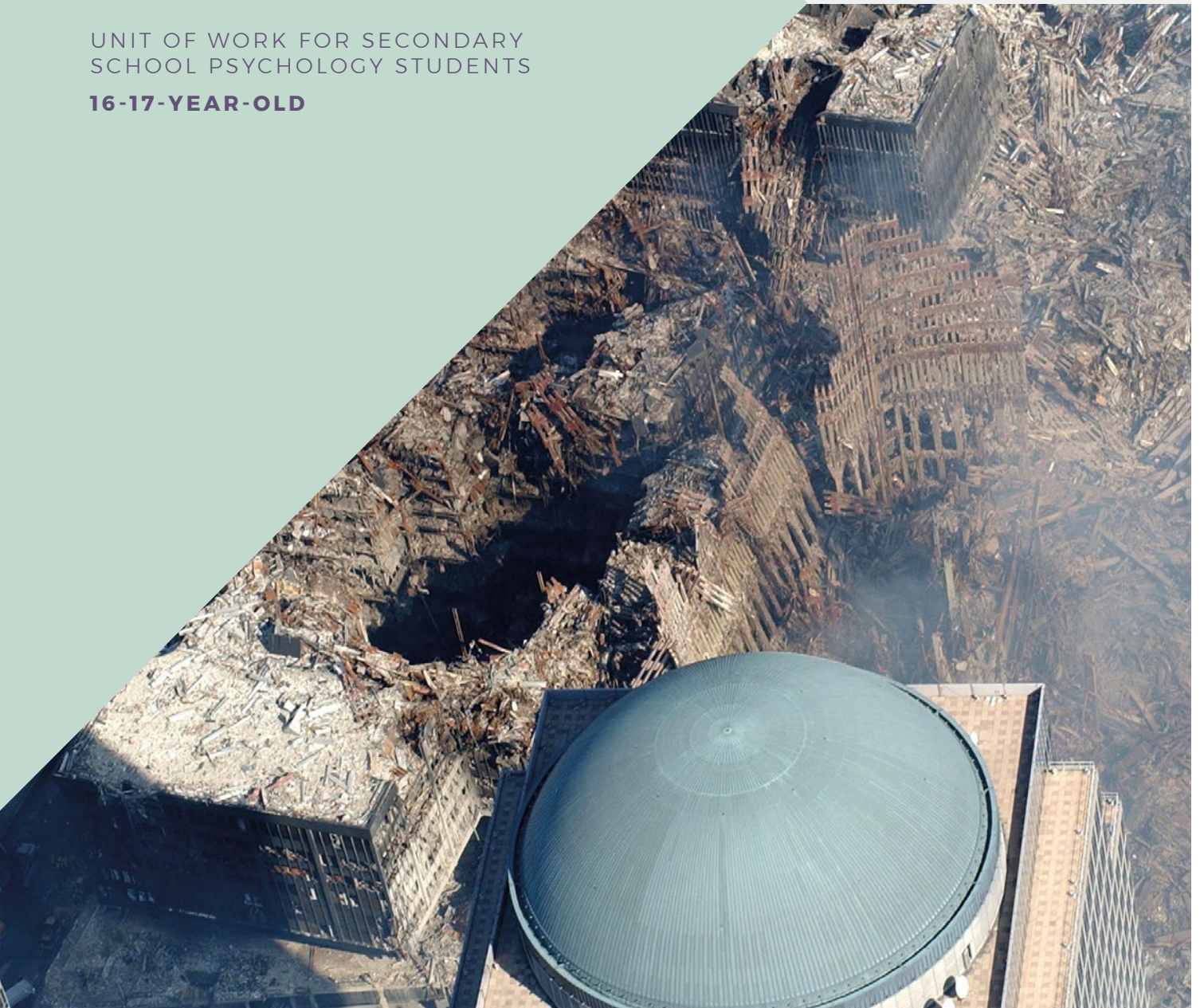




# VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

UNIT OF WORK FOR SECONDARY  
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

**16-17-YEAR-OLD**



**EDUCATIONAL PROJECT: "MEMORY  
AND PREVENTION OF TERRORISM".  
UNIT OF WORK NO.6**

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*Fidel Raso*



# INDEX

The educational project “Memory and prevention of terrorism” is made up by a series of Units of Work that deal with terrorism which could be used for school subjects such as Geography, History, Psychology, Contemporary History, Philosophy, and Citizenship.

This Unit of Work is presented as a complete tool available for teachers to be implemented in the classroom. All content, as well as its didactic implementation, is as it would be in a textbook. The work to be completed in each of the programmed sessions is indicated. The full didactic framework can be found at the end of the document. No modification is needed.

**04**

**Session 01.  
Characterisation of radicalization**

Conceptual delimitations of radicalization  
Challenges to scientific research  
Psychological assessment of radicalization  
Activity: Case Studies

**10**

**Session 02.  
The three pillars of radicalization**

Needs  
Narratives  
Networks  
Practical Implications  
Activity: Interview Analysis

**18**

**Session 03.  
Psychological Traits of terrorist groups**

Level of analysis  
The role of the groups  
Key concepts  
The metaphor of the ,pyramid  
Factors influencing violence  
Psychological Abuse and manipulation  
Vulnerabilities of terrorist organizations  
Activity: Song Analysis  
Activity: Debate

**28**

**Session 04.  
A society resilient to violent extremism**

What do we mean when we talk about resilience?  
Levels of prevention  
Transmission channels  
Early detection  
What can we do to help people at risk?  
Activity: Film Forum

**42**

**To know more**

**45**

**Teaching Guidelines**

## SESSION 01

# CHARACTERIZATION OF RADICALIZATION



The violent radicalization of individuals and groups is a problem affecting personal safety, coexistence, and social cohesion. Political violence and terrorism caused by such radicalization generates suffering and instability in several scenarios at a global level. However, we usually approach terrorism from a local perspective which prevents us from appreciating its real magnitude on this global level.

In this first session, it is necessary to delimit some terms, break existing myths, and analyse the psychological foundations that lead a person to radicalize. Although this theme has been addressed by different areas, social psychology is one of the disciplines that has made significant contributions to improve its understanding.

## CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS

Terminology associated with radicalization is complex and sensitive. Researchers find it difficult to apply universal criteria to unify different scientific, legal, political, and cultural definitions of terrorism. Nonetheless, we will now try to narrow down some key concepts related to terrorism:

### EXTREMISM

Extremism refers to attitudes or behaviours that are outside the norm, in other words, far from what most people consider as right or reasonable. Obviously, this is something subjective and culture-dependent, as something is considered "extremist" depending on the surrounding culture or ideology.

### RADICALIZATION

Radicalization is a process where the commitment to an extremist ideology is gradually increased. This commitment can get to the point of legitimizing the use of violence. From a preventive point of view, it is essential to put the focus on the radicalization process.

### TERRORISM

Terrorism is a type of political violence that uses terror and intimidation in order to achieve its goals.

### RESILIENCE

It is the capacity of an individual or society to overcome challenges that have a negative impact in their wellbeing. In the context of violent extremism, it would imply the capacity to withstand or counteract points of views and opinions that legitimate hatred and the use of violence. Developing resilience in society in general, and in youth in particular, is a priority target.

## MYTHS OF RADICALIZATION

Over the years, certain erroneous myths regarding radicalization have spread, making an understanding of the radicalization process difficult. Here, some myths are examined with the aim of demystifying them:

### THERE IS NO SINGLE PROFILE

The traditional approach is to collect data on radicals and terrorists with the aim to establish a typical profile. However, we can say there is a great variety of profiles.

### THERE IS NO CAUSAL ROOT

There have been attempts to find "causal roots" such as poverty, education or psychopathology. Despite this, we cannot claim that there is a single contributing factor; rather, there are multiple factors. Radicalization is a multifactorial process that occurs due to the interaction between numerous factors that could be considered risk factors.

### MENTAL DISORDERS DO NOT EXPLAIN RADICALIZATION

It has been quite common to refer to radicals and terrorists as "insane". For years terrorists were linked to some type of mental disorder. Some personality disorders such as sociopathy or narcissism were usually proposed as an underlying cause. But the reality is that scientific support to this approach is limited: although psychopathology can be a contributing factor, everything points to the fact that it is not the only factor nor the most important.



## CHALLENGES TO SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Radicalization and terrorism represent threats and risks to security and social cohesion that must be managed. To do this, it is necessary to develop scientific research to support decisions. Although in recent years there have been many advances, there are still some difficulties in this field of study (Moyano, 2019). Some of them are discussed below:

### EXISTENCE OF MULTIPLE THEORIES

There are numerous theoretical models that have tried to explain the psychology of terrorist radicalization, but, in too many occasions, these models have been suggested without being rooted in empirical evidence that supported them. It would be recommended to develop empirical evidence that avoided engaging in speculation.

### CONCEPTUAL DIFFICULTIES

Terrorist radicalization is a controversial social problem. On many occasions there is no agreement on conceptual definitions amongst researchers.

### DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING EMPIRICAL DATA

Obtaining data to evaluate psychological aspects of terrorism is not easy. On certain occasions, this requires travelling to conflict zones or overcoming tedious administrative difficulties. Also, the lack of participation of radicals and terrorists in studies can be another obstacle in attempts to conduct empirical research.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF RADICALIZATION

In recent years, different instruments have been developed to make the assessment of the willingness to justify or use political violence and terrorism. This can be useful to: (1) assess risk indicators; (2) make decisions of an applied nature (e.g. in criminal execution) and (3) carry out investigations in order to analyze the radical intention in relation to other risk factors.

Table 1 shows, as an example, the Political Violence Scale, developed by Bélanger et al. (2019). As we can see, this instrument is a short scale that consists of six items in which the degree of sympathy and adherence to political violence is assessed.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	When violence is used to promote a fair cause, anyone can be affected	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	Violence is necessary for social change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	Retaliation is acceptable against someone who insults my values and beliefs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	I would never consider physical violence as a fair cause (R)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	We should never use violence as a way of trying to change society (R)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	There are effective ways to change society, in addition to resorting to violence (R)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(R) = The items are in the opposite direction to the construct, so they must be inverted before performing the calculations.

Table 1. Political Violence Scale (Bélanger et al., 2019)



Freelimages

## ACTIVITY: CASE STUDIES

Below are three life stories that exemplify the process of radicalization. Read the text and try to answer the following questions:

### GUNTER

Gunter is forty-six years old and has been unemployed for a couple of years. His unhappiness with the system is not new. For a long time, he has been actively involved in a far-right political party. Everything has accelerated after the death of a young German in a brawl with two immigrants. According to him, "you had to act" and, therefore, he participated in several criminal acts against foreigners. A few days ago, he broke into some T.V. studios to insult immigrants and do the Nazi salute, a crime included in the German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch – StGB). For several days, the media echoed the news. He will have to declare before the courts shortly.



**TXEMA**

He was barely fifteen years old. He was a smart but restless boy. In his teenage years everything revolved around the gang: a group of friends who were becoming increasingly involved in street fighting. One evening, they burned several bins. When the police set out to arrest one of them, Txema attacked an officer from behind and left him badly injured. Although at first he had some feelings of guilt, he was comforted to see how his group of friends positively valued that action. Almost without realizing it, he became involved in the armed wing of ETA (a separatist terrorist group in Spain). He abandoned his studies to be part of one of the commandos. Soon after, he became involved in a terrorist attack that resulted in several fatalities. Currently, he is over fifty-five and is still serving a sentence. Putting time in perspective, he can't help but thinking he's wasted his life.

**AHMED**

Ahmed lived in a suburb of Paris. He was a quiet twenty-year-old boy with a girlfriend. Nevertheless, he felt that his life was missing something. By then, the Syrian war had begun and the number of European foreign fighters joining the ranks of the Islamic State was growing. Ahmed's friends began consuming propaganda and reading magazines with jihadist content. In 2013, several of his friends left for a conflict zone. Many young people admired violent mobilization and considered it something heroic. Some even openly influenced others to come to help their "brothers." For several weeks Ahmed meditated on whether he really should be involved in that cause. Finally, he decided without turning back. Even if he wanted to return home on that same day that he crossed the border, his commitment was stronger than his fear. His family hasn't heard from him since.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:**

Do you think the main characters of these stories are crazy?

Do you think they have the same profile?

Was their radicalization sudden or was it a process over time?

How would you characterize the ideologies they defend?

Do you think these ideologies could be defended by non-violent means?

Do you think there was a single factor that contributed to the radicalization of these people?

## SESSION 02

# THE THREE PILLARS OF RADICALIZATION



Historically, the study of violent radicalization has been carried out from various perspectives, such as psychoanalysis, frustration-aggression theory, theories of social learning, psychopathological approaches or cognitive theories. However, so far, no theory has been able to integrate the complexity of this phenomenon. This Unit of Work presents the 3N model of radicalization, developed by Arie W. Kruglanski et al. (see a review in Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna, 2019).

The 3N has key features that make it stand out as a comprehensive framework. Amongst them, we could mention the following: (1) it assumes a multifactorial view of the radicalization process; (2) it assumes that radicalization it is mainly due to individual-group interaction; (3) it has practical implications aimed at counteracting violent extremism; and, in addition, (4) it includes prominent empirical evidence.

The 3N model tries to explain the radicalization process by proposing the existence of three contributing psychosocial factors.

They are as follows:

**Needs** - focused on the theoretical concept of the search for personal meaning.

**Narrative** - referring to ideology and culture in which the individual is immersed.

**Network** - referring to the social influence of the individual network and group dynamics.

These three psychosocial factors can contribute to radicalization in a dynamic and interactive way.

This Unit of Work offers an overview of this promising theory. The factors composing the model are described, as well as discussion on the key factors for preventing radicalization and violence.

*Ales Krivec, Pixabay*

## NEEDS

From the field of social science, numerous explanations have been offered to make sense of the motivation of terrorists. Some of these factors have been humiliation, injustice, revenge, obtaining financial benefits, and the need for affiliation or loyalty to a leader. Although these individual motifs may seem varied and unrelated, the 3N Model points out that there is a common motivator: the search for personal meaning. The concept is not new and comes from some of the ideas of classical authors in psychology, for example, Victor Frankl and Abraham Maslow, who have addressed human needs. Basically, the concept of personal meaning refers to the need to “matter”, to be “someone”, “be respected” by others, and “be worthy of esteem”. There would be two main ways to activate the search for meaning:

### LOSS OF MEANING

When there are situations of humiliation, dishonor or shame that makes an individual or a group feel insignificant.

### CHANCE TO EARN MEANING

This refers to the meaning that an individual or group can obtain as a result of carrying out terrorist actions, something that would make them “martyrs” or “heroes.”

From this perspective, the radicalization process often begins with some type of triggering event that activates the search for personal meaning. Once the search for personal meaning is activated, the person will begin to examine the available means to respond to this need including options which could include violent extremism.

## NARRATIVES

Violent extremism will only be a viable option to gain personal meaning if it is viewed as a legitimate and effective means by a certain group of people. Usually this is articulated through a narrative or legitimizing ideology of violence. This ideology can vary in its content and can be associated with different trends of religious, political or ethnic-nationalist character.

Whatever the content of these ideologies, they establish a means by which personal meaning can be obtained. In other words, it is the ideology itself that establishes what must be done to achieve personal meaning; in this case it is most commonly through violence. We must not forget that not all ideologies promote violence. In fact, ideologies are usually peaceful and prosocial.

Extremist and violent ideologies, apart from being relatively simple and reductionist, often include these elements:

They identify an injustice that has been perpetrated against the group.

They tend to look for “culprits” on whom to shift responsibility (scapegoats).

They justify and legitimize violence as an adequate and just response, something that facilitates moral disconnection necessary to execute violence.

They perceive the prescribed means in ideology as a mechanism of gain or restoration of personal meaning.



Fabricio Macedo, Pixabay

## NETWORKS

The third component of the model refers to social networks and/or group dynamics. The role of the group is fundamental, since it gives validity to ideologies, articulates certain ways of perceiving the world and influences people's motivation.

In this way, the ideological anchoring of the search for meaning will depend on the cultural norm and the reference group. If violent norms are predominant, people will tend to become violent. Hence, the group will admire and respect those who commit violence by considering it legitimate and even honorable. On the contrary, if prosocial norms are dominant, people will tend to be more prosocial.



## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In addition to being a coherent scientific model, the 3N model provides a useful comprehensive framework for front-line professionals (psychologists, criminologists, educators, and social workers) who intervene in the violent extremism approach. Starting from the three elements of the model, some recommendations could be derived to prevent radicalization and facilitate the demobilization of terrorists. Next, they are described briefly:

### RESTORATION OF BALANCED MOTIVATION

To keep individuals away from violent extremism, it is necessary to address motivational imbalance that in any given moment could make them interested in such violent extremism. It may be helpful to offer vital alternatives and attend to vital dimensions such as safety, job occupations, and affective relationships.

### IDEOLOGICAL DISILLUSION

On numerous occasions, the abandonment of violent extremism occurs when individuals are disappointed with the ideology that justifies it. Consequently, generating dissonance and critical attitudes towards violent ideology can reduce violent mobilization.

### ALTERNATIVE NETWORKS

The role of the group is fundamental. Therefore, social ties that connect people with other radical individuals should be made difficult to maintain. In addition, links with more constructive social networks should be encouraged and/or strengthened.

It is important to highlight that the proposed keys can be put into practice at different levels of prevention; whether it is to promote primary prevention in itself or to aid rehabilitation with activities that set out to demobilize people and reintegrate them into society.

## ACTIVITY: ANALYSIS OF AN INTERVIEW

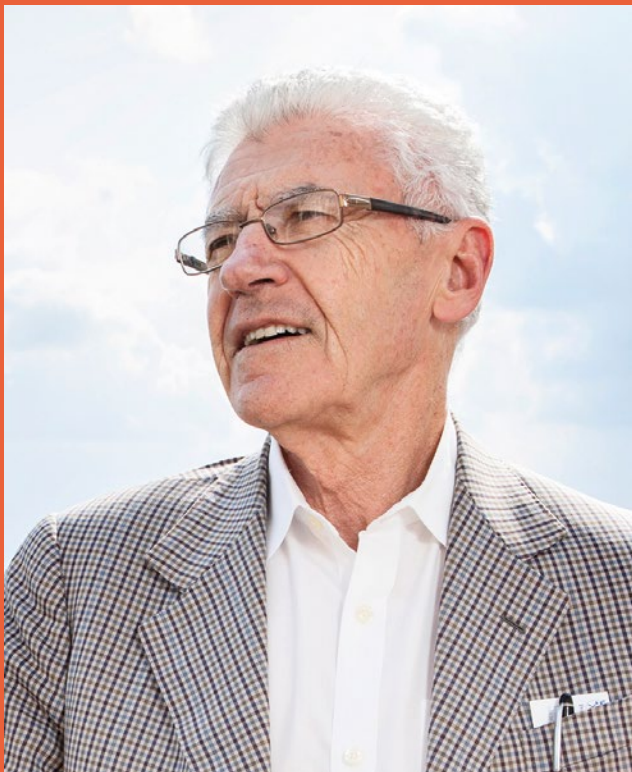
### FIVE QUESTIONS TO ARIE W. KRUGLANSKI

Interview conducted by Zara Greenbaum in *APA Monitor in Psychology* (April 2019).  
Available at: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/04/conversation-kruglanski>

Dr. Arie W. Kruglanski, is an APA Fellow and Distinguished University Professor of Psychology at the University of Maryland. He began his career studying motivated social cognition. But in 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, his research was oriented towards terrorism and radicalization. In 2005, with the support of the Department of National Security, he cofounded START, the National Consortium for the study of terrorism and responses to its coping.

#### How has your understanding of how the psychological factors underlying violent extremism evolved?

In our work at START we identify three main factors: needs, narrative, and networks, and we show how they work together. When we begin to review the existing research, we saw that many authors emphasized the importance of motivations such as revenge, leader worship, money, the advantages of “paradise” or “a meeting with the prophet Muhammad”.



Arie W. Kruglanski. Guilford Press

When we examined them, we concluded that behind each one of them there is a universal need to search for meaning, importance and respect which every human being has to some extent.

The ideological narrative, the history that a terrorist group accounts for to justify their actions, links that search for meaning with violent extremism. For example, an extremist Islamist may consider that he will “receive rewards in heaven” for carrying out a suicide attack. This narrative tells you what to do according to the values of the group to achieve personal meaning. If you make sacrifices for those values, the group will reward you with respect and veneration, thus granting him the status of a celebrity which has significant importance. The psychiatrist Marc Sageman had already introduced the relevant role of social networks and we deduced that they are important because they validate the narrative. Like-minded extremist networks take action as the person’s reference group, giving respect as a reward if you act on the dictates of the narrative. This is especially important for a narrative that deviates from the dominant society, justifying violence and the murder of innocents. The network allows people act violently according to the narrative.

#### How does this framework apply to a particular extremist group like white supremacists?

White supremacists differ from other types of violent extremists in their ideology. While other terrorists can subscribe to a religious narrative, this group consider different grievances and enemies: the government, a minority group, refugees or immigrants. But in terms of the underlying dynamics of needs, narrative and networks are similar to other terrorist groups.



### What do you recommend governments do to prevent terrorism?

The need for personal meaning must be satisfied in a socially constructive way. First of all, it would help governments not to facilitate a loss of meaning, something that occurs under bias conditions and inequality towards certain groups. The second recommendation is to emphasize compelling narratives, ideally, issued by charismatic communicators, promoting constructive ways to gain meaning. These narratives are usually quite accepted by the audience. An example of this could be the inaugural address to the nation of John F. Kennedy in 1961. This speech challenged and inspired young people to contribute to American society. Finally, governments should create movements in which people are accepted, revered, and respected by its activities against violence. Some governments prefer to put all their eggs in one basket whether it is military, police, or intelligence when it comes to countering extremism. However, we consider this to be counterproductive since you can't kill an ideology and you can't repress people's feelings of powerlessness or humiliation.

### How can governments restore personal meaning?

At least, they should provide people with the means to obtain occupations that give them meaning. For example, providing them with vocational guidance and opportunity to earn a living. Second, create organizations that harness the desire of young people to be idealists and to do something for their country. It is important to find ways to support and encourage those kind of things because there is no greater meaning than that which is oriented at the service of sacred values or ideas. Governments should also promote idealism among young people and organize volunteer activities that channel their desire for importance in a prosocial and constructive direction. Because the motivation for meaning is so frequent and so fundamental, that interventions must be wide-ranging and embody a whole-of-life approach to society, from kindergarten onwards. A good example is the Aarhus model in Denmark, directed by psychologist Preben Bertelsen, who offers counseling and support to young people in order to prevent indigenous terrorism.

### What questions persist today about terrorism and radicalization?

The main question is how to translate all these ideas, which are now based on very extensive research work, into best practices. Communities, systems educators, and policy makers need tools and training based on this research. These psychologists cannot do it alone; it requires a government policy that is aware of the threat radicalization represents for society.

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Arie W. Kruglanski recommends promoting "convincing and constructive narratives that promote personal meaning." Try to find some examples of political leaders or famous people speeches or statements who, from your point of view, have succeeded.

What do you think Kruglanski is referring to when he comments that "you cannot kill an ideology and you can't repress feelings of powerlessness or humiliation of people"?

According to Kruglanski, the Aarhus model is a good example of good practice in addressing violent radicalization. This experience, developed in a Danish city, is especially aimed at highly radicalized people who might intend to commit attacks. The program is a collaborative effort between police forces and sociocommunity services and includes different other services such as psychological counseling, family support and professional orientation. Try to locate similar practices in other cities that have addressed prevention of radicalization.

Do you think radicalization and terrorism can only be fought with police and military measures? Why?

**SESSION 03**

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS  
OF A TERRORIST GROUP





In the previous session we examined the 3N model, which explains the psychology of radicalization as an attempt to restore or increase personal meaning. The model suggests that when personal meaning is limited or threatened, individuals tend to seek personal meaning through alternative means, including options that could be associated with extremist causes. Apart from that motivational aspect, the theory proposes that it is essential to attend to the ideology and group dynamics in which the individual is immersed. In this way, these three factors (needs, narrative and social networks) contribute to radicalization in a dynamic and interactive way. In this session, we'll take a closer look to the role of the group in the radicalization process, as well as some psychological traits of terrorist groups and organizations.

## LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

First, it is convenient to distinguish the different levels of analysis commonly used to explain radicalization:

### SOCIOSTRUCTURAL LEVEL

This refers to the role of aspects that affect the radicalization of an individual from a macro point of view. Thus, for example, political aspects, international relations or the economy are factors that sometimes have been used to explain radicalization. Nevertheless, this perspective is limited, since these variables alone don't explain the fact that a person is willing to legitimize or get involved in violence.

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

It is the psychological level itself. From this point of view, it is assumed that there are different psychological factors that may favor to a greater degree people becoming radicalized and/or that at a given moment they are willing to use violence.

**GROUP LEVEL**

From this perspective, the influence of social context is emphasized, especially the group in the process of radicalization. Aspects such as social influence, communication, persuasion or leadership are served at this level of analysis.

Currently, most researchers assume that these three levels influence the radicalization process. However, the psychosocial perspective is essential to understand how “normal people” are able to disconnect morally and become uninhibited towards violence. But why is the group so important?



## THE ROLE OF THE GROUP

In general, there is some consensus that the social group of reference plays an important role in the processes of radicalization.

Belonging (real or perceived) to a radical group or to a terrorist organization can meet certain vital needs (meaning, sense of belonging). On the other hand, the fact of being immersed in the group can psychologically inhibit people from committing possible violent acts.

Research suggests that in more than two-thirds of cases, individuals joined violent groups through a family member, friend, or a person close to them that was previously associated with the violent group. This bonding can occur through personal face-to-face interactions, but it can also occur virtually through the Internet. Progressively, strong ties will be forged and it is usual for the extremist group

to replace family and pre-existing networks. Thus, the more time the individual spends with the group, the greater the probability they will have an active role in it.

## KEY CONCEPTS

There are different types of terrorist organizations which can vary depending on their objectives, ideology, structure, size or communication flows. Beyond these typologies, there are a series of elements with group implications that are usually common to most of them. Specifically, we will mention recruitment, cohesion and leadership.

### RECRUITMENT

It is the recruitment process and linking people to the group. Generally, this link is a process and usually occur progressively. However, it can also occur in an "express" way.

### COHESION

It refers to the union that exists within the organization. This can be enhanced with the existence of external threats, penalties, internal dissensions, and oriented group dynamics to objectives.

### LEADERSHIP

It is common for terrorist organizations to have a division of functions and roles. In the case of the leaders, some of the functions they usually perform within terrorist organizations are: (1) communication control; (2) ideological inspiration; (3) establishment of objectives; (4) assignment of functions and roles; and (5) maintenance of internal cohesion.



Amine M'Siouri, Pexels

## THE METAPHOR OF THE PYRAMID

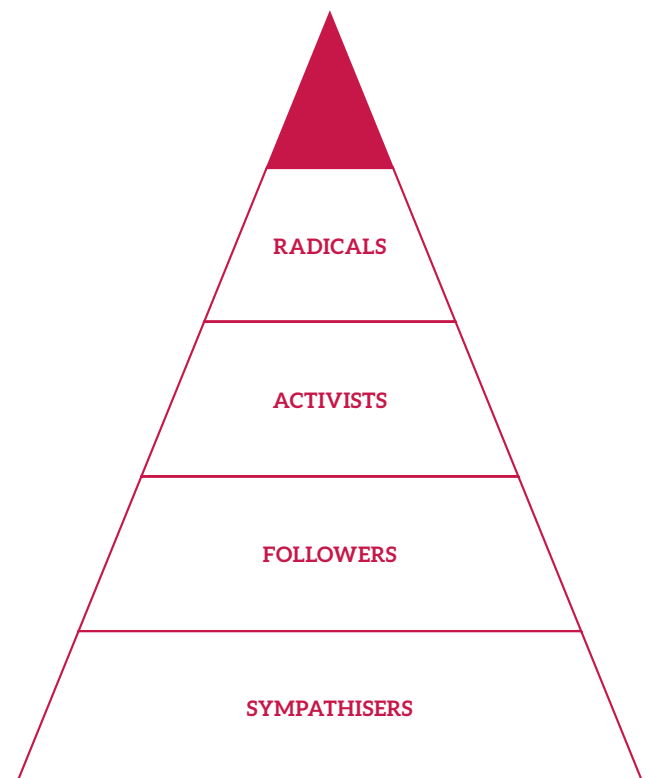
Terrorism is sometimes perceived as a social problem in which the protagonists are exclusively individuals who use violence instrumentally in order to defend a cause. However, that vision is limited.

From a group point of view, it is important to refer to the metaphor of the pyramid.

From this perspective, a social movement could be represented in the form of a pyramid at the base of which would be followers, sympathizers, and activists. On the next level would be radicals. And at the top of the pyramid would be the motivated individuals, uninhibited and willing to act violently. Generally, that peak of the pyramid would be a minority that, nevertheless, would be supported and legitimized by a larger group.

As we can see, this model represents terrorism with a broader view, emphasizing the role that support bases have to legitimize and serve as a tool of recruitment. Group and collective implications from this perspective are important, as they suggest that counterterrorism should focus not only on the peak of the pyramid, but also at the pyramidal base, where proactive measures help to undermine the social support of terrorists.

### TERRORISTS



## FACTORS DETERMINING VIOLENCE

Psychological research has evidenced the importance of group or situational factors in behavior (see Table 1). In the field of violent radicalization, some especially relevant factors have been suggested, among which we could mention social identity, obedience, and de-individuation.

### SOCIAL IDENTITY

From this point of view, radicalization processes are produced due to social categorizations that accentuate differences and cause comparisons between groups. Those comparisons lead to polarization and the creation of stereotypes and prejudices, which are in the basis of inter-group conflict. On occasions, personal identity and social identity can become equivalent. This phenomenon is called fusion of identity. This mechanism can contribute to the violent disposition of the group.

### OBEDIENCE

It occurs when people move their morale towards external authorities that they assume as legitimate. We could mention numerous historical examples of political violence in which people were exonerated from responsibility arguing that they simply "fulfilled orders." This psychological mechanism has interested social psychology in great measure, and it is essential to cite the works by Stanley Milgram (see Box 1).

### DE-INDIVIDUATION

It refers to the loss of the sense of personal identity that can occur when a person becomes part of a group. The assumption of norms and group values, as well as the anonymity and the protection offered by the group, can facilitate conduct that otherwise they would be unable to perform. The degree of deindividuation will depend on variables such as group size, anonymity, and emotion that raises the activity of the group and the type of values they have.

## BOX 1

To analyze people's behavior, it is essential to take into account their social context. This approach has been the basis for the work of numerous researchers, among who we can mention Muzafer Sherif, Solomon Asch, Stanley Milgram, Kurt Lewin, Philip Zimbardo, Henri Tajfel, Robert Zajonc, Serge Moscovici or John Turner. These researchers, greatly influenced by the dramatic political violence of the 20th century and the rise of totalitarianism, tried to find scientific answers to the processes that led "normal" people to be capable of legitimizing violence in the name of a cause. The following documentary reviews some of these fundamental contributions of Social Psychology.

**Documentary. "Psychology in a social context".**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1KQnDFrK0g>



Image from an experiment on obedience to authority by Stanley Milgram

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE AND MANIPULATION WITHIN THE GROUP

The characteristics of certain groups of extremists can facilitate psychological abuse and manipulation. In fact, some authors have considered that within these groups there are some dynamics quite similar to sects. This implies the implementation of coercive methods to influence their followers and achieve their dependence and submission. From this point of view, the groups can promote the psychological manipulation of their members through actions that can make them more vulnerable and dependent. Some of these indicators of psychological abuse would be the following: (1) physical isolation; (2) control of information; (3) limitations to personal life; (4) threats; (5) ideological indoctrination; and (6) imposition of messianic authorities.

Different investigations have provided empirical data on how terrorist leaders can use that type of psychological manipulation techniques to catch and recruit acolytes. Likewise, it is necessary to emphasize that not everyone will be equally vulnerable to these processes of "brainwashing." Or, in other words, certain risk factors can facilitate catchment, recruitment and extremist indoctrination (see Trujillo and Moyano, 2019).





## VULNERABILITY OF TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

Like any group, terrorist organizations often have an ending. This is going to be determined by a series of factors such as a police or military defeat, changes in the political scene, lack of support from the base of the pyramid (sympathizers and supporters) or internal disintegration of the terrorist group. From an applied point of view, it is essential to know what are the vulnerabilities of terrorist organizations in order to limit their communication strategy, their recruiting ability and their attempts to legitimize violence. This way, we will work proactively to prevent violent radicalization and minimize the risk of terrorist attacks.

Basically, the vulnerabilities of terrorist organizations refer to those factors that can undermine its internal cohesion and destabilize its functioning, leading it in some cases to disappearance. It is usual to distinguish between two types of vulnerabilities: (1) internal and (2) external. We briefly review them below following Borum (2004):

### INTERNAL VULNERABILITIES

They are those that occur within the group. Among others we can find:

**Internal distrust.** It occurs when group members feel insecure and feel the need to be hypervigilant towards the possibility of infiltrators, information leaks or external threats. This will influence the decrease in cohesion of group and increase internal divisions.

**Internal competition.** When there are different positions and/or leadership competitions for power that lead to leadership competitions for power that lead to conflict and splits may occur.

**Inactivity.** Lack of action and goals can decrease internal cohesion and increase perception of not having a common project.

### EXTERNAL VULNERABILITIES

They are those that affect the relationship of the group with the context in which it is immersed.

Among these vulnerabilities we can mention the following:

**External support.** The terrorist group needs social support (supporters, followers, activists) to survive. If support disappears, it will be difficult to mobilize, recruit and, ultimately, to survive.

**Intergroup conflict.** It occurs when there are other groups threatening the existence of the terrorist group. Please note that conflict can also come about with splinter factions defending their own project (being violent or nonviolent).

**ACTIVITY: ANALYSIS OF A SONG****ZOMBIE (THE CRANBERRIES)**

Another head hangs lowly  
Child is slowly taken  
And the violence, caused such silence  
Who are we mistaken?

But you see, it's not me  
It's not my family  
In your head, in your head, they are fighting With their  
tanks, and their bombs  
And their bombs, and their guns  
In your head, in your head they are crying

In your head, in your head  
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie  
What's in your head, in your head  
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie, oh

Du, du, du, du...

Another mother's breaking  
Heart is taking over  
When the violence causes silence  
We must be mistaken

It's the same old theme  
Since nineteen-sixteen  
In your head, in your head, they're still fighting With their  
tanks, and their bombs  
And their bombs, and their guns  
In your head, in your head, they are dying

In your head, in your head  
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie  
What's in your head, in your head  
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie

**See audiovisual document:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MuhFxaT7zo>

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:**

Find out what is the story being told in the song.

What terrorist group was the cause of the massacre?

What do you think the date 1916 refers to? Find out about it.

Why do you think the lyrics of the song define the perpetrators of the murder as "zombies"? Reflect on the metaphor they use.

The lyrics of the song challenge the violent: "What's in your head?" What do you think they mean by that?

What are the group aspects that can make it easier for a person to metaphorically speaking become a zombie?

**ACTIVITY: DEBATE**

Read the following passage from the novel «Patria» (Homeland) by Fernando Aramburu. Then have a discussion about the role of the group in radicalization processes.

*"Friends, the gang, bad company, put the poison of the doctrine that led him to the scoundrel to destroy their lives, you know how many families. And he will still believe himself a hero. He's one of the tough ones, they say. Of the hard or rough. He doesn't even know how to open a book."*

# SESSION 04

# A SOCIETY RESILIENT TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM



Toni Ferreira, Pexels



## WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT RESILIENCE?

Coping with violent radicalization and terrorism has become a shared challenge that must be assumed by all institutions and individuals. In this context, the concept of resilience has become popular and turned into a whole declaration of intent. Basically, a resistant society to violent extremism is a proactive society, aware of the complex threat it's facing. This involves the anticipation to reactive scenarios and equip itself with the needed strength to recover when it suffers deterioration that puts its cohesion and values at risk.

In order to achieve this, it is necessary to:

Manage coexistence and diversity in a positive way.

Encourage the rejection of violent extremist ideologies and, at the same time, produce and disseminate alternative narratives.

Try not to succumb to the terror that violent people try to infuse.

Develop the ability to adapt to possible crisis.

Promote participation and democratic values.

Early identification of individual and groups at risk.

Intervene so that at-risk individuals find peaceful activism alternatives.

Promote trust and facilitate cooperation between the different community members (police, educational system, social services, non-profit organizations).

Protect and support community members, in order to counteract prejudice and discrimination.

Promote social inclusion and cohesion.

Delegitimizing terrorism with alternative narratives.

Support victims.

We consider it necessary to emphasize that young people are a key element in any comprehensive policy coping with violent extremism. The social, psychological, and evolutionary characteristics of youth and adolescents make them priority groups. From our point of view, it is necessary to put the focus on those risk factors that can contribute to the radicalization process. But, in addition, it is necessary to give value to

the positive aspects that youth can bring to society in terms of participation, creativity, innovation and commitment.

Ultimately, the goal would be not only to consider youth at "risk", but also see this as an "opportunity." In this session we will review some aspects that influence all of the above.



## PREVENTION LEVELS

Prevention is key to countering violent extremism. As in the field of public health, three levels of prevention can be differentiated: (1) primary; (2) secondary; and (3) tertiary. Taking into account its potential and practical usefulness, each of them is described below:

### PRIMARY

It aims to reduce the incidence of violent extremism in individuals and groups. It is oriented to intervene on the channels where extremist ideologies are transmitted and to control risk factors. Some examples of performances that should be developed would be restrict radical content in cyberspace, implement educational programs or condemn hate speech.

### SECONDARY

Its goal is an early detection of radicalization and try to intervene. This results in identifying the population at risk and carry out interventions to reduce its prevalence.

### TERTIARY

It refers to actions that should be developed when there has been a process of violent radicalization. It aims to recover individuals who can pose a threat to safety through their rehabilitation (e.g. through reintegration and/or rehabilitation programs).

## TRANSMISSION CHANNELS

Radical ideology is transmitted through channels such as prisons, schools, cyberspace and certain urban environments (Trujillo and Moyano, 2019). They are described below briefly:

### PRISONS

It is estimated that in the coming years hundreds of terrorists will be released after serving their sentences. The risk that these individuals leaving the prison environment are more radicalized than when they entered it should give reason for concern. Furthermore, prisons themselves can be a breeding ground for violent extremism. Therefore it is essential that the imprisonment of terrorists incorporates a component of rehabilitation and reintegration to try and minimize the risk of a prisoner re-offending.

### EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Education is key for preventing youth from being attracted to extremist ideologies. To do this, they must comprehensively develop aspects such as critical thinking, democratic values, multiculturalism or addressing prejudice and discrimination. Likewise, participation should be encouraged, established protocols for identifying individuals at risk and provide adequate institutional responses to critical incidents. As we said before, young people should be the protagonists of any preventive strategy. However, the intervention from the educational system should also take into account families, professionals and the community in general.

### CYBERSPACE

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Although the Internet is an extraordinary resource, it doesn't come without risks, since it can become a dissemination platform for extremist messages and hate messages. It is common for some groups to disseminate attractive audiovisual products that can seduce the audience, as well as justify and trivialize the use of violence. To prevent violent extremism, it is necessary for citizens and, more specifically, youth, to develop competences in digital literacy. In the digital age, parents and educators can play a prominent role in providing this media education and the development of critical thinking.

### URBAN CONTEXTS

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There are particularly sensitive urban environments due to their sociodemographic and urban characteristics. Within these contexts, the risk of social exclusion, the highly ethnic-cultural concentration, and the perception of injustice can favor feelings of alienation of its inhabitants. All these factors can become risks factors contributing to violent extremism. Therefore, it is essential to work for the real social inclusion of people and groups.





*Lukas Rychvalsky, Pexels*

## EARLY DETECTION OF RADICALIZATION

To adopt preventive approaches, we must detect early radicalization indicators. With that aim in mind, in recent years actions have been developed to disseminate these indicators of radicalization. An interesting tool is the barometer of radicalization proposed by the Center for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV). This resource (available at [www.info-radical.org](http://www.info-radical.org)) provides a scheme of behaviours that must be addressed and which can be considered typical indicators of the process of radicalization. The barometer is divided into four categories of behavioral indicators according to the degree of severity: (1) insignificant behaviour; (2) troubling behaviour; (3) worrisome behaviour; and (4) alarming behaviour.

The displayed barometer is only an orientative guide that should be used wisely. This implies that it should not be considered a comprehensive tool, but rather a resource for families and professionals to help them identify risk indicators for early intervention.

## SUBTLE INDICATORS

These include behaviors associated with forms of political-religious participation that would be characterized by peaceful and democratic actions. These behaviors can be considered normal and, in many cases, have a positive element.

Among other indicators, the following could be mentioned:

Arguing fervently to defend his/her convictions in their close environment.

Adopting visible signs (clothing, hairstyle, symbols, tattoos, etc.) to express their identity and/or membership.

Being active in social networks in defense of the cause.

Peacefully defending a cause.

Being very interested in national and international news.

Expressing the desire to be more engaged with a certain cause.

Expressing a need for strong emotions or adventures.

Aspiring to correct social injustices.

## PROBLEMATIC INDICATORS

It includes behaviors that denote some personal discomfort, as well as a greater identification with a cause or an ideology that leads the individual to change significantly his/her behavior.

Other indicators include:

Expressing extreme and polarized points of view.

Adopting behaviors that can lead to breakups with the family environment.

Isolation from family and previous friendship networks.

Sudden changes in habits.

Feelings of victimization and rejection.

Rejecting the rules and formalities of conventional institutions (school, workplace, etc.) motivated by his/her ideology.

Refusing to participate in group activities or interact with certain individuals due to aspects linked to ethnic, ideological or personal characteristics.

Showing difficulty reevaluating own ideas and accepting in a constructive way that there may be other points of view.

## CONCERNING INDICATORS

It refers to behaviors associated with the beginning of a radical trajectory. Some indicators are:

Breaking ties with family members and friends and replacing them with a new circle of friendships.

Legitimizing the use of violence to defend a cause or ideology.

Hiding from his/her family and friends a new style of life or personal involvement for a cause.

Joining up with violent extremist individuals or groups.

Suddenly losing interest in professional activities and/or school.

Showing related symbology related to support for violent extremist groups.

Obsessing over the "end of the world" or with points of the Messianic view.

Expressing hatred towards other individuals or groups.

## ALARM INDICATORS

This category includes behaviors that point to an exclusive and sectarian compliance with an ideology or cause, perceiving violence as a valid and legitimate means of action.

Participating in activities of extremist violent groups through different means (e.g.: logistics, financial, propaganda).

Recruiting individuals for an extremist and violent cause.

Maintaining contact with radical networks, either online or in real life.

Reinforcing his/her violent beliefs through consultation of forums and websites.

Committing or planning violent acts inspired by a violent extremist cause.

Learning how to acquire or use weapons outside the legal limits.

Planning to move to conflict zones or where there is activity by violent extremist groups.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP PEOPLE AT RISK?

In view of possible situations of radicalization, there are no magic recipes. However, there are some key ideas and actions that can be taken into account. Here are some helpful tips to help friends and loved ones who may be immersed in a process of radicalization.



*Ryan Aréstegui, Freemages*

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO HELP PEOPLE AT RISK (Bélanger *et al.* 2015)

### KEEP POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Listening and trying to understand why the person is involved in violent extremism.

Spending time with the person.

Participating in recreational and social activities together.

### ASK FOR HELP

Finding trusted people in your environment and request help.

Referring to specialized devices in the approach of these cases. Each case of radicalization has its particularities, so the interventions should be, as much as possible, individualized and contextualized.

### MAINTAIN OPEN AND HONEST LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Rejecting their speeches and behavior, but making him/her feel accepted.

Encouraging him/her to adopt a respectful speech towards people with different beliefs.

Exposing him/her to different points of view.

### FIND ALTERNATIVE MEANS

Helping him/her find activities that promote his/her beliefs peacefully, either in the community or in political activity.

Exposing him/her to peaceful ideologies.

## EXERCISE: FILM FORUM

The following table presents some films that can be watched and used as a resource to debate some of the covered contents.

### FILMS ABOUT VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALIZATION

#### THE CRYING GAME (1992)

**Director:** Neil Jordan.

**Synopsis:** The terrorist organization IRA kidnaps a British soldier. During his confinement, the prisoner befriends Fergus, one of the terrorists, and asks him that if he is killed, to go and see his girlfriend. Some time later, Fergus, on the run of his colleagues, travels to London to the pub where Dil, the girlfriend of the British soldier, works.



#### RUNNING OUT OF TIME (1994)

**Director:** Imanol Uribe.

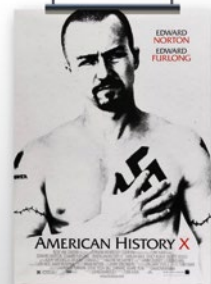
**Synopsis:** Antonio, a gunman for the terrorist gang ETA, days before committing an attack meets Charo, an eighteen-year-old drug addict who despite the sordid environment in which she grew up still retains her naivety. Antonio has dedicated his life to a cause in which he no longer believes in and his discomfort grows when he feels trapped in a dead-end where everything is destruction and death.



#### AMERICAN HISTORY X (1998)

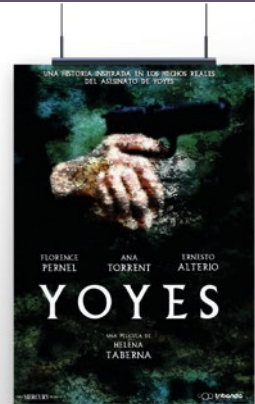
**Director:** Tony Kaye.

**Synopsis:** Derek, a young man influenced by neo-Nazi ideology, is imprisoned for murdering a black man who wanted to steal his van. When he gets out of prison and returns to his neighborhood willing to get away from the world of violence, he finds that his little brother, for whom Derek is the role model, follows the same path that led Derek to jail.



**YOYES** (1999)**Director:** Helena Taberna.

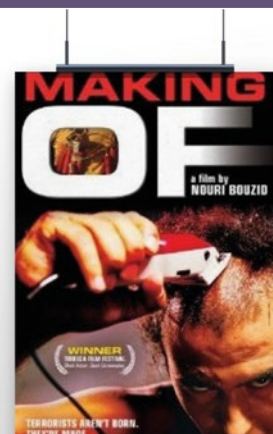
**Synopsis:** Yoyes, the first woman to hold positions of responsibility within ETA, returns from her exile in Mexico and tries to rebuild her life. But her return is not easy. She has changed, she has studied a university degree, she has worked at the UN, and she has become a mother. Meanwhile, in Spain, violence continues to be the main story on the front pages of newspapers. Yoyes tries to forget and be forgotten, but her years of exile have made her a myth. Her former colleagues will interpret her return as a betrayal. She loves her country but autumn will bring more than just dead leaves.

**PARADISE NOW** (2005)**Director:** Hany Abu-Assad.

**Synopsis:** Khaled and Said are two young Palestinians, friends since childhood, recruited to carry out a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. After one last night with their respective families, of which they are not allowed to say goodbye. The leave for the border with explosives sluck to their bodies. Nevertheless, nothing goes as planned and a series of setbacks forces them to separate. Then they will have to rethink their lives and beliefs.

**MAKING OF** (2006)**Director:** Nouri Bouzid.

**Synopsis:** The film tells the story of three characters. The director, Nouri, a middle-aged man, is divided between his private life, which is reeling, and a movie that he is afraid to shoot because he still doesn't know how it will end. The actor, Lofti, who accepted the role without knowing what would be the end of his character, feels cheated when he discovers that the dancer whom he is acting as ends up becoming a fundamentalist. The character he is acting as is Bahta, a young dancer whose career is cut short because of the war in Iraq and ends up in the hands of a fundamentalist preacher who brainwashes him.



**THE WAVE** (2008)**Director:** Dennis Gansel.

**Synopsis:** In Germany, during project week, the high school teacher Rainer Wenger (Jürgen Vogel) comes up with an experiment to explain to his students the operation of a totalitarian regime. In just a few days, what seemed an innocuous test based on discipline and the feeling of community goes drifting towards a situation over which the teacher loses all control.

**FOUR LIONS** (2010)**Director:** Chris Morris.

**Synopsis:** Omar, a radical Muslim of English nationality, has created a terrorist cell of which his brother Waj, a very simple boy, is part of, along with Barry, a white-hating extremist and Fessal, a squeamish maker of bombs. While Omar and Waj are in Pakistan at a mujahideen training camp, Barry recruits Hassan, an aspiring rapper. When Omar returns to Britain he brings a plan with him: a suicide bomb attack on an unusual western target.

**1980** (2013)**Director:** Iñaki Arteta.

**Synopsis:** Documentary that narrates the terrorist attacks perpetrated by ETA in 1980 through the memories and opinions of various journalists, a philosopher, a victim and a policeman. In 1980, the organization's bloodiest criminal year, there were almost a hundred murders, hundreds of explosions, dozens of kidnappings, unsuccessful attacks and innumerable terrorist acts of various kinds.



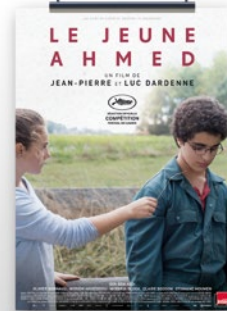


**LAYLA M** (2016)**Director:** Mijke de Jong.

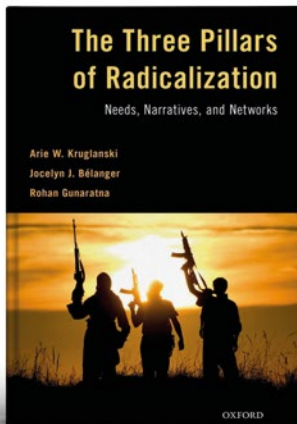
**Synopsis:** During the course of a soccer game, racist remarks made by people in the crowd are seen by Layla as an attack on her Muslim creed and her Moroccan ancestry, even though she is Dutch by birth. From here, Layla radicalizes her thinking and feels more and more attracted to extremism. She ends up marrying a young jihadist and leaving Amsterdam to start a different path from the one she has taken, but also from the one she imagined.

**YOUNG AHMED** (2019)**Director:** Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne.

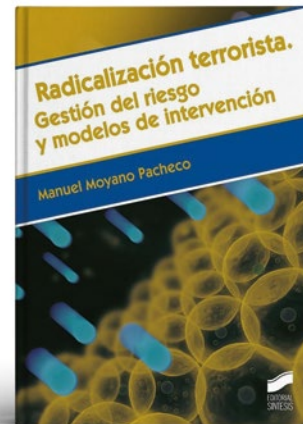
**Synopsis:** Ahmed is a teenager living in Belgium. Over time he displays a process of personal change, strongly influenced by his relationship with the imam of the mosque. Although his mother and his educators try to help him, the results seem unsuccessful. The film shows the difficulties that front-line professionals and families may face when trying to address the processes of violent radicalization.



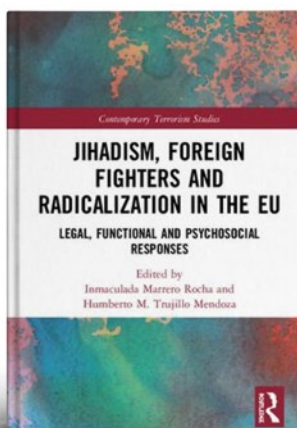




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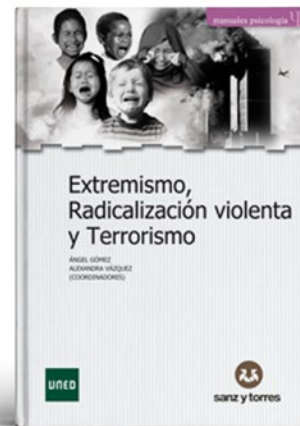
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# TEACHING GUIDELINES

## SUBJECT

Psychology, 2nd year.

## LINKS WITH THE SPANISH CURRICULUM

This Unit of Work is linked with Theme 6 "Social Psychology of organisations".

Spanish curricular legislation: *Real Decreto 1105/2014, de 26 de diciembre, por el que se establece el currículo básico de la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y del Bachillerato. (BOE del 3 de enero de 2015).*

## AIMS

Getting to know the characteristics of the process of violent radicalization.

Identifying risk and protective factors.

Knowing the group and ideological aspects influencing radicalization.

Valuing the role of resilience and social cohesion to confront violent extremism.

Getting to know some keys to prevention and early detection.

## CONTENTS

Characteristics of violent radicalization.

Contributing factors to violent radicalization.

The role of the group.

Psychosocial keys of terrorist organizations.

Prevention of violent radicalization.

Levels of prevention.

Early detection and intervention.

## METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

It is advisable to use this resource with active methodologies such as cooperative learning, project-based learning, learning portfolios or designing mind maps. Also, it is suggested to follow the following structure for the development of the sessions:

Students' previous work (readings, information searches).

Preparation of a list of basic concepts that help contextualize the situation.

Working in small groups to address the content or activities.

Holding debates and solving questions.

Synthesis of the most relevant aspects.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

In each session, specific activities are suggested such as:

Case studies.

Searching for information related to the topic.

Analysis (texts, interviews and songs).

Debates.

Film Forum.

## TIMING

It is recommended that this Unit of Work is developed throughout the second term of the academic year. For its full completion, there will be four sessions (approximately one hour per session). Another option is to select content in order to celebrate an international day in a curriculum-integrated way (for example, World Peace Day, International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism).

## LEARNING STANDARDS

Learning standards are included in Theme 6 of the subject Social Psychology of Organisations as set up in the Spanish curricular legislation (*Real Decreto 1105/2014, de 26 de diciembre*):

Analyzing and valuing cultural differences and their impact on the behavior of individuals when exerting influence on cognitive frameworks, personality development and the life development of the human being.

Investigating the social origins of personal attitudes, assessing its usefulness for prediction of human behaviour and its influence on gender violence in school, work, and the domestic environment amongst others.

Search and select information on the Internet about the characteristics of the behavior of the individual immersed in the mass, such as: impulsivity, intolerance, unconsciousness, lack of perseverance, volubility and lack of critical capacity, among others.

Drawing in group collaboration, conclusions and raising preventive behavior guidelines in order to prevent people from becoming part of the crowd, losing control of their behavior, thoughts and feelings.

## PROCEDURES AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Formative Assessment is recommended. Thus, you can use different tools and techniques (questionnaires, student records, personal essays, etc.). An interesting choice is that students prepare a portfolio with their completed work. The formal and reflective degree of elaboration of the portfolio should be very relevant to their assessment.

## RESOURCES

For the development of this Unit of Work it is recommended to have a projector and speakers. For working with texts, it is advisable to facilitate students with the material in digital format. Some sessions could take place in a computer room or using laptops.

## ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The reference assessment criteria are included in Theme 6 (Social and organizational psychology) of the subject curriculum (*Real Decreto 1105/2014, de 26 de diciembre*):

Understanding and appreciating the social dimension of human beings and understanding the socialization processes as the internalization of social norms and values appreciating their influence on personality and people's behavior.

Knowing and assessing the psychological processes of groups of people, such as their nature, characteristics and patterns of behavior in order to avoid situations of vulnerability in which the individual can lose control over his/her own actions.

UNIT OF WORK FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

**16-17-YEAR-OLD**

