INTRODUCTION[1]

The Gaza Strip has today emerged—more than ever—as one of the world's most complex arenas with respect to the political and religious radicalization of its population. This radicalization has been shaped over decades of conflict with Israel, collective trauma, and a reality of external occupation and internal rivalries—from the 1950s, through decades of Israeli control over Gaza, and culminating in further intensification since Hamas' takeover of the Strip in 2007. Together, these dynamics have produced an extremist religious-nationalist environment that permeates all spheres of life and profoundly shapes public consciousness in Gaza.

Israel's war in the Gaza Strip following Hamas' brutal attack on October 7, led to the near-total destruction of civilian infrastructure, mass casualties, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents. This reality—together with the deep frustration and desire for vengeance felt by Gaza's population in the war's aftermath—sharpens the question of how a new civic and political order can be rebuilt that will detach Gazan society from Hamas' violent ideology and anchor it instead within a more moderate socio-political framework.

The purpose of this study is to examine how processes of deradicalization—or, in the Gazan context, de-Hamasification—might be realized in the Gaza Strip, drawing on lessons from international and regional examples and comparing them with the local realities on the ground. The study presents a conceptual and operational framework designed to enable a deeper understanding of the conditions, tools, and mechanisms capable of generating profound societal change in Gaza, beyond the narrow security dimension of dismantling terrorist infrastructures.

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The paper opens with a review of the theoretical literature on various models of radicalization and deradicalization, including studies from the fields of social psychology, political science, and international relations, and proceeds with a brief historical overview of the factors and processes that have driven the radicalization of the Gaza Strip since the mid-twentieth century. It then presents a qualitative comparative analysis of case studies from the Western world (Germany, Japan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia) and from the Arab and Muslim world (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia). This analysis makes it possible to identify recurring patterns, the necessary conditions for successful processes, and key points of failure. On this basis, the concluding section offers insights and recommendations regarding the feasibility of advancing de-Hamasification in the Gaza Strip and the various pathways for doing so.

The contribution of this study is twofold. On the theoretical level, it seeks to bridge Western models of deradicalization—largely grounded in post–World War II state-reconstruction paradigms—with contemporary Arab models that reflect lived experience in confronting Islamist and jihadist movements. On the applied level, it offers policymakers and scholars a conceptual framework and a possible plan of action for addressing the "day after" challenge in Gaza—one that requires the integration of security mechanisms, a political horizon, civilian reconstruction, religious legitimacy, psychosocial and economic rehabilitation processes, and coordinated regional leadership.

CHAPTER ONE

RADICALIZATION—CONCEPTS, DRIVERS, AND MECHANISMS

WHAT IS RADICALIZATION?

Radicalization is a process of "gradual change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the in-group" (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). While "radicalism" can be understood more broadly as support for profound social change of any kind, radicalization in the sense of extremism is inherently defined as anti-democratic and anti-pluralist (Schmid, 2013).

Radicalization can occur at the level of the individual, the group, or even an entire society, when extremist narratives succeed in penetrating the societal mainstream. Under conditions of rising structural grievances, perceived threats to collective identity, and the persuasive power of extremist narratives, entire publics may be drawn into and normalize extreme norms and worldviews.

PATHWAYS TO RADICALIZATION: DRIVERS AND STAGES IN THE PROCESS

Many scholars describe the radicalization process through two complementary pathways. Mechanistic theories explain how specific drivers (such as collective feelings of frustration or practices of cultural hegemony) foster the emergence of radicalization within human societies; and process models, by contrast, which depict radicalization as a multi-stage trajectory moving from experiences of grievance to violent action, and seek to explain *when* and *how* these shifts occur over time.

MECHANISMS OF ESCALATION: ADVERSITY, IDENTITY CRISES, AND IDEOLOGICAL MOBILIZATION

Research identifies several structural, emotional, and cognitive drivers that create the foundations for radicalization:

- **Perceived victimhood and moral outrage:** A profound sense of injustice and a perceived gap between expected living conditions and lived reality can generate moral anger. These feelings may stem from economic collapse, systemic discrimination, or the obstruction of political participation. This anger, in turn, is often channelled against an out-group, thereby legitimizing aggression (Gurr, 1970).
- **Collective (or "chosen") trauma:** Shared memories of violence—such as wars, massacres, and forced displacement—can become "chosen traumas," etched into collective identity as enduring historical pain and reinforcing calls for revenge. Extremist propaganda frequently reactivates these memories in order to sustain mobilization (Volkan, 1997).
- **Identity fusion:** Psychological research shows that when personal identity becomes fused with group identity, individuals are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to defend the group, even at the cost of self-sacrifice. Rituals, charismatic leadership, and dense social networks accelerate this process of fusion (Swann et al., 2009).
- **Adapting to the framework and emotional resonance:** Extremist narratives link personal experiences with collective grievances and a perceived moral obligation to act. Moral shocks, victimhood framing, and the demonization of the adversary are commonly employed to achieve this effect (Snow & Benford, 1998).
- **Sacralization of values:** Objectives become sacred and insulated from criticism or negotiation; violence is reframed as a moral duty. Individuals acting in the name of such values are willing to engage in self-sacrifice and violent action based not on cost–benefit calculations, but on a logic of absolute morality (Atran & Axelrod, 2008).
- **Deficient moral–emotional regulation:** Cognitive distortions (such as dichotomous or catastrophizing thinking) combined with unregulated anger increase susceptibility to extremist messaging. Accordingly, emotional–

behavioral training and critical thinking programs can help build psychological resilience against radicalization (Trip et al., 2019).

- **Institutional vacuum:** Weak or corrupt state institutions create a governance void that extremist non-state actors can fill. The "club model" explains how armed movements convert the provision of social services into ideological loyalty. When a single movement achieves a monopoly over schools, clinics, or charitable organizations, its worldview becomes normalized. Control over social services also strengthens in-group solidarity, filters out free riders, and deepens loyalty among group members (Berman & Laitin, 2008).

These mechanisms typically operate in parallel, mutually reinforcing and amplifying one another. Agents of radical ideology exploit this underlying infrastructure, weaving the various drivers of radicalization into a coherent and simplified narrative and worldview that provides the public with a sense of meaning, moral clarity, and practical purpose.

The most comprehensive framework for understanding the operation of ideological agents of radicalization is Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. Ideological movements—including extremist ones—seek to secure broad social consent for their ideas by penetrating the institutions of civil society, such as schools, welfare organizations, the media, and religious institutions (Gramsci, 1971). Neo-Gramscian scholarship demonstrates that social hegemony is reproduced through the formation of "historical blocs"—movements that succeed in aggregating and mobilizing additional social groups and operate within the social sphere to disseminate their ideas. When such a "historical bloc" gains control over the key platforms of civil society, its worldview gradually becomes the default—and eventually the "natural order" of things—paving the way for the subsequent consolidation of political hegemony as well (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

PROCESS MODELS

Various scholars propose analytical frameworks that identify successive stages in the radicalization process. What these models share is the notion of a gradual narrowing of moral and behavioral options as individuals or groups move toward increasing extremism.

Model	Key Stages	Source
Cognitive Opening	Crisis → Religious/Ideological Search → Adapting to the Framework → Socialization and Commitment	Wiktorowicz, 2005
Staircase to Terrorism	Ground Floor (Perceived Injustice) → First Floor (Search for Alternatives) → Second Floor (Channelling Aggression) → Third Floor (Moral Identification with Terrorism) → Fourth Floor ("Us" versus "Them") → Fifth Floor (Terrorist Action)	Moghadam, 2005
Pyramid	Base (Mainstream Supporters) → Middle (Activists) → Apex (Violent Actors)	McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008

Process models function primarily as diagnostic tools. They do not in themselves prescribe mechanisms of deradicalization; rather, they help identify critical turning points at which preventive intervention is possible (for example, before moral justifications for violence become entrenched and translate into terrorist action).

Because the mechanisms of radicalization cut across the different stages of the escalation process, deradicalization efforts must involve **multidimensional interventions** (psychological, institutional, and narrative). For instance, incorporating a plurality of ideas into the education system can counter hegemonic domination, while cognitive–behavioral training can address identity fusion and moral anger.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF RADICALIZATION

Processes of radicalization must be examined across different levels (Schmid, 2013), ranging from the individual level to the broader extremist environment—including social communities, online networks, and even state actors—within which extremism can flourish. Reciprocal radicalization between rival groups (for example, in the Palestinian context, between Hamas and Fatah, or between Palestinians and Israelis) can further escalate conflicts and render strategies of prevention, deradicalization, or disengagement more complex and difficult to implement.

CONCLUSION

Societal radicalization emerges from a complex web of grievances and frustrations, identity dynamics, and the hegemonic control exercised by extremist actors over everyday institutions. Reversing this trajectory requires systemic change: reducing structural injustices, offering alternative identities, building cognitive and emotional resilience, and opening the civic space to diverse viewpoints. Only under such conditions can counter-narratives gain the legitimacy and reach necessary to compete effectively with entrenched extremist worldviews.