

NAVIGATING THE MARGINS OF RADICALIZATION: INTERSECTIONALITY OF GANG AFFILIATION AND TERROR EXTREMISM

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Abstract

By providing technical definitions for the terms marginality, radicalization, extremism, gangs, and terrorism, this paper concentrated on the relationship between gang membership and terrorist activity. the significance of comprehending the overlap for community leaders, law enforcement, and legislators. The combination of terrorist extremism and gang activity poses a complex problem in the current global security environment that necessitates a sophisticated understanding and creative solutions. The study examined the complex relationship between terrorist groups and urban gangs, emphasizing the shared experiences of marginalization, radicalization, and resistance to extremism. The study also examined the complex and often intertwined domains of gangs and terrorism, highlighting the connection between low-level criminal activity and extremist ideologies. The study also explored the intricate and frequently entwined realms of terrorism and gangs, emphasizing the range that links extremist ideologies with low-level criminal activity. We identify the pathways from social and economic disenfranchisement to violent extremism by analyzing the similarities between the marginal experiences of gang members and those at risk of radicalization. We learn about the individual experiences and group dynamics that drive people from gang culture into the world of terrorism through case studies and profiles. The study also examined institutional and community reactions to this intersection, providing deradicalization, intervention, and prevention tactics. In the end, this investigation emphasizes the significance of a comprehensive and cooperative strategy for reducing the overlap between gang activity and terrorist extremism.

Keywords: *Marginality, Radicalization, Extremism, Gangs, Terrorism, Identity, Street-Jihadi Spectrum.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The paper provide a comprehensive exploration of the gang-terrorism overlap. We begin by discussing the common ground of marginality, highlighting the social, economic, and political factors that contribute to the marginalization of individuals. Next, we delve into the radicalization pathways that lead individuals from gang life to extremist ideologies. The role of identity and belonging is examined, emphasizing how the search for meaning and community can propel individuals along the spectrum.

Through detailed case studies and profiles, we illustrate real-world examples of individuals who have traversed the street-jihadi spectrum. We then explore resistance strategies, focusing on community and institutional responses that aim to counter radicalization and support reintegration. The chapter concludes with policy implications and recommendations for future research, emphasizing the need for a multi-faceted and collaborative approach to address the gang-terrorism nexus.

In summary, this introduction sets the stage for a thorough examination of the intersection between gangs and terrorism. By understanding the shared pathways of marginality and radicalization, we can develop more effective strategies to combat both phenomena and foster resilience within vulnerable communities.

2. THE NEXUS OF GANGS AND TERRORISM

The relationship between terrorist extremism and gang affiliation is not just a theoretical concept; rather, it is a real-world issue with important ramifications for international security. The recruitment strategies employed by both gangs and terrorist organizations, the socioeconomic backgrounds of their members, and their operational and control strategies are just a few examples of how this overlap shows up. It is important to comprehend this overlap for a number of reasons. It improved security tactics, to start. To counter the combined threat of gangs and terrorism, policymakers and law enforcement organizations must create more potent plans. More focused and thorough interventions may result from acknowledging the traits and approaches that these groups have in common.

Second, it affects the community. Gangs and terrorist groups both flourish in settings where communities are disenfranchised and marginalized. Addressing the root causes of marginality can help prevent the rise of both phenomena. The third is the necessity of allocating

resources. A better grasp of the relationship between gangs and terrorism can guide the efficient distribution of funds for prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation initiatives.

To comprehend the complexity of the gang-terrorism overlap, it is essential to define several key concepts. By exploring these definitions, a foundation for understanding how individuals move along the street-jihadi spectrum, from gang involvement to terrorist activities will be established.

Marginality: The state of being excluded from mainstream social, economic, and political life, often leading to feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation.

Radicalization: The process by which individuals come to adopt extreme political, social, or religious ideologies, often leading to the justification of violence.

Extremism: Holding and advocating for radical views, particularly those that are considered far outside the norm and often in opposition to fundamental societal values.

Gangs: Organized groups often involved in criminal activities, marked by their territorial claims and the use of violence to maintain control and cohesion.

Terrorism: The use of violence and intimidation, particularly against civilians, to achieve political aims.

Identity: Identity: Understanding why people join gangs and terrorist groups requires understanding the ideas of identity and belonging. Both groups give their members a sense of purpose, community, and recognition that they often don't have because they are on the outside.

Street-Jihadi Spectrum: The Street-Jihadi Spectrum is the range of behaviors that people go through as they go from being in gangs to being involved in terrorist activities. This spectrum has overlapping reasons for joining, ways of getting people to join, and ways of doing things. By examining this continuum, we can identify critical points for intervention and develop holistic approaches to prevent the escalation from gang violence to acts of terrorism.

3. THE COMMON GROUND AND PATHWAYS

Marginality is the fertile ground from which both gang membership and terrorist extremism often emerge. People who are economically, socially, and politically marginalized and live on

the edges of society are more likely to be influenced by gangs and extremist groups. To deal with the root causes that lead to radicalization and gang membership, you need to understand what marginality has in common.

Marginality, encompassing socio-economic, social, or political dimensions, serves as a unifying factor connecting gang affiliation and terrorist extremism. By addressing the root causes of marginality through improving economic opportunities, enhancing educational access, fostering social inclusion, and ensuring political representation, effective prevention and intervention strategies can be developed to disrupt the pathways leading to gang membership and radicalization.—we can mitigate the factors that push individuals towards these destructive paths. Understanding marginality as the common ground is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies that can disrupt the pathways leading to gang membership and radicalization.

Understanding the pathways from marginality to extremism is crucial for developing strategies to prevent individuals from transitioning from marginalized circumstances to participation in violent gangs or terrorist activities. Radicalization is a complex process influenced by a combination of personal, social, and ideological factors. This section delves into the mechanisms and stages of radicalization, highlighting the similarities and differences between gang recruitment and terrorist radicalization.

The pathways from marginality to extremism reveal critical points of intervention where effective strategies can disrupt the progression towards gang membership or terrorist involvement. By addressing the socio-economic, social, and political factors that contribute to marginalization, and by providing alternative sources of identity, purpose, and community, we can reduce the appeal of radical ideologies. To make sure that prevention and intervention strategies can lower the risks posed by these overlapping threats, it is important to understand how people become radicalized in both gangs and terrorist groups.

Radicalization is the process of moving from being on the edge to being extreme. People often start out on the fringes of society, where they have trouble making ends meet, are socially isolated, and have no political power. This makes it easy for people to become radicalized as they look for ways to solve their problems. People who have low self-esteem, are going through an identity crisis, or have been through trauma are more likely to believe in radical ideas. Recruiters often take advantage of these personal weaknesses. People who are

on the fringes of society often feel very disconnected from the rest of society. Both gangs and terrorist groups can be very appealing because they give people a strong sense of identity, purpose, and belonging. People are exposed to radical ideologies that align with their experiences and complaints through social media, online discussion boards, and face-to-face interactions with recruiters.

A major driving force behind violent radicalization is a sense of grievance over perceived unfair circumstances (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Hafez and Mullins, 2015; Ahmed, 2023). Such complaints may stem from poverty, poor employment prospects, disapproval of political developments, and experiences of racism, exclusion, and stigmatization (Kepel, 2004; Khosrokhavar, 2017). This exclusion and marginalization can be exacerbated by radicalization discourse and associated police repression (Heath-Kelly, 2013). One could argue that violent extremism offers a cathartic release of repressed discontent and a chance to rediscover a sense of purpose in life (Back, 2018; Kruglanski, 2014).

Indoctrination stage, during this stage, individuals start to internalize the radical beliefs and narratives presented to them. This can involve ideological education, religious instruction, or exposure to violent propaganda. The influence of peers and the desire to conform to group norms play a significant role in deepening one's commitment to radical ideologies. The group provides validation and reinforces the radical worldview. Individuals move from merely holding radical beliefs to committing to action. This could mean participating in gang activities or engaging in terrorist acts. The transition is marked by a willingness to use violence to achieve ideological goals. In both gangs and terrorist organizations, recruits undergo various forms of training to prepare for violent activities. This includes physical training, tactical instruction, and sometimes, indoctrination sessions to solidify their commitment.

4. FACTORS INFLUENCING RADICALIZATION

Social Networks and Recruitment Tactics: Recruitment often occurs through existing social networks. Friends, family members, or acquaintances who are already involved in gangs or extremist groups can be powerful influences. Both gangs and terrorist organizations use targeted recruitment tactics to identify and recruit vulnerable individuals. This can involve outreach in schools, community centers, and online spaces.

Ideological Narratives: Radical ideologies provide a narrative that frames personal and communal grievances within a broader ideological struggle. This can be particularly powerful

for individuals seeking to make sense of their marginalization. Both gangs and extremist groups promise empowerment and a sense of agency. They portray involvement as a way to fight back against perceived injustices and to gain respect and status.

Community and Environmental Factors: The specific conditions of a community, such as levels of violence, economic opportunities, and social cohesion, play a critical role in the radicalization process. High-crime neighborhoods and conflict zones are particularly susceptible to gang and extremist recruitment. Heavy-handed or discriminatory actions by the state can exacerbate feelings of marginalization and injustice, pushing individuals further towards radicalization. Conversely, inclusive and supportive state policies can help mitigate these risks.

5. MARGINALITY THE COMMON GROUND

Economic Marginalization: Individuals in impoverished communities face limited access to legitimate economic opportunities. This deprivation often drives young people to seek alternative means of income and social mobility, which gangs and terrorist groups can provide. High unemployment rates, especially among youth, contribute to a sense of hopelessness and frustration. Gangs and extremist groups exploit this vulnerability by offering financial incentives and a sense of purpose.

Poor educational infrastructure and underfunded schools in marginalized areas fail to provide quality education and future prospects, pushing individuals towards gangs and radical groups that promise better opportunities. Without access to vocational training or higher education, marginalized youth find themselves ill-equipped for the job market, making gang affiliation or extremist involvement more appealing as a means to achieve status and respect.

Social Marginalization: Marginalized individuals often feel excluded from mainstream society, leading to feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement. Gangs and terrorist groups provide a sense of belonging and community that fills this void. Experiences of systemic racism and discrimination can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and injustice, making the narratives of gangs and extremist groups more attractive as they often promise empowerment and retribution.

Broken homes, domestic violence, and substance abuse within families can push individuals towards gangs or extremist groups that offer a surrogate family structure and support system.

In communities where social cohesion is weak, gangs and extremist groups can step in to provide the structure and sense of belonging that the community fails to offer.

Political Marginalization: Marginalized communities often feel underrepresented in political processes, leading to disillusionment with the state. Gangs and extremist groups exploit this disillusionment by positioning themselves as alternatives to the perceived corrupt or ineffective political system. Experiences of police brutality, unjust incarceration, and human rights abuses can push individuals towards radical ideologies as a form of resistance against oppressive systems. When governments and institutions are seen as corrupt or inefficient, marginalized individuals lose faith in official channels for change. This distrust makes the radical promises of gangs and extremist groups more appealing as they often portray themselves as fighting against a corrupt status quo.

6. THE ROLE OF IDENTITY AND GROUP DYNAMICS IN COMMON GROUND

Many young people from marginalized communities experience a crisis of identity. They struggle with questions about who they are and where they fit in society. This crisis is exacerbated by socio-economic deprivation, discrimination, and lack of opportunities. Gangs and extremist groups provide clear, albeit radical, answers to these identity questions. They offer a ready-made identity that is often tied to a sense of pride, power, and purpose. This is especially appealing to individuals who feel invisible or powerless in mainstream society.

Joining a gang or terrorist group involves adopting a new identity that aligns with the group's values and goals. This new identity often replaces the individual's previous sense of self, which was marred by marginalization and exclusion. Symbols, rituals, and narratives are used by both gangs and extremist organizations to support this new identity. Propaganda materials, initiation rites, and tattoos all serve to reinforce the person's transformation and dedication to the group.

a feeling of fraternity and community. Gangs and extremist organizations serve as surrogate families for a lot of people. They provide a sense of belonging, emotional support, and protection that the person's real family or community might not be able to offer. A strong sense of brotherhood or sisterhood is fostered by these groups' close-knit structure. Members frequently call one another family, which strengthens ties of allegiance and camaraderie.

People in marginalized communities often feel ignored and underappreciated, while gangs and extremist organizations offer respect and recognition; membership in these groups confers

status and prestige both within the group and occasionally within the community; involvement in terrorist operations or gang activities is presented as an accomplishment; and when these activities are carried out successfully, members experience a sense of pride and accomplishment that they might not otherwise experience.

One significant element in the hiring process is peer pressure. By using their existing connections of loyalty and trust, friends or family members who are already active in gangs or extremist organizations can influence others to join. People frequently feel pressured to adopt the norms and behaviors of the group once they are inside it. Social dynamics and, occasionally, threats and coercion are used to enforce this conformity. The group's leaders and other members' approval is very important. The individual's dedication and loyalty are strengthened by this social validation, making it challenging to leave the group even if reservations start to surface. The group's collective identity often becomes more significant than the individual's own identity. Members start to view themselves mainly as belonging to the group, this drives further integration and radicalization.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of identity and belonging in the radicalization process; both terrorist groups and gangs use these needs to recruit and keep members. When we understand these dynamics, we can create interventions that give marginalized people alternative sources of identity and community by addressing the root causes of marginalization, fostering inclusive environments, and offering opportunities for meaningful engagement. By doing this, we can break down the pathways that lead people from marginality to extremism.

Puzzle Model of Radicalization

The radicalization "puzzle" model. According to Dalgaard-Nielsen (2010), this model views radicalization as a process that results from a variety of overlapping factors that, when combined, may drive a person toward extremism. First, according to this model, a major element that could encourage radicalization is a feeling of disillusionment, discontent, and resentment over unfair conditions. Being impoverished, having poor employment prospects, strongly disagreeing with political developments, and experiencing racism, stigma, or exclusion can all lead to these negative emotions (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Kepel, 2004; Roy, 2017; Sageman, 2008). Therefore, it could be argued that street culture and radicalization share the first component of the "puzzle.". Extremist narratives and ideologies are the second important component in radicalization processes (Halverson, 2011). Narratives and ideologies

have the power to stir people's emotions, energize sentiments around political issues, and unite large numbers of people behind a common cause, including violence, in addition to influencing people's thoughts (Presser, 2018).

According to Hafez and Mullins (2015), for instance, extremist ideology offers a "tool kit" of discursive resources that draw attention to a variety of social issues, their root causes, and the steps that must be taken to address them (Hogan and Haltinner, 2015). Such lofty ideological narratives are typically absent from street culture (Ilan, 2015). Extremist narratives can therefore be especially alluring to street youth because they elegantly and explicitly address the issues that initially drew them to street culture.

Social networks are the third piece of the puzzle of radicalization, and they frequently play a significant part in the radicalization of an individual or group (Bakker, 2006; Carlsson, 2020). Social bonding with extremist friends, family, or charismatic recruiters is often the means by which people become radicalized (Nesser, 2016). It is common for people to undergo radicalization with a group of their peers rather than alone (Cottee, 2011; Sageman, 2011). In street culture, networks play a similar role by enabling group action and creating a resource that people can use (Ilan, 2013). Street youths may encounter jihadi recruiters in street cultural settings like jails (Silke, 2014), street drug markets (Tutenges and Sandberg, 2022), or they may have known them from their childhood, having grown up in the same neighborhoods (Truong, 2018). When combined with the numerous cultural similarities between street and jihadi cultures, these networks can occasionally be viewed as "enabling environments."

The fourth component of the radicalization puzzle proposed by Hafez and Mullins (2015). The post-subculture theory (Kahn-Harris and Bennett, 2004; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003) emphasizes the contingency and fluidity of lifestyles, rituals, claimed symbols, and narratives, which is more in line with this more flexible, sporadic, and fluid view of radicalization than the staircase model. The patterns of abrupt and partial radicalization that have been seen in the cases of numerous Islamist attackers with a street culture background are still not adequately explained by the puzzle model (Toulouse and Montauban in 2012 and in Copenhagen 2015). It also neglects to elucidate instances where radicalization occurs abruptly, seemingly by caprice or impulse, or when individuals oscillate between jihadi and street cultural behaviors repeatedly (Cottee, 2016). "Osama in the morning and Tupac in the night" is an observation from research in Guinea-Bissau, illustrating the potential to connect tentatively and intermittently with fundamentalist ideologies and radical contexts (Utas and Vigh, 2017).

7. CONCLUSION

Addressing the complex issue of extremism requires a multifaceted approach that involves both community and institutional responses. These efforts aim to mitigate the factors that contribute to radicalization, offer alternative pathways for individuals at risk, and strengthen societal resilience against extremist influences. This section explores various strategies and programs implemented by communities and institutions to resist extremism.

Resisting extremism requires a comprehensive approach that integrates community and institutional efforts. By addressing the underlying causes of marginalization, providing support and alternatives for at-risk individuals, and fostering strong, resilient communities, it is possible to mitigate the factors that lead to gang involvement and radicalization. Collaborative efforts between community organizations, educational institutions, law enforcement, and government agencies are essential for creating a holistic response to the threat of extremism. Continuous evaluation, adaptation, and innovation in these strategies will be key to their long-term success.

As societies grapple with the complex challenges posed by extremism and radicalization, policymakers must continually reassess their approaches and adapt to emerging threats. This section explores the policy implications drawn from current research and outlines potential future directions for combating extremism effectively. In navigating the complex landscape of extremism, it is evident that bridging the gaps between various stakeholders and approaches is essential for developing effective strategies to counter radicalization and violence. This conclusion synthesizes key insights from the preceding discussions and outlines the importance of collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by extremism.

Addressing extremism requires a multifaceted and adaptive approach that combines prevention, intervention, and enforcement strategies. By investing in early intervention, promoting social inclusion, enhancing rehabilitation programs, and balancing security concerns with civil liberties, policymakers can create a more resilient society capable of resisting extremist ideologies. Embracing innovation, collaboration, and international cooperation will be crucial for staying ahead of evolving threats and effectively countering extremism in the future. Continuous evaluation, learning, and adaptation will be key to ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of counter-extremism efforts in the years to come.

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