UAB

Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology

Final Degree Thesis
Executive Summary

THE ROLE OF PRE-EXISTING SOCIAL TIES IN JIHADI-SALAFIST RADICALIZATION: THE CASE OF SPAIN

MARINA TOVAR I VELASCO

TUTOR: RAFAEL GRASA
May 2022, International Relations Degree

Jihadi radicalization is highly contingent on several factors, among which social networks and pre-existing social ties with radicalized individuals are crucial. Social links are severely underrated in radicalization processes studies due to the challenging nature of explaining, generalizing, and demonstrating as an empirical variable. Nevertheless, they have crucial significance in adopting radical beliefs as they contribute to reinforcing and legitimizing radical networks and radical ideas. Radicalization leads, in some cases, to engage in violent action, like terrorist activities. Thus, comprehending the nature of the radicalization processes will aid us in creating new policies to prevent individuals from engaging in these processes.

This research paper analyses how pre-existing social ties influence in the Jihadi-Salafism radicalization processes from the theoretical point of view and provides a practical approach by studying data on this matter applied to Spain. The empirical-descriptive methodology will consist of two sections. Firstly, we will use thematic analysis to gather information from the existing literature, focus on trends, and compare theories and concepts on jihadist radicalization and network formations, allowing us to create our theoretical framework. Secondly, we will use El Cano's database of Jihadists in Spain (BDEYE) data from 2001 to 2018 to observe how pre-existing social ties and radicalization modalities in the two periods, from 2001 to 2011 and from 2012 to 2018, evolve. Our two research questions: (1) Are social networks, and specifically, pre-existing social ties significant in the process of jihadi-Salafism radicalization in Spain? And (2) As the Internet and social media platforms become prominent in the second period of study, will the role of pre-existing social networks still be relevant? will guide our research. Our case study will observe the data and test our hypothesis, "social networks, especially pre-existing social ties, are essential in adopting radical jihadist beliefs in Spain in the two periods."

The Jihadi-Salafism ideology consists of a rigorous and literal interpretation of the sacred texts (Moghadam, 2008). Nevertheless, terrorist groups, like Al-Qaeda, use these texts and provide additional tactics, goals, and strategies to pursue their objectives. Multiple variables, like socioeconomic factors, influence individuals who engage in Jihadi-Salafist radicalization processes. Still, Malthaner (2018), Sageman (2004, 2008), and other authors have proved that social ties are highly relevant in shaping individual pathways to adopting radical beliefs. Social network analysis allows us to comprehend that individuals need to interact socially, leading to the emergence of radical networks when radicalized individuals interact and gather. Mobilization via pre-existing social ties allows radical networks to create more engagement and participation among participants and permit recruitment via kinship and friendship (McAdam, 1986; Della Porta, 1992; Diani, 2013).

In Spain, radicalization processes do not occur in a balanced and distributed way; instead, we find radicalization bags concentrated in Autonomous Communities like Catalonia, Madrid, and Ceuta y Melilla. As radicalization processes focus on some areas, this could indicate the presence of radical networks and, therefore, pre-existing social ties. BDEYE's data shows that eight out of ten radicalized individuals in Spain had some pre-existing social ties, which confirms our hypothesis. When pre-existing social ties existed, friendship, kinship, and relations within the same neighbourhood allowed individuals to engage in radicalization

processes. Radical agents in the family or friend groups will instrumentalize their social connections for recruitment purposes or influence other members and expand the radical network they belong to.

As to the radicalization modalities in Spain, there is a decrease in the offline modality and increased relevance of the mixed and online modalities from one period to the other. Virtual spaces, the low cost of maintaining social media platforms and websites, and the diffusion of jihadist propaganda have let social media channels increase their importance, changing trends in the two periods. As a result, radical networks, radical agents, and individuals seeking to expand their networks have diversified their recruitment methods. However, the change in pattern does not decrease the importance of pre-existing social ties to virtual communities as the mixed and offline modality in the second period gathered 71,9% of individuals. In other words, seven out of ten individuals radicalized with pre-existing social ties or as part of a radical network.

To conclude, using social network lenses and existing publications on pre-existing social ties has aided us in understanding the importance of this variable on Jihadist radicalization processes. Our case study has confirmed our hypothesis and answered our two research questions. Social networks and pre-existing social ties are crucial in radicalization processes, including in Spain, as they shape, reinforce, and validate radical beliefs. Furthermore, despite the change in patterns in radicalization processes in the periods studied due to the expansion of the Internet and social media channels, social ties are still incredibly relevant in aiding radical networks in recruiting new members, primarily via kinship and friendship.[1]

Bibliography

Antunez, J.C. (2017). Salafism: From a Religious Movement to a Political Force, Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2017), pp. 11-41. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18847/1.5.2

Bakker, E. (2006). Jihadi terrorists in Europe: Their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad. *Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael*, 1-70. ISBN-13: 978-90-5031-113-7

Bokhari, L., Hegghammer, T., Lia, B., Nesser, P., & Tønnessen, T. H. (2006). Paths to global Jihad: Radicalisation and recruitment to terror networks-proceedings from a FFI seminar, Oslo, 15 March 2005.

Bouchard, M., & Nash, R. (2015). Researching terrorism and counter-terrorism through a network lens. In *Social Networks, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism* (pp. 48-60). Routledge.

---

[1] Word count of the Executive Summary: 784 words.

Bourekba, M. (2019). Preventing Violent Extremism in France: from a society of vigilance to a society of suspicion? *CIDOB Opinion*, 600 3(3), 1-3. https://www.cidob.org/ca/content/download/74243/2368262/version/12/file/600_OPINION_ MOUSSA%20BOUREKBA_ANG.pdf

Bunzel, C. (2017). 'From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State'. *Centre for Middle East Policy at Brookings,* Vol. 19 (March 2015). Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf

Cragin, R. K. (2014). Resisting violent extremism: A conceptual model for non-radicalization. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *26*(2), 337-353. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2012.714820

Della Porta, D. (1992). *Social movements and violence: participation in underground organizations.* Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.

Diario, M., Mische, A. (2015). Network Approaches and Social Movements. *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, 306-325. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1679106

Europol (2021). Spanish Police arrests 5 jihadists on suspicion of preparing a terrorist attack. Retrieved March 8, 2022, from https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/spanish-police-arrests-5-jihadists-suspicion-of-preparing-terrorist-attack

Fillieule, O. (2010). Some elements of an interactionist approach to political disengagement. *Social movement studies*, *9*(1), 1-15. DOI:10.1080/14742830903442436

GESI (2022). Operaciones Policiales Contra el Terrorismo Yihadista en España. Retrieved April 20, 2022 from http://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=es/content/operaciones-policiales-contra-el-terrorismo-yihadista-en-espa%C3%B1

Hafez, M., Mullins, C. (2015). The radicalization puzzle: A theoretical synthesis of empirical approaches to homegrown extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *38*(11), 958-975. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375

Hegghammer, T. (2006) Terrorist recruitment and radicalization in Saudi Arabia. *Middle East Policy*, 13 (4), pp. 39–60. DOI:10.1111/j.1475-4967.2006.00269.x

Heinke, D.H., & Persson, M. (2016). Youth Specific Factors in Radicalization. *Defence Against Terrorism Review*, vol. 8, pp. 53-66.

Jordán, J. (2009). Procesos de radicalización yihadista en España. Análisis sociopolítico en tres niveles. *Revista de psicología social*, *24*(2), 197-216. https://www.ugr.es/~jjordan/publicaciones/radicalizacion.pdf

Jordán, J., Mañas, F. M. & Horsburgh, N. (2008). Strengths and weaknesses of Grassroot Jihadist Networks. The Madrid Attacks Case. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 31, 17-39. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701767148

King, M., & Taylor, D. M. (2011). The radicalization of homegrown jihadists: A review of theoretical models and social psychological evidence. *Terrorism and political violence*, *23*(4), 602-622. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.587064

Knoke, D., Yang, S. (2008) Social Network Analysis. Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Kruglanski, A. W., Bélanger, J. J., & Gunaratna, R. (2019). *The three pillars of radicalization: Needs, narratives, and networks*. Oxford University Press, USA. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190851125.001.0001

Lexico (2022). *Radicalization*. Retrieved 15th February 2022 from https://www.lexico.com/definition/radicalization

Malthaner, S. (2017). Radicalization: The evolution of an analytical paradigm. *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 58(3), 369-401. doi:10.1017/S0003975617000182

Malthaner, S. (2018). Spaces, ties, and agency: The formation of radical networks. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12(2), 32-43. ISSN 2334-3745

Malthaner, S., & Waldmann, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Radikale Milieus: Das soziale Umfeld terroristischer Gruppen* (Vol. 6). Campus Verlag.

Malthaner, S., & Waldmann, P. (2014). The radical milieu: Conceptualizing the supportive social environment of terrorist groups. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *37*(12), 979-998. 10.1080/1057610X.2014.962441

Maskaliūnaitė, A. (2015). Exploring the theories of radicalization. *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal (IS)*, *17*(1), 9-26. DOI:10.1515/ipcj-2015-0002

McCauley, C., & Moskalenko, S. (2017). Understanding political radicalization: The two-pyramids model. *The American psychologist*, *72*(3), 205–216. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000062

Moghadam, A. (2008). The Salafi-jihad as a religious ideology. *CTC Sentinel*, *1*(3), 14-16. https://ctc.usma.edu/the-salafi-jihad-as-a-religious-ideology

Moskalenko, S., Clark, M. (2009). "Measuring Political Mobilization: The Distinction between Activism and Radicalism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (April): 239-260. https://doi.org/10.1080/0954655090276550

Nasiri, O. (2007). Mi vida en Al Qaeda. Barcelona: El Andén

Nepstad, S., & Smith, C. (1999). Rethinking recruitment to high-risk/cost activism: the case of Nicaragua exchange. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *4*(1), 25-40. DOI:10.17813/MAIQ.4.1.8152670287R21558

Nesser, P. (2005). The Slaying of the Dutch Filmmaker – Religiously motivated violence or Islamist terrorism in the name of global jihad? Oslo: FFI

Nesser, P. (2008). *Europe hasn't won the war on terror*. Politico. Retrieved March 8, 2022, from www.politico.eu/article/europe-hasnt-won-the-war-on-terror/

Neumann, P. R. (2013). The trouble with radicalization. *International affairs*, *89*(4), 873-89. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12049

Neumann, P., & Rogers, M. B. (2007). *Recruitment and mobilisation for the Islamist militant movement in Europe*. European Commission. http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1234516791ICSREUResearchReport_Proof1.pdf

O'Loughlin, B., Boudeau, C., Hoskins, A. (2011) Distancing the extraordinary: Audience understandings of discourses of 'radicalization', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studie*s, 25:02, 153-164, DOI: 10.1080/10304312.2011.553937

Olidort, Jacob (2015), "What Is Salafism? How a Non-political Ideology Became a Political Force", Foreign Affairs (24 November).

Precht, T. (2007). "Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe: From Conversion to Terrorism". Danish Ministry of Justice. (http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/sites/default/files/media/Arbejdsomraader/Forskning/Forskningspuljen/2011/2007/Home_grown_terrorism_and_Islamist_radicalisation_in_Europe_-_an_assessment_of_influencing_factors__2_.pdf

Reinares, F., Garcia-Calvo, C., & Vicente, Á. (2017). Differential association explaining Jihadi radicalization in Spain: A quantitative study. *CTC Sentinel*, 10(6), 29-34. Retrieved https://ctc.usma.edu/differential-association-explaining-jihadi-radicalization-in-spain-a-quantitative-study/

Reinares, F., García-Calvo, C., Vicente, Á. (2019). *Yihadismo y yihadistas en España: quince años después del 11-M*. Real Instituto Elcano. https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/monografias/yihadismo-y-yihadistas-en-espana-quince-anos-despues-del-11-m/

Sageman, M. (2004). Understanding terror networks. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Sedgwick, M. (2010). The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22 (4): 479-494. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2010.491009

Silber, M. D., Bhatt, A., (2007). Radicalization in the West: The homegrown threat (pp. 1-90). New York: Police Department.

Snow, D. A., Zurcher, L. A., & Ekland-Olson, S. (1980). Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment. American Sociological Review, 45(5), 787–801. https://doi.org/10.2307/2094895

Thomas, D. (2003). Le Londonistan. La voix du djihad. París: Editions Michalon.

Vicente, Á. (2021). Social Ties and Jihadist Participation: A Mixed-Methods Approach to the Differential Recruitment of Radicalized Youth in Spain. *Terrorism and Political Violence,* 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1989415

Vicente, Á. (2022). How radicalizing agents mobilize minors to jihadism: a qualitative study in Spain. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, *14*(1), 22-48. DOI:10.1080/19434472.2020.1800063

Weimann, G. (2006) Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, The New Challenges. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). Radical Islam rising: Muslim extremism in the West. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.