Thematic Issue: Guest Editorial

Developmental Pathways towards Violent Left-, Right-Wing, Islamist Extremism and Radicalization

Herbert Scheithauer*
Freie Universität Berlin

Vincenz Leuschner
Berlin School of Economics and Law

Nils Böckler
Institute of Psychology and Threat Management, Darmstadt

Babak Akhgar
Centre of Excellence in Terrorism, Resilience, Intelligence and Organised Crime Research, Sheffield Hallam University

Holger Nitsch
Hochschule für den öffentlichen Dienst in Bayern, Fachbereich Polizei

Over the last decade, a tremendous amount of papers have been published, dealing with the concept "radicalization". Radicalization can be defined as "a personal process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence" which may lead to "a mental and emotional process that prepares and motivates an individual to pursue violent behavior" (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010, p. 38). Recently the main focus of the literature has been on Islamist radicalization, furthermore other forms of "extreme" attitudes and behaviors leading to violent actions have additionally been extensively studied, e.g. from the field of left-wing, right-wing extremism. For this Thematic Issue, we were especially interested in papers dealing with the following questions: Which psychological, sociological etc. process can serve to describe the development of radicalization into violent extremism? What exactly leads an individual from having a "radical opinion" to undertaking "radical action" (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014)? What do we know about recruitment strategies and its effect on the different target groups? Which pathways and mechanisms of violent radicalization can be described - and which mechanisms operate in different ways for different people at

*Address for correspondence
Herbert Scheithauer, Unit Developmental Science and Applied Developmental Psychology, Department of Education and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin, Germany. E-mail:herbert.scheithauer@fu-berlin.de

different points in time and perhaps in different contexts? What are the implications for and examples of adequate and effective preventive interventions, interventions, or anti- and de-radicalization initiatives, threat assessment and management approaches etc? What kind of impact do internet-enabled technologies such as social media, messaging services, or gaming platforms have in support or prevention of violent extremism? As there is a lack of studies with a developmental focus, we were especially interested in studies with such a focus.

Our call for papers resulted in the acceptance of nine excellent manuscripts, submitted by renowned scholars within and across their respective field. This Thematic Issue brings together empirical studies with very different designs (e.g. experimental, surveys, single case analysis), diverse methodologies (from quantitative and qualitative research) and populations together as well as multi-study papers, multi-single-case analyses, or reviews, from diverse scientific fields (e.g. Psychology, Sociology, Criminology). Thematically, the present thematic issue focuses particularly on the phenomena of "left-", "right-wing extremism" and ideology driven extremism such as "Islamist extremism", violence respectively.

Böckler, Leuschner, Zick, and Scheithauer (2018) conducted a comparison of Jihadi terrorism and adolescent and young adult perpetrators of targeted school attacks. Their research shows that there are overlaps in the developmental processes, pathways respectively, and social mechanism. The research is a qualitative research based on single-cases analyses using court files. The research is based on data from a former project called "TARGET – Engl.: Case Analysis of Severe Targeted Violence". The most important findings were classified in seven different categories to find similarities or differences. This unique research shows many different results, that enriches the academic research on the topic, e.g. that no attack takes place in a social vacuum. The profound analysis gives an insight of the processes taking place that will help to find possibilities to counter radicalization processes as well as school attacks. The authors recommend further studies and created basic layers for it.

Bäck, Bäck, Altermark, and Knapton (2018) elaborate on attitude adaption to a radical group following social exclusion. The authors used an experimental approach using the Cyberball paradigm with a sample of 71 individuals. Participants were either included or excluded and subsequently included by the member of a radical group. In this experiment the attitude of the member of the radical group is different as the one from the group that excluded the individual. The role of social exclusion is explained explicitly and the importance to belong to a group for the sense of control and self-value. One of the key-findings is that intensity of rejection sensitivity that individuals perceived were important. The results add value to the discussion about the reasons of radicalization and should in addition have an impact on preventive measures.

Early radicalization in the context of psychological needs and risk factors is explored by Macdougall, van der Veen, Feddes, Nickolson, and Doosje (2018). The authors investigated the relation of psychological needs, like injustice, identity, sensation, and significance, with other risk factors like social deprivation, symbolic and realistic threat and participation in the decision making. Results of 179 participants, gathered from an online survey in the United States, were analyzed according to the psychological needs and 183 participants in a second study in public spaces in the Netherlands concerning the other risk factors. One of the most important findings is the strong relation between radicalization and individuals with a strong demand for justice and for status. The uniqueness of the research is the empirical evidence of the relations.

Pauwels and Hardyns (2018) investigated thrill-seeking, active exposure to extremism via online media and politically/religiously motivated aggression. The endorsement to terrorism is especially looked at for left-wing, nationalist/separatist, and religious extremism. The main focus is on the differential effect of exposure to extremist online content. The authors used the General Aggression Model as a framework for their research. A large survey in schools and in addition online in Belgium was conducted to gain relevant data for the active exposure to extremist content. The authors name the limitations of their research and give an outlook for further research and the policy implications.

Online radicalization and violent radicalization is examined by Hassan, Brouillette-Alarie, Alava, Frau-Meigs, Lavoie, Fetiu, Varela, Borokhovski, Venkatesh, Rousseau, and Sieckelinck (2018) in their systematic review. The Internet - especially since the invention of Web2.0 technology and social media platforms - plays a "viral role" in disseminating and delivering hate speech. The authors are aim to fill the gap in research on the impact of these practices and present the strategies used on the basis of results from eleven primary studies (that were eligible according

to author's inclusion criteria). The research findings help to understand how online radicalization works and how it influences individuals.

Lösel, King, Bender, and Jugl (2018) present results from – to our knowledge the first – systematic review of research on protective factors against extremism and violent radicalization. The authors considered an extensive high number of documents and analyzed these according to the ideology and the potential protective effects. Firstly two test pilots were run; finally the authors evaluated 36 primary studies and reports. The findings show the most significant factors divided in different categories according to their coding schema. The broad variety of protective factors - also in relation to certain ideologies - does have theoretical and practical effects. The findings will help further research to concentrate on these also concerning questions related to anti- and de-radicalization. In addition, results may also be helpful for practitioners and policymakers.

A focus on the differentiation of right wing-extremism towards violent extremism is explored by Perry, Wikström, and Roman (2018). Their research aims to examine the relation between criminogenic exposure and violent extremism with the focus on right wing extremism, as this effect with crime is established. The basis of their analysis is the Situational Action Theory of crime. The study explains these established relations and develops three working hypothesis. A large survey was conducted in the United Kingdom with a sample of 684 young individuals. The findings establish that there is a strong correlation of criminogenic exposure to violent extremism, comparable to the correlation with crime, but not to non-violent extremism, a surprising result that needs further research.

van de Wetering, Zick, and Mietke (2018) analyze disengagement of women from extreme right wing groups. They focus on the integration and translation of identity related extreme-right femininities into everyday life. Furthermore, they look for approaches in their research for disengagement. This is based on interviews they conducted with women, who had disengaged, using the biography theory for the analysis of the interview, which is combined with grounded theory. This innovative approach leads to interesting results that enhances the academic knowledge as well as the practical use of the results.

Finally, King, Endres, Schwaß, Stemmler, Lauchs, and Armborst (2018) look at prisoners with Islamist relations. The authors especially examine the question, if prisoner files are valuable data for individual

research and assessment related to Islamism. They investigate a total number of 40 inmates of Bavarian prisons with Islamism-security related background. The research highlights the gap in the analysis of biographies, as the results are often contradictory. Therefore the authors refer for their analysis to three different analysis tools, which have different approaches. The research allows a different view on the radicalization process as the incidents are rare and the perpetrators usually do not cooperate with researchers. The results of the research enrich the academic discussion with an innovative approach and they may have an impact on policymaking and the judiciary system.

Conclusions

The different approaches of the papers selected for this Thematic Issue will give a broad picture of the phenomenon and in addition, include not just psychological research, but also research from other scientific disciplines. All papers were selected because of their innovative, unique approaches to enrich the academic literature about radicalization with research from different perspectives with a collection of different topics and variety of used methods. This is not just meant to be a rich source for academics for further research, but in addition to give practitioners the chance to look at the big picture about the phenomenon of radicalization. However, future research must make stronger efforts on investigating radicalization processes based on the background of developmental issues: e.g., what is the function of radicalization in terms of identity formation, development of attitudes in certain social groups, peer pressure, need to belong etc. for the psychosocial development of (especially) young men? Additionally, to understand what leads people into violent extremism, it is also important to ask why it is that most young people *don't* become radicalised! Beside factors that push people towards a radical ideology, and factors that pull them towards extremism, additionally, protective factors seem to play an important role. Beside the usefulness of single case analyses, comparative single case analyses respectively (cf. Böckler, Leuschner, Roth, Zick, & Scheithauer, 2018), prospective studies with unselected samples as well as other innovative methods are needed to get deeper insights into processes of radicalization. As research presented in this Thematic Issue shows: Studies are needed

that combine different radicalization outcomes, that is left-, right-wing extremism, jihadi and other religiously motivated forms of extremism as well as other forms of severe targeted violence.

We very much hope that this issue reaches a wide readership. Finally, we would like to thank the authors – as well as the many expert reviewers of the manuscripts – for the worth reading contributions to this Thematic Issue.

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