Editorial

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Extremism, Radicalization and Terrorism

<https://doi.org/10.1515/mks-2021-0134>

Since 2020, societies around the globe are particularly concerned about the Coronaviruses and the related Covid-19 diseases. However, in parallel and over a much longer time period the topic of the present thematic issue was and is also an extremely important issue for policy makers, practice and research worldwide: Politically, religiously, ethnically, and otherwise motivated forms of extremism, radicalization, and terrorism. After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center at 9/11 in 2001 with about 3000 deaths the world became again and hugely alerted to this topic. As a consequence numerous practical measures and also research projects were undertaken to prevent such terrible events. However, still nearly every month the mass media report terrorist attacks or actions of radicalized groups in one or the other part of the world. During the production of this thematic issue, Norway commemorates the killing of 77 mostly young people by a right-wing extremist in 2011. Germany experienced over several years the murder of eight Turkish victims (plus one Greek victim) by the so-called National Socialist Underground. After the terror by the IRA in the 1970s and 80s, Great Britain experienced various terror attacks by Al-Queda, for example in 2005 when 52 people were killed in London. France experienced the attacks by two Islamist terrorists on journalists of the satiric journal *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015 at Paris (12 deaths) and a deadly truck attack by another Islamist in 2016 at Nice that killed 86 persons and wounded hundreds. Similarly, on a Berlin Christmas market in 2016, an Islamist occupied a truck, killed twelve innocent people and wounded others seriously. These terrible crimes are only a few examples of terrorism in the Western world. They were temporarily top news in all mass media and governments took much action to prevent similar events. Looking back to terrorism in the 1960s and 70s the types of terrorism seem to have changed, but as other

serious crimes could not fully be prevented. However, the largest database on worldwide terrorism gathered by the University of Maryland (<https://gtd.terrorismdata.com/files/gtd-1970-2019-4/>) shows that terrorist attacks in the Western world are only a minor proportion and even decreasing in recent times. The most frequent and deadly attacks occur in countries that are suffering from wars, civil wars, conflicts between different religious groups, general hostility towards other cultures and politics. Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Nigeria, Mali, Indonesia, Bali, Yemen, and the Philippines are some of these examples. Reports on deadly terrorist attacks in these countries became more or less regular marginalia in Western newscasts.

However, every victim is one too many. Therefore, we should avoid any relativization, but also keep an appropriate balance between rational evaluations of facts and emotional dramatization. The latter may increase anxiety within the population what is exactly an aim of radical extremists and terrorists. From a scientific viewpoint, terrorist violence is often, but not always, the final phase in a development of extremism and radicalization (e.g., Borum, 2017; Doosje et al., 2016; Moghaddam, 2005; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Therefore, a large part of research on risk factors, protective factors, theoretical explanations, and prevention measures focuses on these earlier processes of extremism and radicalization.

Systematic reviews of the multidisciplinary literature on our topic comprise thousands of documents (e.g., Lösel et al, 2020; Wolfowicz et al., 2020). It is impossible to represent this huge amount of scientific contributions adequately in the few papers of this thematic issue. For a comprehensive overview we still suggest the handbook of LaFree and Freilich (2017), although there is now more recent research. In spite of thousands of publications on extremism, radicalization, and terrorism, leading experts agree upon gaps in sound empirical knowledge on key issues (e.g., Jensen et al., 2016; Monahan, 2017; Sageman, 2014; Silke & Schmidt-Petersen, 2017; Webber & Kruglanski, 2017). This is due to various limitations:

For example, there are no generally accepted definitions of key terms. In accordance with Maskaliūnaitė (2015), Schmid (2012), and other authors we use the following working definitions: *Extremism* is a verbal or active opposition to basic values in a society, such as democracy,

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equality, liberty, rule of law, and tolerance for the faiths and beliefs of others. *Radicalization* is a process by which a person adopts beliefs that justify the use of violence for social and/or political change. *Terrorism* is an intentional act or threat of violence by a non-state actor that aims to attain a political, religious, economic, or social goal and coerces or intimidates an audience beyond the direct victims. Although this terminology is a plausible framework, we should be aware that these concepts allow much interpretation. For example, some individuals who were labeled as radical extremists or even terrorists at one time by a government became political leaders after they achieved a regime change in their country (e.g., members of the IRA in Northern Ireland, Menachim Begin in Israel, Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, or even Nelson Mandela in South Africa). Extremism contains a gradual difference in attitudes and behavior that deviate from (more or less explicit) norms of conformity, that depend on time, political, social, individual, and other factors. In principle, there are no clear thresholds of seriousness and its relation to violence in processes of radicalization (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2009). Police, criminal justice and intelligence agencies need to act and apply pragmatic definitions of extremism that mostly embrace various forms of radical publications or vandalism and in more violent cases physical attacks of other groups or state representatives, demolition of cars and others' property, fire setting, etcetera. In various Western countries, the prevalence of extremist activities and radical violent acts increased over time. In Germany, for example, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution reports increasing figures for right wing and left wing extremism and violence, whereas data on Islamist activities seem to stagnate (BMI, 2021). Not rarely, there is some controversy about the classification of specific acts. For example, the deadly attack on eight Muslim victims 2020 in Hanau by a German terrorist with clear schizophrenic symptoms (Kröber, 2020) was officially labeled as right wing extremism. In contrast, a case in 2021 with a migrant perpetrator from Somalia who stabbed three women to death in Würzburg was primarily attributed to mental health problems in the media (the legal evaluation is pending). From a scientific perspective, both attributions can be valid because a mental health problem is one among other risk factors for terrorism (see LaFree & Schwarzenbach, this issue). Sometimes, an official categorization was even changed after several years, i.e. when an adolescent's act of amok in 2016 initially interpreted only as revenge for school bullying was also classified as right-wing terrorism in 2016. In France, the practice seems to be somewhat different. For example, even individual killings of a priest or a teacher by Islamists

were defined as terrorist acts. Such different processes remind criminologists to the labeling approach on the definitional power of mighty institutions or persons. With regard to extremism there is a tendency to label an opinion or a person as »extremist« and thus avoid rational argumentation and integrative discourses. The frequently quoted »division of society« in the media and the political arena is a more or less natural consequence of these processes, although sharp (dividing?) controversies between leading parties have been very frequent in modern democracies.

From a scientific point of view, extremism and radicalization are very heterogeneous with regard to underlying motivations. Doosje et al. (2016) differentiate between the following groups:

- a) *Extreme right-wing groups*, who want to safeguard the high status position of the white race that is perceived to be threatened by minorities and immigrants (e.g. the Ku Klux Klan in the USA or the National Socialist Underground, NSU in Germany).
- b) *Extreme left-wing groups*, who aim for a just distribution of wealth and see capitalism as the main source of evil (e.g. the FARC in Columbia, the Baader-Meinhof Group/Red Army Fraction in Germany, Brigate Rosse in Italy, and more or less violent Antifascist Action (Antifa) groups in various countries).
- c) *Religiously motivated groups*, who adhere to a very strict interpretation of their religion that justifies violence against »infidels« (e.g. ISIS in Syria and Iraq, Al Quaida in several countries, Hisbollah in Lebanon, Army of God in USA).
- d) *Nationalist or separatist groups*, who want to secure a territory, power and independence for the own group (e.g. ISIS in Syria and Iraq, ETA in Spain, IRA in Ireland and UK, PKK in Turkey).
- e) *Single issue groups*, who focus on a particular topic such as the protection of the environment, animal rights, or abortion (e.g. Earth Liberation Front in UK, Animal Liberation Front in various countries, and the Army of God for anti-abortion in USA).

Although these basic differentiations are appropriate, they contain some overlap. For example, there is often a mixture of religious and national/separatist motivation (e.g. ISIS). Depending on the single issue, these groups partially overlap with extreme left wing groups (e.g. ecology preservation) or right wing groups (e.g. faith-based anti-abortion activists). Religiously motivated extremism is also partially confounded with ethnic conflicts. Analyses of radicalization processes also show similarities between right wing and Islamist groups (Ebner, 2017; Jensen et al., 2016). Over-

all, there is both heterogeneity in extremist motivation, attitudes, and actions, but also similarity. Furthermore, the view that extremism and radicalization are mainly related to direct group contacts also needs to be differentiated because »lone actors« sometimes seemed to become radical via the internet (e.g. Corner & Gill, 2015; Meloy & Genzman, 2016).

There are numerous theories and hypotheses on origins or risk factors. These refer, for example, to identity formation, strain and deprivation, social learning, social bonding, rational choice, societal injustice, in-group vs. outgroup dynamics, intolerance of ambiguity, reactance to injustice, mental health problems, and other domains (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2017; Raets, 2017; Sageman, 2017). More recently, also protective factors have been addressed as many individuals who are at risk do not enter a pathway of extremism and radicalization (e.g. Lösel et al., 2018, 2020). Doosje et al. (2016) rightly refer to shields of resilience that may protect against an extremist development or later help to disengage and desist. As in other fields of criminology (e.g. Farrington et al., 2019), many theories are not alternatives, but address different origins and levels of influence. Some levels can at least partially be integrated (e.g. Wikström & Bouhana, 2017; see also Williamson et al., this issue).

There is also a variety of methodological approaches. Most research based on cross-sectional data or retrospective case analyses, whereas sound prospective longitudinal designs are rare (Scarcella et al., 2016). The classification of extremist attitudes and behavior continues to be controversial. In community or school samples an extremist attitude has to be more or less arbitrarily defined when the mean scale score exceeds the absolutely middle scale range and thus expresses at least minimal agreement with the items (e.g. Baier et al., 2016). Accordingly, even Klaus Kleber, a not at all right-wing oriented deskman of the Second German Television (ZDF), asked a researcher on 25.4.2019 whether somebody is already a right wing populist if sh/e wants legally correct instead of generous procedures in cases of asylum seeking. Of course, single items and scale scores should be analyzed in context, however, there are basic challenges of relatively arbitrary thresholds of extremism (e.g., Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Kruglanski et al. 2009). In empirical studies, these may depend on the respective items, questionnaires, samples, and preferences of authors. Legal behavioral criteria are more objective, but often have a large dark field, low base rates for the most serious cases, incomplete information in official files, and cooperation or language barriers in assessments of violent extremists.

The articles in this thematic issue illustrate the above-mentioned general issues and specific empirical findings.

As in other criminological fields, there is a clear need of comparative findings and replication (e.g., Farrington et al., 2019; Lösel, 2018). The present articles show indeed substantial consistency across different studies. Our selection of papers had various main aims: First, we wanted to cover a broad range of relevant topics, ranging from theoretical concepts, empirical risk and protective factors to measures of prevention and intervention. Hereby, the focus was on social science approaches and not on police, secret service and other control measures. Second, we aimed for international contributions, but also for a mix with German research. The *Monatsschrift für Kriminologie und Strafrechtsreform* (Journal of Criminology and Penal Reform) is one of the oldest German language criminological journals. Since its foundation in 1904, it contained much substantial criminological research. However, probably due to language barriers, German contributions seem to be rarely recognized internationally, particularly in Anglo-American countries (e.g. Lösel, 2021a,b). Therefore, we decided to publish this thematic issue in English. The new publisher, de Gruyter, advocated this step towards increased internationalization. A third aim was the inclusion of different phases of extremism from early risk and protective factors to individual and social influences on radicalization to data on sentenced and incarcerated terrorist suspects. Fourth, we aimed for a variety of methodological approaches. These comprise large-scale community surveys, focused investigation of specific risk groups, meta-analyses, official files' data, questionnaires and qualitative interviews with prisoners, various data sources on terrorist acts, and practice-oriented research on intervention.

Altogether, the ten articles show the richness of research on the present topic. The references in the papers indicate much activity in recent years. This is also obvious in the field of prevention where controlled international evaluations of programs substantially increased in the last few years (Jugl et al., 2021; Lösel et al., 2021). As Germany and other countries invest much money in prevention programs against extremism and radicalization, a further increase in sound evaluation is highly relevant. Several contributions to the present issue underline this view.

The first article, authored by *LaFree and Schwarzenbach*, addresses micro and macro-level risk factors for terrorism. It reports findings of the worldwide most comprehensive and valid data set on terrorism, gathered at the University of Maryland, USA. The authors also emphasize the need for more criminological perspectives on the topic of extremism. *Williamson, de Buck and Pauwels* report a large empirical study of thousands of young Belgian citizens on group threat and self-reported right-wing vio-

lence. The multivariate data analyses demonstrate the benefits of an integration of various theoretical concepts. *Wolfowicz, Weisburd and Hasisi* present a meta-analysis that compares European with non-European studies on radicalization. This shows various differences that suggest cultural differences in the relevance of specific risk factors. The contribution from *Bliesener, Schröder and Lehmann* contains a large German cross-sectional survey that tests theoretical stage concepts on the development of ideological beliefs, acceptance, and extremist behavior. The findings clearly suggest processes of aggravation from attitudes to concrete extremist behavior. *Jugl, Bender and Lösel* report a study that specifically focuses on left-wing extremist behavior. For various reasons, research on this form of extremism and radicalization is very rare so that the present data on risk and protective factors in this group are highly welcome. The paper of *King, Endres and Stemmler* contains a study on the role of religion for radicalization potentials of young Muslim prisoners. The results indicate an increased vulnerability of Muslim inmates for religious radicalization, but also suggest no direct effect of religious confession on militancy. *Rodermund and Weerman* report research on family characteristics of suspects of terrorism in the Netherlands. Its access to an official data set is a particular strength of this study. The article of *Stemmler, Endres, King, Ritter and Becker* contains a study of radicalized versus non-radicalized Muslim prisoners in Bavaria. The authors chose a qualitative approach with intensive interviews in a small sample, what enriches the methodological breadth in this thematic issue. *Beelmann* writes on the topic of developmental prevention of radicalization. His paper contains both empirical findings as well as promising conceptual strategies that are important for practice. The article from *Silke, Morrison, Maiberg, Slay and Stewart* addresses the developmental phase of disengagement and de-radicalization from violent extremism and terrorism. The authors present data on evaluation studies and, in particular, the Phoenix Model as a practical program from the United Kingdom.

We are grateful to the authors who were very cooperative in meeting deadlines. The reviewers also deserve our thanks for their thorough and timely feedback. In addition, we thank the publishing house for accepting more pages as usual and for a quick production process. Of course, there are many other highly relevant studies on the topic of this thematic issue, but as always, space is limited. We hope that the broad range of themes is of interest for readers and inspires further research in German-speaking and other countries.

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