From Dissent to Violence: The Contested Field of Protest Movements and Extremism

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Abstract

This article examines the complex and dynamic relationship between protest movements as tools for social change and the phenomena of violence and extremism as threats to political and societal security. The analysis begins with an in-depth theoretical review of protest movements, drawing on multiple models such as resource mobilization theory, political process theory, framing theory, and new social movements. It demonstrates how these frameworks complement each other to understand the emergence of movements, their mobilization mechanisms, and their role in bringing about societal transformation.

The article focuses on the dynamics of protest movements and analyzes the impact of leadership, organizational structure, mobilization tactics, media, and state response in shaping the trajectory of movements. It also explores how major protest movements—such as the civil rights movement and Black Lives Matter—have influenced legislation, public discourse, and cultural identity, even though some may end up fragmenting or sliding toward extremism due to structural challenges and repression. The article analyzes the phenomena of extremism and terrorism, defining each as an independent yet interconnected phenomenon. Extremism is presented as a rigid intellectual system that rejects pluralism and, under certain circumstances, may lead to terrorism, defined as the organized and intentional use of violence to achieve ideological or political goals. The article highlights the psychological, social, and political factors that motivate extremism, including marginalization, narratives of victimhood, and the role of the digital space in recruitment and mobilization.

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In the final section, the article links the trajectories of protest and extremism, noting that the shift from peacefulness to violence is not inevitable, but rather the result of a complex interplay between repression, the infiltration of extremist groups, mass polarization, and digital "echo chambers." Citing cases such as Syria, Northern Ireland, and anti-globalization movements, it emphasizes that government responses—whether totalitarian or repressive—remain a determining factor in determining the fate of movements. It also highlights the role of political dialogue and inclusion strategies in preventing protests from sliding into extremism. The article concludes that a comprehensive understanding of social movements and extremism requires moving beyond rigid interpretive dichotomies and recognizing that the space between opposition and violence is not merely a dividing line, but rather a complex arena of conflict where notions of legitimacy, resistance, and political participation are being reshaped. The article recommends balanced policies that address structural grievances while simultaneously safeguarding security and freedoms, to prevent protest spaces from transforming from arenas of change into hotbeds of extremism.

Keywords

Protest Movements, Political Violence, Radicalism, Extremism, Social Mobilization, State Repression, Democracy.

Introduction

Throughout history, protest movements have been one of the most prominent tools for social and political change. They have played a pivotal role in challenging injustice, defending rights, and reshaping governance, as witnessed in the civil rights movement and more recent revolutions such as the Arab Spring. Although most of these movements began peacefully, they often arise and operate in contested environments, opening the door to the potential for radicalization or violence, especially in light of factors such as state repression, external infiltration, or the adoption of extremist ideologies.

This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about the complex relationship between protest and radicalization, and how movements seeking change can bring about positive transformation or be exploited to justify violence. In recent years, extremist groups have exploited legitimate grievances within some movements to recruit individuals and spread their propaganda, heightening global security concerns. Digital platforms have also complicated the landscape, facilitating both

democratic mobilization and the dissemination of extremist ideology. This research paper aims to explore this sensitive intersection by focusing on three axes: the nature and impact of protest movements, the threat of extremism and terrorism, and the intertwined relationship between protest and violence. Drawing on academic literature, the study seeks to understand how and why some movements slide toward extremism, and what can be done to mitigate this threat while preserving the democratic right to peaceful protest.

Study Objectives

This study aims to analyze the complex relationship between protest movements, violence, and extremism by addressing the following main objectives:

Understanding protest movements as a tool for change: This section explores the theoretical foundations of protest movements, their dynamics, and their impact on political and social transformation. By examining historical and contemporary examples, the study sheds light on how movements mobilize supporters and influence governance.

Examining extremism and terrorism as a threat to global security: The second section defines extremism and terrorism, explores their ideological underpinnings, and examines the factors that motivate extremism. It also discusses the challenges of combating extremist ideologies before they escalate and escalate into violence. Analyzing the Relationship between Protest Movements and Violence: The final section examines the circumstances under which protest movements turn violent, the role of government repression, and the infiltration of extremist groups into legitimate movements. It also assesses how state policies and security measures can prevent or exacerbate radicalization.

Research Significance

This study contributes to the growing literature on social movements, extremism, and terrorism. By examining the intersection between protest, extremism, and violence, the study aims to provide policymakers, researchers, and activists with a deeper understanding of how to protect democratic activism while mitigating the risks of radicalization. The findings will be particularly relevant in contemporary contexts, where governments must balance the protection of civil liberties with ensuring national security.

Article Structure

The study consists of three main axes:

Axis One: Protest movements as a tool for social change, analyzing their foundations, dynamics, and impacts.

Axis Two: Extremism and terrorism as security threats, identifying their root causes and the challenges in combating extremism.

The third axis examines the complex relationship between protest movements and violence, assessing the factors contributing to extremism and the role of government responses in shaping the trajectories of protest movements.

By addressing these themes, the research seeks to provide a nuanced perspective on the contested terrain between peaceful activism and violent extremism, providing insights into how societies can foster democratic expression while preventing the escalation of political violence.

1. Protest Movements as a Tool for Social Change

1.1　The Concept of Protest Movements and Their Theoretical Foundations

Protest movements are a form of collective action undertaken by individuals or groups with the aim of addressing social, political, economic, or environmental grievances, challenging power structures, or demanding comprehensive societal reforms or changes[2]. These movements take various forms, such as public demonstrations, strikes, marches, and other forms of nonviolent resistance[3]. Their organization and objectives vary from spontaneous popular uprisings to organized campaigns led by institutions or coalitions. Researchers agree on three main characteristics of these movements: their collective nature, which expresses shared grievances and aspirations[4]; their public expression of

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2- Tilly, C. (2004). *Social movements*, 1768–2004. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315632063

3- Tarrow, S. (1998). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813245

4- McAdam, D., Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2001). *Dynamics of contention*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511805431

dissent through tools such as protests and digital activism[5]; and their consistent pursuit of political or societal change.[6]

The study of protest movements has been a major focus of interest in sociology and political science, with a range of theories developed to explain their emergence, mobilization, dynamics, and impact. Among the most prominent of these theories is:

The resource mobilization theory[7], which argues that the success of movements depends not only on the existence of grievances, but also on the availability of strategic resources such as funding, leadership, organization, and media coverage. Thus, social discontent does not automatically transform into effective protest unless it is supported by an effective organizational structure.

Resource mobilization theory emerged in the 1970s as a critique of previous psychological and structural functionalist models that interpreted protest as irrational or deviant behavior. This theory assumes that social movements are rational projects that require resources—material, human, and organizational—to succeed[8]. Movements do not arise solely from grievances; they rely on the ability to mobilize supporters, secure funding, secure leadership, and establish bureaucratic structures. The underlying assumption is that grievances are persistent in society, but protest only occurs when sufficient resources are available. This perspective explains why similar grievances may lead to protest in one context but not in another.

Political process theory[9], which highlights the importance of political conditions and structural opportunities in the emergence of movements, such as elite divisions or the openness of the political system, along with organizational structures and support networks, and the ability of movements to craft persuasive messages that appeal to the aspirations of the public.[10]

5- Tarrow, S. (1998). Ibid

6- Della Porta, D. (2013). *Clandestine political violence*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139043144

7- McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(6), 1212–1241. https://doi.org/10.1086/226464

8- Ibid.

9- Tarrow, S. (1998). Ibid

10- Tarrow, S. (2011). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511971826

Framing theory: Emerging from symbolic interactionism and cognitive sociology, it emphasizes the importance of meaning construction in social movements. It focuses on the symbolic dimension of protest movements—that is, how these movements construct their narratives around problems, propose solutions, and motivate participation. The more messages connect with the public's emotions, the more effective they are at mobilizing and influencing. It also focuses on how movements construct interpretive frames—or "collective action frames"—that mobilize potential participants by defining problems (diagnostic framing), proposing solutions (predictive framing), and motivating action (motivational framing).[11]

Framing is not limited to communication; it also includes building legitimacy and interaction. This theory explains why movements with similar goals may be more or less successful based on how effectively they frame their issues. Framing theory has been particularly useful in studying media strategies, emotional influences, and collective identity construction.

New social movement theory, developed by scholars such as Touraine (1981)[12] and Melucci (1989)[13], suggests that contemporary movements are no longer based solely on class struggles, but rather on issues of identity, culture, and the environment. This theory highlights the importance of collective identity in the mobilization process, particularly in movements focused on topics such as climate change, gender justice, and digital activism[14]. New social movement theory emphasizes post-materialist values, collective identity, and the cultural dimensions of activism.[15]

Unlike traditional movements driven by economic grievances, new social movements emphasize lifestyle, identity, and meaning. They challenge not only state institutions but also cultural norms and systems of representation, focusing less on formal organizational structures and more on decentralized horizontal networks. One of the strengths of the theory lies in its attention to how activists construct new ways of being and belonging, often through symbolic actions and alternative media. However,

11- Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. *International Social Movement Research*, 1, 197–217.

12- Touraine, A. (1981). *The voice and the eye: An analysis of social movements*. Cambridge University Press.

13- Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. Temple University Press.

14- Habermas, J. (1981). *The theory of communicative action*. Beacon Press.

15- Touraine, A. (1981), Ibid.

critics point to its limited applicability to traditional or economically motivated protests, particularly in countries of the Global South.

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks help understand how protest movements take shape, transforming from peaceful initiatives into effective forces capable of influencing policy, or, in some cases, radicalizing as a result of internal and external factors such as state repression or ideological shifts.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly seeks to synthesize these theories rather than treating them as contradictory. This multi-theoretical approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of protest, recognizing that various elements—resources, identity, and meaning—dynamically interact in any given movement.

1.2 Dynamics of Protest Movements

The dynamics of protest movements refer to the complex processes that govern their emergence, development, strategies, and outcomes. These dynamics are influenced by a range of internal and external factors, including leadership, organizational structures, mobilization methods, state responses, the role of the media, as well as ideological shifts and changes in public opinion[16]. These movements operate within a contested political context, interacting with authorities and opposition groups, which contributes to determining their trajectories and transformations.[17]

Leadership and organizational structures play a vital role in determining the effectiveness and sustainability of movements. While some movements, such as the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr., rely on a centralized leadership to coordinate efforts and formulate goals, others, such as Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring uprisings, tend toward decentralized models, leveraging digital networks and collective coordination[18]. While decentralization promotes inclusiveness and participation, it can weaken strategic cohesion and limit sustainability.[19]

16- McAdam, D., Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2001), Ibid

17- Della Porta, D. (2013), Ibid.

18- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. Polity Press.

19- Diani, M., & McAdam, D. (Eds.). (2003). Social movements and networks: Relational approaches to collective action. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0199251789.001.0001

At the level of mobilization strategies and tactics, movements' tools vary from nonviolent means, such as civil disobedience[20], strikes, and boycotts, to more severe tactics such as sit-ins and roadblocks. The development of digital media has transformed methods of organizing and mobilization, with movements like Black Lives Matter using Twitter and Instagram to frame their messages, mobilize support, and apply political pressure.[21]

State responses play a central role in determining the trajectory of movements, ranging from dialogue and reform[22] to direct repression using violence and arrests[23], or political co-optation of movement leaders to neutralize them. In many cases, repression can backfire, as occurred in the civil rights movement in the United States, where police violence contributed to strengthening the movement's momentum[24]. The Arab Spring uprisings demonstrate how the interplay between popular mobilization and state repression can lead to radical political change, and sometimes to chaos and instability.[25]

The media and public opinion are powerful factors influencing the legitimacy of movements; positive coverage can bolster community support, while negative images can erode popular support and justify repression[26]. Unlike traditional media, digital platforms have enabled movements to bypass institutional censorship and disseminate their narratives directly to the public.[27]

Over time, movements may face internal challenges that threaten their sustainability, such as ideological divisions, leadership struggles, or

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20- Sharp, G. (1973). *The politics of nonviolent action*. Porter Sargent Publishers.

21- Diani, M., & McAdam, D. (Eds.). (2003), Ibid.

22- McAdam, D. (1999). *Political process and the development of Black insurgency*, 1930–1970. University of Chicago Press.

23- Davenport, C. (2007). *State repression and the domestic democratic peace*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511510021

24- Branch, T. (1988). *Parting the waters: America in the King years 1954–63*. Simon & Schuster.

25- Gerges, F. A. (2016). *Contentious politics in the Middle East: Popular resistance and marginalized activism beyond the Arab uprisings*. Palgrave Macmillan.

26- McAdam, D. (1999). *Political process and the development of Black insurgency, 1930–1970*. University of Chicago Press.

27- Earl, J., & Kimport, K. (2011). *Digitally enabled social change: Activism in the Internet age*. MIT Press.

fatigue resulting from a lack of tangible progress[28]. Repression and legal restrictions can also weaken a movement's ability to sustain itself, as was the case with the decline of the Occupy Wall Street movement due to weak leadership and fragmentation.[29]

Understanding these dynamics helps explain why some movements succeed in bringing about lasting change, while others fail, end up fragmenting, or even shift toward more radical paths under pressure from their surrounding environment.

1.3 The Impact of Protest Movements

Protest movements play a pivotal role in shaping societies. Historically, they have demonstrated their ability to push for legislative reforms, alter public discourse, and achieve cultural transformations, although some can lead to unintended consequences such as polarization or extremism. The impact of these movements varies depending on their strategies, state responses, and the surrounding political and social contexts.[30]

Prominent movements, such as the American civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., contributed to the passage of landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, while movements such as Solidarity in Poland and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa demonstrated the power of nonviolent resistance to dismantle oppressive regimes. [31]Various feminist and environmental movements have also led to significant legal reforms worldwide.[32]

Although some movements may not bring about immediate political change, they profoundly impact public discourse and societal awareness, as did the Black Lives Matter movement, which highlighted systemic

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28- Meyer, D. S., & Tarrow, S. (1998). *The social movement society: Contentious politics for a new century*. Rowman & Littlefield.

29- Juris, J. S. (2012). Reflections on Occupy Wall Street: Horizontalism, leadership, and prefigurative politics. *American Ethnologist*, 39(2), 259–279.

30- Tilly, C. (2004), Ibid.

31- Ost, D. (2005). *The defeat of Solidarity: Anger and politics in postcommunist Europe*. Cornell University Press.

32- Dryzek, J. S., Downes, D., Hunold, C., Schlosberg, D., & Hernes, H. K. (2003). *Green states and social movements: Environmentalism in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Norway*. Oxford University Press.

racism, and the struggles of LGBTQ+ communities, which transformed societal attitudes toward issues of identity and individual rights.[33]

However, the effectiveness of these movements often depends on political opportunity structures—that is, the openness of the political system to influence. Repressive regimes may respond with crackdowns, which limits immediate success but often leads to the consolidation of support or the garnering of international solidarity.[34]

Protests not only challenge political authority but also reshape societal norms. They contribute to identity formation, generate collective memory, and strengthen social solidarity. Participation in protests has "biographical effects," altering individuals' attitudes, values, and engagement in the long term.

Beyond their political and social impact, protest movements bring about profound cultural and identity transformations. For example, the anti-war and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s reshaped social values associated with war and gender[35]. Indigenous movements contributed to greater recognition of their cultures and rights[36], while youth-led environmental activism, such as Greta Thunberg, increased awareness of climate issues.

In many cases, movements become a space for the development of new political actors, producing future parties and leaders. The Solidarity movement in Poland transformed from a labor union into a political force that led the country toward democracy[37]. The Arab Spring uprisings contributed to changing the political landscape, particularly in Tunisia, although some led to conflict or the return of authoritarianism[38]. The Occupy Wall Street movement influenced economic discourse and inspired the rise of left-wing populism.[39]

33- Bernstein, M. (2005). Identity politics. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31, 47–74.

34- Vestergren, S., Drury, J., & Chiriac, E. H. (2017). The biographical consequences of protest and activism: A systematic review. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(2), 203–221. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2016.1252665

35- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. University of California Press.

36- Niezen, R. (2003). *The origins of indigenism: Human rights and the politics of identity*. University of California Press.

37- Ost, D. (2005), Ibid.

38- Gerges, F. A. (2016), Ibid.

39- Juris, J. S. (2012), Ibid.

However, not all movements lead to positive outcomes; they can face repression, suffer from internal divisions, or be co-opted by the political system, losing momentum and emptying them of their original content[40]. In some cases, frustration at the lack of response turns into radicalism or even armed conflict, as happened with the Syrian uprising, which began peacefully in 2011 and ended in a civil war due to repression and foreign intervention.

Today, the digital age has increased the scope and volatility of protest movements. Online platforms enable rapid mobilization, transnational communication, and symbolic resistance, but they also introduce new risks such as disinformation, surveillance, and representative activism. Digital protest, particularly around climate issues, can effectively increase participation in peaceful collective action, particularly among younger age groups.[41]

Protest movements are expected to play a more significant role in global governance. The rise of authoritarian populism, the climate crisis, and widening inequality have created fertile ground for both popular resistance and innovation. Nonviolent movements, when inclusive and strategically adaptive, are likely to remain pivotal actors in driving democratic renewal.[42]

2. Extremism and Terrorism as Security Threats

2.1 The Concept of Extremism and Terrorism

Extremism encompasses rigid and extremist belief systems that reject democratic principles, tolerance, and diversity. It is often political, religious, or ideological in nature. Extremism can exist without violence, but it provides fertile ground for justifying it. It typically includes the following: rejection of moderation, ideological authoritarianism, and the delegitimization of dissenting views. It is important to note that not all extremists are violent, but violent extremists act on the basis of these ideologies in destructive ways.[43]

40- Della Porta, D. (2013), Ibid.

41- Landmann, H., & Naumann, J. (2024). Being positively moved by climate protest predicts peaceful collective action. *Global Environmental Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1024/gep.11113

42- Rapp, C., & Ackermann, K. (2016). The consequences of social intolerance on non-violent protest. *European Political Science Review*, 8(3), 385-408. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773916000113

43- Malik, A. A., Azeem, W., & Asad, M. (2024). Innovative technologies in countering extremism and terrorism. *International Journal for Electronic Crime Investigation*.

Extremism and terrorism are interconnected phenomena that pose serious threats to security and political stability in various societies, although they are distinct in essence and manifestation. Extremism is defined as the adoption of extreme ideological positions that reject pluralism and seek radical change, often through undemocratic means, and may involve violence[44]. This extremism can manifest across a wide spectrum of ideologies, including far-left and far-right movements, religious and nationalist movements, and single-issue movements[45]. Among its forms are:

- Ideological extremism, which embodies a dogmatic adherence to ideological rejection of compromise and democratic processes.[46]

- Religious extremism, often associated with fundamentalist interpretations that justify the use of violence.[47]

- Political extremism, which advocates for authoritarian or revolutionary regimes.[48]

While not every extremist becomes a terrorist, this type of rhetoric can contribute to creating fertile environments conducive to terrorism by fostering polarization and dehumanizing others.[49]

Violence refers to the use of physical force or coercion to inflict harm, assert power, or achieve goals. In this context, violent extremism is a subtype of violence motivated by an extremist ideology. It is violence justified by a worldview rejected by the mainstream and often rooted in utopian or extremist visions of society.[50]

44- Neumann, P. R. (2013). *The new jihadism: A global snapshot*. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.

45- Mudde, C. (2019). *The far right today*. Polity Press.

46- Schmid, A. P. (2013). Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: A conceptual discussion and literature review. *ICCT Research Paper*.

47- Juergensmeyer, M. (2003). *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence*. University of California Press.

48- Eatwell, R., & Goodwin, M. (2018). *National Populism: The RevoltAgainst Liberal Democracy*. Penguin.

49- Hogg, M. A. (2007). Uncertainty-identity theory. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 39, 69–126.

50- Christodoulou, E., & Nesterova, Y. (2020). Violent extremism: Types, implications, and responses. In *Encyclopedia of Educational Innovation*.

Terrorism, on the other hand, is broadly defined as the deliberate use or threat of violence to instill fear and achieve political, ideological, or religious goals[51]. Terrorism includes key elements such as:

Ideological or political motivation[52], The use or threat of violence[53], Direct targeting of civilians[54], Symbolism in the selection of targets to attract media attention and maximize psychological impact[55].

Types of terrorism vary, including state-sponsored terrorism[56], religious terrorism such as al-Qaeda and ISIS[57], ethnonationalist terrorism such as the Irish Republican Army or the Tamil Tigers[58], as well as left-wing and right-wing terrorism such as the Red Army Faction or neo-Nazi groups.[59]

The radicalization process—the transformation of individuals from adopting extremist beliefs to carrying out violent acts—is a prominent area of research in counterterrorism studies[60]. Several factors influence this process, including:

Group dynamics and social identity, where marginalized individuals seek membership in extremist groups.[61]

51- Schmid, A. P. (2011). The definition of terrorism. In *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. Routledge.

52- Crenshaw, M. (1981). The causes of terrorism. *Comparative Politics*, 13(4), 379–399.

53- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside Terrorism*. Columbia University Press.

54- Pape, R. A. (2005). *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. Random House.

55- Jenkins, B. M. (1975). The study of terrorism: Definitional problems. *RAND Corporation*.

56- Byman, D. (2005). *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.

57- Juergensmeyer, M. (2003), Ibid.

58- Jones, S. G., & Libicki, M. C. (2008). *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida*. RAND Corporation.

59- Mudde, C. (2019), Ibid.

60- Silke, A. (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*. Routledge.

61- Hogg, M. A. (2007), Ibid.

Narrations of political, economic, or religious grievances exploited by recruiters.[62]

The role of the internet and social media in disseminating extremist propaganda and facilitating recruitment.[63]

A deeper understanding of the relationship between extremism and terrorism contributes to the development of effective prevention strategies, whether by dismantling extremist ideological structures or addressing the social and political contexts that motivate them.

2.2 The Relationship between Extremism and Terrorism

The relationship between extremism and terrorism is complex and multidimensional. Extremism does not necessarily lead to terrorism, but it often creates a fertile environment for it. Extremism refers to the adoption of rigid ideological beliefs that reject democratic values and call for radical change, while terrorism is defined as the use of violence to achieve political, religious, or ideological goals[64]. While not all extremists become terrorists, terrorism often takes root in environments where extremist ideologies are legitimized.[65]

Some extremist ideologies serve as the ideological foundation of terrorism, through features such as the rejection of pluralism, the moral justification of violence, the demonization of opponents, and the promotion of tragic or utopian narratives of a supposed final victory[66]. Salafi-jihadist extremism, for example, underlies many acts of terrorism aimed at establishing a global Islamic state[67], and right-wing extremism has provided the backdrop for attacks such as the Christchurch mosque massacre[68].

Researchers have studied the processes by which extremist beliefs transform into terrorist acts. The staircase model offers a gradual

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62- Neumann, P. R. (2013), Ibid.

63- Conway, M. (2017). Determining the role of the Internet in violent extremism and terrorism: Six suggestions for progressing research. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(1), 77–98.

64- Neumann, P. R. (2013), Ibid.

65- Silke, A. (2018), Ibid.

66- Crenshaw, M. (1981), Ibid.

67- Gerges, F. A. (2016), Ibid.

68- Mudde, C. (2019), Ibid.

conceptualization[69] of this transition, beginning with a sense of injustice, followed by the displacement of aggression, and culminating in the acceptance and participation of violence. Social identity theory explains that a sense of marginalization drives individuals to join extremist groups that provide them with a sense of identity and purpose. Other models point to the influence of push factors, such as deprivation and discrimination, and pull factors, such as a sense of belonging and the promise of purpose. Numerous studies emphasize the role of the internet in disseminating extremist propaganda and recruiting individuals through digital communities[70].

There are also diverse paths to terrorism, including radicalization in conflict zones[71], involvement with extremist communities within prisons or political movements, and a reaction to government repression[72]. Events such as the US invasion of Iraq have played a role in accelerating jihadist radicalization, while immigration policies and economic inequality in the West have fueled the rise of right-wing extremism.[73]

Despite the close connection between extremism and terrorism, some terrorist acts are committed without a clear ideological motivation. This includes individual terrorism committed by isolated individuals driven by personal or psychological motives[74], as well as criminal terrorism used by organized crime groups to gain influence and control without an ideological agenda. It is important to distinguish between these different types to develop effective counterterrorism strategies based on a deep understanding of motives and contexts.[75]

2.3 Challenges of Combating Radicalization Leading to Terrorism

Countering radicalization leading to terrorism is a complex task facing governments, security agencies, and international organizations.

69- Moghaddam, F. M. (2005). The staircase to terrorism: A psychological exploration. *American Psychologist*, 60(2), 161-169.

70- Neumann, P. R. (2013), Ibid.

71- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside Terrorism*. Columbia University Press.

72- Crenshaw, M. (1981), Ibid.

73- Mudde, C. (2019) , Ibid.

74- Lankford, A. (2013). *The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Killers*. Palgrave Macmillan.

75- Jones, S. G., & Libicki, M. C. (2008), Ibid.

It requires comprehensive strategies that go beyond traditional security approaches to include social, political, and economic interventions[76]. One of the key challenges is achieving a delicate balance between protecting national security and preserving civil liberties, as draconian measures, such as widespread surveillance and arbitrary arrests, can backfire, exacerbating feelings of marginalization and fueling radicalization[77]. The nature of extremism complicates counterterrorism efforts. It is difficult to distinguish between those with non-violent extremist beliefs and those who might turn to violence. This raises concerns about the stigmatization of peaceful political opponents or the targeting of specific groups, as occurred with the implementation of the "Prevent" strategy in the United Kingdom.[78]

On the digital front, the internet and social media have become a new arena for the dissemination of extremist propaganda. Algorithms play a role in amplifying radical content, and extremist groups exploit encryption tools to evade surveillance[79]. In this context, government pressure on technology companies to remove extremist content has sparked a heated debate about the limits of freedom of expression[80]. ISIS has emerged as a clear example of the use of digital campaigns to recruit thousands of foreign fighters[81].

Furthermore, the root causes of extremism, such as economic deprivation, social marginalization, and political injustice, remain critical challenges that require long-term structural reforms[82]. However, many strategies still focus on security solutions without effectively addressing these factors. Repressive policies, as in the case of Syria after the Arab Spring, have contributed to the rise of groups like ISIS[83]. At the international level, discrepancies in legal frameworks and national policies hinder effective cooperation against transnational terrorism.

76- Silke, A. (2018), Ibid.

77- Della Porta, D. (2013), Ibid.

78- Thomas, P. (2012). *Responding to the Threat of Violent Extremism: Failing to Prevent*? Bloomsbury.

79- Weimann, G. (2016). *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation*. Columbia University Press.

80- Klein, A. (2019). *Radicalization Online: The Dark Side of Social Media*. Bristol University Press.

81- Gurr, T. R. (2015). *Why Men Rebel*. Routledge.

82- Crenshaw, M. (1981), Ibid.

83- Gerges, F. A. (2016), Ibid.

Some countries differ in their definition of terrorist groups, while others are reluctant to share intelligence for security or political reasons[84]. While the international coalition against ISIS has helped shape a model for international cooperation in countering extremism, military interventions such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq have demonstrated how foreign policies can produce counterproductive effects that empower extremist groups.[85]

3. The Relationship between Protest Movements and the Phenomenon of Violence and Extremism

The relationship between protest movements and extremism is a complex and controversial field of study in political science and sociology. Although most protests are peaceful in nature, certain conditions can push them toward violence or extremism. These conditions range from government repression, the infiltration of extremist groups, and disillusionment with the lack of change, to the effects of mass polarization and the digital sphere.[86]

Several studies indicate that the state's use of excessive force or the suppression of political expression can lead to protests escalating and turning violent, as occurred in the Arab Spring revolutions in Libya and Syria, where state violence led to armed uprisings[87]. The same applies to the experience of Northern Ireland, where the republican movement transformed from peaceful activism to armed conflict following the suppression of protests by British authorities[88]. These cases reflect what is known as "grievance-based extremism," where state violence pushes individuals toward supporting or perpetrating violence.[89]

In addition to repression, the infiltration of extremist groups into protest movements is another factor driving them toward violence. While anti-globalization protests in the 1990s were largely peaceful, anarchist groups such as the Black Blocs used violence, leading to clashes with

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84- Byman, D. (2005), Ibid.

85- Lister, T. (2015). *ISIS: The Inside Story*. CNN Special Report.

86- Della Porta, D. (2013), Ibid.

87- Gerges, F. A. (2016), Ibid.

88- English, R. (2003). *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. Oxford University Press.

89- Hafez, M. (2003). *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*. Lynne Rienner

security force[90]s. Far-right groups have also exploited anti-lockdown protests during the COVID-19 pandemic to recruit new supporters and spread anti-establishment rhetoric.[91]

On the other hand, psychological and social factors play an important role in pushing some individuals toward adopting extremist ideologies within movements. Phenomena such as "group polarization"[92] and digital echo chambers [93]reinforce the tendency toward extremism within ideologically homogeneous groups. Social identity theory supports this idea, as individuals strive to conform to group positions, even if they are extreme[94]. Failure to achieve a movement's goals sometimes leads to a slide toward violence, as in the case of the Weather Underground in the United States, which embraced violence after becoming disillusioned with the slow pace of change, or the shift of some members of the Muslim Brotherhood to armed factions after the 2013 coup in Egypt.[95]

Governments play a pivotal role in preventing protests from turning violent by adopting strategies of political inclusion and dialogue. For example, the inclusion of the African National Congress in negotiations helped end apartheid in South Africa, and peace negotiations in the Basque Country contributed to the disarmament of ETA[96]. Conversely, the use of excessive force can backfire, as demonstrated by the repression in Chechnya, which contributed to the rise of jihadist terrorism, and by US policies during the "War on Terror," which led to further polarization and extremism in some regions.[97]

Understanding the dynamic relationship between protest movements and extremism is essential for designing policies that protect legitimate political expression while reducing the risk of violence. This

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90- Della Porta, D., & Diani, M. (2006). *Social Movements: An Introduction. Blackwell.*

91- Mudde, C. (2019), Ibid.

92- Sunstein, C. R. (2009). *Going to Extremes: How Like Minds Unite and Divide.* Oxford University Press.

93- Conway, M. (2017), Ibid.

94- Hogg, M. A. (2007), Ibid.

95- Lynch, M. (2016). *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East.* PublicAffairs.

96- McAdam, D., Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2001), Ibid.

97- Pape, R. A. (2005), Ibid.

requires a balanced approach that addresses legitimate grievances and ensures security accountability to prevent protests from transforming from vehicles for change into arenas for extremism and violence.

Conclusion

This article reveals that the relationship between protest movements and extremism is neither linear nor inevitable. Rather, it emerges within a contested space where social grievances, official responses, ideological stakes, and digital interactions intersect. While protest movements represent a legitimate expression of popular demands, they may transform—under specific conditions of repression, exclusion, or ideological penetration—into forms of violence or radicalism. Understanding this transformation can only be fully understood through a multi-level approach that integrates sociological and political theories and takes into account the interplay between structure and agency.

Historical and contemporary examples have shown that the political response to protest movements, whether through containment or repression, remains a key determinant of their outcomes. Furthermore, the role of digital media has become crucial in accelerating or altering mobilization trends. Conversely, relying solely on security-based approaches to addressing extremism often produces counterproductive results and leads to the reproduction of the same motivations that fuel violence. Hence, the need for balanced public policies that preserve space for peaceful expression while simultaneously addressing the structural causes underlying protest and extremism, such as marginalization, inequality, and closed political systems. Strengthening inclusion mechanisms, opening channels for democratic participation, and building trust between state and society are essential conditions for preventing societies from slipping into cycles of violence and ensuring that social movements remain a constructive force in the democratic transition process, rather than a harbinger of chaos or extremism.

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