

# Understanding Radicalization

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## *Abstract*

*This essay is a critical view of the concept of radicalization proposed by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko who explained the mechanism of political radicalization as one of the many models to describe the role of radicalization in the context of terrorism. Analytically, it is necessary to distinguish between radicalization that does not include violent behavior as existing in political expression in democratic societies and radicalization that defines violent behavior as existing in the characteristics of terrorist groups. In this way it will enable us to understand appropriate counterterrorism policies.*

**Keywords:** *Radicalization, non-violent radicalization, terrorism, counterterrorism.*

## **Abstrak**

Esai ini adalah pandangan kritis terhadap konsep radikalisasi yang diusulkan oleh Clark McCauley dan Sophia Moskalenko yang menjelaskan mekanisme radikalisasi politik sebagai salah satu dari banyak model untuk menggambarkan peran radikalisasi dalam konteks terorisme. Secara analitik perlu dibedakan antara radikalisasi yang tidak termasuk perilaku kekerasan seperti yang ada dalam ekspresi politik dalam masyarakat demokratis dengan radikalisasi yang mendefinisikan perilaku kekerasan seperti yang ada dalam karakteristik kelompok teroris. Dengan cara demikian akan memungkinkan kita untuk memahami kebijakan kontraterorisme yang sesuai.

**Kata kunci:** *Radikalisasi, radikalisasi tanpa kekerasan, terorisme, kontraterorisme.*

Phenomenon of radicalization has become more and more discussed in the circle of terrorism studies. More scholars even believe that the root of terrorism or the core of terrorism is radicalization. Thus, a valid and reliable understanding of the radicalization is crucial and urgent. Governments around the world, especially law enforcement agencies have been working hard to ensure that terrorism disruptions do not interfere the democratization being carried out by all countries in the world. Then, it is clear that, the need for understanding radicalization is not only merely answering the academic needs, but more than that related to the urgency of the national security policy makers

to make efforts to counter the terrorism that increasingly growing in unpredictable direction. This is a fact of a global development related to the widespread of threat of terrorism than ever before. Consequently, from the initial of its emergence, the concept of radicalization to be misguided by assuming that all terrorist actors derive from the abundance of extreme group sympathizers (Arun Kundnani, 2012). Moreover, the media sometimes try to take the role of academics in explaining completely related to radicalization. The role that is not based on proper knowledge has obviously been the cause of social noise in the society. One of which is the re-emergence of the right-wing extremists who object to the existence of certain communities such as in cases of Islamophobia. Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen (2010; 805 ) said,

*The media, when corroborated with official documents and trial transcripts, might offer a valid source of information about socioeconomic data such as age, family background, and criminal record. But information about complex social processes and individual motives is hardly substantive and possibly not valid.*

The misunderstanding of the radicalization concept can be found for instance through the dissemination of a number of the concepts related to the non-violent extremism. The development of the concept of non-violent extremism as if to reject the fact that only a small part of a group of people who have extreme ideology that ultimately perform acts of terrorism. Therefore, it is important to understand radicalization as an initial condition for the occurrence of terrorist activity, so the possibility of errors in the implementation of counterterrorism policy can be minimized. Anthony Richards (2012; 22), said that:

“The concern with non-violent ideology as a focus of a counter terrorism strategy diminishes

the prospect of opening up radical but non-violent avenues for democratic political expressions as an alternative to the use of terrorism.

Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of radicalization is essential in the counter-terrorism agenda.

Neumann and Kleinmann (2013) explains how difficult it is to conduct research to explain the concept of radicalization, which ultimately produces concepts not only elusive but often confusing in explaining the latter terrorist events. The explanation focuses on three arguments, namely; first, research on radicalization is largely based not on academic needs but on the pragmatic needs of government-related terrorism law enforcement. The second factor is related to the nature of the research subject which is very difficult to find because terrorists and its sympathizers always avoid being exposed. If ultimately able to be found, the atmosphere and the current situation will be a challenge to obtain an objective data. The third factor relates to the fact that research in the field of radicalism and terrorism studies has not been a consistent and coherent discipline. Approaches, perspectives and frameworks that vary greatly according to the background of the science of each researcher (multidisciplinary), has given rise to the context and methodological confusion that should be a benchmark in a patented science study (Peter Neumann & Scott Kleinmann, 2013). Mark Sedgwick (2010) said, with regard to the challenge of doing research in the field of radicalism is the difference of agenda that becomes the underlying framework. Some of that agenda are; the security agenda, the integration agenda, the foreign-policy agenda, and the Islamic agenda (Mark Sedgwick, 2010; 488). The distinction of these agendas seems to be logical as an explanation for the difficulty of understanding radicalization as a consistent concept.

Related to the explanation of radicalization as the “origin of terrorism”, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko (2008), proposed a radicalization concept of a political background as a mechanism considered to answer the involvement of an individuals, groups, and mass public in a conflict and violence. This concept described that a person who ultimately commits an act of violence in terrorism is not spontaneously but through the phases of a coherent and logical mechanism. In this respect, radicalization is meant as a change of individual’s beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that ultimately leads to the justification of violence and sacrifice in maintaining the existence of the group for the achievement of common goals (Clark McCauley & Sophia Moskalenko (2008; 416). Furthermore, the commitment to a political organization that justifies acts of violence and its ability to change one’s behavior always demands more sacrifice of time, money, risks to be faced, and violence. The activists who are members of mass or politics organizations, have greater possibilities exposed by the radical ideology. Radical ideology is shared among members expressively as a form of identification of group identity that binds and becomes a feature of the group’s internal relations. Furthermore, radicalization is explained more effectively within a small group rather than in a large and complex organization. This denies the rational choice theory that explains the involvement of individuals within an organization, where it is difficult to distinguish between an agenda and individual interests with organizational agendas and interests as this is known as the “free rider” phenomenon. In a small group, the differences of agenda and interests between individuals and groups are more easily controlled. This is because individual behavior in small groups has long been known amongst each other group members. Therefore, radicalization within a small group is likely to be the most effective venue of radicalization.

Moreover, radicalization can be done not only to individuals but also to groups and masses. Individual radicalization occurs through individual and group grievances that one of them is conveyed by the mass media. Meanwhile, political radicalization within the group and the mass of the public is forged through conflicts with governments or other groups. In this respect, McCauley and Moskalenko (2008, p.418) introduced twelve paths within the framework of radicalization mechanism to individuals, groups, and masses. Radicalization to an individual can occur through multiple paths that are; Personal victimization, personal grievance, joining a radical group (slippery slope), joining a radical group (the power of love). Political radicalization to a group, can be accomplished through several paths, namely; Extremity shift in like-minded groups, extreme cohesion under isolation and threat, competition for the same base of support, and competition with state power (condensation). Political radicalization to the public mass can be formed through multiple paths, that paths are; Within-group competition (fissioning), jujitsu politics, hate, and martyrdom.

Examples of the terrorists categorized in radicalization by individual victimization are those who have experienced and witnessed the atrocities that occurred in the past. Feeling as a victim has established a perspective to do something that ultimately justifies the acts of violence. The examples of those which included into this category are they that able to withstand social conflicts in their communities, such as the conflict in Tamil, Chechnya, and Palestine. Meanwhile, Ted Kaczynski the unabomber, Buford Furrow, John Allen Muhammad, Lee Boyd Malvo, and Matt Halle are the examples of the individuals who have undergone radicalization based on complaints against government or other governmental organizations whose policies are inconsistent with their personal grievances. A person can also experience radicalization when

joining a radical group. When a person joins a radical organization, he will generally experience several stages of internal selection. He will be given initial tasks that are not related to violence. Having been able to perform the initial tasks well then it is likely that he will be given more ideological and violent tasks. Examples of these cases include the Red Army terrorist organization, IRA, and ETA. In this category of individual radicalization, one can also be radicalized by a terrorist that has an amazing charisma.

Furthermore, McCauley and Moskalenko (2008), described the radicalization within the group is generally related to the individual's attitude to the opinions, direction, and the goal of a terrorist group. Sometimes an individual can be unconsciously radicalized, but can also be forced by circumstances that do not allow them to reject it. In terms of radicalization within the group, social cohesion is a leading indicator. The other concept of group radicalization is the existence of competition among violent groups as a means of achieving goals to supplement the support of supporters in the same location. In this case, violent activities committed by a group to get more support from the sympathizer, in other words the violence was done as a means to gain more endorsement. Another form of group radicalization done by small, weak, and diffuse groups that needed the public support is gaining endorsement by making public appearance such as, protest march, a rally, hunger strike, and other form of civil disobedience in order to get sympathy from the public or its base supporters. Intra-group competition can also be the way of radicalization in a group. A small community inside a group can also be established as differences of a recent value appears to be a fundamental issue and if this happened fissioning would be inevitable. Mass radicalization is the other way of the public radicalization. One of the form is dealing with the outgroup threat or hate which

can increase group cohesion and strengthen group identity. And the ultimate way of the mass radicalization is the martyrdom. Martyrdom is considered as the popular way among the radical violent groups to show its coherent and its in-group identity.

The above explanation has at least given a picture of how the mechanism of radicalization to individuals, groups, and masses of political background. From the explanation we can learn strengths and weaknesses in empirical data or substantial case studies. The concept of mechanism of political radicalization as the pathway towards terrorism, we can see that the author did not dare propose this concept into a reference for understanding radicalization. It is said that "Tamil tigers of the suicide brigades called "Black Tigers" are often described as survivors of Sinhalese atrocities". Such an explanation proves that the concept proposed by the author is based on qualitative assumptions without the support of accurate data. From an academic perspective, of course, this kind of thing is a weakness. Related to the concept proposed across varying ideologies can be very clearly seen that this concept is intended to answer the whole phenomenon of radicalization through the passage of time and society as well as diverse countries. This can be seen from the discussion related individuals and groups that have a range of political tendencies from the right to the left wing. From the introduction of this concept it is clear that this concept is proposed to answer questions relating to the phenomena that have occurred. The grouping of the object of radicalization which pointed upon individuals, groups, and the mass of the public for a later explanation of the background of radicalization that ultimately resulted in the violent action aimed at politically, clarifying this concept aims at pragmatically answering the questions that already exist. The main argument of the concept of mechanism of political radicalization as a

pathway toward terrorism is that radicalization occurs to individuals related to changes in aspects of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. Then explained in more detail that such changes can occur both personally and within the group but with more emphasis on the changes caused by group dynamics.

The implications of this concept can enrich the treasury of knowledge about what and how terrorism can occur, as it is known by radicalization. The radicalization described as a political mechanism by the authors will obviously invite fierce debate. And academically it is very positive. However, it must be admitted that until now research on radicalization is still difficult to do related to the limitations of research subjects are also associated with demographic aspects. Michael King and Donald M Taylor (2011; 615) said,

*Considering the discrepancies and the commonalities among the five models, and the lack of empirical research verifying the factors and processes within these models, no one model can be distinguished as being more accurate than any other. This conclusion does not only apply to the models reviewed in this article, but can be generalized to most descriptions of radicalization in the broader field of terrorism studies.*

In spite of these pessimistic opinions, the concepts proposed by McCauley and Moskaleiko may be the basis of further relevant research on how do we distinguish the psychological condition between killer and suicide bomber in terrorism activity at the time when doing it? It is a different psychological background in the both action. Marc Sageman (2014; 568) said that,

*McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008) proposed an intriguing set of mechanisms constituting this process of radicalization, but the mechanisms are ad hoc, based on very schematic biographies of nineteenth-century*

*Russian militants and selective confirmatory evidence from global neo-jihadi terrorism. It remains to be seen whether their concepts will be fruitful enough to generate a research project or be useful in the field.*

In the future, we should be able to really find the root of terrorism which by that we can formulate a comprehensive counter-terrorism series from preemptive efforts (counter-radicalization) to the rehabilitation stage (de-radicalization). We have to find the explanation upon the terrorist that kills people which is inspired by violent action, and the terrorist that committed suicide bombing which is someone that willing to sacrifice themselves in consciousness. So, in those two types of a terrorist, that considered they were radicalized in different way, we should do something based on the clearest foundation that we can find and learned. Why we are concern about these differences? Because the killer and the suicide bomber type of terrorist is our factual threat to the public.

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