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# A Functional Approach to Violent Radicalization. Building a Systemic Model Based on a Real Case

Aproximación funcional a la radicalización violenta.  
Propuesta de un modelo sistémico basado en un caso real

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**ABSTRACT:** A paradox in the study of violent radicalization is that while each of the empirical findings can be explained with multiple theories, very few theories can explain a relevant number of these findings simultaneously. This paper conducts a functional behavior assessment of violent radical behavior, investigating the factors responsible for its initial learning and subsequent maintenance. Specifically, a model of radicalization is proposed that can explain a wide range of observed phenomena, accommodate apparent exceptions, and obtain testable consequences. It also challenges some firmly rooted ideas, as the alleged existence of aggressive influence practices, or brainwashing. Finally, the model can also provide valuable predictions for subsequent research, such as those related to the reversibility of the process of radicalization.

**KEYWORDS:** Radicalization, de-radicalization, terrorism, functional behavior assessment, cognitive-behavioral approach.

**RESUMEN:** Una paradoja en el estudio de la radicalización violenta es que, si bien cada uno de los hallazgos empíricos puede explicarse desde múltiples teorías, son escasas las teorías capaces de explicar varios de estos hallazgos simultáneamente. En este trabajo se aplica el análisis funcional de la conducta a la conducta radical violenta, buscando los factores que pudieran estar detrás de su adquisición y mantenimiento. En concreto, se propone un modelo de radicalización que puede explicar un amplio abanico de fenómenos observados, acomodar aparentes excepciones y obtener consecuencias contrastables. También permite desafiar algunas ideas firmemente arraigadas, como la supuesta existencia de prácticas de influencia agresiva, o lavados de cerebro. Finalmente, el modelo permite obtener predicciones de gran valor para la investigación posterior, como las relacionadas con la reversibilidad del proceso de radicalización.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Radicalización, des-radicalización, terrorismo, análisis funcional de la conducta, enfoque cognitivo-conductual.

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## INTRODUCTION

In studying the phenomenon of violent radicalization, there is a broad consensus on issues such as the progressiveness of the process, the low proportion of radical individuals who eventually become terrorists, and the importance of bonds of friendship and camaraderie, amongst others. Similarities have also been noted between the processes emerging in different contexts of radicalization, independent of its associated ideologies or inclinations (European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalization, 2008). Much of the research conducted in this regard has been based on the social sciences, trying to clarify the factors that might be related to the phenomenon. This has led to the development of many theories and the proposal of some conceptual models (Borum, 2011).

The paradox, however, is that while each of the empirical findings related to violent radicalization can be explained with multiple theories, very few theories can explain a relevant number of these findings simultaneously. In fact, very few proposed models of radicalization are able to explain a wide range of observable phenomena and, simultaneously, figure out contrastable consequences.

This paper is a continuation of “A Cognitive-Behavioral Approach to Violent Radicalization, Based on a Real Case” (Peco, 2014), which conducted an analysis of a real context of radicalization based on the practices of a known terrorist organization and its political arm. As described in the article, this context was characterized at the time by the absence of reasons that normally correlate with the use of violence to reach political purposes. Notwithstanding this, paradoxically, it was also characterized by its relative success in radicalizing supporters and generating violence. These features make this case a particularly suitable context to identify the key factors that could be involved in the process of radicalization of certain individuals.

This paper will use the empirical evidence gathered in the previous work to build a comprehensive and coherent model of radicalization. The first step in constructing this model will be the definition of the structural elements involved in the process of radicalization. Next will be the proposal of the effects caused by the interaction of these elements. Finally, it will be the definition of the main process and its dependent variable, as well as the variations thereof as a result of the individual's interaction with the aforementioned effects. All the above will be traced through a flowchart with feedback mechanisms that control the value of that variable.

As a coherent body of hypotheses, the model will be tested in two ways. On the one hand, for its ability to both explain a wide range of observable situations within radicalization environments and accommodate particular cases. On the other hand, the model will be indirectly tested for its ability to produce conclusions that can be contrasted in a reasonable manner.

To finish this introduction, it is necessary to highlight one of the underlying assumptions for this model. Unlike other types of common violent behavior where benefits for the individual are derived from external rewards, benefits for the violent radical are primarily internal. Militancy and subsequent violent activities in the radical group can provide internal rewards through feelings of pride, acceptance, belonging, achievement, etc. In the context of a developed society, these rewards are easier to attain this way rather than through other individual or social activities that normally require a higher level of effort and perseverance.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This model was developed with a cognitive-behavioral approach as well as functional behavior assessment (FBA). Regarding the first, it is necessary to point out that radical violent behavior is seen as a learned behavior, and, therefore, its acquisition, maintenance and possible extinction are subject to the principles of Learning Theory. In a cognitive behavioral context, behavior does not only include visible motor behavior; thoughts, feelings and attitudes associated with that motor behavior are also considered as a part of the individual's response, which is elicited under specific stimuli. As a result, responses and behavior in general are considered to manifest themselves through three separate systems: cognitive, physiologic and motor (Lang, 1968).

From a functional approach, behavior is analyzed in terms of response to specific stimulatory conditions. However, the individual's response towards a given stimulatory condition may not always be the same. According to Operant Conditioning paradigm, responses may vary in magnitude and frequency depending on the consequences of past responses (Skinner, 1987). An FBA is intended to precisely identify the circumstances in which the individual's behavior was acquired and why it is presently maintained. The axiom of the FBA is that if a behavior persists, even though it is not an adaptive behavior, it is because that behavior is carrying out a function that translates into benefits for the individual<sup>1</sup>. Technically speaking, it is said that the behavior is being reinforced, because otherwise it ought to have disappeared already, either by extinction or punishment.

An additional advantage provided by the use of an FBA is the avoidance of moral assessments on individual's violent acts, which are frequent reactions when dealing with very sensitive topics like this one. Violent behavior carried out by a radical activist is considered non-adaptive strictly for functional reasons. On the one hand, the likelihood for an activist to reach his declared objectives by using violence is very little. On the other hand, the likelihood that violence will be followed by aversive consequences, like prison penalties for long periods of time, is high. These reasons, among others, make radical violent behavior in developed societies a non-adaptive approach, and there is no need to take into consideration ethical or moral aspects, which are reserved for other disciplines.

An FBA also allows for the definition of the role of beliefs that are normally associated with the process of radicalization. From a cognitive-behavioral point of view, those beliefs mark the difference between radical violent behavior and other contexts of organized violence, e.g. those linked to common crime. However, functionally speaking, there is little difference among beliefs based on politics, religion or other corporative imagery. As a matter of fact, the proposed model of radicalization can be easily adapted to other kinds of violence, e.g. violence conducted by some gangs of youths. Finally, it is necessary to remark that the process of radicalization constitutes a relevant subject of study because sometimes it encompasses violence, and not because of the more or less extreme way that a given individual understands or professes those beliefs.

In building the model, the following classic theories are used to explain specific sequences: Social Learning (Bandura, 1977), Operant Conditioning (Skinner, 1938), and Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Although using all these theories to explain the same phenomenon is not an orthodox approach from the point of view of the cognitive-behavioral paradigm, this inconvenience is balanced through the use of concepts that in general are more familiar for most of the readers. It is also worth mentioning that only strictly necessary theories have been used, despite the fact that there exist a number of more recent ones that can explain certain aspects of the process of radicalization. This

approach contributes additionally to the simplicity of the proposal, and is fully in line with the principle of parsimony.

This last criterion also justifies the absence of references to other models of radicalization, which might seem partially similar to the one here proposed.<sup>2</sup> Although the findings of those models are acknowledged, they are not necessary either to elaborate or to support the present one. It is also not intended to conduct a comparative study among different theories on radicalization –that would perhaps be an endeavor for other authors, should the case arise- but simply to show a coherent model, made by using a different approach that is, above all, based on a very particular context of radicalization.

## PROPOSING A MODEL OF RADICALIZATION

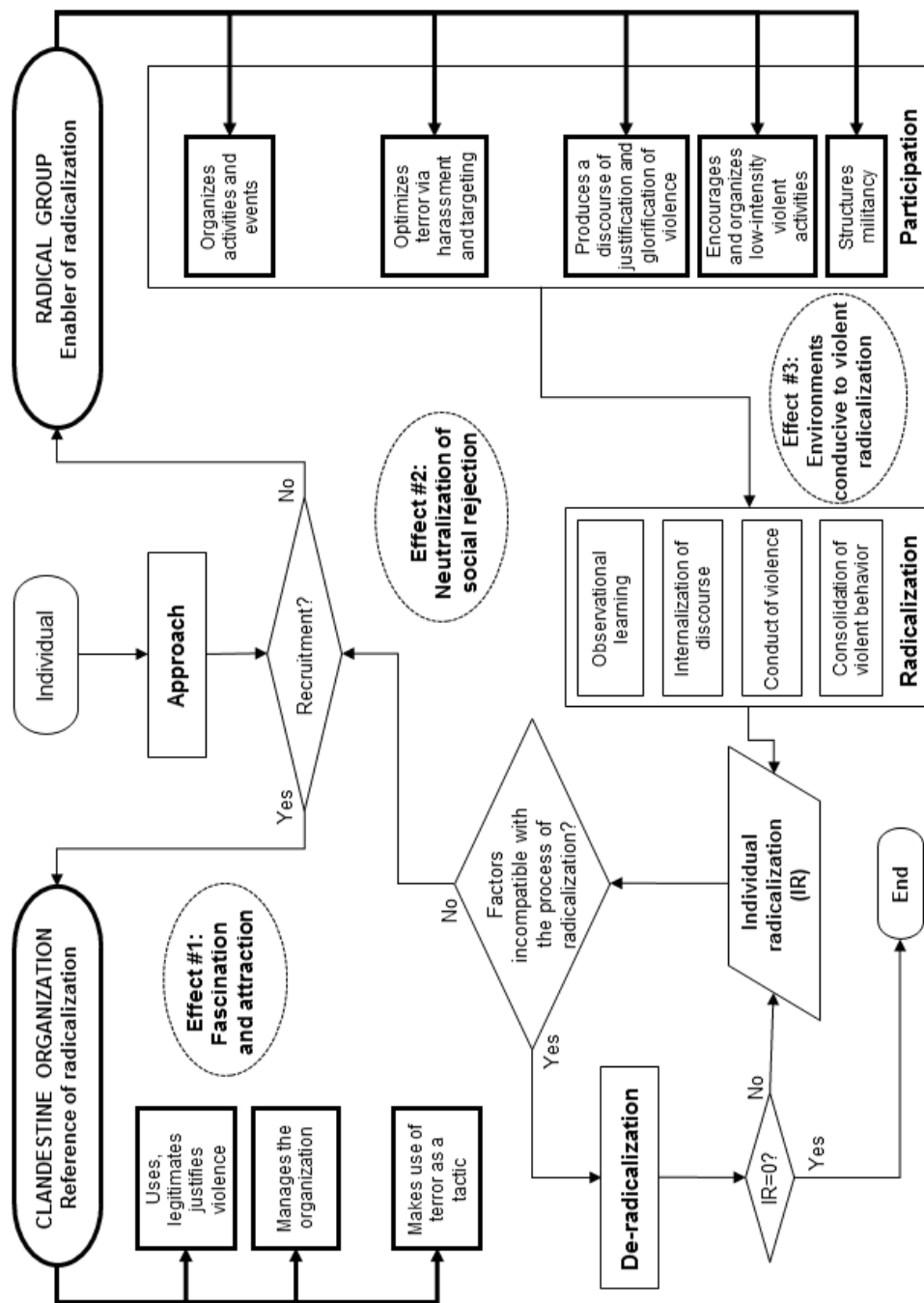
### *Structure*

The model structure consists of three basic elements (Figure 1). First is the clandestine organization, which becomes the reference of radicalization for some individuals. This organization operates on a relatively established physical or virtual infrastructure; employs, justifies and legitimizes the use of violence to achieve their goals; makes use of terror; and recruits new members to ensure its survival and expansion.

Second is the radical group, which operates within the bounds of legality and becomes the great intermediary between the clandestine organization and the social environment. This group carries out a series of actions aimed at supporting that organization, at recruiting and mentoring its own militants, as well as influencing the social environment where it is deployed. Specifically, key activities conducted by the radical group that potentially relate to individuals' radicalization are:

- Organizing and controlling protest activities and recreational events.
- Harassing and targeting political opponents.
- Producing and disseminating a discourse that justifies and glorifies violent activities carried out by the clandestine organization.
- Encouraging and organizing low-intensity violent activities.
- Organizing and structuring activities relevant to members' militancy.

Figure 1. PROPOSAL OF A MODEL OF RADICALIZATION



And third, there is the social environment where the radical group is deployed, which is directly influenced by the group itself and also by the clandestine organization. Within this social environment, an important role is played by the sympathizers, i.e. an undefined group of people who get along with that organization in a spontaneous manner; that share to some extent its ideology, objectives and means to achieve them; and that may even

achieve some degree of informal organization. Some of these sympathizers can start radicalizing gradually, having the option to integrate themselves into the radical group as militants, and even into the clandestine organization as members.

### *Interaction*

Regular activities undertaken by the clandestine organization and the radical group create a series of effects in their social environments. Before going to their description, two key assumptions in this regard should be noted. These assumptions are backed by the empirical evidence gathered in the analysis of the real case this model is based on (Peco, 2014).

The first one is that the combination clandestine organization-radical group can cause fascination and attraction among certain sectors of the population. When it comes to understanding the process of radicalization, it is a serious mistake to consider the radical group only as a group of activists willing to carry out protests by violent means. Rather, it is necessary to put oneself in the sympathizer/potential activist's shoes and view the radical group as a clear and structured way of life that offers the possibility of taking part in an exciting and transcendent project, such as changing a society. Thus, membership in these groups might be for some individuals a great shortcut to a mirage of self-realization, especially if there are no alternative routes to achieve this latter.

The second assumption, closely related to the first one, is that militancy in the radical group, including the use of violence, is a source of internal satisfaction for the individual. Internal satisfactions such as perceiving the admiration of others, a feeling of acceptance in the group, high self-esteem, or even consummating revenge for pretended offenses, can be as motivating as material rewards like money or other benefits.<sup>3</sup> The expectation of achieving any of these satisfactions can provide an explanation of why some individuals come to embrace the path of violence in the absence of a clear motive, with all the disadvantages that an eventual step into hiding mean in terms of deprivation.

The three effects considered relevant in this model of radicalization are: attraction, neutralization of social rejection, and environments conducive to violent radicalization.

**Attraction.** The clandestine organization, together with the radical group, creates an effect of fascination and attraction among certain sectors of the population. This effect causes some individuals to approach the radical group, start participating in its activities, and get exposed to its influence. A key feature to achieve the effect of attraction is the radical group's ability to organize, control and offer a wide range of activities, including both protest and recreational events. Thus, the whole package of activities within a radical group can be exciting and offers an alternative to conventional life. Control of a broad spectrum of activities by the group, along with attracting the individual to its influence, also lessens the opportunity to receive other influences competitive with extremism.

**Neutralization of social rejection.** The terror created by the clandestine organization, once optimized by the radical group through harassing and targeting political opponents, is able to neutralize a social response that, according to the results of surveys and other studies, could be otherwise much more widespread and forceful. (Peco, 2011; Peco et al, 2013). Neutralization of social rejection leaves the way open for the appeal of both the group and the radical organization. This lack of external feedback may contribute to the radical militant's illusion of seeing his movement as representative of the surrounding society, or even its vanguard.

**Environments conducive to violent radicalization.** These are situations created by the

radical group where favorable conditions exist for individuals to develop and deepen their process of radicalization. These environments are formed by the confluence of three activities. First, development and dissemination of a discourse of justification and glorification of violence, which exposes the militant to models of conduct to imitate and also provides justification for violent acts. Second, encouragement and organization of low-intensity violent activities, which provides an opportunity for militants to start exercising violence in a progressive and safe manner. And third, organization itself and other militancy-related activities, which expose individuals to favorable contingencies to consolidate the recently acquired violent behavior.

#### *Main process and dependent variable*

This model considers violent radicalization a learning process –in the sense of the Learning Theory- of patterns of violent behavior by the individual. These patterns include consistent cognitive and behavioral components, and refer to a given ideology and/or belief. Similarly, de-radicalization is the process by which the individual abandons previously-learned patterns of violent behavior. According to the Learning Theory, this latter process can occur either by the appearance of punitive circumstances (punishment) or lack of rewards (extinction). In this model, the process of radicalization is represented through a cyclical flow diagram, which includes the following phases: approach, participation in group activities, radicalization itself, and potential de-radicalization.

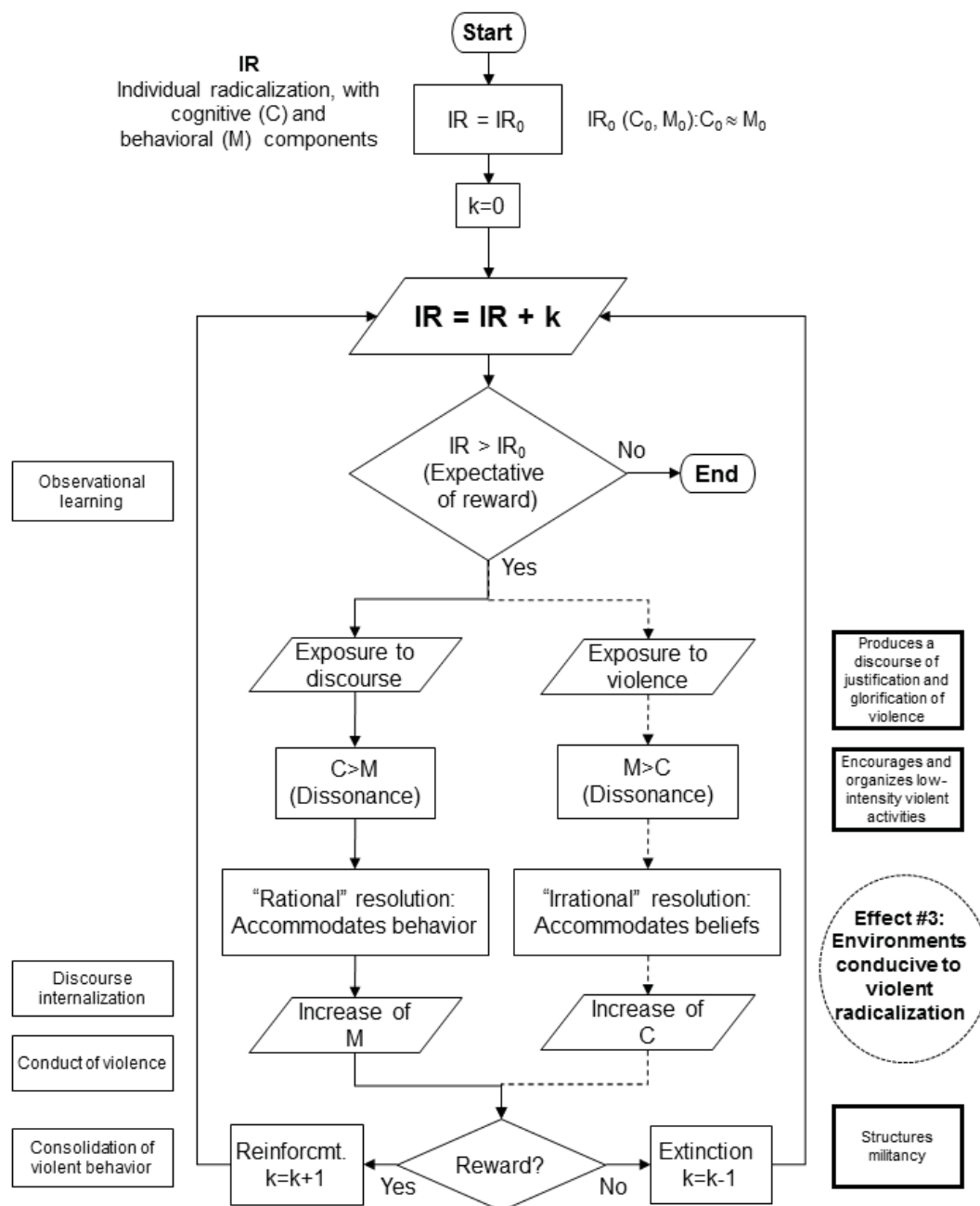
For the purposes of this model, the level of individual radicalization (IR) is the variable that, in general, shows the likelihood that a given individual carries out violent behavior, which is representative of his/her radicalization environment.

The effect of attraction provokes the approximation of sympathizers, i.e. increases the likelihood that some of these individuals start participating in the activities of the radical group and get exposed to its influence.

From here on, the process of radicalization, from a cognitive-behavioral perspective, can be explained by a combination of the following classical paradigms and/or theories: Social Learning (Bandura, 1977), Operant Conditioning (Skinner, 1938) and Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957).<sup>4</sup> The aforementioned environments conducive to violent radicalization contain the necessary conditions for the processes described in these paradigms to occur.



Figure 2.- PROPOSAL OF A MODEL OF RADICALIZATION (IN DETAIL)



Violent behavior can be initially acquired by observational learning, through participation of the individual in group activities and subsequent expectation of reward in the form of feelings of pride, acceptance, belonging, achievement, etc. From here on, two different paths are proposed, which are based on two extreme theoretical situations that define the range of real situations where the individual may be involved. The first path starts with the exposure to a discourse of justification and glorification of violence. This exposure prompts the individual to internalize the arguments provided by that discourse. As a result, the cognitive component of the incipient violent behavior increases, exceeds the behavioral (motor) component, and dissonance between thought and action appears.

Since there is an expectation of reward, which was obtained through observational learning, this dissonance tends to be resolved upwards, i.e. the behavioral component tends to equalize the cognitive one, and not the other way around. The external conditions are suitable for this purpose, since activities involving episodes of low-intensity violence provide the opportunity to implement the ideas previously acquired in a safe and suitable manner. The result is an increase in visible violent behavior; up to equalize the cognitive component. From the individual's point of view, ideas and actions are already consistent. Therefore, in this way violent action accommodates new ideas in a kind of rational manner.

The second path starts with individual's exposure to situations of low-intensity violence. It is shown in Figure 2 with a dashed line. Small violent actions, not too far from the individual's beliefs, can be elicited merely by peer pressure, local action-reaction dynamics, fear, or other causes. Once these actions are carried out, the behavioral component exceeds the cognitive one, and dissonance appears. Since an expectation of reward exists, as was the case in the previous path, this dissonance tends to be resolved upwards. The external conditions are also fit for this purpose, since violent discourse provides the arguments the individual needs to justify his own violent actions. Thus, the individual assimilates violent discourse, and the result is an increase of violence-related cognitions. The new individual's thinking adapts the previous action, and both become consistent.

In any case, once the dissonance is reduced, emerging violent behaviors and cognitions will adjust to each other. Then, they will be followed by recognition from other militants, and a feeling of internal satisfaction will appear. The interaction that occurs between individuals during activities related to militancy provides the appropriate setting for such rewards to become reinforcements of the violent behavior, and therefore increases the likelihood that behavior will be repeated in the future. In short, what began as an incipient violent behavior becomes consolidated behavior.

In summary, the initial learning mechanism of emerging violent behavior may be observational learning. After that, the escalation in intensity and frequency can be explained by the upwards adjustment between cognitive and behavioral elements. In any case, this escalation is driven by a previously-acquired expectation of reward. Finally, continuance of violent behavior can be explained by the primacy of potentially reinforcing contingencies within radical environments.

The process is repeated cyclically, thereby leaving the individual in the midst of a spiral of radicalization in which thoughts, feelings, and actions match each other following an upward trend. Ethical barriers concerning the use of violence, if any, fall one after another. The individual immersed in the process of radicalization self-justifies his new lifestyle as a result of his commitment to a cause. Violence is clearly seen as a legitimate way to achieve an idyllic end situation, and he sees himself as one of those chosen to carry out such a transcendental task.<sup>5</sup>

According to this model, the individual enters a radicalization loop. Once immersed in this process, it is very difficult to leave. Furthermore, for some individuals there is no other way to enjoy internal satisfactions like those provided by the radical group: a clear objective and structured way of life, self-esteem, feeling of belonging, friendship, etc. At some point in this escalation, he may be recruited by the organization and go into hiding. From this moment on, for the purposes of this model, there is little chance of turning back, and the individual gets increasingly involved in the regular activities of the radical organization.

*Neutralizing the effectiveness of aversive stimuli*

It is necessary to stress the feeling of security that the radical group provides to the individual who carries out low-intensity violent activities. This feeling is provided not only through objective physical aspects such as providing coverage, promoting mass action, executing detailed planning, etc., but also through subjective perceptions. Thus, the radical group could be neutralizing the effectiveness of these aversive stimuli by creating a perception of impunity via highlighting police errors and contradictions in the legal system, threatening and targeting law enforcers, creating supportive networks for convicts, or promoting a belief in a future withdrawal of legal measures by the authorities, for instance. This supposed neutralization of the effectiveness of aversive stimuli into the radical group can explain why observational learning sometimes does not work in reverse, i.e. punishing violent behavior through the expectation of detention by the police, or fear of possible criminal responsibilities in the future.

In addition to the above, and when speaking of contexts of radicalization inserted in democratic societies, a clarification must be made regarding the security and protection provided to all citizens by the rule of law. Under these conditions, a member of a radical group does not normally risk his life or his physical integrity. On the contrary, he may carry out protest activities, and even use violence, from the base of a normal life where his basic needs are met.

*Stabilization and de-radicalization*

In order to approach the process holistically, it is better to set the behavioral view aside and focus on motivation. Thus, the process of radicalization can be considered as being driven by the imbalance between motivational and deterring factors of violent behavior, in favor of the former. This imbalance, in turn, is caused by the amount of motivating factors existing in the radicalization loop, while the deterring factors are inexistent or merely neutralized. In principle, theoretically, while this imbalance is maintained, the individual will increase his violent behavior.

However, it is reasonable to assume this imbalance is not constant, and the more the individual enters into the process of radicalization, the more relevant the deterring factors become with respect to the motivational ones. In fact, the further the individual advances in the process, the greater the risks he has to face are, and the more the comforts of modern societies he is forced to give up. Thus, it might be a gamble too high for most of them to continue on the path of radicalization with the prospect of finally going into hiding.

This idea can be represented in the model by introducing a loop of de-radicalization. In case of factors incompatible with the process of radicalization progressively appear - which will be discussed later on- the individual may begin decreasing his IR and eventually reach a balance around a given level. At this point, the flow in the diagram will adopt a cyclic trajectory in the shape of an "eight".

## DISCUSSION

The validity of this model is supported in two ways. First, because of its ability to explain a wide range of observable situations that happen within radicalization environments, as well as to adapt to cases that, in principle, could be viewed as exceptions. And second, it can also be sustained directly due to its ability to reach deductions that can be contrasted

in a reasonable manner taking into account the particular circumstances of the phenomenon of radicalization.

*Ability to adapt observable facts and apparent exceptions*

The model allows for the deduction of aspects such as the progressivity of the process of radicalization or the importance of the individual's ties of friendship and camaraderie. The model also provides an explanation for the empirical data on the low proportion of radicals who eventually become terrorists. This is due to the growing prominence of the deterring factors as the process progresses. Finally, the model also takes away some relevance from the classic question of why some people become terrorists and others do not. A proper influx of people to the process is sufficient condition to perpetuate the phenomenon, no matter who of them will eventually join the organization or merely continue contributing to the group's activities.

The model also applies to cases of individuals who, if they could, would carry out violent behavior at their initial involvement with the radical group. This conduct may be motivated, for instance, by an extreme fanaticism, by a history of learning violence in other areas, or even by suffering some kind of ailment. In all these cases, part of the process of radicalization is already done. Then, the radical group will provide the individual with supporting arguments for the use of violence, as well as the resources, structure and leadership needed to carry out such violent activities. This way, the group will allow the individual to adjust his manifest behavior to his previous convictions, or vice-versa. In short, the process of radicalization will progress more quickly.<sup>6</sup>

Anger is usually considered as a causal factor of radicalization, which needs some clarification. This feeling can be found in many members of radical organizations and in some circumstances can become a catalyst of radicalization. The problem, however, lies in considering anger solely as a natural reaction unleashed by grievances felt by the individual, either directly or vicariously, e.g. excessive reactions from security forces or supposed repressive political conditions. In this respect, it is necessary to point out that anger can appear also as a result of cognitive activity, either induced or modulated by the imagery of the radical group, and subsequently become subject to contingencies of reinforcement. In other words, anger can also be the result of a learning process and, therefore, a consequence of the individual's activity.

*Deduction of consequences: Is it possible to break the process and consequent de-radicalization of the individual?*

According to this model, radical violent behavior may diminish or even disappear through a number of mechanisms. First, through a process of extinction caused by a lack of expectation of reward within the group.<sup>7</sup> This can occur, for instance, in case the individual stops receiving reinforcements from other activists and leaders.

Second, by the appearance of external, aversive stimuli that may become punishments under certain circumstances, according to the Learning Theory. Applying this logic, promoting citizens to freely express their rejection towards violence might be one of the most powerful ways to reverse the process of radicalization. This is because that rejection constitutes an aversive stimulus itself, it directly counteracts the discourse of justification and glorification of violence, and because of the synergy with other measures to promote de-radicalization. This creates a virtuous circle where citizens would be able to express

themselves freely and support the measures taken by the authorities, at the same time that the radical group would weaken.

Third, violent behavior could also disappear through the successful competition of other activities that may become sources of rewards for the individual. For instance, encouraging and involving the radical in activities worth of merit, self-esteem or social recognition from the community, for example, could re-direct the individual's expectation of reward from violent activities to more constructive endeavors. It is, therefore, worth exploring alternatives to the process of radicalization as a necessary complement to either leaving it or avoiding any backsliding.

The last two mechanisms can be found in Figure 1, at the detour of factors incompatible with the process of radicalization. Actually, all the identified mechanisms affect the individual's expectations, either that related to the aversive consequences of his/her behavior or to the possibility of losing opportunities for reward. The expectation of the individual becomes therefore a key variable in controlling the level of radicalization. Manipulating the factors that influence this variable could theoretically modify and redirect the process towards the de-radicalization loop.

Finally, it should be noted that the aforementioned actions coincide substantially with measures already planned or even implemented by the authorities in order to combat the phenomenon of radicalization. Among these measures, those included in the EU strategy for combating radicalization should be highlighted (Council of the European Union, 2005), as well as others carried out as a result of applying national legislation, e.g. the Organic Law 6/2002 in Spain. This coincidence of results provides credibility for and represents an endorsement of the model presented here, and therefore suggests that it could be effectively applied to a wide range of contexts of radicalization.

## CONCLUSIONS

The proposed model shows a feasible, consistent path by which some individuals can become violent radicals. Arguments supporting the validity of the model come from its ability to explain observable facts, such as the progressiveness of the process of radicalization, the scarce percentage of individuals that finally become terrorists, and the possibility to be applied to other individuals that are already violent for other reasons. On the other hand, arguments in favor of its usefulness can be drawn from its ability to identify critical sequences from which the process of radicalization can be interrupted or even reverted. This should allow for the development and implementation of both preventive and corrective action plans with a solid scientific foundation.

The model also challenges some firmly-rooted beliefs about the process of radicalization. In this model, individual radicalization is seen as a learning process of violent behavior, accepted by the individual and influenced by external factors. While this influence from external factors is important, it is actually the individual who radicalizes himself by increasing his violent behavior and changing his thoughts, beliefs and feelings. All of this is done under the motivating drive of an expectation of internal reward. Therefore, it is not necessary to resort to aggressive influences, indoctrination, etc. to explain why some individuals become violent radicals. In other words, although it is true that the individual's leading role in his/her own process of radicalization is compatible with supposed influence practices undertaken by more-radicalized individuals, these practices might be actually less effective than they appear.

Finally, the model also suggests that the appearance of spontaneous sources of radicalization, with a potential to become organized groups, is a feasible phenomenon. In fact, according to the model, only three conditions are required for the process of radicalization to start: first, the belief that carrying out violent actions in a relatively safe manner is something feasible; second, the possibility of interacting with other comrades in a way that expectations can be shared and encouraged among each other; and third, the presence of an appropriate reference that can provide guidance, identity and narratives. The first two conditions are not unique to radical groups; instead, they can be found in other environments where informal relationships take place. And as for the third condition, the fact is that guidance, identity and narratives are available today in a direct manner, without intermediaries, thanks to the possibilities of information technologies. Thus, once the incipient source of radicalization appears, it is relatively easy to create an organization that is able to protect its individuals and allows them to pursue at least mid-term goals. In short, the phenomenon of collective radicalization can appear spontaneously if and when a minimum of given conditions happen, and can evolve over time into more complex systems.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the term “adaptive” has a relative meaning. Throwing homemade bombs to security forces, for instance, is a non-adaptive behavior in a conventional civilian environment because such behavior is unacceptable for most of the citizens and normally provokes both moral rejection and legal punishment. However, since it is well established that such behavior happens regularly in certain radical environments, it is possible that this behavior is adaptive to some individuals. The FBA will aim to discover precisely why that behavior is kept in an individual’s repertoire in given circumstances, despite the fact that it is not adaptive to most of subjects and/or circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, that of Kruglansky *et al.* (2014)

<sup>3</sup> Maslow’s Motivation Theory (1943) is very useful when studying behavior in environments such as developed societies, in which basic human needs are mostly covered. As Maslow argues, there are five groups of basic needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. According to Maslow, people are perpetually willing to satisfy these needs. Furthermore, we tend to satisfy some of them before others. In other words, following our “devourer” quest, we are perpetually looking for needs to be satisfied, beyond those we have just accounted for.

<sup>4</sup> The Operant Conditioning paradigm (Skinner, 1938) states that the individual’s response to given stimuli varies according to the consequences the same response provoked in the past. Thus, delivering a pleasant outcome as a result of the individual releasing a free behavior is likely to provoke that behavior to be repeated in the future. In contrast, delivering an unpleasant outcome (aversive stimulus) associated to the same behavior is to provoke a decrease in the likelihood for that conduct to be released in the future. In both cases, withdrawing these stimuli is to reduce or increase, respectively, the likelihood for that behavior to be repeated in the future. Bandura, in his Social Learning Theory (1977) remarked the possibility of learning to occur indirectly, by observing other’s behavior and its consequences, through what he called observational learning. Finally, Festinger (1957) suggested that incoherence between individual’s manifest behavior and the moral assessment of that behavior carried out by the individual himself/herself (dissonance), is to provoke aversive stress, and, therefore, an inner drive to reduce such stress will appear. In Festinger’s experiment, that dissonance reduction was observed when the individuals modified the moral assessment of their own behavior, from negative to positive, after having released it voluntarily and consciously.

<sup>5</sup> This proposal is fully compatible with the widely known Bandura theory on mechanisms of moral disengagement (2004). In this theory, the author suggests that an individual’s disengagement from self-sanctions can provide an explanation for violent behavior in some circumstances.

<sup>6</sup> It is true that these individuals, eager to carry out violence, can play an important role at the base of the movement, since they can accomplish many violent activities without compromising the rest of the group. However, by its very nature and the difficulty of their control, it is not easy to be given access to resources and information needed to undertake major attacks.

<sup>7</sup> This mechanism has been included in Figure 2