

Considering radicalization: How do violent extremists happen?

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While we can recognize the danger that violent extremists pose, it is critical to note that these individuals were not always a risk. That before they adopted radical views and accepted violent action, they were regular people. To understand how and why individuals turn to extremism, we can consider the phenomenon as a process of radicalization. There are features of radicalization that have consensus—that it is a gradual process that can happen over weeks, months, or years, and that it can apply to any ideological progression. Beyond that however, using radicalization to understand violent extremism becomes a series of decisions with definitional trade-offs which guide choices in policy and practice. Questions such as *how* people radicalize and *why* they do, are related but shed light on different aspects, vulnerabilities, and mechanisms of individual psychology and sociopolitical circumstances. This chapter introduces the concept of radicalization as a way of understanding the turn towards violent extremism and demonstrates how different priorities concerning extreme thought and violent action lead to alternative ways of challenging the emerging threat.