



MUNOB

Counter Terrorism Committee

Addressing the impact of social media
in the process of radicalization

-Research report-

I. Table of content

Introduction	2
Key Terms	3
Background Information	3
Major concerns	4
Major Parties Involved	5
Timeline of Events	6
Relevant UN Treaties and Events	6
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue	7
Possible solutions	7
Questions that delegates should ask themselves while doing research	8
Usefull Links	8

II. Introduction

With the passing of time, the globe has seen countless waves of violent extremism, disturbing global well-being and claiming the lives of countless innocent people. Extremist organizations are on a restless “quest” of spreading their ideologies by lying and manipulating people into becoming recruits. With the growing advancements in the tech world and the world-wide spread of social media, this “quest” became easier, as extremist groups are now using social media as one of their main radicalization methods.

Radicalization, a key prelude to violent extremism, has an influence on people of all ages, faiths, and genders, both educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed. This phenomenon predominantly affects younglings, particularly individuals grappling with identity crises, societal roles, experiences of discrimination or racism, or familial challenges and trauma. External factors affecting youth encompass insufficient political inclusion, limitations on free expression, and a diminishing civic space.

Individuals may be radicalized by familial or social influences, direct engagement with extremist organizations, or through online platforms. Affiliation with an extremist group may offer those experiencing an internal crisis a sense of identity or purpose, rendering such organizations appealing. However, not all extremists follow an unavoidable route to violent extremism, and not all alienated groups or people adopt radical attitudes and ideas. Therefore, in order to prevent radicalization, it is necessary to identify and distinguish between the three stages that one may experience: alienation, radicalization, and commitment to violence.

III. Key Terms

- Extremism: concept that refers to holding beliefs far out of
- Jihadism: militant Islamic movements that are perceived as existentially threatening to the West. It has been applied to various insurgent Islamic extremists, militant Islamist and terrorist individuals and organizations whose ideologies are based on the Islamic notion of “jihad” (=praiseworthy aim).
- Radicalization: a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces an extreme ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism, to reach a specific political or ideological purpose.
- Right/Left-wing extremism: movements motivated by a variety of different far-right/far-left ideologies, most prominently neo-fascism, neo-Nazism, white nationalism(right), respectively aiming to overthrow current capitalist systems and replacing them with communist, anarchist or socialist societies(left).
- Algorithmic Amplification: methods used by social-media apps to attract and sustain engagement with the app, by pushing sensitive/ extreme content, with the purpose of shocking the viewer.
- Memetic warfare: a type of informational and psychological warfare, consisting of spreading niche memes on social media. Memetic warfare is becoming a more popular weapon used by governmental organizations and other parties to sway public opinion, even though it differs from conventional propaganda and disinformation strategies.

IV. Background Information

The internet has changed how radicalization occurs ever since its invention. Extremist groups have always utilized the newest available technology. During the late 90s and early 2000s, radical groups used forums along with websites like Stormfront and jihadist message boards to disseminate propaganda. With the introduction of social media in the mid-2000s, websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube served as new platforms for extremist recruitment. By the 2010s, terrorist groups like ISIS had become adept in the use of digital propaganda, using high-quality videos and social media campaigns to gather followers from all over the globe. During the 2016 U.S. election and Brexit, political extremists were able to utilize algorithms that catered to his core conspiracy theories and polarized ideologies. Sites like 4chan and 8chan became havens for far-right radicalization and subsequently, violent extremism. The conspiracy was further deepened in the early 2020s with the onset of covid and the subsequent spread of misinformation along with more extremist narratives. Today while platforms are becoming increasingly stringent against extremist content, many groups are migrating to more decentralized networks such as telegram which greatly obfuscates these counter-radicalization measures.

Even though every terrorist group has its own specific agenda and belief, they share certain similarities in their modus operandi of recruiting new members and radicalizing the youth. They invest a considerable amount of resources in social media and other internet-based platforms to promote their ideologies while building an ecosystem of saving their target population. Such campaigns are very effective as they tend to appeal to specific demographics, age brackets and prejudices. Some even go so far as to incorporate such beliefs within the school systems to set their target audience from a young age. Situations of political discontent, worsened economic situations or social injustice are used to instill anger, fear and sadness

pushing more individuals to become radicalized. However, each one of the terrorist organizations listed below had/have slightly different ways of utilizing social media with radicalization purpose:

- **ISIS:** ISIS serves as an important example of social radicalization on social media. Using Hollywood-caliber production, they produced gripping videos that depicted gruesome executions and a fantastical existence in the so-called Islamic State. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Telegram were used to spread this news at an astounding rate. Additionally, ISIS recruiters used personal correspondence to build connections with those who were at risk, including teenagers, and progressively radicalize them over time. Hashtag hijacking, or the technique of oversaturating popular hashtags with propaganda, was another crucial strategy. This ensured that their messages were seen and covered as much as possible.
- **Al Qaeda:** Al-Qaeda emphasized on jihadist forums and magazines like Inspire and Al-Nafir rather than launching flashy campaigns on social media. These books not only offered ideological justifications for terrorism, but they also offered DIY (do-it-yourself) terrorism guides and instructions on how to make bombs and kill people. Because Al-Qaeda relied on social indoctrination rather than social media bombardment, its influence was more complex and long-lasting.

V. Major concerns

A variety of societal, individual, and institutional variables often contribute to the pursuit of extreme beliefs, fostering an environment that is conducive to the growth of radical ideas. These people are particularly vulnerable to the narratives advanced by radicals because they may be dealing with identity difficulties, debilitating loneliness, or traumatic experiences. These carefully-crafted pieces of content seek out people who lack these qualities and are meant to encourage and inspire them to feel more strong and meaningful. On a bigger scale, outside influences like peer pressure to fit in, family history of extremism, and exposure to radicals in the community can permanently change a person. This cause is also greatly aided by unfair treatment, exclusion, and ostracization, which intensify the sense of unfairness that radicals subsequently exploit. The sense of alienation is further exacerbated by structural problems such as poverty, civil instability, and limited access to opportunities or education. Extremist organizations sadly seize on this and push themselves to be the remedy to the oppressions that took transpired. When employed online, the media and other tools only serve to exacerbate the situation by promoting and aiding the dissemination of misinformation and increasing the power of these influencers.

- **Education:**

Schools play an important role in shaping young brains because they are effective tools for developing kids' social resilience, values, and beliefs. Although many schools offer instructional initiatives to raise awareness about extremism and teach kids how to safely navigate on the internet, there are several outliers, particularly in the impacted areas, that encourage extreme ideologies and violence.

- **Religion:**

Extremist groups frequently use religious motivations to radicalize people, portraying violent acts as a responsibility to the divine through digital preaching and radical clerics. However, studies have shown that, in some situations, faith may serve as a barrier against radical views. For example, Christianity, despite its close association with right-wing extremism, may have a stronger protective impact against radical ideologies than Islam.

- Unfavourable environments:

A person's social and economic circumstances may also be a contributing factor to their susceptibility to radicalization, albeit a less important one. Financial offers are a common tactic used by terrorist groups to lure young individuals out of challenging circumstances. Additionally, vows based on domestic tragedy may be used to convince the groups at risk to join.

VI. Major Parties Involved:

- USA: despite the fact that the United States ranks just 30th on the 2023 Global Terrorism Index, several foreign terrorist organizations continue to target individuals and establish bases there. Since the deadliest attack in American history, on September 11, 2001, the government has taken numerous steps to improve security, including the passage of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which resulted in the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, which is responsible for preventing terrorist attacks and reducing the population's vulnerability to radicalization.
- Afghanistan: In the last 10 years, Afghanistan has been among the top five countries most afflicted by terrorism. Although mass radicalization does not appear to be a widespread threat in Afghanistan, the major factors of radicalization are prominent and a source of worry. An atmosphere prone to fostering radicalization implies that the Taliban and other violent organizations remain capable of recruiting adherents, and that expanding gaps in the Afghan political landscape may more readily lead to future conflict.
- Palestine (Non-Member State): Palestine has an important role in this issue since it is the home nation of HAMAS, an organization fighting for territorial rights. According to reports, Palestinian schools instill hatred for Israel in minors, teaching them that they will do everything to "annihilate the remnants of the foreigners". The well-known hate-speeches and debates on social media are only escalating the problem, dividing the population and pushing individuals to resort to extremist ideologies.
- Israel: Israel's policies and sociopolitical processes have contributed to the radicalization of young people, especially under the given circumstances, with the conflict this country is currently involved in. Extremist organizations like the "Hilltop Youth" have developed in the West Bank as anti-Palestinian and expansionist views spread among Israelis, relying heavily on technology and social media. Social media sites like as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Telegram act as echo chambers, amplifying religious and nationalist excuses for violence. By facilitating tactical

coordination and real-time communication, these networks help organize so-called "price tag" attacks, which are acts of violence and destruction directed against Israeli security personnel and Palestinians.

- Iraq & Syria: Iraq and Syria both play key roles in the radicalization of young people since they were the primary sponsors of the formation of ISIS. According to national authorities' estimates from 2019, approximately 2,000 boys and girls 'identified as' being involved with the group were detained across the country. Because the children had been removed from their families and communities for such a long time, they were much more vulnerable when they were finally released.

VII. Timeline of Events:

1861-1865 - American Civil War
1987 - Creation of the HAMAS
1988 - Creation of Al-Qaeda
1994 - Creation of Taliban
1998 - Al-Qaeda first launch of Online propaganda
2001 - 9/11 attacks and Online Jihadist Networks
2004 - Creation of the ISIS
2004 - Launch of Facebook & YouTube
2015 - Paris & San Bernardino attacks
2017-2025 - Usage of AI Deepfakes for extremist propaganda

VIII. Relevant UN Treaties and Events

The United Nations has come up with multiple solutions and has adopted several resolutions and initiatives in order to combat the radicalization of youth and ensure peacebuilding efforts around the world are up-to-standards. Among the most important ones we find:

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015), the pivotal resolution urges Member States to improve youth participation in decision-making processes at all levels and to increase inclusion of the representation of youth in preventing and resolving conflicts
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018). This resolution advocates for the active and meaningful participation of young people in the negotiation and implementation of peace accords. It tries to protect schools as safe havens while also advocating for young people to actively participate in security debates.
- Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015). As stated by the UN Secretary-General, this approach necessitates a comprehensive strategy that combines security-oriented counter-terrorism components with self-contained capacity development measures aimed at addressing the core reasons of membership in violent non-state groups.

- UN Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) & Tech Engagement (2020-Present). The CTC has worked with social media companies like Meta (Facebook), YouTube, and Twitter to enhance content moderation and prevent extremist content from spreading.
- UN Conference on Social Media & Terrorism (2016). It brought together policymakers, tech companies, and civil society to discuss strategies for countering extremist narratives online.

IX. Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Following a number of incidents since 2015, the European Union has implemented steps to combat terrorism that focus on three primary areas: maintaining citizens' security, preventing radicalization and protecting values, and collaborating with foreign partners. Some of the recommended strategies for preventing youth manipulation were:

- collaborating with Europol to develop online referral capabilities.
- developing communication techniques that promote tolerance, non-discrimination, and fundamental freedoms.
- providing education, vocational training, career prospects, social integration, and rehabilitation.

The United Nations, through both the Security Council and the United Nations Development Programme, has adopted a number of resolutions, including UNSC S/RES/2178/2014, condemning violent extremism and urging Member States to support efforts to implement longer-term solutions based on addressing the root causes of radicalization and terrorism. Another passed resolution that will be considered when analyzing potential solutions is UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace, and security, which recognizes the rise of radicalization and violent extremism and emphasizes the importance of addressing the conditions and factors that contribute to their impact on youth. The Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism emphasizes youth engagement, leadership, and empowerment. More than 120 eminent religious scholars and intellectuals from throughout the Muslim world have published an open letter to the Islamic State's leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, as another strategy to combating extremism and radicalization. The 17-page paper criticized the extreme group's 24 activities that violated Islamic law.

X. Possible Solutions

- Providing quality education and guidance on using the internet, browsing through social media and while cultivating critical- thinking, tolerance and moral values in order to fight extremist influences in the cyberspace and outside of it.
- Developing stronger partnerships with Tech Companies and pushing for mandatory transparency reports, by requiring proof and details related to the removal and supervision of extremist content.
- Strengthening anti-corruption measures, including harsher penalties and interim bans of activities in cases of suspicion.
- Developing UN Cybernetic & Counter-radicalization measures, by working with member states to strengthen and enforce more regulations regarding social media usage, activity and content uploading.

XI. Questions that delegates should ask themselves while doing research

- What measures has *given country* taken in the past and how did it affect our current situation?
- What solutions have not been implemented yet?
- How is my country affected by the already taken measures?
- What is my country's stance on *given incident/ action* taken by another country?
- What are the setback on the journey to solving our issue and how can they be changed?
- Which other countries share my country's stance on the matter?

XII. Useful links and resources

- <https://news.un.org/en/>
- <https://www.apu.apus.edu/area-of-study/security-and-global-studies/resources/what-are-the-four-stages-of-radicalization/>
- <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/role-mass-and-social-media-radicalization-extremism>
- <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2017/02/unesco-addresses-youth-radicalization-online-hate-speech-nice-conference/>
- [https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/youth-mobility#%2271286575%22:\[0\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/youth-mobility#%2271286575%22:[0]})
- <https://www.devonscp.org.uk/child-abuse/radicalisation-and-extremism/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism/Types-of-terrorism>
- <https://thediplomat.com/2011/09/how-al-qaeda-recruits-online/>
- <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-psychologie-sociale-2010-1-page-25?lang=fr>
- <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adk2031>
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326343>
- <https://www.thetimes.com/article/4588fcc0-aa94-4c59-9de2-e23fe17299cb>
- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22611328/>
- <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol4/iss4/9/>
- <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2614564>
- <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/radicalization-the-origins-and-limits-of-a-contested-concept/>