The Role of Agency and Self-Efficacy in Violent Radicalization

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Why do some people become terrorists and others do not?

- Large body of theories seeking to explain pathways of radicalization, e.g. Moghaddam, Sageman and others

- But fail to explain why some people radicalize and others do not, some people engage in violence and others do not

The discourse is centered on individual disposition and social exposure.

- We speak of:
- Susceptibility/vulnerability to radicalization
- Youth at risk
- Cognitive opening/ mental health
- Grooming
- Bunch of guys/networks/milieu

- But what can explain why some individuals facing the same social conditions radicalize and others do not?

Examining agency:

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy

- Self-efficacy= the belief about one's own capabilities to successfully perform an action
- *Belief* in our own agency

- According to Bandura we are not only shaped by external conditions, but are proactive and reflecting agents capable of anticipation and making choices based on our *perception* of the likelihood of succeeding

High self-efficacy can facilitate the decision to take violent action.

- High self-efficacy = higher likelihood to take action (belief in succeeding)

- Low self-efficacy = avoidance of the situation (fear of failing)

- -> May help explain why some have the confidence to take action and others do not

Social persuasion and vicarious experiences can increase self-efficacy.

- If: high self-efficacy = higher likelihood to take violent action

- Then: Terrorist organizations seek to increase self-efficacy in the process of radicalization

- How? Social persuasion and vicarious experiences

Social persuasion by authority figures can increase perceived self-efficacy.

- Social persuasion = authorities with diagnostic competency communicate their judgment of our capabilities

- Can influence our intern standards of self-evaluation and increase self-belief

- If we are told that we are able to, we are more likely to believe that we can succeed and more likely to take action

Vicarious experiences by peers can increase self-efficacy.

- Vicarious experiences or modelling influences = witnessing the action and success of peers
- The higher the similarity between the individual and the model, the higher the likelihood that the vicarious experience will increase self-efficacy
- -> positive social comparison, incentive to take action

Self-efficacy is a promising concept for radicalization studies.

- Self efficacy has been extensively researched in other contexts and proven to be reliable

- Preliminary findings suggest applicability to radicalization processes (but more theoretical and empirical work is needed)

- May help explain why some people radicalize and others do not

Thank you for your attention!

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