

Radicalization

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Within the field of research on terrorism, one important question is: how and why do people become terrorists? Finding the answer is not easy, because there is no clear definition of what terrorism is [2]. The main reason for lacking a definition is pointed out in the famous saying "one man's terrorist, is another man's freedom fighter", i.e. the description on what terrorism is depends on the context and who answers the question. It is also not clear when someone can be labeled as a terrorist. Is a suicide bomber a same kind of terrorist as someone who supports a terrorist organization, but does not participate in their activities? Can someone, who once was a terrorist, get rid of this label? Or is he a terrorist for the rest of his life?

The aim of this research project is to build a model of radicalization, in order to get better insights in the process of why and how people become terrorists. The model is based on the theoretical framework from [5] that explains the mechanism behind radicalization as a combination of personal and social concepts. Here, radical behavior is explained as behavior that helps reaching one personal goal, but at the same time undermines goals that matter to other people. Clearly terrorism is radicalism, with the undermined goals being protecting the democratic order, killing others or even killing oneself. But also anorexia, suicide or severe crime are examples of radical behavior.

The question of how someone becomes a terrorist now changes to what personal goal do terrorist have that makes them neglecting all these other goals? According to the theory, this is the need for significance, i.e. the need of people to feel important in the eyes of others. Together with an ideology as a mean to get that significance, and relations with a social group acting according to this ideology, the need for significance could trigger the process of radicalization.

A first implementation of this theory has been made. However, the model must be extended in order to resemble human behavior. For example:

1. How should a social group be defined? How can a group identity be modelled? How does this relate to a personal identity? [9, 6, 8]
2. How should sacred values be modelled? How will it be related to extreme and irrational behavior? [1, 3]
3. How can the goals of agents be extended such that significance is one of the goals of the agents? How does this relate to personalities, described by MBTI or OCEAN? [4, 7]

References

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