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The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion

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The ubiquity of use of the term “radicalization” suggests a consensus about its meaning, but this article shows through a review of a variety of definitions that no such consensus exists. The article then argues that use of the term is problematic not just for these reasons, but because it is used in three different contexts: the security context, the integration context, and the foreign-policy context. It is argued that each of these contexts has a different agenda, impacted in the case of the integration agenda by the rise of European “neo-nationalism,” and so each uses the term “radical” to mean something different. The use of one term to denote at least three different concepts risks serious confusion. The proposed solution is to abandon the attempt to use “radicalization” as an absolute concept.

Keywords definition, integration, Jihadism, neo-nationalism, radicalization

“Radicalization” is at present the standard term used to describe “what goes on before the bomb goes off.” The term’s ubiquity suggests an established consensus about its meaning, but in fact the current use of the term is of recent origin. As some other researchers have recently argued,¹ and as this article also argues, the term is understood and used in a variety of different ways, which in itself produces confusion. Even more problematically, as this article shows, the term is also used in three different contexts: the security context, the integration context, and the foreign-policy context. Since each of these contexts has a different agenda, each uses the term “radical” to mean something different. The use of one term to denote three different concepts risks even more serious confusion, which is compounded by the fact that each of these three contexts has at least two levels: an analytic and official level, and a public and political level. The public and political level in Western Europe is especially important as a result of the impact of what has been called “neo-nationalism.” Other agendas can also intervene, adding to the confusion. The only solution, this article argues in concluding, is to recognize the inherently relative nature of the term “radical,” and cease treating “radicalization” as an absolute concept.

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History

The general popularity of the term “radicalization” is relatively recent, as Figure 1 shows.

Before 2001, “radicalization” was rarely referred to in the press, although the term was occasionally used in academia, generally in what is identified below as its “relative” sense.² The greatest increase in frequency of use of “radicalization” in the press was between 2005 and 2007, timing that strongly suggests that the term’s current popularity derives from the emergence of “home-grown” terrorism in Western Europe, notably the London bombings in July 2005. Since 2005, most Western European countries have established “counter-radicalization” programs, institutionalizing the term “radicalization.” This, and the funding for research that is attached to some of these programs, helps ensure that the term remains both current and prominent.

The origin of the current use of the term in relation to terrorism was, in the view of Peter Neumann (now director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence in London), the political climate after 9/11:

There is a long and well-established discourse about the “root causes” of terrorism and political violence that can be traced back to the early 1970s. Following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, however, it suddenly became very difficult to talk about “the roots of terrorism,” which some commentators claimed was an effort to excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians. . . . It was through the notion of radicalisation that a discussion . . . became possible again.³

It is in part true that the adoption of the term “radicalization” made possible an analysis of Islamist terrorism that built on pre-existing experience and knowledge, but the adoption of the term has also had negative consequences, discussed in this article. Another negative consequence, which will be mentioned in passing, is that the whole discourse has subtly shifted. The earlier discourse on terrorism, to which Neumann refers, focused on the circumstances, the ideology, the group, and the individual. The concept of radicalization emphasizes the individual and, to some extent, the ideology and the group, and significantly de-emphasizes the wider

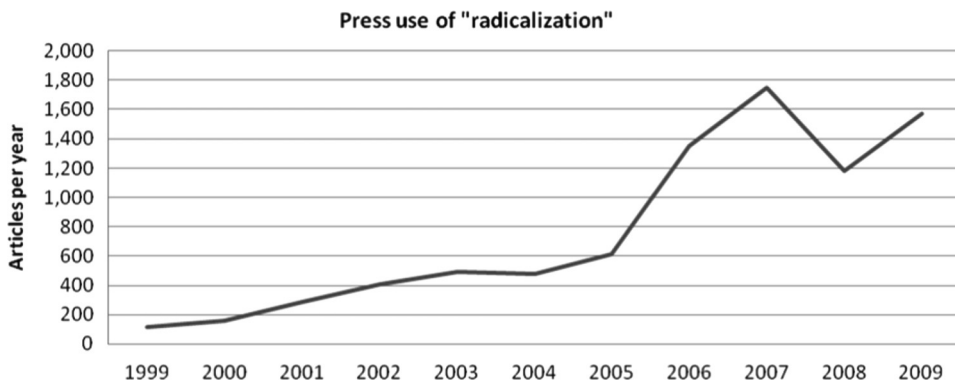


Figure 1. Articles using the term “radicalization” in the English-language press (*Source:* aggregated, time-limited Google News searches).

circumstances—the “root causes” that it became so difficult to talk about after 9/11, and that are still often not brought into analyses. So long as the circumstances that produce Islamist radicals’ declared grievances are not taken into account, it is inevitable that the Islamist radical will often appear as a “rebel without a cause.”⁴

Another result of this decreased attention to wider circumstances is a tendency to conflate groups and individuals operating in disparate circumstances on the basis of what they have in common: Islam and violence. Matthew Herbert has recently drawn attention to this problem:

In lumping all Islamic terrorist groups together at the outset of the analytic process, we prejudice the conclusion that all violent Islamists are driven by religious principles, implacably opposed to anything alien to Islam and irrationally murderous in attitude.⁵

Inevitably, if radicalism is defined as what disparate groups have in common, the results of any analysis of radicalism will reflect the basis on which those disparate groups were chosen in the first place.

Existing Definitions

The term “radical,” and hence the terms “radicalism” and “radicalization,” can have two types of meaning, one relative and one absolute. The relative meaning, which will be considered first, is frequently encountered, and is uncontroversial in itself. The absolute meanings, which will be considered next, are where the confusion begins.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one meaning of “radical” is “representing or supporting an extreme section of a party.”⁶ In this sense, the term may be used as a synonym for “extremist,” and in opposition to “moderate.” It serves the useful purpose of indicating a relative position on a continuum of organized opinion. “Radicalization” thus indicates movement on that continuum. The use of the term “radical” in its relative sense, then, is unproblematic. It does, however, raise two questions. One is where to draw the line: where does the moderate section of the continuum lie? The other and more difficult question is what continuum should be considered in the first place. If a group is organized around one central issue, as some pressure groups are, it is clear that the appropriate continuum is the one that relates to that issue. We all know what “a radical anti-abortionist” is. In reality, however, few groups are single-issue. That political parties, for example, generally pursue multiple issues may be why the *Oxford English Dictionary* specifies “an extreme section of a party”: one party may have more than one extreme section. It is not immediately clear, then, what “a radical Republican” stands for.

When it comes to contemporary Islam, of course, there are many thousands of groups, nearly all of which are multiple-issue. Some of these groups resemble each other, but many differ dramatically in terms of the mix of issues that they address, as well as in terms of the approaches they take to those issues. It is of course possible to rank multiple-issue groups on the basis of their positions on one particular issue, which is what has in practice often been done when analyzing Islamic radicalism, but this involves ignoring positions on other issues which may well be more important to the groups in question, and has as a result been criticized. Herbert, for example, argues that “in reality, a thousand flowers are abloom in the realm of

Islamic activism: to approach such diversity with a simple with-us-or-against-us dichotomy primarily in mind is a hopeless, futile task.”⁷

The relative sense of “radical,” then, is useful so long as it is specified what is meant by “moderate,” so long as the continuum along which the line is being drawn is carefully considered, and so long as it is recognized that some other continuum may be more important to the group or selection of groups being analyzed. Very frequently, however, none of these criteria are observed, resulting in what is in effect an absolute use of the term. This may happen because the line between moderate and radical is presumed to be self-evident, and because the continuum (“with-us-or-against-us”) is also presumed to be self-evident. If so, these presumptions are erroneous. As will be shown later in this article, neither the line nor the continuum are in fact self-evident, and lines are drawn in different places on different continua in response to different agendas.

Various attempts have been made at absolute definitions of “radical.” Three such varieties of attempt will now be considered: the general philosophical, the analytic, and the official. The philosophical attempts, it will be seen, are interesting, but of little use when dealing with the phenomenon of Islamist “radicalization.” The analytic attempts are also interesting, and differ significantly from the philosophical attempts. The official attempts are most interesting, because of the significant disagreements they reveal.

One classic philosophical definition dates from an observation made in 1923 by the Spanish political philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who contrasted the radical spirit of the modern revolutionary with earlier forms of rebellion. “When medieval man rebelled, he rebelled against the *abuses* of the lords,” wrote Ortega y Gasset. “The revolutionary, however, rebels not against *abuses*, but against *uses*” (my emphasis).⁸ Following on this distinction, one may contrast radicalism with reformism, when reformism is understood, following the Mexican intellectual Octavio Paz, as the desire to “leave the social or cultural structures intact and . . . only . . . limit or improve this or that procedure,” and radicalism is understood as the desire “to correct the uses themselves rather than the mere abuses of them.”⁹

A similar philosophical distinction was made in 1962 by the American sociologist Egon Bittner, who drew on Weber to establish an opposition between radicalism and what he called “the common sense outlook.” The common sense outlook is the “normal, ordinary, traditionally sanctioned world-view,” which includes a variety of convictions that may not always be strictly coherent, and which are automatically modified in practice as circumstances dictate. Radicalism, in contrast, is, in Bittner’s words, “a unified and internally consistent interpretation of the world”¹⁰ which becomes an inflexible guide to action. Bittner’s definition of radicalism, it will be noted, has much in common with Hannah Arendt’s famous discussion of totalitarianism.¹¹ Bittner emphasizes the mentality that produces Ortega y Gasset’s rebellion against established uses and the determination to change established structures altogether. Bittner places the radical in opposition to the normal; Ortega y Gasset places it in opposition to the reformist.

Both these philosophical definitions make valuable contributions to our understanding of one variety of liberalism, which values “the common sense outlook” and opposes abuses, but accepts uses. Neither, however, gets us very far when it comes to Islamic “radicalization.” Ortega y Gasset’s definition would classify 90% of the population of the Arab world as radical, since 90% of the population of the Arab world hopes for radical change in existing social, cultural, and political structures

there. This is understandable; Western governments looking at the Arab world generally come to similar conclusions, even if it was only the administration of President George W. Bush that acted on that conclusion, in attempting the radical transformation of Iraq from Baathist authoritarianism to democracy. A definition that classifies so many people—including President Bush—as radical, though it may be interesting, is of little use for practical purposes. Bittner's definition has a similar problem, since it risks identifying any devout Muslim as radical, since any devout Muslim acts on the unified and internally consistent interpretation of the world known as Islam. Something similar might be said of many Christians.

Analytic definitions produced with current circumstances in mind are surprisingly rare. As has been said, most researchers using the terms “radical” and “radicalization” do not define these terms, either relying on their relative meaning or assuming that their absolute meaning is understood. Sophia Moskalenko and Clark McCauley, however, have recently proposed a distinction between “radicalism” and “activism,” where activism is defined as “readiness to engage in *legal and non-violent* political action” and radicalism is defined as “readiness to engage in *illegal and violent* political action” (my emphases). Activism, they argue, is widespread, but radicalism is rare.¹² Jonathan Githens-Mazer blurs Moskalenko and McCauley's distinction somewhat, proposing a definition of radicalism as “a collectively defined, individually felt moral obligation to participate in direct action,” legal or illegal. He distinguishes radicalism not from activism but from “apathy.”¹³ Both these definitions, then, regard radicalism not as a state of mind, as the two philosophical definitions do, but as a variety of propensity towards particular varieties of activity. An alternative approach was taken by Lene Kühle and Lasse Lindekilde, who did not object to understanding radicalism as a state of mind, but argued that existing official definitions (discussed below) were inadequate, and proposed a distinction between true radicalization and “the expression of youthful frustrations, revolt and solidarity with populations in the Muslim world.”¹⁴

Official definitions reveal serious points of disagreement, as other researchers¹⁵ have noted, and as this article will now illustrate. The definitions used below are from two countries in North America (the U.S. and Canada) and three countries in Western Europe (the UK, the Netherlands, and Denmark) and have been selected to represent a range of current official thinking.

The first of three major points of agreement among all five countries is that the radical is not the same as the terrorist. The terrorist is presumed to be a radical, but the radical is not presumed to be a terrorist, or at least not yet. Secondly, the radical is generally defined by reference to the “extremist.” Thirdly, most definitions include a reference to the radical as a threat. Thus a U.S. definition from a Congressional bill specifies “the purpose of facilitating . . . violence,”¹⁶ a Canadian definition from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) includes the phrase “could eventually (but not always) lead to . . . direct action,”¹⁷ and a Dutch definition from the General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen-en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD) includes the phrase “which may constitute a danger to the continuity of the democratic legal order.”¹⁸

The first of these points of agreement—that not all radicals are terrorists—is important, if uncontroversial. The second of these points—the interchangeable use of “radical” and “extremist”—follows the relative definition, and so adds no absolute precision. The third point of agreement—that radicalism is a function of threat—also carries the implication that not all radicals of all varieties are necessarily

threats, and that what matters is what might be called “threat-radicalism,” not radicalism *per se*. This is true and important, but leads to the circular argument that the type of radicalism that is a threat is radicalism that is a threat. None of the three points of agreement, then, gets us very far.

Although it is agreed that not all radicals are terrorists, comparison of these official definitions reveals disagreement concerning the relationship between radicalism and violence. Most official definitions of threat-radicalism include a reference to violence. Sometimes violence is seen as a central element of threat-radicalism, as in the case of the U.S. definition quoted above (“facilitating . . . violence”), or in a British definition from the Home Office, which is short and to the point: “active support for violent extremism.”¹⁹ Sometimes violence is less central, as in the RCMP definition (“could eventually . . . lead to extremist activity or direct action”), or in a U.S. definition from the Department of Justice that refers to “extreme views, *including* beliefs that violent measures need to be taken”²⁰ (my emphasis)—that is, radicalism can also include extreme views that do *not* lead to violence, or at least do not lead directly to violence, and still be a threat. Finally, Danish and Dutch definitions cover both violence and non-violent but undemocratic means. The Danish definition refers to “accept[ance of] the use of undemocratic or violent means,”²¹ and the AIVD definition includes both a formulation similar to the Canadian and American (“the potential to result in terrorist violence”) and a formulation that specifically excludes violence, but includes “the active pursuit of and/or support for far-reaching changes in society . . . *possibly* by using undemocratic methods”²² (my emphasis). With regard to non-violent challenges to society, the Danish definition goes furthest of all, including within radicalism any variety of “opposition to an open, democratic and pluralistic society,” including accepting that “social groups be threatened, insulted or denigrated on account of their color, national or ethnic origin, faith or sexual orientation.”²³

The question, then, is whether something is threat-radicalism only if it leads directly to violence, whether it can be threat-radicalism even if it does not lead directly to violence, or whether it can be threat-radicalism even if it does not lead to violence at all, and consists only (for example) of opposing pluralism by accepting that somebody may be denigrated on account of their sexual orientation. Since something that leads to violence is certainly a threat, the question is really whether something that does not lead directly to violence, or something that does not lead to violence at all, can be a threat.

A similar disagreement is found with regard to the relationship between thought and action. Some official definitions of threat-radicalism refer to ideology or belief, as for example the U.S. definition from the Congressional bill, which refers to “an extremist belief system”²⁴ or the RCMP definition, which refers to “an overly ideological message and belief system.”²⁵ Some definitions, however, make no reference to ideology or belief, as in the case of the British definition that is concerned only with “support for violent extremism.” The U.S. and RCMP definitions, then, potentially consider both Moskalkenko and McCauley’s “activism” and their “radicalism” to be threat-radicalism, then, while the British definition considers only their “radicalism” to be threat-radicalism.

Differing Agendas

These disagreements at the official level would on their own produce confusion, but more serious confusion—it will now be argued—results from the multiple contexts in

which the term “radical” is used, and the resulting competition between differing agendas.

The three most important official and semi-official contexts in which the term “radicalization” is at present used in Western nations are the security context, the integration context, and the foreign policy context.²⁶ The agenda of the security context will doubtless be the most familiar of these three to readers of this journal. The integration agenda will be less familiar, especially since the European integration agenda takes some very specific forms that will be unfamiliar to many in North America. As D. Elaine Pressman argues, in countries such as Canada and the United States, where integration issues are absent from the public and political agendas, radicalization is only on security agendas.²⁷ Elsewhere, it is also on the public and political agenda. The foreign policy agenda is straightforward, but its implications for the use of “radical” can usefully be examined.

The Security Agenda

The security agenda is the easiest one to establish. Though intelligence agencies and police agencies have differences of emphasis, both are concerned with radicalization primarily to the extent that it constitutes a direct or indirect threat to the security of the state or of individual citizens of the state. The ways in which radicalism can constitute a direct threat without actually constituting terrorism are many, including for example carrying out Jihadist propaganda on the internet, and are not subject to much dispute. They will not, therefore, be considered further in this article. The way in which radicalism can constitute an indirect threat, however, is more complex.

As is widely accepted by students of the history of terrorism, almost all terrorism takes place against the background of a supportive milieu and with a particular constituency as its principal audience. The supportive milieu may engage only in entirely legal and entirely peaceful political activity—Moskalenko and McCauley’s “activism”—or may not engage in any political activity at all—Githens-Mazer’s “apathy”—but it still matters. Almost without exception, every terrorist group since the emergence of modern terrorism in the 1870s can be placed within a broader social, political, or ethnic movement, including both violent action and non-violent activism of some sort, and can be understood by reference to the circumstances and grievances of the terrorists’ (and the non-violent activists’) broader potential constituency.²⁸ As well as anarchists who used terrorism in the late nineteenth century, there were anarchists who did not use terrorism, and socialists who were not anarchists; most important of all, perhaps, was the new industrial proletariat, the constituency in whose name both terrorists and the activists worked, and for whose support they were competing. As well as the Weathermen in the U.S., there was Flower Power, and the youth of the 1960s and 1970s. Muslim communities in Western Europe today seem to be one important constituency for Islamist terrorists, and one source of their supportive milieu. Opinion within these communities may contribute indirectly to a threat, and so may be somewhere on the security agenda.

The political level of the security agenda differs only slightly from the official level, to the extent that at the political level it is necessary not just to take appropriate measures but also to be seen to be taking appropriate measures. At the intelligence level, in contrast, visibility is generally not desired.

The Integration Agenda

Integration agendas are more complex, and Western European integration agendas are especially complex. In theory, integration is the opposite of segregation, “the bringing into equal membership of a common society those groups or persons previously discriminated against on racial or cultural grounds.”²⁹ Desegregation and the prevention of segregation are thus important items on the integration agenda, with special emphasis on avoiding residential and labor-market segregation by such means as suitable public housing policies and language- and skills-training for recent immigrants.³⁰

There is more to integration than this, however, as a result of the emergence in Western Europe of “neo-nationalism,” a trend which, it has been argued, is best understood as a social phenomenon with ideological and political consequences, and which must be distinguished from both the old European Far Right and the sometimes related phenomenon of regional secessionism. Contemporary European neo-nationalism is characterized by “populist appeals to the mass cultures of the present,” and related positions on immigration, integration, and relations between national governments and the central bodies of the European Union.³¹

The political level of the integration agenda therefore differs from the official level much more than the political level of the security agenda differs from the official level of that agenda. Security is not, on the whole, a political issue. Immigration and integration, in contrast, are. Neo-nationalist parties play a significant role in the political life of certain Western European countries. In Denmark, for example, the Danish People’s Party (DPP) won 13.8% of the vote in the last (2007) national election,³² making it the third largest party in the Danish parliament. Although the DPP is not a member of the governing coalition and so has no ministerial portfolios, the governing coalition depends on its votes, giving it almost as much influence as if it were a formal coalition partner. In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom was expected to do as well as the DPP or even better in the 2010 Dutch national election.³³ Even in Western European countries where neo-nationalist parties do not (yet) take a significant share of the vote or play a major part in national politics, other parties are mindful of the possibility that they might, and adjust their positions accordingly, and also adjust their positions in response to strong neo-nationalist sentiment among sections of their electorates. To an extent which varies from country to country, the integration agenda in Western Europe is politically contested, debated in parliament, and discussed in the media and private conversations. A wide range of positions and understandings results, with an increasing emphasis on cultural issues.

The impact of neo-nationalism on the integration agenda is illustrated by the publicly stated responsibilities and objectives of some of Western Europe’s ministries of integration. These generally have responsibility for immigration and for areas directly related to integration in the sense of desegregation, such as those already mentioned. They also have responsibility for certain cultural issues, often expressed in terms of democracy and citizenship. The “Common Integration Agenda” promoted by the Netherlands’ Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment thus includes “active citizenship.”³⁴ Denmark’s Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, established in November 2001 and so arguably Europe’s oldest such ministry,³⁵ has as the third of its three main objectives that “society should be based on common fundamental democratic values.”³⁶ Sweden’s Ministry

of Integration and Gender Equality, established in January 2007, has responsibilities that include “democracy, discrimination, social movements, inclusion” and “co-citizenship.”³⁷ France’s Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-development, established in May 2007, has among its main objectives the promotion of “republican principles” as well as of French identity.³⁸ All these ministries, then, have objectives that go well beyond combating segregation. These objectives may also reflect neo-nationalist agendas. Arguably, this is as it should be, given the nature of democracy.

The articulation of some of these other objectives is complicated, and inevitably somewhat subjective. Residential segregation can be measured and appropriate counter-measures designed, but essentially cultural objectives such as “republican principles,” “fundamental democratic values,” “active citizenship,” and “co-citizenship” are hard to define. They often include “tolerance,” in many cases articulated in terms of gender relations and gay rights. This is why accepting the denigrating of someone on account of their sexual orientation figures in the Danish definition of radicalism. Although no other country goes as far as this and specifies that intolerance of homosexuality constitutes radicalism, draft guidelines for obligatory “social orientation” of immigrants issued in 2010 by the Swedish ministry of integration contain eight major headings, one of which is “Starting a family in Sweden.” This has seven subheadings, starting with “Individualistic and collectivist approaches,” passing through “Homosexual, bisexual and transgender rights,” and ending with women’s shelters.³⁹ The Dutch government also stresses toleration of homosexuality, to which it adds nude sunbathing. Scenes of both of these are included in a video on life in the Netherlands included in an information pack which certain categories of prospective immigrant are required to buy, and pass a test on, before applying for a visa.⁴⁰ One Dutch official lamented in private that the whole of Dutch culture seemed to have been reduced to gay rights. In fact, this is not what has happened. Gay rights have been adopted as a form of shibboleth, as a way of distinguishing the neo-nationalist conception of the authentically national from the non-national.

The Foreign-Policy Agenda

Foreign policy agendas are concerned with radicalism both directly and indirectly. Direct involvement follows the security agenda, while indirect involvement follows the agendas of other friendly and allied governments on the one hand, and of friendly Arab regimes on the other hand. This brings in rather different agendas, as Arab regimes have an obvious interest in labeling their internal oppositions as “radical,” since this helps justify the repressive measures they routinely take against individuals and groups that they see as a threat to their continued control of state power, and also bolsters their case for continued Western political and economic support.⁴¹ Since the only significant internal opposition in any Arab country is Islamist, Arab regimes have a clear interest in expanding the definition “radical” as much as possible. This is one reason why Egypt’s Muslim Brothers are still often seen as radical, despite not having been connected with any act of violence for over fifty years and despite having both endorsed and engaged in electoral politics.⁴²

The political level of the foreign-policy agenda does not, on the whole, differ significantly from the official level.

Islamic Agendas

As well as these official and public and political agendas, there are also private agendas that can intervene, adding to the confusion. Most importantly, Islamic groups have agendas of their own. When funding is made available to “moderate” groups and individuals, it becomes important for any Islamic organization to be seen as moderate, and for its competitors to be seen as radical. It is, of course, easier to modify the definition than to modify the group. Even when funding is not an issue, groups can still have reasons of their own for de-legitimizing other groups. Thus, for example, the American Sufi leader Hisham Kabbani, in an address to a U.S. State Department forum in 1999, warned that 80% of American mosques had been taken over by extremists.⁴³ This warning reflected Kabbani’s own agenda, his position in a theological struggle that has been going on since the late eighteenth century between those who support *taqlid* (the authority of the classical scholarly consensus of the ulema) and those who oppose it, and between those who favor the somewhat mystical approach to religion identified with Sufism and those who condemn Sufism as an illegitimate innovation. Supporters of *taqlid* and Sufism such as Kabbani are pitted against the opponents of *taqlid* and Sufism,⁴⁴ who for various reasons have been steadily gaining ground since the start of the twentieth century. For theological reasons that have nothing to do with their political stances, Jihadis are generally opponents of *taqlid* and Sufism. Not all opponents of *taqlid* and Sufism are Jihadis, however; they include, for example, the official state-sponsored religious establishment of Saudi Arabia. Despite this, Muslims such as Kabbani sometimes attempt to support their own agenda by presenting all their opponents as radicals. It may have been true in 1999 that 80% of American mosques were opponents of *taqlid* and Sufism, but it was certainly not true that 80% were extremists in any terms other than Kabbani’s.

Agreement and Disagreement Between Agendas

Security, integration, and foreign-policy agendas sometimes coincide, for example in so far as the successfully integration of Muslim communities would reduce part of the Islamist terrorists’ supportive milieu and divert some of their constituency. Security, integration, and indirect foreign-policy agendas also differ, however. An Islamic group in Denmark, Sweden, or the Netherlands that argued that homosexuality was a sin, for example, would be radical in terms of the integration agendas of those countries, but would not pose a security threat, so long as it did nothing else. In fact, in security terms such a group might even be useful, either as a source of information about groups that did pose a security threat, or as an alternative to such groups. As a result, the security and integration agendas not only differ, but actually conflict.

The difficulties attending these conflicting agendas are well illustrated by a recent dispute in the United Kingdom over funding provided under the CONTEST program. A report by the British think-tank Policy Exchange entitled “Choosing our Friends Wisely: Criteria for Engagement with Muslim Groups” argued that the British government was, in its attempt to combat radicalism, actually supporting radicalism.⁴⁵ Charles Farr, then director general of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism in the British Home Office (interior ministry), denied that it had ever been government policy to distribute funds “to use extremists against

violent extremists,”⁴⁶ but in fact such a policy would have been entirely defensible. It may make a lot of sense in security terms to support a group that is not a security threat in order to provide an alternative to a group that is a security threat, even though the group supported is a problem in integration terms. However, Farr stressed that CONTEST aimed to support groups that uphold “values” such as “freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, and respect for and responsibility toward others.”⁴⁷ These values come from the public and political integration agenda, not the security agenda. Lack of equality of opportunity is not a security threat. Worse, a Muslim group that—for example—supports respect for homosexuals is by definition going to be marginal in the circles where a security threat is most likely to arise. In this case, then, the public and integration agendas ended by labeling as “radical” groups that were not a security threat, and diverted funds intended for security purposes to groups that might assist the integration agenda, but could hardly assist the security agenda.

In the same way that a group or individual that is a problem in integration terms may not be a threat in security terms, a group or individual that is a threat in security terms may not be a problem in integration terms. As is well known, many home-grown terrorists have been apparently well integrated into European societies, and a disproportionate percentage of Islamist terrorists have been converts to Islam. In retrospect, of course, an ethnic European who converts to Islam and becomes a terrorist was presumably never very well integrated into his or her society of origin in the first place. Such individuals, however, are not on the agenda of the integration authorities.

Finally, the foreign policy and the domestic security agendas may conflict. Kühle and Lindekilde, for example, found that almost all Danish Muslims they interviewed in Århus expressed some degree of support for at least one foreign organization (such as Hamas) that was considered by the Danish security authorities, in response to the indirect foreign-policy agenda, to be a terrorist organization.⁴⁸ None of the organizations in question, however, pose any direct threat to Danish internal security, and all interviewees but one made a clear distinction between support for foreign organizations and support for the use of violence in Denmark, which they condemned.⁴⁹ The indirect foreign-policy agenda, then, would classify almost the entire Muslim population of Denmark’s second largest city as radical, while the security agenda would classify only one individual among those interviewed in that city as radical.

The conflicting agendas of the public and political discourse, of security and integration, and of foreign policy, then, are among the causes of the disagreements noted earlier in official definitions over whether it is thought or action that constitutes a threat, and whether non-violent radicalism is or is not a threat. The thought involved in non-violent radicalism may well be a threat to integration, but it is especially action that supports violence that is a security threat. The thought involved in non-violent radicalism, however, is also relevant to terrorists’ supportive milieu and to terrorists’ wider constituency, and so does require attention. It is not self-evident, however, that the agenda of the integration authorities determines the appropriate variety of attention.

The problem of conflicting agendas seems to have been noticed by the British Commission on Integration and Cohesion which, in 2007, recommended that “addressing political extremism . . . be distinguished from addressing issues relating to integration and cohesion.”⁵⁰ This recommendation was, however, rejected

by Hazel Blears, then Britain's Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, on the grounds that the different agendas supported one another, since "violent extremism" lessens "community cohesion" (i.e., integration) and in "cohesive communities... extremist messages are less likely to find support."⁵¹ That two agendas may overlap, however, does not mean that they cannot also conflict, as this article has argued. When cohesion is understood as integration, and integration includes a neo-nationalist cultural agenda, the attempt to produce cohesion may actually *increase* support for messages that are radical in security terms.

Blears' reaction is also an example of the consequences of institutionalization. She could hardly have accepted the commission's recommendation, since doing so would have severely undermined the logic behind the British government's then recent combination of responsibility for integration and for counter-radicalization in the ministry of which she was in charge.

Conclusions

Despite its popularity, then, the term "radicalization" is a source of confusion. Its use in connection with terrorism is recent, and may, as Peter Neumann suggests, be of political origin, allowing discussion of the causes of Islamist terrorism without appearing to "excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians." To the extent that it discourages inclusion of wider circumstances in analysis, however, it damages that analysis, for example by encouraging the lumping together of disparate varieties of radicalism—however defined—against which (in another context) Matthew Herbert has rightly warned.

Attempts have been made to define "radicalism" in absolute terms, both philosophically without reference to current circumstances, and by a few researchers and many official bodies with reference to current circumstances. Comparison of some of these definitions reveals disagreement about the relationship between radicalism and violence, and relationship between thought and action. Radicalism is easier to define in relative terms, as a position on a continuum of opinion, but two main problems then result: the problem of whether there is a continuum in the first place, and the problem of where to draw the line.

One result of the overlapping but sometimes differing agendas of security, integration, and foreign policy, sometimes complicated even further by the private agendas of individual Islamic organizations, is that lines are drawn in different places, and on different continua. The security agenda draws the line between "moderate" and "radical" in the light of concerns with direct or indirect threats to the security of the state or of individual citizens of the state, describing as "radical" more or less what Moskalenko and McCauley call "radical," in contrast to "activist." The integration agenda draws the line in the light of concerns about citizenship, including cultural issues raised by neo-nationalism, so that stances that Moskalenko and McCauley would call "activist" rather than "radical," or in extreme cases stances which Githens-Mazer would call "apathy," are described as radical since they threaten particular conceptions of citizenship. These conceptions can sometimes draw the line in remarkable places. One view that is found in the Danish press (though not in any official documents), for example, is that Danish culture is not particularly religious, and that reducing individual Muslims' religiosity is therefore a triumph for integration.⁵² On this basis, even the normal practices of Islam may be classed

as “radical.”⁵³ Meanwhile, the foreign-policy agenda necessarily considers the agendas of other governments when drawing its line, resulting in the classification as “radical” of stances that would not otherwise be of concern for either the (domestic) security agenda or the integration agenda.

One result of these overlapping but different definitions of “radical” is confusion over where the line between “moderate” and “radical” should be drawn, and on what continuum. It has been argued by European officials in private that this confusion may serve a useful purpose, in that it permits a degree of bi-partisanship in what is, in many countries, a highly charged and highly polarized political atmosphere. No political actor, whatever their views on Islam, integration, immigration, or culture, wishes to encourage radicalization. This may be true, but the negative consequences are also significant. At an analytic level, confusion is never to be desired. At a public and policy level, overlapping agendas mean the contraction of the space that may be described as “moderate” to the satisfaction of all agendas, and so an exaggeration of the apparent threat to Western security. An associated risk is that this threat may actually be increased. A group that is labeled as radical and thus excluded from normal public and political processes may, as a result, be more likely actually to become radical in security terms, since exclusion from normal processes encourages a search for alternative processes.⁵⁴ A further negative result is that stances that are not in fact of concern to security agencies risk being identified by other government agencies as security threats, and treated accordingly, with worrying implications for civil liberties.

Under these circumstances, the best solution for researchers is probably to abandon the idea that “radical” or “radicalization” are absolute concepts, to recognize the essentially relative nature of the term “radical,” and to be careful always to specify both the continuum being referred to and the location of what is seen as “moderate” on that continuum. Researchers also need to be aware of the sometimes very politicized integration agenda in many Western European countries, both with regard to that agenda’s impact on definitions of radicalism, and with regard to that agenda’s possible impact on Muslim populations in Western Europe.

At the policy level, all agencies involved need to be aware that the apparent common ground suggested by the use of the common terms “radical” and “radicalization” may mask fundamentally different agendas, and even mask conflicts between agendas. An approach similar to that recommended above for researchers may assist in identifying these differences and resolving possible conflicts.

Notes

1. See for example David R. Mandel, “Radicalization: What does it mean?” In *Indigenous Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalization Among Groups With an Immigrant Heritage in Europe*, T. Pick & A. Speckhard, eds. (Amsterdam: IOS Press, forthcoming), Jonathan Githens-Mazer, “Causal Processes, Radicalisation and Bad Policy: The Importance of Case Studies of Radical Violent Takfiri Jihadism for Establishing Logical Causality” (unpublished paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Toronto, 6 September, 2009), and Lene Kühle and Lasse Lindekilde, “Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus” (Aarhus: Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation, January 2010, www.ps.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/radicalization_aarhus_FINAL.pdf)

2. These comments are based on a limited review of articles from the 1990s containing the term.

3. Peter R. Neumann, Introduction to *Perspectives on Radicalisation and Political Violence: Papers from the First International Conference on Radicalisation and Political Violence, London 17–18 January 2008* (London: International Center for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2008), 4.

4. Or rather an “individual . . . ‘without a cause.’” Kühle and Lindekilde, “Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus” (see note 1 above), 27.

5. Matthew Herbert, “The Plasticity of the Islamic Activist: Notes from the Counterterrorism Literature,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32 (2009), 392.

6. “Radical, adj. and n.,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, September 2009.

7. Herbert, “Plasticity of the Islamic Activist,” 389–900.

8. José Ortega y Gasset, “El ocaso de las revoluciones” (1923), 2, pazfuerzayalegria.net/IMG/pdf_D8_el_ocaso_de_las_revoluciones.pdf

9. Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 21–22.

10. Egon Bittner, “Radicalism and the Organization of Radical Movements,” *American Sociological Review* 28 (1963), 932.

11. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951).

12. Sophia Moskalenko and Clark McCauley, “Measuring Political Mobilization: The Distinction Between Activism and Radicalism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (2009), 240.

13. Githens-Mazer, “Causal Processes, Radicalisation and Bad Policy” (see note 1 above).

14. Kühle and Lindekilde, “Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus” (see note 1 above), 69, 73–74.

15. See Kühle and Lindekilde, “Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus” (see note 1 above), 23–25; Mandel, “Radicalization: What does it mean?” (see note 1 above), and D. Elaine Pressman, “Exploring the Sources of Radicalization and Violent Radicalization: Some Transatlantic Perspectives,” *Journal of Security Issues* 2, no. 1 (2008).

16. House Resolution 1955 of the 110th Congress, “Violent Radicalization and Home-grown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007,” section 899A (2), www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-1955, accessed November 6, 2009.

17. RCMP Alternative Analysis Unit, internal communication (2007), quoted in Pressman, “Exploring the Sources of Radicalization” (see note 15 above), 2. See also Mandel, “Radicalization: What does it mean?” (see note 1 above).

18. AIVD (Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service), *The Radical Dawa in Transition: The Rise of Islamic Neoradicalism in the Netherlands* (The Hague: AIVD, 2007), 10, www.aivd.nl/contents/pages/90126/theradicaldawaintransition.pdf

19. United Kingdom, Home Office, “Preventing Violent Extremism: A Strategy for Delivery” (May 2008), 5.

20. United States Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, “A Review of the Federal Bureau of Prisons Selection of Muslim Religious Services Providers” (April, 2004), 6, n. 6, www.usdoj.gov/oig/special/0404/final.pdf

21. Denmark, Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, “En fælles og tryk fremtid. Handlingsplan om forebyggelse af ekstremistiske holdninger og radikalisering blandt unge” (2009), 7, www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/A797F73E-33E0-431A-9224-EE8BC39C932B/0/en_faelles_fremtid.pdf

22. AIVD, *Radical Dawa in Transition* (see note 18 above), 10.

23. Denmark, Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, “En fælles og tryk fremtid” (see note 21 above), 7–8.

24. HR 1955.

25. RCMP, internal communication, quoted in Pressman, “Exploring the Sources of Radicalization” (see note 15 above), 2.

26. This observation is based on private discussions with a number of European government officials.

27. Pressman, “Exploring the Sources of Radicalization” (see note 15 above), 18–19.

28. If this were not the case, one would probably be dealing with criminality or insanity, not terrorism.

29. “Integration,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 1989.

30. A concern with avoiding polarization between Muslim and majority communities is also, it has been argued by some European officials in private, one good reason for using the term “radicalization”: it allows public discussion of the problem of violent Islamism without using the words “Islam” or “Muslim.” This may be true, but it may also simply establish the idea that “Muslim” and “radical” are synonymous.

31. Marcus Banks and André Gingrich, “Neo-nationalism in Europe and Beyond,” in *Neo-nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*, Gingrich and Banks, eds. (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 2–3.

32. “Endelig opgørelse af folketingsvalget den 13. September 2007,” valg.ism.dk/valg/folketingsvalg/Documents/Med-endelige-res.pdf

33. Michael Steen, “Far Right Seeks to Benefit from Dutch Election in June,” *Financial Times*, February 24, 2010, www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d0f13ca2-20e4-11df-b920-00144feab49a.html

34. Mehmet Aközbek *et al.*, “Datgene wat ons bindt: gemeenschappelijke integratieagenda van rijk en gemeenten” (January 2009), 2, www.vrom.nl/pagina.html?id=2706&sp=2&dn=w1090

35. “Arguably” because the Netherlands position of Minister without Portfolio for Migration and Integration, established in 2002, was a development of the position of State Secretary for Migration, established in 1989.

36. Denmark, Ministeriet for Flygtninge, Indvandrere og Integration, “Oversigt over regeringens integrationspolitik,” www.nyidanmark.dk/da-dk/ministeren/regeringens_integrationspolitik, accessed November 22, 2009.

37. Sweden, Integrations-och jämställdhetsdepartementet, “För egenmakt – mot diskriminering,” www.regeringen.se/sb/d/8324/a/103538, accessed November 22, 2009.

38. France, Ministère de l’immigration, de l’intégration, de l’identité nationale et du développement solidaire, “Missions et rôle,” www.immigration.gouv.fr/spip.php?page=dossiers_them_org&numrubrique=311, accessed November 22, 2009.

39. “Sverige för nyanlända: Värden, välfärdsstat, vardagsliv” (Stockholm: Government Office, 2010), 20, www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/14/07/76/f7d489d6.pdf

40. An edited version is available for use in jurisdictions where possession of the unedited version of the video might constitute a criminal offense (“The Film ‘Coming to the Netherlands,’” Netherlands Ministry of Justice, www.naarnederland.nl/documentenservice/pagina.asp?pagkey=53774, accessed March 12, 2010).

41. These comments are based especially on observation of the policies and statements of the Egyptian government.

42. An excellent article is Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005), 373–395.

43. Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, “Islamic Extremism: A Viable Threat to U.S. National Security,” address at an Open Forum at the U.S. Department of State, January 7, 1999, members.fortunecity.com/amirm/Extremism.html

44. There are also supporters of *taqlid* who condemn Sufism, and supporters of Sufism who condemn *taqlid*, but these are not major categories.

45. Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, *Choosing Our Friends Wisely: Criteria for Engagement with Muslim Groups* (London: Policy Exchange, 2009), 5.

46. Charles Farr, letter to Dean Goodson, June 23, 2009, 1, www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/pdfs/Dean_Godson_letter_Choosing_our_Friends_Wisely_23-06-09.pdf

47. Farr to Goodson (see note 46 above), 2.

48. Kühle and Lindekilde, “Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus” (see note 1 above), 47.

49. Kühle and Lindekilde, “Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus” (see note 1 above), 58.

50. United Kingdom, Commission on Integration and Cohesion, “Our Shared Future,” final report of the commission (Wetherby: Communities and Local Government Publications, 2007), 15.

51. United Kingdom, Department for Communities and Local Government, “The Government’s Response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion” (Wetherby: Communities and Local Government Publications, 2008), 11.

52. At least one bishop of the Danish National Church has objected to this conception in a newspaper column, pointing out that she was both Danish and religious (Elisabeth Dons Christensen, “Frygten for religion har Fanden skabt,” *Jyllands-Posten*, 21 February 2010, A 22).

53. I have never seen this position expressed in an official document or in print—where the normal practices of Islam are simply described as an obstacle to integration rather than as actually radical—but have heard such practices described as “radical” in conversation.

54. It is, after all, a standard strategic objective of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency to bring groups within the political process.