image: the questions of "who are we?" and "who belongs?" This identity dimension is relevant at the level of society, as it is here that the awareness of society as a whole and the construction of the other, as well as belonging, take shape. Polarization is incited when the deepening threats of foreign infiltration, exclusion and structural discrimination take root in the wake of economic crises and trans-nationalization (Zick, Küpper, and Hövermann 2011; Heitmeyer 2012a).

Discursive constructions of identity that build on an antagonistic, hostile relationship among social groups, prone to polarizing a society, can be seen as a contributing factor to the radicalization of the latter (see Mason 2015; Suhay 2015). Studies on social cohesion (see Rapp 2016) and on the role of social media emphasize a connection among identity constructions with social media leading to a loss of the "common public sphere" and, thus, to isolated, polarized and potentially hostile groups, in extreme cases (Webster 2011; Holmes and McNeal 2016). Zarkov (2017: 199),

[5] For an extended comparison see Herschinger et al. 2018.

for instance, assumes that identity constructions foster negative opinions about social groups that are not deemed to be members of majority society. This often occurs when a discursive attribution of characteristics establishes an inimical relationship between "us" and "the others". These sorts of defamatory strategies of polarization, through which political rivals are turned into enemies, are typical for extremist (right-wing) parties and (right-wing) populist actors, and it is essentially based on the proposition of the "inequality of social groups" (Küpper and Zick 2015; Wodak 2015b). A hostile stance between the Others and one's own people can be made to resonate with society as a whole via public fearmongering (Nagel 2016), ultimately leading to polarization.

The constructed borders of national identity can develop into a radicalizing force when they forward the idea of the inequality of the Others, as authors such as Klein (2014: 224) have shown to be the case in Germany (see also Heitmeyer 2012b: 15). This particularly applies to Islamophobia, and the rejection of refugees and Muslims, which, according to countless studies, has been on the rise. Using the example of Germany, Zick, Küpper and Krause (2016; also Zick 2016: 207) demonstrate that the hostility towards Muslims and immigrants harbored by right-wing populist and right-wing extremist groups has found resonance at the center of society. Moreover, as 40% of respondents believe that German "society has been infiltrated by Islam", Islamophobia has itself turned into "a conspiracy myth" (Zick 2016: 207). Decker, Kiess and Brähler (2016) also highlight this point by showing that Islamophobia is most strongly articulated among anti-democratic authoritarian milieus. Some scholars have even begun to speak of a normalization of Islamophobia within the public discourse, which has been promoted, not least, by the Pegida movement (Bergfeld and Fischer 2017: 19; Mondon and Winter 2017).

Discourse-analytical studies have investigated this development among political and medial discourses, public opinion, the visible positions taken by various social groups in relation to one another within it, the negotiation of social conflicts and the resultant shift in norms. These studies highlight how discursive processes of normalization lead to the "normalization of the not-normal" (such as immigrants posing a threat) and to a concurrent shift in the borders of what can be said (through fake news and fake science as well as through attacks against democratic institutions such as the judiciary and the media, reminiscent of the "lying press") (Wodak 2018: 324; Jäger and Jäger 2007).

These studies have generally not investigated such processes of normalization in view of radicalization but rather in relation to the construction of immigration in the public discourse, right-wing populist discourses (Wodak 2015b, 2015a; Link 2018) or national defense against terrorism. Studies on terrorism, for example, often address the matter of how polarizations are created by way of discursive formulations of a (new) consensus – the "war on terror" – or the (altered) constructions of identity (such as the "Axis of Evil"), thereby promoting radicalization. Discourse-analytical studies on the topic of immigration and integration illustrate that the definition of "who belongs to 'us' and who does not; what is of benefit to 'us' and what is not; what one must fear and what one must not; who is at fault; etc." (Wodak 2015a: 32) leads groups within society to adopt a hostile stance towards each other. These types of polarizations do not arise overnight: they often exhibit a historical continuity and foster the normalization of certain positions, shift the borders of what can be said and foster hostile polarizations (Mondon and Winter 2017; Cammaerts 2018).

Though the consequences of such politically polarized situations can vary, they are also far reaching. For instance, they have the potential to empower political and social action when broad restrictions on civil liberties are enacted for the purposes of protecting the nation against terrorism, thereby altering the relationship between state and citizen (see Jackson 2005; Herschinger 2011). The same is true for cases in which social realities and norms are changed, despite opposition, such as the liberalization of marriage for same-sex partners or entitlements to citizenship. The contested nature of diversity in the public discourse is instructive here. This debate reveals the necessity for social diversity in a pluralist, democratic society and the anti-pluralist movements that advocate for an "end to tolerance", which can have the effect of intensifying polarization.

4.3 Re-nationalization/re-ethnicizing

Another factor contributing to the radicalization of society is the phenomenon of re-nationalization/re-ethnicizing, i.e., the spread of right-wing extremist views among individuals of foreign ancestry in Western Europe (e.g., the Turkish nationalist group "Grey Wolves" or the perpetrator of the 2016 Munich shooting, a German-Iranian). In Germany, this sort of ethnicization of social conflicts goes hand in hand with the escalation of social confrontations and processes of social pluralization. Ethno-cultural group identities, in particular, are stimulated in order to gain an advantage in the struggle for social and economic distribution. This ethnicization emerges as a "mechanism for social exclusion" that "negatively labels" immigrants and perpetuates the privileges of a dominant majority (Butterwegge 2006: 186). A growing process of re-ethnicization and re-nationalization may result in a radicalization processes related to one's place of origin as well as a response to the fault lines and exclusionary mechanisms of the host society. Research on immigration has shown that there is a mounting racism among migrants, drawing support from nationalistic claims to superiority and the devaluation of other groups and minorities (Bozay 2017b: 57).

As argued in research on radicalization, trans-nationalization is taken to be an essential element of re-ethnicization/re-nationalization. Domestic political conflicts raging in the respective countries of origin of immigrant groups become manifest in the receiving country. Studies show that views held by young Muslims about Britain's foreign policies are closely related to social, economic and cultural sources of dissatisfaction (O'Duffy 2008) and that debates surrounding the conflict in the Middle East, policies towards the Kurdish population and relations between Turkey and Europe have an impact on (young) Germans of foreign ancestry. The more that domestic political conflicts in these countries of origin escalate, the greater the likelihood that fault lines will develop within the society of immigrants, some of which may lead to violent confrontations (Bozay 2017a; Jikell 2017).

These conflicts show the degree to which social and national problems are ethnicized and how the activities of right-wing extremist individuals of foreign ancestry relate to their country of origin (see Ortner 2010; Bozay 2017a, 2017b). On the other hand, this dynamic of self-ethnicization and self-exclusion can also be explained by the (perceived) right-wing populist and anti-Muslim atmosphere prevalent within the host society. Here, we are dealing with the social "importation" of ethnic conflicts from the country of origin to the host country (see Brieden 1996: 17-19). One result of this is the flourishing of large numbers ultra-nationalistic umbrella organizations with a high potential for mobilization. Ultimately, the polarizations among various groups and social layers that arise as a result of this also might lead to a radicalization of society.

4.4 Anti-Semitism

One commonality shared by all three forms of extremism considered above is their fundamental anti-Semitic stance. Looking at the context of Germany, studies on right-wing extremism include anti-Semitism within the right-wing extremist scale. In terms of left-wing extremism and Islamism, the positions taken with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict are telling. Among the former group, this varies depending on which current of the left-wing spectrum one considers: anti-imperialists reject the existence of Israel and criticize Israeli foreign policy as being racist (Ullrich 2015) while the leftist so-called anti-Germans are seen as a "supportive of Israel" with an unconditional position in support of the state of Israel and Judaism (Kestler 2007: 52). Within Islamism, the conflict serves to construct a collective concept of the enemy, "Israel", as well as a new Muslim collective identity. The concept of the enemy creates "community and a sense of belonging" (Müller 2012: 65) centered around the rejection of Israel and the concurrent glorification of one's own Muslim group. A study by Mansel and Spaiser (2013) references society as a whole, addressing the racist, anti-Semitic and anti-democratic views held by young people (of and without foreign ancestry) in Germany. In a measure of "Israel-related anti-Semitism", 41.5% of Arab young people agree with the statement that "Jewish people are less likable due to Israel's policies", compared to only 2.9% of young people who are not of foreign ancestry (Mansel and Spaiser 2013: 193).

One possible factor contributing to anti-Semitic views, especially among people of Arab and Turkish ancestry, relates to the political and radical interpretation of Islam. Islamist movements propagate anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and call for a "struggle against the Jews" (Müller 2012: 58). Here, Kiefer (2007: 72) refers to "Islamist anti-Semitism", citing that anti-Semitism in the Arab world is primarily an "import from Europe". The issue of anti-Semitic sentiments among refugees is also currently being debated. One recent study found "a broad range of views towards Jewish people" to exist (Jikell 2017: 8). Mansel and Spaiser (2013: 75) claim that experiences of discrimination and exclusion are interwoven with anti-Semitic views, especially considering that young people suffering from such experiences tend to be more susceptible to anti-Semitism.

5 Conclusion

We may conclude by affirming that the research discussed thus far highlights that political polarization constitutes a threat to open society by promoting its very radicalization. Significant socio-political changes such as growth in extremist views among the middle of society, the rise of populist parties and an increase in populism, a problematic approach to immigration, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and exclusionary identity constructions are all polarizing factors. This results in a reduction of social cohesion as polarization leads to hostile confrontations between extremist individuals, groups, milieus and social layers as well as between the proponents of non-radicalized positions. Such confrontation can lead to a calcification of positions, be they political or religious. The radicalizing effect primarily arises from the fact that calcified views do more than just turn their backs on the predominant norms, they also effect a shift towards less openness, diversity and plurality within society. This is likewise supported by an increased willingness to employ violence – which does not necessarily refer to terrorist acts but, rather, and in particular, the consistently high number of attacks targeting refugees mentioned above. The root of the radicalization of society as a whole by individuals and groups lies in the very questioning of the legitimacy of the prevailing order.

We have offered a conceptualization of the radicalization of society emerging from radicalizing individuals or groups, who polarize society and create a climate conducive to radicalization. While we have shown that societal radicalization is a multifaceted process, the various factors considered here all share the capacity to polarize society. By identifying polarization as a main promoter of radicalization – deemed to "increase the propensity of all participants in interaction to employ violent means" (Tilly 2003: 229) – we have gained a solid perspective for further research into the radicalization of society.

What is needed now is thorough comparative research on radicalization that is able to draw consolidated conclusions about the relationship between radicalization phenomena and changes within society. While it is not easy to draw conclusions at the level of entire societies (hence our illustrative focus on Germany), some factors presented here might be instructive for comparative research. Based on factors such as anti-Semitism – which is not only a component of extremist ideologies but also a common thread that runs throughout society – comparative views can provide us with insights into how exactly anti-Semitism manifests today, the potential for mobilization it holds and how it can be counteracted.

A comparative perspective would also allow us to conduct a thorough analysis of the role of the state as a political representative of society. To what extent can government measures have a radicalizing effect on (segments of) society? We should not overlook the instance of co-radicalization by the state as a catalyst for radicalization potential. This point is currently being addressed by international radicalization research on Islamist currents and it may be expanded to other forms of extremism.

Furthermore, comparative approaches stand to benefit from the idea of conceptualizing society in terms of communication or discourse, as important sociological studies have done in the past. By applying such an understanding of society, this perspective could approach the potential for radicalization in society as a whole that arises out of the dynamics between the structural and the individual or group-specific level by looking more deeply into the ways in which they interact (see Pisoiu 2013: 55-57). At the same time, po-

larization as a catalyst for societal radicalization could be built upon using these different perspectives, allowing for a more nuanced conceptualization of how the radicalization of individuals and groups affects society as a whole and potentially leads to mass radicalization.

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