Processual Models of Radicalization into Terrorism: A Best Fit Framework Synthesis

Ghent - ESC | 19.09.2019

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SEQUENCE OF THE TRAJECTORY TOWARDS TERRORISM

how radicalization occurs (i.e. courses), rather than the question why radicalization might occur (i.e. causes)
01 RELEVANCE
  for counter-terrorism policy

02 PROCESSUAL MODELS
  critical note on

03 METHODOLOGY
  Best Fit Framework Synthesis

04 RESULTS
  thematic analysis & meta-framework

05 DISCUSSION
RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

To what extent is the urge to intervene as early as possible supported by theoretical or empirical evidence on the process of radicalization?
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is radicalization seen as a chronological or sequential process?

2. To what extent has existing research succeeded in mapping the chronological sequence of the radicalization process?

3. To what extent are the existing models and frameworks consistent? What are the similarities or dissimilarities across the existing models? To what extent can these models be integrated as an evaluative framework of counterterrorism policy?
Critical note on processual models

Phase models numerous represented among efforts to map the pathways towards terrorism. But a great deal of criticism due to often dogmatic linear character. Phases are not necessarily successive in nature (overlap, skipping of stages, abandon process, etc.).

Nevertheless, processual basis is only thing experts agree upon. Inclusion in study: models that represent a certain process, in the sense of “a sequence of events, involving steps or operations that are usually ordered and/or interdependent”, but at the same time acknowledge that “it does not necessarily imply a simple deterministic account”.

critical note on

PROCESSUAL MODELS

Shortcomings existing literature / models

- Research highly fragmented
- Models isolated, making little or no reference to each other
- Existing literature reviews often limited or partial in scope

Overarching theoretical framework still needed
METHODOLOGY

BEST FIT FRAMEWORK SYNTHESIS

aim: combine research results from several studies into a meta-framework

specificities: systematic method to search and select research studies | combines deductive and inductive techniques of analysis | start from one or multiple existing frameworks
(1) the identification of one or multiple pre-existing frameworks

(2) the thematic reduction of these theories to create an a priori framework

(3) the supplementing of the a priori framework with new themes by extracting and coding data from included studies

(4) the transition from the resultant framework to the final conceptual model
BEST FIT FRAMEWORK SYNTHESIS

**BEST FIT FRAMEWORK SYNTHESIS**

(1) the identification of one or multiple pre-existing frameworks

King & Taylor, 2011*: Borum (2003); Moghaddam (2005); Sageman (2008); Silber and Bhatt (2007); and Wiktorowicz (2004)

(2) the thematic reduction of these theories to create an a priori framework

(3) the supplementing of the a priori framework with new themes by extracting and coding data from included studies

(4) the transition from the resultant framework to the final conceptual model

(1) The identification of one or multiple pre-existing frameworks

(2) The thematic reduction of these theories to create an a priori framework

common & unique elements: seven themes and eighteen characterizing elements

(3) The supplementing of the a priori framework with new themes by extracting and coding data from included studies

(4) The transition from the resultant framework to the final conceptual model
(1) the identification of one or multiple pre-existing frameworks

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(3) the supplementing of the a priori framework with new themes by extracting and coding data from included studies

searching-, screening- and inclusion-strategy
23 additional research studies
1 extra theme (post-implementation)
15 extra characterizing elements

(4) the transition from the resultant framework to the final conceptual model
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<td>Post-implementation (new theme)</td>
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(4) the transition from the resultant framework to the final conceptual model

integrated meta-framework, visualized by an eight-phased funnel model

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results

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

01 PRE-RADICALIZATION
02 AWARENESS AND GRIEVANCES
03 SOLUTION-SEEKING
04 INTEREST
05 TARGETING
06 INDOCTRINATION
07 IMPLEMENTATION
08 POST-IMPLEMENTATION
01 PRE-RADICALIZATION

Initially included by Silber and Bhatt in their NYPD model

Separate stage that precedes the actual radicalization process

- at-risk individuals, their social background and their reasons for receptiveness before they radicalized

- compilation of the general population
At the start of actual radicalization process *sensu stricto*

- increased perceptiveness for a radical worldview, namely the need for a sense of meaning, the need for a response to perceived injustice and the need for social bonding
- general sense of “disillusionment”
- perceived discrimination as a consequence of undesirable events or conditions on a personal and/or political level
- profound questioning of the existing order and the legitimacy of the system
- sense of “awareness”, in which individuals are exposed to alternative ideas for the first time
03 SOLUTION-SEEKING

Less frequent in existing models

- individuals seek for a possible solution that responds to their needs

- at this stage: radicalization process often halted, since many people – who share the same grievances – do find an outcome through legitimate means
Transformation of awareness into interest in the newly found doctrine | primarily cognitive factors

- religious seeking
- identity search and related change in behavior
- social inclusion and the break with the former life
- weakening of resilience against violence
- actively seeking of like-minded individuals
- acceptance of the cause
Attributing blame to a certain target and dehumanizing this so-called enemy

- inhibitory mechanisms are crossed
  - easier to use violence in later stages

- “Us versus Them” dichotomy
  - creation of a common enemy
  - reinforces the cohesion within the radical group
certain sense of intensification of the concepts elaborated on in earlier stages of the radicalization process

- intensifying of beliefs and conviction that belief they adhere is the only correct one
- further construction of a new identity
- increased group-bonding
- accepting violence as a legitimate political means and conviction that action is required to support the cause
- praising and honouring of the actions of terrorists or the broadcasting of one’s own intent
- willingness to use violence and the acceptance of their duty
- behaviour indicative of preparation for action (e.g. going abroad, training camps, etc.)
- entering into a terrorist organization
ultimate culmination of the radicalization process

- only a small minority of people that progresses through certain stages of the radicalization process eventually commits a terrorist act
  \[=\text{NON-LINEARITY}\]

- not all models end their framework with an implementation stage

- labelling differs from model to model
after the implementation of a terrorist act

- no part of a priori framework, but added during analysis of 23 supplementing research studies

- only a small minority of models

- from disengagement, to deradicalization, to re-engagement and the formal reaction of the criminal justice system
META-FRAMEWORK

PHASE 1
Pre-Radicalization

PHASE 2
Cognitive Opening

PHASE 3
Solution-Seeking

PHASE 4
Interest

PHASE 5
Targeting

PHASE 6
Indoctrination/Acceptance

PHASE 7
Implementation

PHASE 8
Post-Implementation

CONTINUUM

BENCHMARK

ACTUAL RADICALIZATION PROCESS sens.str.

TRADITIONAL BOUNDARY CRIMINAL LAW

Pre-radicalization & post-implementation
Grievances and relative deprivation
Cognitive + non-violent behavior

Group-related
Violence & attitude towards violence
Combination of factors

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DISCUSSION

sequence of a ‘typical’ radicalization process from pre-radicalization to post-implementation, while bearing in mind its inherent complexity and highly individual nature

also useful in policy context

tendency to criminalize behavior that corresponds to early phases of the radicalization process

=> **criminal liability is extended** to preparatory acts and even risk-involving behaviour (prior to phase 7, especially within phases 4 to 6)
critical notes

- radicalization in the sense of “developing or adopting extremist beliefs that justify violence” is but one of the many pathways to terrorism
- methodological pitfalls of phase models
- limitations of a review conducted by a single researcher
- integration of multiple models of a different nature

recommendations further research

- testing of meta-framework with empirical data, while also including valid comparison groups,
- differentiations in the meta-framework in terms of the type of ideology and the type of terrorists
- critical legal analysis of certain criminal law provisions that intervene in early stages of the radicalization process
Notwithstanding the limitations of the research: initial incentive to transcend the fragmented approach in the field of radicalization research, while making the link to its importance on a policy level.

MORE IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS?


FURTHER QUESTIONS? Q&A
References 28 included studies

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