

ARTICLE_YOUTH INCLUSION AND ITS LINK TO RADICALIZATION

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TACKLING YOUTH RADICALIZATION THROUGH INCLUSION IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY TUNISIA



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ARTICLE

Inclusion and its link to Youth Radicalization

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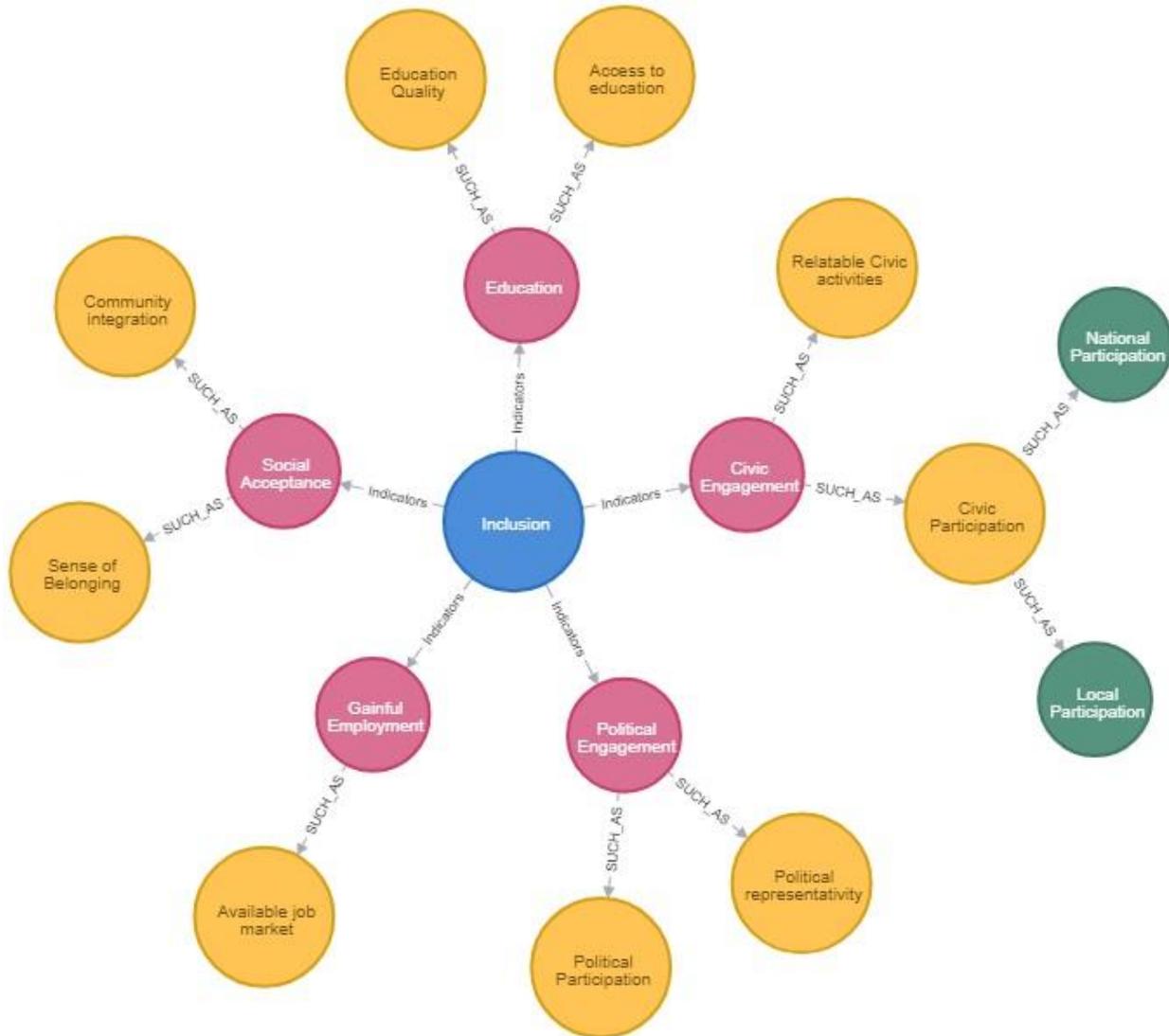
The relationship between Inclusion and Radicalization is a question that scholars have eventually studied from different perspectives and through different methodologies. In MEF research, studying the link starts with understanding Youth Inclusion in Tunisia in a post revolution context and to what extent it affects the motivations to join and support extremist jihadi groups.

Defining Inclusion started with elaborating a list of indicators coming from several studies and conventional definitions of the feeling or perception of Inclusion. These indicators are grouped in 6 main categories which are; Social Acceptance, Civic Engagement, Politic representation, Religious acceptance, Education and Employment.

The motivations to support and join extremist jihadi groups are divided into psychological and societal factors. The baseline of understanding these motivations is that Radicalization is a personal individual process that combines a perfect mixture of motivations to join and factors that push them from the societal norms.

Inclusion

Youth Inclusion, as stated by the word bank, is when youth have gainful employment or education, are religiously accepted, politically represented in the capital, civically engaged in their communities, and not socially isolated.



According to MEF research entitled “Tackling Youth Radicalization through Inclusion”, and while assessing these indicators among Tunisian youth, and specifically after testing the **religious** and **political** aspects, the research concluded that: historically, **religion** has influenced traditions and social norms. However, societal conservatism had substituted religion, and according to the study subjects, community influence along with traditions and social norms are the basis of conservatism. Therefore, for youth to feel socially accepted they must conform with prevailing social norms and traditions.

“[...] It doesn't matter if you pray five times a day or not, all they [local community] care about is that you have to wear a scarf. It is not about religion it is more about tradition.”

Youth expressed a lack of interest in the conventional **political activities**. They have lost faith in the political institutions in the country and the system. They had **high expectations** after the revolution which the

political elite failed to meet. New ways of channeling their political activities has strongly emerged such as joining student unions or participating civic activities. Some of those who were willing to engage in political events faced problems such as registrations and logistics.

"[...] I didn't vote in the presidential elections because I felt that my voice is not heard. Carthage is hundreds of kilometers away. It is kind of unreachable that's why I only voted in the municipal election."

Regarding the assessment of the other indicators, the combination of Social Acceptance, Civic Engagement and Employment emerged widely in youth perceptions of the main factors to reinforce their sense of belonging.

Social Acceptance is defined by having the support of the family, friends and the community. This sought support includes specifically respecting youths desire for change to the point to overcome some limitation imposed by social norms and traditions.

On the national level, social acceptance is a more generalized perception, meaning community, as a whole, is socially accepted among other groups or populations. Stigma plays a key role in the process of Social Acceptance; the absence of stigma from other regions and media is important to reinforce integration and to fortify the sense of belonging to the national community.

Civic Engagement is providing a sense of belonging to a community of youth and helping them maintain personal and professional skills. This sense of belonging is tangible as long as their community is supporting and accepting their civic engagement and provide them with moral and financial support.

Employment is defined as to have available job opportunities and more investment in the local natural resources and human capacities. Although, when defining employment by youth in different regions in Tunisia, the legal framework is not even mentioned and the idea of having a job is beyond legal restrictions; The informal economy is the solution to their feeling of marginalization, it helps them create a bond with their community and represents a safety net for their emotional vulnerabilities.

"Belonging" or the feeling of Inclusion represents the foundation to youth resilience to psychological and societal tensions or vulnerabilities. Resilience is defined as youth's capacities to overcome social and individual stresses such as personal trauma, economic instability, political tensions... These tensions potentially represent major motivations for youth to support and/or join extremist ideologies, making it interesting to map the root causes of Radicalization and understand the connection to the feeling of Inclusion.

Root Causes of Youth Radicalization

Motivations to support and/or join violent extremist groups are divided into two categories; psychological and societal drivers.

Psychological drivers such as feeling of insignificance due to traumatic experiences, social isolation, conventional depictions of masculinity and femininity, a desire for self-destruction represents factors that influence individual personal process of Radicalization. These drivers deepen the frailty of someone's personality and create a void that can be easily filled by extremist ideas and beliefs.

As an important psychological driver, Feeling of insignificance due to traumatic experiences, and by traumatic we mean experiences such as emotional displacement (losing love or a key romantic relationship) as well as sexual abuse which can lead a person to make decisions in a temporary emotional state that may support violent action, or as Niconchuk coined it, "heroic limbo." Acts of violence are by consequence, in this context, a way for individuals to overcome their trauma-inflicted feelings of insignificance. These feelings are countered by a strong desire for glory and significance where one seeks to become greater than one is.

On the other hand, societal drivers derive more from a common history and a cumulation of tensions experienced by the community. These drivers can be summarized by identity threats and crisis, a predisposition to violence before recruitment, network influence, loss of faith in and active abuse by existing structures of justice, corruption, political collapse of the State, sense of injustice and loss of hope, religion-based discrimination and repression by the State, a limited educational system.

In Tunisia and according to the study subjects of MEF research, the most significant driver is sense of injustice and loss of hope which is defined as the contrast between the high expectations of people after the Arab spring meeting unresponsive state institutions which drives individuals to feel marginalized and powerless. They lose hope and become convinced that problems in Tunisia are hopeless and that they would never improve with unemployment, indifference and an increasing low self-esteem still existent.

The mind map below proves to a certain extent, that the root causes of Radicalization are mainly personal and complex. No algorithm or a pattern exists in studying the vulnerability of youth to Radicalization.



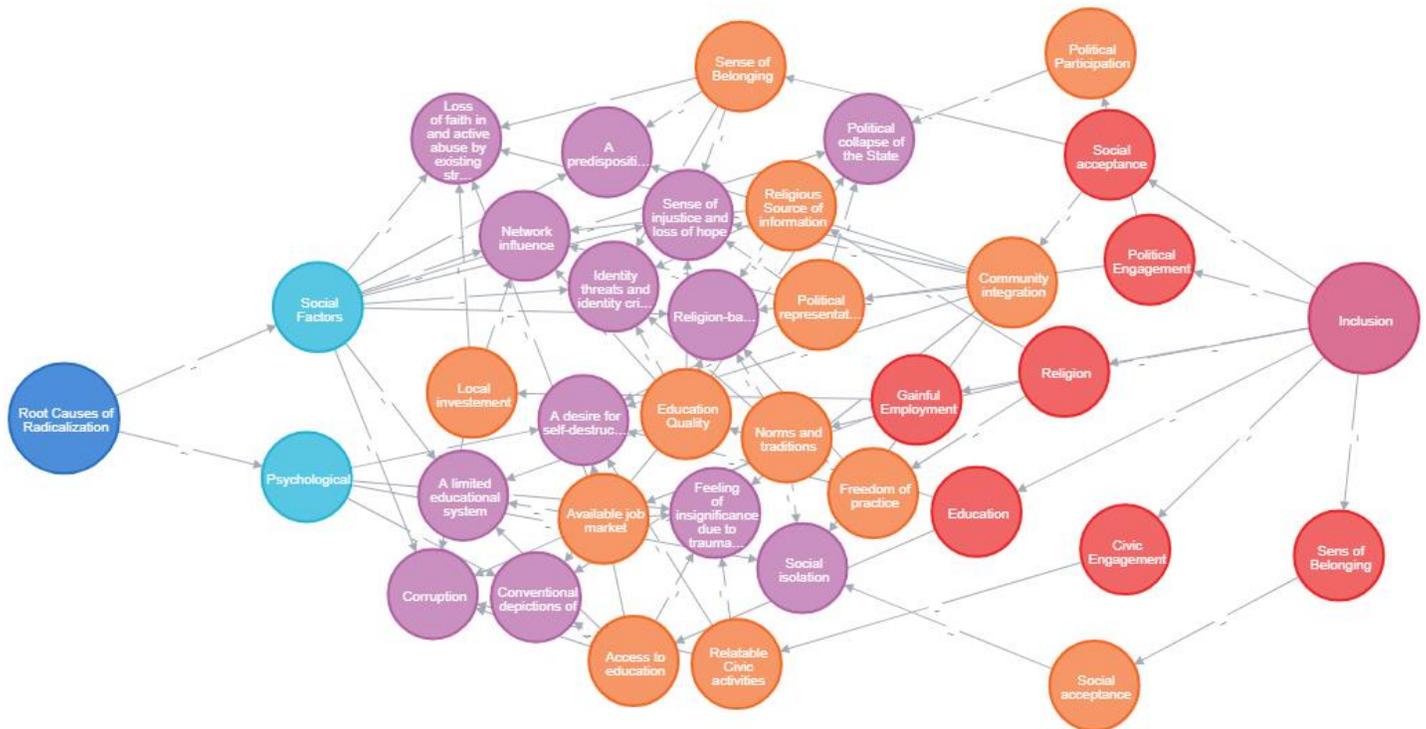
Linking Motivations to join extremist groups to Inclusion

To a certain extent, studies and experiences such as the Aarhus model implemented by the Danish government, which is based on dissecting the root causes of Radicalization and targeting them with specific inclusive interventions in order to prevent youth from joining violent groups and to also reinforce exit programs.

Inclusion is an approach to remedy certain root causes of Radicalization which can be used to prevent violent extremism or/and deradicalize extremists.

As presented in the mind map below, each indicator can stanch one or multiple root causes of Radicalization proving that Inclusion is one of the major factors to prevent Radicalization and reinforce youth Deradicalization even though, experts, scholars and practitioners in several studies and key notes confirm that mapping the link between the motivations or root causes of Radicalization and the indicators of Inclusion is as complicated as any psychological change that an individual can face. A simple mind map of the interrelations between each indicator and its effect on one of the root causes of Radicalization can showcase the complexity but also the extent “Feeling Included” can affect the process of Radicalization.

Connecting Inclusion to root causes of Radicalization is fundamentally based on the interrelations between a young person's perceptions on psychological and societal concepts and a young person's process of Radicalization.



Linking Inclusion and Deradicalization, or more specifically Disengagement, is a complex process and a multiplex exercise. The baseline of such a study is the comprehensive understanding of the feeling of Inclusion among young people and the resonance of its components along with the root cause of Radicalization. As many approaches try to tackle violent extremism through Inclusion, the general understanding is missing a specific aspect which is the personal perception of Inclusion and the personal experience of Radicalization. Generalized strategies to prevent violent extremism and reinforce Deradicalization do not resonate with individualized concepts and perceptions.