



Terrorism and Political Violence Association
Student Research Network

Radicalisation and Counter Radicalisation: Causes and Policies

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(Image Source: You Tube)

- Why does radicalisation occur and how to prevent it?
- Increase in Islamophobic attitudes since 9/11
- Need to prevent social marginalisation of vulnerable people to prevent them from becoming radicalised

Islamic Radicalisation in Europe

Since the 9/11 attacks the question of how to deal with the problem of radical Islam has dominated news stories and many political discussions. The rise of ISIS and their links to terror attacks carried out recently in Paris and Belgium has made the issue of Islamic violent extremism even more prevalent in Europe. One of the perpetrators behind the terrorist attacks, [Salah Abdeslam](#) was a French national born in Belgium and [Abdelhamid Abaaoud](#), believed to be the mastermind behind the attack was born and raised in Belgium, which raises the question how and why did these individuals become radicalised?

Far right activists such as Britain First of the English Defence league would argue that extremism is a directly related to the Islamic ideology that is inherently violent in its teachings. Taking a literal interpretation, the Qur'an does indeed have [many versus](#) which can be seen as radical or inciting violence, but the same can be said for the bible (see Numbers 31:17-18, Ephesians 6:5 and Jeremiah 19:9 for all but a few examples) yet Christianity has been the official religion of the UK for centuries. This also fails to explain why the majority of Muslims are able to coexist peacefully with non-Muslims in Europe; the simple fact of the matter is that it all comes down to a case of interpretation, there are certain schools of Islam such as Wahhabism which takes an ultraconservative view of Islam (which does not directly lead to committing terrorists attacks) and on the other hand there are more flexible schools such as Hanafism. Islam is just like any other religion in the sense that there are multiple interpretations with varying degrees of conservativeness so why has Islam been singled out? As previously mentioned, since 9/11 and the war on terror Islam has replaced communism as the West's number one enemy, Islam is the [world's fastest growing religion](#) and conflicts in the Middle East have seen a huge influx of Muslims arriving in Europe so their presence is becoming ever more worrying for Western leaders.

Radicalisation can be viewed as cyclical process, firstly the individual becomes frustrated, this then leads to the individual becoming isolated from a society, which does not share the same values and frustration as them, and this can potentially lead to radicalisation. There are many different reasons why a Muslim may become frustrated, often one of the most cited reasons for frustration is the 'war on terror' which appears to have become synonymous with a 'war on Muslims'. Atrocities committed in Iraq have a ripple effect on Muslims living in Europe, many of which would have Iraqi origins. This makes it harder to identify with European values and culture, thus potentially causing the embrace of a more radical Islamic culture. The war on terror also brought into play the concept of defensive jihad, the idea that there is a compulsory obligation to defend Muslim communities under attack. This is a concept that is not exclusively embraced by radical Muslims; in fact modernist Muslim scholars such as Sayyid Ahmed Khan accept the obligation of offensive jihad whilst believing Islam and the Western world could co-exist. There is also an acceptance amongst most Muslims on the principle of a covenant of security (adq aman) which states that Muslims who enjoy the protection of a non-Muslim state are forbidden from harming the state or its citizens. However this ceases to be valid if said state wages war against Muslims. So the war on terror can be seen to make the covenant invalid, which then permits Muslims to attack the state, opening up the path for increased radicalisation and violence.

Whilst the policies of the war on terror are the source of much of the frustration experienced by many modern-day Muslims, the Islamophobic attitude of Western media perpetuates this frustration. Newspapers such as the [Daily Mail](#) and the [Sun](#) continue to portray Muslims in a negative light and has caused [Islamophobic attacks to rise by 70%](#) from 2014-2015. Hostility towards Muslims can often cause them to feel isolated within the community and seek hospitality within Muslim communities, which extremists can use to ["exploit their poison"](#) (Ismael Lea South).

I am not suggesting that responsibility for the radicalisation of Muslims lies solely in the hands of the west, if there was no religious grounding for these violent actions then they wouldn't occur (or at least occur significantly less frequently). My point is that perhaps less people would interpret Islam in a violent way if it weren't for the hostility of the West towards Islam. If Muslims are expected to apologise and take responsibility for crimes they didn't commit then what difference does it make if they do actually commit these crimes? The marginalisation of Muslims in society and the presence of far right nationalist parties are only serving to push more people towards extremism. It is important to ensure that whilst we are targeting terror groups such as ISIS in the Middle East we are simultaneously making an effort to accommodate Muslims in Western society by cracking down on Islamophobic hate crimes and accepting them as part of our community so they are not isolated and drawn towards extremist Islamic ideologies.

How radicalisation occurs

No doubt that there are common factors that contribute to, and facilitate radicalisation. However, it is quite difficult to specify exactly the complex interplay between the factors and thus processes of radicalisation. Although there are different ways in which radicalisation as a process occurs and there are no single mechanisms that are transferable from case to case, one can see a general contextual mechanism in which radicalisation can be identified. This includes three elements which will continue to be part of the radicalization process for a long time. These are ideology, social relations and activism.

For the ideological element, a person becomes radicalised when exposed to the ideology of the radicalising group. Such ideology may (or may not) be non-negotiable about what is good for society and thus justifies violence as a means to enforce the good. Here one should distinguish between radicalisation and violent radicalisation (both religious and secular ideologies). In fact, there is nothing unique about religion or particular religions like Islam that make them distinct from secular beliefs in causing violence in a politicised domain. For the second element: the social relations. Joining groups is very important for individual's social life. These relations can be personal face-to-face relationships or/and virtual like becoming part of an online community of people who share their views. The internet is nowadays the main tool to legitimize extremist views. However, online-active individuals are very often already influenced by extremist views available to them through their social networks before becoming further indoctrinated via internet. The last element is activism where the radicalised person begins to act up violently, causing immediate threat to public.

What one might suggest here is that we should see radicalisation as a dynamic and chain reactional process. There is no single narrative, individuals may become radicalised for a number of reasons. Radicalised individuals are usually influenced and triggered by vary social, economic, psychological, ideological and/or political triggers. Therefore it is always crucial to find allies from within the community to halt radicalisation and its violent narratives by producing credible anti-violent narratives based on or by those radical defectors themselves who can go public with stories of disillusion and disgust that accompanied their own experiences.

Assessment of current counter-radicalisation policies:

Radicalisation occurs in a number of contexts. As individual's transition towards radicalisation and then to criminal activism (terrorism) is not precisely pre-

determined, programmes and initiatives on counter-radicalisation are facing relatively very subjective disorganised processes. Consequently, they sometimes found it difficult to see the thin line between extremism/religious fundamentalism and violent extremism. In the United Kingdom, alongside 'Prevent Strategy': the Governmental Counter-Terrorism/extremism Strategy, launched in June 2011 and updated in October 2015, there are some local projects work to tackle radicalisation. For example, both the update governmental Counter-Extremism Strategy and Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT) at Henry Jackson Society call to broaden counter-terrorism strategy to include non-violent extremism. According to them 'no-violent' extremism can also legitimise terrorism via creating suitable atmosphere that tolerates and popularises extremists views that terrorist exploit to justify their criminal acts. However, we should be careful of when and at what stage should force be used to prevent terrorism. A premature intervention could give the opposite outcomes wished. To challenge radicalisation in its early stages which includes fundamentalism (upholding belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture), it is sometime better deploying third party intervention rather than using government enforcement force. It should be noticed that the increasing commitment to strict belief is different from that of the radicalisation towards violent extremism. We cannot always assume violent outcomes from such a commitment to unconventional belief.

There might thus be a need to review the current discourse about radicalisation that is adopted by some counter-radicalisation projects. The stress should be much more on addressing issues of social marginalisation, identity crisis and lack of integration and building effective counter-propaganda, using both popular press and virtual social media to challenge that propaganda which targets vulnerable audience on internet. Moreover, educational system should not work to make the relationship between the state and minorities groups seen as an issue of state security. Perceiving religious or ethnic groups as a security threat not a matter of social policy could lead to dangerous outcomes for democracy. Those groups that oppose the main stream values of society are not necessarily more inclined to radicalisation and terrorism. Seeing such oppositional voices as a potential threat to that particular narrative of national identity could silence, alienate and isolate them. The majority of carriers of those voices are only calling on to alternatives policies in a democratic society, not to forcefully impose their own through terrorism.

Furthermore, if the state perceives certain groups as unable to respect human rights, anxieties in the society as a whole will increase and hate crimes especially those carried by far-right individuals and groups will rise too. We should not fail to highlight the shared commitment to human rights across ethnical and religious lines. Nevertheless, one should mention that the updated Counter-Extremism Strategy acknowledges the importance of partnership with communities to defeat extremism, stressing on the 'shared' values' that unite the country/society.

Finally one may suggest increasing across ethical and religious public debate in the society about the share values and the community problems such as identity crisis and isolation that lead towards justification of violence and terrorism, stressing that injustice can be inflicted on everyone regardless of their religious or ethnical belongings.

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