

# ACHTERGRONDEN EN DETERMINANTEN VAN RADICALISERING EN TERRORISME

Joop van der Pligt

Wim Koomen



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

ONDERZOEKSINSTITUUT PSYCHOLOGIE

SOCIALE PSYCHOLOGIE

## **Abstract**

This report presents an overview of a variety of factors that determine processes of radicalisation and terrorism in general, with special emphasis on factors that play a role in The Netherlands. We developed a tentative model capturing the various factors and specifying their role in the above mentioned processes. The model first addresses the role of social and individual antecedents that might foster processes of radicalization. Elements of the social context that might play a role concern socio-economic factors such as income, education and job opportunities. The model also describes the possible role of isolation and discrimination, and emphasizes the role of social comparison processes and the resulting relative deprivation as one of the key antecedents. Social comparison processes might explain that education is positively related to a tendency to opt for radicalization to resolve the experience of relative deprivation. It is argued that factors such as relative deprivation might constitute a threat to both the individual and the group and that this threat can be realistic, symbolic or pertain to the esteem of the group. Realistic threats are based upon competition between groups for relatively scarce resources (career perspective, adequate income). Symbolic threats are related to discrepancies between groups in terms of important values and beliefs. Finally, threats of group esteem are generally seen as caused by actions of others that imply a negative evaluation of the group to which one belongs.

In the first half of this report we also describe the possible role of cultural values and beliefs, religion, and specific experiences and events in radicalisation and the tendency to engage in terrorism. Examples of factors that are discussed are beliefs

about authority, uncertainty avoidance, and aversive events that affect(ed) the lives of relatives or friends, or the group as a whole. Finally, we briefly discuss the possible assumption role of personality factors and demographics such as age, and marital status. The assumption that terrorists tend to have severe personality problems is not supported by the existing literature.

In the proposed model the experience of threats generated by the majority group and/or relevant authorities lead to cognitive responses such as felt uncertainty, perceived injustice, dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem. Moreover, the experience of these threats also leads to a number of emotions such as fear, anger, and possibly contempt and disgust. We discuss these emotional responses as well as the related emotion hate and the wish to revenge the actions of the other group and/or the authorities. These emotions and cognitions all affect group identity; i.e., they tend to increase the importance of group membership and the social as opposed to individual identity of threatened individuals. Enhanced social identity is likely to increase intergroup differentiation and the perceived distance between members of one's own minority group and members of the majority group, especially if the latter is seen as responsible for the threats posed to the minority group. This polarisation between groups can be accompanied by more pronounced and more extreme religious and ideological beliefs, and these can in turn be supported by for instance a circle of close friends and supporters, as well as the wider community. These forms of direct and indirect social support can maintain and foster processes of radicalisation and tendencies to engage in terrorist action.

The increase of more polarised and radical beliefs and the perceived appropriateness of violent action usually take place in groups. The model also addresses a number of group processes (e.g. polarisation, groupthink), as well as the impact of isolation and leadership style on these processes. The role of internet is also briefly discussed. Finally, the model addresses a number of ways of thinking used to justify radical beliefs and actions. The two most important methods are the dehumanization of members of the majority group and the denial of personal responsibility for radicalisation and terrorist action. The latter results in a view in which terrorism is seen as the only possible outcome of the way the majority group deals with people or groups with different beliefs and values. A summary of the proposed model is

presented in the discussion. In this final section we also briefly discuss the applicability of our model to other forms of radicalisation and terrorism. We also briefly describe factors determining the growth and decline of radical groups. Finally, we mention possible interventions to prevent and combat radicalisation and terrorism as well as avenues for further research. Figure 8 on page 76 presents an overview of the various factors discussed in this report and places them in an overall model describing and explaining processes of radicalization and terrorism.