

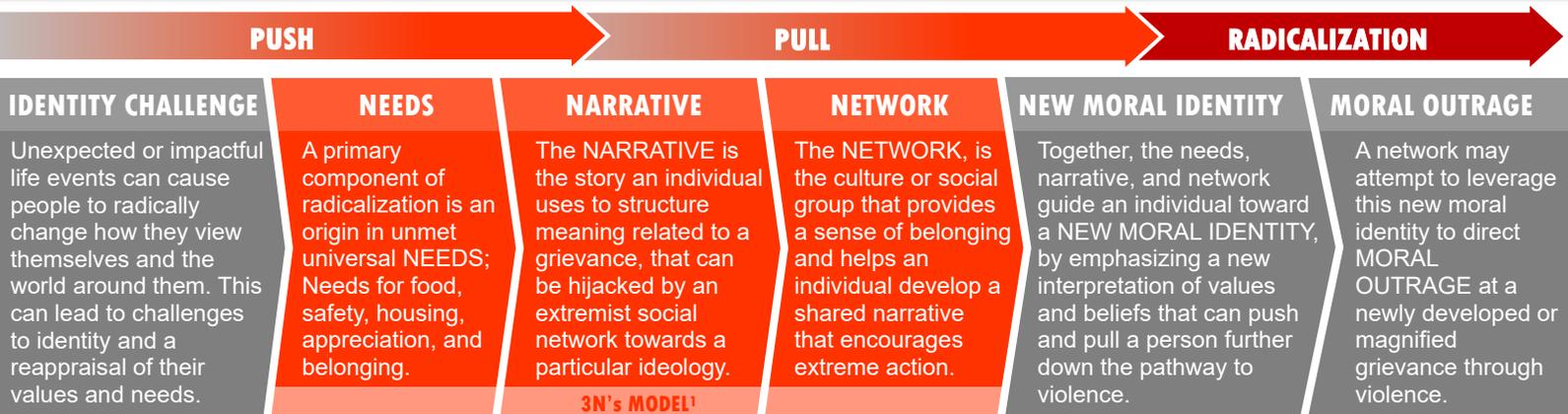


# BTAC BULLETIN

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE | LAW ENFORCEMENT & COUNTERINTELLIGENCE | CYBERSECURITY | EMPLOYEE MANAGEMENT RELATIONS | THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT

## ORIGINS OF RADICALIZATION IDENTITY, NEEDS, & SOCIAL NETWORKS

There is no one pathway of radicalization; it involves many psychological, cultural, and social factors by which individuals become increasingly accepting of violence for a cause. Those who turn to violent extremist behavior rarely do so out of a simple desire for violence, but instead because they are attempting to address unmet NEEDS and they have come to view the world through a NARRATIVE of personal grievance that has been reinforced by a NETWORK of like-minded people<sup>1</sup>. This dynamic and multi-faceted process is influenced by personal biopsychosocial factors (psychological vulnerabilities and personality traits) and Push/Pull factors in their environment<sup>2,3</sup>. *Push factors* are real or perceived situational influences that drive the individual toward radicalization like a personal grievance, while *Pull factors* are group-level factors involving the network and environmental context that draw the individual to seek information, experiences, and other individuals that align with their newly developing ideology, reinforcing their grievance narrative.



### MORAL IDENTITY & HUMAN NEEDS

When someone experiences a crisis of identity brought on by significant life change (e.g., employment loss, separation from service, relationship change, moral injury, or relocation) they can experience emotional upheaval that renders them more vulnerable to violent radicalization. Individuals faced with an identity challenge seek to make sense of their experiences and fulfill newly unmet needs. While many support groups are protective and helpful, violent extremist groups take advantage of these needs by filling voids and providing supportive camaraderie, shared backgrounds, and ultimately a shared grievance narrative.

Violent extremist groups can provide a social network and narrative through which a person can interpret their recently experienced turmoil. Consider an individual isolated in a new foreign environment not knowing the language and without money, or a person who has been terminated from a position in career they have strongly identified with. Without support, and under the right circumstances, violent extremist groups can take advantage of these individuals and provide or reinforce a narrative of hate and anger which may move them further down the extremism spectrum, pushing and pulling them toward radicalization and criminal behavior.

### MITIGATION STRATEGIES

- Develop and communicate local work conduct guidelines that define extremist behavior, and follow-up on all reports of potential radicalization indicators. Early action may reduce the risk of behaviors escalating to violence.
- Promote social engagement and encourage participation in community organizations and activities that support positive identity development.
- Proactively manage separations by providing resources. (e.g., health care, resume updates, career counseling) and encourage language that implies continued connection and belonging.

1. Webber, D., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2017). Psychological factors in radicalization: A "3N" approach. In *The handbook of criminology of terrorism*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. G. LaFree & J.D. Freilich (Eds.), John Wiley and Sons. 2. Gill, P. (2012). "Terrorist violence and the contextual, facilitative and causal qualities of group-based behaviors." *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 17, 565-574.

3. Horgan, J. (2005). *The psychology of terrorism*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge. 4. Institute for Defense Analyses (2023). *Prohibited Extremist Activities in the U.S.* Department of Defense.



**DITMAC** DOD Insider Threat Management and Analysis Center