

Guest Editorial: Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization

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Radicalization and
Deradicalization**

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Guest Editorial: Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization

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The study of radicalization and de-radicalization, understood as processes leading towards the increased or decreased use of political violence, is central to the question of how political violence emerges, how it can be prevented, and how it can be contained. The focus section of this issue of the *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* addresses radicalization and de-radicalization, seeking to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the processes, dynamics, and mechanisms involved and taking an interdisciplinary approach to overcome the fragmentation into separate disciplines and focus areas.

Contributions by Pénélope Larzillière, Felix Heiduk, Bill Kissane, Hank Johnston, Christian Davenport and Cyanne Loyle, Veronique Dudouet, and Lasse Lindkilde address repressive settings, legitimacy, institutional aspects, organizational outcomes, and dynamics in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America.

Radicalization may be understood as a process leading towards the increased use of political violence, while de-radicalization, by contrast, implies reduction in the use of political violence. Taken together, the study of radicalization and de-radicalization is central to answering the question of how political violence emerges, how it can be prevented, and how it can be contained.

Notwithstanding their theoretical and practical relevance, thus far most studies of radicalization and de-radicalization have been fragmented into separate disciplines and topical focus areas, which emphasize varying theoretical approaches and different aspects of the phenomenon. Different waves of violence have been addressed by specialists of different geographical areas, using different toolkits and often bringing to bear idiosyncratic explanations. In particular the wave of Islamist political violence during the past decade has attracted a great amount of research on processes of radicalization. This research has focused mostly on terrorism and has been largely restricted to the appearance of very specific groups that have emerged in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Moreover, historical perspectives on this contemporary phenomenon have been rare

and most studies of radicalization have not taken into account its counterpart, processes of de-radicalization.

The major aim of this focus section of the *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the processes, dynamics, and mechanisms of radicalization and de-radicalization. This focus section began with an international conference on Radicalization and De-Radicalization held in Bielefeld, Germany, in April 2011 and generously supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. We want to thank Stefan Malthaner, Lorenzo Bosi, Chares Demetriou, Alex Veit, André Bank, and Teresa Koloma Beck for writing the original application and organizing the conference. We have relied greatly on their hard work in putting together and presenting this focus section. This volume seeks to enrich the burgeoning academic debate in this area with new theoretical approaches and methodologies. The contributors to this focus section approach the topic from a wide range of comparative and disciplinary perspectives, locate radicalization/de-radicalization in its broader transnational and global context, and in so doing, go well beyond the phenomenon of terrorism. Contributors analyze different forms of radicalization/de-radicalization across space as

well as time. The papers explore the complex interactions between the social, political, and cultural environment (macro-level), but also the role of internal dynamics in armed groups (meso-level) and individual life-experiences (micro-level) in radicalization and de-radicalization processes.

1. The State of Recent Research

In research on political violence in advanced democracies in the 1970s, the term radicalization emerged to stress the interactive (social movements/state) and processual (gradual escalation) dynamics in the formation of violent, often clandestine groups (Della Porta 1995). In this approach, radicalization referred to the actual use of violence, with escalation in terms of forms and intensity. In recent years, the term “radicalism” became prominent in research on terrorism, particularly research on Islamist terrorism in OECD countries. Scholars were especially concerned with the phenomenon of young Muslims with Western socialization who joined militant Islamist groups. Much of this research sought to explain processes of individual radicalization and ways of becoming part of violent groups (see, e.g., McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Wiktorowicz 2005; Waldmann 2009). Some studies identified elements in the personal and social situation of Muslim immigrants that make them vulnerable to radicalization. A number of these studies also examined the role of certain groups and settings (e.g., mosques), as well as typical trajectories of radicalization processes on the micro-level. Closely connected with this were a number of studies focusing on processes of de-radicalization and disengagement from terrorism (in particular, Bjorgo and Horgan 2009) and discussions of how terrorism ends (e.g. Cronin 2009; LaFree and Miller 2008). With few exceptions, this research was characterized by its focus on individuals, on ideological and psychological processes, and on examining violent groups in isolation from their social and political context. Several recent works on Islamist terrorism in Middle Eastern countries deal with the emergence of violent groups and processes of decline and disengagement from terrorism (e.g. Hafez 2003; Hegghammer 2010). They contribute important insights, which, however, have so far only partially been integrated into the general debate on radicalization and de-radicalization.

Research on radicalization has also drawn heavily on the literature on social movements. Here, radicalization is understood as an escalation process leading to violence. This line of research analyzes patterns of movements’ interaction with police and other actors. The influential resource-mobilization (collective action) approach interprets the use of violence by movement organizations as a strategic choice under the constraints of particular opportunity structures and the availability of certain resources and emphasizes context and interactive dynamics. Radicalization is also traced to the level of the actors’ perceptions and attitudes, with scholars using the concept of interpretative frames and examining the role of violence-legitimizing narratives (see Della Porta and Diani 2006 for a summary). Whereas most social movement research focuses on non-militant movements, a number of works have dealt explicitly with the emergence of violent groups and processes of violent radicalization. These studies thus link social movement theory to the field of terrorism studies (Della Porta 1995, Tilly 2004, Wood 2003). Similarly, some works within the research on terrorism adopted approaches from social movement theory (in particular, Wiktorowicz 2004). Nevertheless, research on terrorism and research on social movements have remained largely separate.

Other fields of research relevant to this focus section are studies of civil war, insurgencies, and political violence. Numerous works among the broad array of research on revolutions and violent insurgencies deal with questions of how violence emerges, how conflicts escalate, or how actors and their aims transform in the process (Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2007). Several studies specifically examine processes of escalation and de-escalation. Yet, with few exceptions (Waldmann 1993, 2003; Della Porta forthcoming), there are no comparative works on different forms of violence, and research on civil wars seldom considers results from the other research traditions and vice versa.

2. Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization

Many researchers conceptualize radicalization as a process characterized by increasing commitment to and use of violent means and strategies in political conflicts. Radicalization from this point of view entails a change in perceptions towards polarizing and absolute definitions of

a given situation, and the articulation of increasingly “radical” aims and objectives. It may evolve from enmity towards certain social groups, or societal institutions and structures. It may also entail the increasing use of violent means.¹

Radicalization in these approaches refers to patterns of both behavior and attitudes. These two dimensions of radicalization – action (behavior) and attitudes (aims and perceptions) – are closely linked, but must not be understood as necessarily depending on or even corresponding to each other. Radical attitudes do not always precede or lead to violent acts. Groups voicing the most radical aims are not necessarily the first to engage in violence. Becoming involved in violent groups and engaging in acts of violence does not always presume adherence to radical aims and frames of reference, but can be motivated by, for example, personal relationships and loyalty to a group. It is therefore helpful to distinguish micro, meso, and macro levels of radicalization. Individual processes of radicalization should be distinguished from radicalization on the group and organizational level, and both need to be situated in prevailing structural conditions and discursive settings.

Radicalization, in other words, is a phenomenon composed of various processes which should be distinguished analytically as they seem to be driven by different mechanisms, follow different patterns, and need to be understood in their social and political context. Especially the latter aspect needs further scrutiny. The concept of radicalization is often used in a way that focuses attention on “radical groups” or certain individuals considered prone to radicalization, suggesting that the problem of violence lies with some quality intrinsic to these groups and individuals, rather than being a result of a larger conflict and societal and political conditions. Radicalization may more profitably be analyzed as a process of interaction between violent groups and their environment, or an effect of interactions between mutually hostile actors. It takes, for example, the

form of escalation processes between protest movements and state security forces, or of escalating confrontations between different social groups. Moreover, radicalization may be an expression as well as a trigger of larger social change.

The term de-radicalization can be understood to simply denote the reversal of radicalization processes. Yet even more than radicalization, the concept of de-radicalization suffers from a lack of precision concerning the actual processes involved. Often what is meant is the prevention and disruption of radicalization (i.e. non-radicalization) rather than its reversal, and often behavioral and cognitive elements are not clearly identified.

Again, de-radicalization needs to be scrutinized on micro, meso and macro levels, and most importantly the interplay between these dimensions. On the individual level, it is important to distinguish between the de-radicalization of attitudes and beliefs, the disengagement from violent behavior, and the process of leaving violent groups and re-integrating into other social groups and structures. Again, these processes do not necessarily correspond. People can, for example, disengage from violence or leave violent groups but retain “radical” beliefs and attitudes. On the meso-level, the ending of violent campaigns by radical groups can result from defeat, declining resources, organizational disintegration, or, connected to the macro level, from changing political opportunity-structures. Thus, aims and attitudes can remain the same, be adapted to changing circumstances, or be even further radicalized.

At this point we know relatively little about how processes of de-radicalization are involved when the disengagement from violence is not voluntary. Individual and group processes of disengagement can be linked in various ways. Groups can disintegrate or radicalize as a result of defections. And individuals can de-radicalize in parallel with their organization. On the other hand, it can also often be observed that new, even more radical groupings emerge

¹ This understanding of radicalization is partly based on McCauley and Moskalenko, who define radicalization as follows: “Functionally, political radicalization is increased preparation for and commitment to intergroup conflict. Descriptively,

radicalization means change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the group” (2008, 416). Our understanding differs from theirs insofar as we put greater emphasis

on the element of violence and do not use the concept of intergroup conflict – both in order to keep the definition more open and to make it applicable to various forms of political conflict and political violence.

when the leadership of an organization decides to stop a violent campaign. How social changes, sometimes enhanced by radicalization processes themselves, and changing discourse in larger society, affect radical groups and individuals also remains a largely open question.

Considering the social quality of radicalization and the role of political context, the analysis of de-radicalization, too, has to take account of interactions and relationships. De-radicalization involves the disruption (or reversal) of cycles of escalation and self-reinforcing dynamics in violent confrontations, for example between protest movements and police, insurgent and incumbent forces, or between different armed groups in a civil-war situation. In addition, de-radicalization may involve changes in the structure of violent groups as well as changes in the conflict structure. For example, ending violent campaigns may entail (or require) a shift in power between different factions or political and military wings of an organization. Finally, de-radicalization may involve – or even may result from – changes in the relationship between violent groups and certain audiences, in particular the legitimacy of radicalism in the perspective of groups' constituencies and other audiences.

In line with the interdisciplinary and international scope of the IJCV, in this volume we seek to establish a comparative perspective on processes of radicalization across national and cultural contexts as well as with respect to different phenomena of political violence and violent conflict. Our aim is to encourage comparative interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary perspectives on radicalization and de-radicalization that adequately address the complexity of these phenomena.

2.1. Radicalization and De-Radicalization in Repressive Settings

The literature on radicalization processes has so far focused mainly on episodes of radicalization in non-repressive settings, such as political violence perpetrated by small groups in Western democracies or collective riots in large Western cities. Thus far few researchers have considered radicalization processes in repressive settings, such as authoritarian regimes. Two papers in this focus section deal directly with this issue. Pénélope Larzillière examines how radicalization and de-radicalization operates in Jordan, a

highly authoritarian regime, pointing out how professional associations and the Islamist social movement have been critical to these processes. Larzillière's work underscores the need for less state-centered explanations of radicalization and de-radicalization processes. Similarly, Felix Heiduk examines how radicalization and de-radicalization processes play out in post-Suharto democratic Indonesia. Observing that political liberalization has at the same time witnessed a strengthening of moderate Islamic civil society organizations and Islamic parties, but also the emergence of violent Islamist groups, he points out the highly ambiguous relationship between state and political Islam, with parallel policies of repression and co-optation. The resurgence of political Islam is therefore linked to the power politics that lies behind the post-1998 creation of democratic institutions in Indonesia.

2.2. The Legitimacy of Radicalization/De-Radicalization

Given that de-radicalization – just like radicalization – occurs in front of audiences, the legitimacy the audience may bestow on, or withhold from transforming radical groups, is highly relevant for the course of de-radicalization. Radicalized electorates, for example, may exert pressure against conciliatory policies; religious leaders may influence radical sects to reconsider the religious mainstream; counter-cultures may sanction a return to mainstream behavior; the opinion of a social movement's base may lead it to return to the fold; and the certification an international body (e.g., the UN Security Council) may provide to the parties engaged in a peace process can supply incentives to either continue or break the process, depending on the circumstances.

When and how, therefore, is legitimacy an impediment, and when and how does it boost de-radicalization? The phenomena connecting legitimacy and de-radicalization fall into the purview of a range of academic disciplines and sub-disciplines. Yet, on a basic level, they all concern the relationship between actors and audiences. Bill Kissane examines many of these legitimacy issues in a paper on the effects of elections on the development of nationalism in Ireland. Examining the victory of Sinn Féin's moderate wing in 1922–23, he focuses on the potentially de-escalating effects of elections as crucial mechanisms for making nationalist elites accountable to their citizens.

2.3. Institutional Radicalization/De-Radicalization

States may of course play a major role in radicalization and de-radicalization. Extreme examples of radicalized states, societies that murdered large proportions of their own population, are Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under Stalin, and Cambodia and Rwanda in the mid- to late-twentieth century. But less obvious cases of state radicalization dynamics, such as the contemporary “war on terror” in nominally liberal states, also need to be investigated. In ordinary situations, state institutions often respond to challenges with repressive means that are prone to escalate conflicts with social movements, oppositional groupings, or external contenders. In many cases, interactions between states and their societal opponents result in processes that are difficult to halt or turn around.

This focus section includes two papers that deal with institutional processes of radicalization and de-radicalization and examine the role of states in resisting radicalization. Hank Johnston adopts a cross-national approach, focusing on the processes of radicalization within the states themselves. Drawing on the experiences of high-capacity states, he observes how states use violence against oppositional groups. He examines as examples China, Russia, Iran, and the Middle East, stressing the complexity of the State’s repressive apparatus, but also the creativity of the opposition in finding ways to voice protest. Christian Davenport and Cyanne Loyle focus on the relationship between the United States government and the Republic of New Africa, a black nationalist organization that was active in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They find that long-term plans to eliminate challengers deemed threatening to the U.S. political economy and a crusade against black radicals increased the likelihood of continued government coercion despite short-term failure.

2.4. Organizational Dynamics of De-Radicalization

Violent groups, organizations, and movements are complex entities. Leaders face the challenge of maintaining organizational cohesion and discipline, of securing economic resources, and of gaining sustainable approval for their role and strategies. Violent organizations are composed of different factions and sub-groups that compete over power and over the group’s political and strategic direction.

Moreover, different organizational structures may entail different degrees of segmentation, isolation and autonomy of sub-division, and hierarchy, which affects the way they react to external challenges.

Veronique Dudouet focuses on the organizational dynamics of what she defines as non-state armed groups. Noting that these represent important stakeholders in political conflicts, she presents original empirical findings on the rebel leaders’ own accounts of the internal dynamics in rebel organizations. Based on participatory action research, the paper contributes new knowledge on negotiation processes in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Nepal, Aceh, El Salvador, Colombia, and South Africa. In all seven countries and territories, processes of negotiation, demobilisation, disarmament, and democratic institutionalisation ended up in successful transitions from violent insurgency to peaceful political participation,

2.5. The Outcomes of Radicalization/De-Radicalization

If radicalization is understood to be the strategic use of physical force to influence several audiences, and de-radicalisation as an intended reverse process, what are some of the intended and unintended outcomes of radicalization and de-radicalization? Lasse Lindeskilde directly addresses these issues. Using the Danish case as an example, he observes the potential dangers when the term radicalization has been stretched to include beliefs (rather than behaviors) and used for so-called anti-radicalization policies that stigmatize large portions of the population. Just belonging to a group with potential grievances, identifying with a certain community, or being particularly religious can come to be considered as indicators of high radicalization potential. The unintended outcome is then mistrust among the affected population and a de-legitimization of the regime.

3. Concluding Thoughts

Radicalization and de-radicalization emerge as important concepts both in our understanding of political violence and in the choice of policy strategy to contain it. In focusing on these concepts, this special set of articles presents diverse theoretical approaches, methodological choices, and disciplinary contributions, in the context of a broad

range of countries and types of violent political action. When selecting these papers for publication, we, as editors, have explicitly sought diversity as a way to enrich our knowledge on political violence and policies addressing it. In line with this journal's emphasis, we believe in the virtue of cross-fertilization between disciplines and

approaches as a necessary balance against trends towards over-specialization which are present in most disciplines. Of course, interdisciplinary, theoretically eclectic, and methodologically pluralist knowledge is difficult to develop – but we hope this volume can represent a step in this direction.

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