

Prevention of Violence and Democracy Enhancement

von

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Prevention of Violent Extremism & Enhancement of Democracy

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- * Lecturer at the National Security School of Greece on the topics “Multiculturalism, Migration and Security, Intercultural Policing and Community Policing, Radicalisation and Jihadist Terrorism”.
- * He holds a PhD in European Security and New Threats from the University of the Aegean.
- * He is a certified by RAN COE trainer in Radicalization and Member of the RAN LOCAL Group.
- * CEPOL network expert and a specialized trainer on hot-spots trends and challenges and FTF’s common identification indicators.
- * Actively coordinating and participating to the implementation of European and Research projects (HORIZON 2020, ISF- Police, AMIF, ERASMUS+).

Setting the Problem

- * (Lack) of democracy as a cause for violence or (enhancement) of democracy as important tool for the prevention of violence?
- * Racism, xenophobia, hate speech and social exclusion leading to a general perception about problems with effective democracy.
- * The general feeling in a number of European citizens about a serious democratic deficit in EU.
- * Strongly connected with democracy is the issue of trust, especially the (dis) trust in democratic institutions and political elites.
- * Youth mobilization leading to violence which is usually linked with the general perception about democratic deficit and with the mystification about the negative role of elites and their possible influence in democratic institutions.
- * From the other side the prevention of extremism and violence policies are strongly connected with the enhancement of democratic citizenship.

The aim of the Lecture

- * The aim of this lecture is twofold.
- * From the one side to present the linkages between problems with democracy and youth extremism with political violence and
- * From the other side to present policy proposals about effective prevention of extremism and violence using as an important tool the enhancement of democracy and the active engagement of citizens.
- * Finally, the lecture will highlight the challenges for democracy and democratic participations raised by the polarisation within European societies, especially as an outcome of the migration and security crises.

Trust & Participation

- * As long as people **trust** in the democratic system and **feel** that **they can influence** the decisions that **affect their** everyday lives, extremism will be confined to the outer fringes of society.

But...

- * A democratic and open society can never be entirely invulnerable to violence-promoting extremism.
- * In different contexts and under different circumstances, individuals will be tempted to resort to violence in order to achieve social change.
- * It is furthermore difficult to establish which factors give rise to political violence and will affect the long-term threat from violence-promoting extremism.



radical environmental or animal rights groups that use violence to promote their causes



A form of radicalization essentially motivated by a sole issue. This category includes anti-abortion extremists, certain anti-gay/anti-feminist movements, and ultra-individualist or independent extremist movements (such as Free Men on the Land and sovereign citizens). Mass murderers whose motivations are partially or wholly ideological may also fall under this category.



associated with fascism, racialism/racism, supremacism and ultranationalism. This form of radicalization is characterized by the violent defence of a racial, ethnic or pseudo-national identity, and is also associated with radical hostility towards state authorities, minorities, immigrants and/or left-wing political groups.



associated with a political interpretation of religion and the defence, by violent means, of a religious identity perceived to be under attack (via international conflicts, foreign policy, social debates, etc.). Any religion may spawn this type of violent radicalization.



focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems considered responsible for producing social inequalities, and that may ultimately employ violent means to further its cause.

Types of Radicalization

The Definition of Radicalization

- * **Radicalization is a process leading into violent extremism (RVE)**
- * *A process whereby people adopt extremist belief systems—including the willingness to use, encourage or facilitate violence—with the aim of promoting an ideology, political project or cause as a means of social transformation.*
- * In short, violent radicalization entails:
 1. The adoption of an ideology that becomes a way of life and a framework for meaningful action for the individual;
 2. Belief in the use of violent means to promote a cause;
 3. The merging of ideology and violent action.

Who and Why?

- * People who **do not accept the foundations** on which our open society is built -
- * Individuals and groups who **believe that the rule of law lacks legitimacy** and that breaking the law and **using violence to achieve social change are justifiable courses of action.**
- * Extremist groups who operate on the fringes of society normally attract just a small number of individuals, but when they commit violent acts that are aimed at the very core of our democratic system; they become a pressing concern for the whole of society.

Reject Society & Democracy

- * Their ideological differences aside, these various violent extremist environments are similar social phenomena.
- * They are often based on a black-and-white and conspiratorial view of the world.
- * Conflict with the surrounding society and the glorification of violence are central to them.
- * It is basically the same social mechanisms that motivate individuals to join a violent extremist environment, regardless of whether it promotes a classless, an ethnically homogenous or an Islamist society.

Driving Forces

- * Issues concerning socioeconomic exclusion.
- * Circumstances such as perceived discrimination or unemployment.
- * Dis- trust in the democratic system.
- * People who consider that their lives don't live up to the expectations and norms of society often feel frustrated.
- * Collective feelings of powerlessness can be a breeding-ground for violence and cause individuals to give credence to dogmatic political solutions.

The Complexity

- * **The reasons why people develop into violent extremists is more complex than simply a feeling of social and economic injustice.**
- * The desire to resort to violence is instead described as an emotional driving-force that comes from within.
- * The extremist environment is often a context that creates meaning for individuals with poor self-esteem.
- * Membership in the group can satisfy a need for power or control, status, social interaction, friendship or identity and affiliation.
- * Individuals who join extremist movements often come from conflict-ridden and socially weak homes, although research shows that many of them also come from well- educated and relatively high-income families.
- * Furthermore, the very social dynamic and social intercourse within extremist groups are key to individuals developing a propensity for violence.
- * Leadership figures can also play a crucial role in attracting people into violent environments.

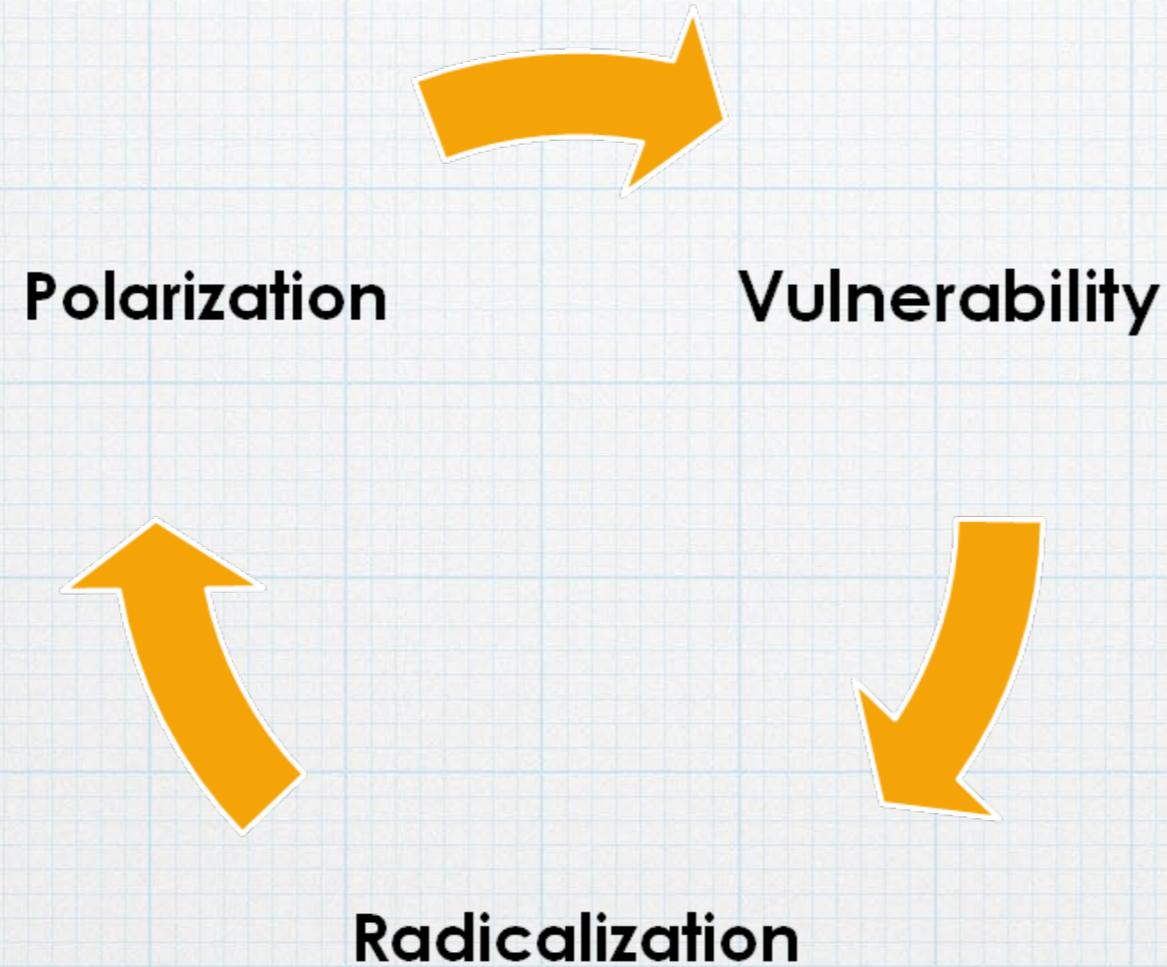
What about Democracy?

- * Anti-democratic attitudes have gained a foothold among certain groups of young people.
- * These individuals may be enticed into violence-promoting extremist environments.
- * Political circumstances in European societies may also affect people's long-term willingness to sanction violence as a means of achieving ideological aims.
- * Democracy can therefore never be taken for granted, but must be continuously improved, strengthened and safeguarded.

Violence & Democracy

- * Violence from extremist groups can constitute a threat to parts of the democratic system.
- * Violence and the threat of violence against elected representatives and persons in authority can weaken the justice system.
- * Hate crime committed against individuals on the basis of their ethnicity, religious faith, sexual orientation or political conviction increases the risk of social polarisation.
- * The glorification and justification of violence are central to extremist groups, but violence is not necessarily considered as merely a tool to achieve a political aim.
- * The use of violence among young people may also be an attempt to compensate for a feeling of frustration and powerlessness and can often reflect social problems such as mental ill-health and stereotyped gender roles.
- * This is particularly true of young men who are often both the victims and perpetrators of violence.

Polarization & Vulnerability



Democracy as a key...

- * It is important to intensify the efforts to safeguard democracy in order to counter tendencies that may constitute a long-term challenge to the democratic system.
- * The work to safeguard democracy and to thereby prevent violence-promoting extremism is also one of the fundamental components of the fight against terrorism and its breeding grounds.
- * Awareness of democracy must be strengthened on all levels of society and efforts must be made to counter the breeding grounds for all forms of violence-promoting extremism.
- * These efforts cannot be limited to measures taken by the police and judicial authorities but must be cross-sectoral in nature and be based on a broad consensus in society.

Prevention Culture

- * Preventing individuals from being enticed into violent extremist environments and preventing such movements from establishing themselves and spreading in societies is also a matter of strengthening and safeguarding the democratic system.
- * Ideologically motivated violence or the threat of such violence is normally directed at society's institutions or its representatives, however, it also affects private citizens based on their ethnic, religious or sexual identity or on their political views.
- * A society that does not clearly distance itself from violence-promoting extremism risks becoming polarised.

Enhancing Democracy

- * To counter intolerance and extremism, the principles of democratic governance and respect for human rights must have an effect.
- * Ideological violence has a tendency to occur in societies in which intolerance, xenophobia and anti-democratic attitudes are rife.
- * In a society where all citizens have equal rights, obligations and opportunities, regardless of their identity or background, extremism will be confined to the fringes.
- * Such a society not only requires the authorities to respect human rights and treat individuals fairly and legitimately, but also requires every individual to be aware of their rights and to respect the rights of others.

Policy Proposals

- * To combat discrimination, xenophobia and similar intolerance.
- * To promote initiatives to ensure that all individuals can enjoy their human rights.
- * To enhance awareness of the values upon which our democratic system is based.
- * To increase awareness and knowledge of violence-promoting extremism among authorities, municipalities, organisations.
- * To develop or establish mechanisms and structures to allow authorities, municipalities and civil society organisations to be able to cooperate more effectively on preventive work.
- * To intensify efforts to prevent individuals from joining violence-promoting extremist movements and to help individuals to leave them.
- * To strengthen efforts to counter the breeding grounds for ideologically motivated violence.
- * To increase election turnout and to enhance democratic awareness.
- * To implement democracy-promoting initiatives in civil society, in schools and in the cultural policy.
- * Initiatives to strengthen democratic awareness and to stimulate democratic involvement should be directed at young people. For these to be successful, it is important that young people are not seen simply as a target group. Some young people can also help to design the initiatives aimed at their contemporaries.