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# Refugee Radicalization/Militarization in the Age of the European Refugee Crisis: A Composite Model

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## ABSTRACT

This article constitutes an effort to examine the prospect of long-term refugee radicalization, beyond the dominant “short-sighted” debate on the possibility of radical Islamist militants posing as refugees. The main argument of the article is that refugees are inherently different from second-generation economic migrants, on whom most radicalization models are based. The article proposes a composite model that enriches our understanding of radicalization drivers with insights from refugee militarization studies. The model demonstrates that not only do some radicalization drivers present different dynamics in refugee populations, but that there are also other important factors, such as refugees’ cause of flight or prior political organization, which are absent in traditional radicalization models. Moreover, the article highlights the importance of a host state’s *will* and *capacity* to address refugees’ needs and the influence of external actors in policy formulation, particularly in weak or struggling host states. One implication of this study is that early-stage policies largely predetermine future radicalization. Another implication is that the possibility of refugee radicalization is not the same for every refugee population and in every (European) country. Thus, the policies the European Union or specific states adopt should be tailored to the specific needs of each community and state.

## KEYWORDS

Europe; radical Islamism; radicalization model; refugee militarization; refugees

## Introduction

The securitization of the debate around the unfolding refugee flow is an increasingly stark reality of the refugee experience in Europe. Refugees have been blamed for providing a “convenient cover” for Islamic State (IS) militants, who wish to sneak through European Union’s (E.U.) “humanitarianism.”<sup>1</sup> However, IS militants posing as refugees constitute only a small fraction of the jihadi militants that have attacked Western countries. This paper contends that by shortsightedly fixating on the possibility of IS militants passing undetected, the relevant debate overlooks the much larger threat of refugees’ long-term radicalization. The paper argues that the cascading hardships of the refugee experience and state (and supra-state) policies and restraints build up to a more explosive baggage of grievances that might give rise to radical violent expressions in the future.

This long-term prospect of refugee radicalization in Europe, however, requires a leap in our theoretical understanding of the factors affecting radicalization—a leap that accounts for the different contexts from which radicalization drivers arise. Petter Nesser has noted

that radicalization grows out of three contexts: the “local” (events and conflict in the country of origin); the “global” (the global jihad against the perceived enemies of Islam); and the “diaspora” context (grievances born out of the experience of being a diaspora in Europe).<sup>2</sup> Nesser’s survey of the motivations of jihadi militants in Europe at the turn of the century has shown that the combination of “diaspora” and “global motivations” was more important than “local motivations.”<sup>3</sup> This trend signaled a generational shift in the jihadi milieu from first-generation migrants and asylum seekers, who saw Europe as a temporary sanctuary to further their struggle in their countries of origin, to second-generation migrants from middle-class backgrounds, whose radicalization derived from their resentment towards their lives in the West and an ill-defined affiliation to their suffering brethren in the Middle East. The latter did not share the attachment of their predecessors in the 1990s to developments in their countries of origin.

In this light, the experiences of the refugees fleeing to Europe have more in common with those of the first-generation jihadi militants. Hence, local motivations are expected to play a more prominent role in radicalization. Contrary though to first-generation jihadists, Europe today is not considered a temporary sanctuary, but a permanent new home. Thus, the interplay between “local” and “diaspora” contexts is highly significant.

This paper puts forward a model that assesses the process of long-term refugee radicalization. This radicalization model rests on the assumption that the “refugee” character of the recent migratory flows renders traditional radicalization theories inadequate, because they are built on examples of second- and third-generation descendants of economic migrants. These theories could accommodate the few radicalization cases of long-staying refugees, which resembled, though, those of second-generation migrants.<sup>4</sup> However, the magnitude of the current refugee flow carries along significant group dynamics that will shape the refugees’ experience in a more profound way than the maladaptation path of second-generation migrants.

Instead, this paper proposes a model that enriches the study of radicalization by incorporating refugee-specific insights, as it traces the radicalization process along its multi-level trajectory. In the following sections, I present the core assumptions in the study of radicalization and, in the process, I outline a composite refugee radicalization model that identifies the key radicalization drivers stemming both from the “local” and the “diaspora” context. This enhanced model explores new paths in the radicalization study, closer to present and future realities. As such, it can provide a useful insight on the challenges lying ahead and beyond the “jihadi wolf in refugee clothing” narrative.

## **Refugee radicalization in perspective**

As most concepts linked to the phenomenon of political violence, radicalization still lacks a definition that enjoys widespread consensus, apart from an agreement that it is a process and it takes place “before the bomb goes off.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, there are several—often conflicting—suggestions as to what causes radicalization. In the public discourse, radicalization is perceived largely as a matter of personal traits and individual pathways to radical beliefs and violent acts. Self-radicalization, often mediated through the Internet, appears as the dominant pattern. However, several studies have shown that although some radicalization drivers can be traced on the individual level, there is no distinct terrorist personality.<sup>6</sup> Instead, it is more accurate to identify causes of radicalization “not just on the micro-level

[individual] but also on meso-[radical milieu] and macro-[government and society] levels.”<sup>7</sup>

While the debate on radicalization tends to overlook structural factors, the discussion about refugees tends to do the exact opposite. The UN 1951 Refugee Convention (as supplemented by the 1967 protocol) considers a refugee “[A]ny person who [...] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” is forced to seek safety outside his country and is unable or unwilling to return.<sup>8</sup> Born out of war, refugees are mostly seen as the unfortunate end result, rather than a cause of conflict. By the same token, the refugee problem is considered a matter of swift and inclusive provision for their basic needs by the international refugee regime and host states. Although accurate to a large extent, this representation of refugees and the challenges they pose is incomplete as it strips refugees of their agency.

However, according to a growing body of scholarship, refugees are not only by-products but also carriers of conflict.<sup>9</sup> In fact, refugees constitute a common pool of recruits that has been repeatedly exploited by rebels across time and cases. Alongside recruitment, other security-sensitive processes often unfold in the presence of refugees. Refugees’ grievances towards their country of origin combust under the difficult living conditions and lack of prospects in their host countries. Negative coping mechanisms abound, while opportunity costs for joining rebel groups become significantly lower. Meanwhile, pressures on public administration and infrastructure heavily strain (host) state capacity and foster local grievances, while refugee-generated demographic shifts occasionally exacerbate dormant intercommunal tensions in the host country. This explosive mixture often leads to increased violence and conflict that overburdened host states do not want or find difficult to contain. As the refugee militarization grows in size and intensity, conflict spill-over becomes multi-directional. In advanced militarized refugee situations, violence is not limited to the country of origin but is equally directed to and from the host government and society, refugees, and other external actors, involved or holding an interest in the outcome of the conflict. Civil war in the host country and/or international war are likely to follow.<sup>10</sup>

It is estimated that refugee militarization affects 15% of refugee crises.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly though, 95% of refugee-related violence seems to occur in only one-fifth of the states that host refugees.<sup>12</sup> This frequency and relative rarity of refugee militarization can be attributed to a number of factors. While some of those are comparable to factors linked to migrant radicalization, others are specific to refugees.

In the table below (see [Table 1](#)), I outline the factors that appear to influence refugee radicalization. For clarity, I employ the distinction between micro, meso, and macro levels to group these factors. Socioeconomic indicators that have been linked to radicalization are placed under a separate category that transcends all levels, because these factors affect perceptions on the micro level, but are shaped at the macro level and are often affected by developments beyond it. Moreover, another category is added that refers to the influence of external actors, such as third states or humanitarian organizations. Their impact is rather limited in the case of second-generation migrant radicalization, but it is of particular importance in refugee militarization cases. In the following pages, these factors are examined in further detail.

**Table 1.** Model of refugee radicalization/militarization drivers.

Level	Refugee radicalization drivers	
Micro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Personal victimization</li> <li>● Collective grievances</li> <li>● <i>Cause of flight</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Socioeconomic indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Living conditions</li> <li>○ Employment opportunities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Meso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Violent and non-violent radical groups' access to refugees</li> <li>● <i>Level of prior political organization</i></li> <li>● <i>Presence of militants</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Access to education</li> <li>○ Crime and Safety</li> <li>○ Integration prospects/discrimination</li> </ul>
Macro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Societal rifts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ethnic</li> <li>○ Religious</li> <li>○ Political</li> <li>○ Socioeconomic</li> </ul> </li> <li>● State-church relations</li> <li>● Centralized/de-centralized administration</li> <li>● <i>Host state capacity and will to address refugees' and local population grievances</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Settlement patterns:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>hotspots,</i></li> <li>○ <i>open camps,</i></li> <li>○ <i>urban housing,</i></li> <li>○ <i>unorganized/unofficial in public spaces</i></li> <li>○ <i>urban/rural/remote settlement</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
External Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Specific interests of third states, mitigated by their influence over host state</i></li> <li>● <i>Relief organizations' level of access and adequate funding</i></li> <li>● <i>Regulation of relief efforts</i></li> </ul>	

Note: Radicalization factors that are specific to refugees and supplement traditional radicalization models are in *italics*

### **The micro level**

At the micro level, the radicalization process is seen as unfolding inside and around the individual. The personal experiences and feelings of injustice, discrimination, and abuse constitute the baseline of the road to radicalization. In other words, radicalization is reduced to (individual) belief, feeling, and action.<sup>13</sup> Hence, the belief of personal victimization (real or assumed) transforms into a desire for revenge (feeling) that under specific conditions can end in violent actions. While (actual) victimization will be discussed below (“socioeconomic indicators”), here the focus is on the “feeling” aspect of the radicalization process.

Radicalization appears to grow out of feelings of fear and isolation that ostracism from a society or a group causes.<sup>14</sup> Ostracism might take a physical mode, in the form of “voluntary” segregation and enclavization, which leads people on both sides to lead parallel lives and realities.<sup>15</sup> It may also take more intangible forms through social and professional interactions. Both tend to encourage an identity re-shuffle in the individual. Some, as Azouz Begag has observed among the French banlieue youth, tend to scale down their identity focus to their neighborhood or peers.<sup>16</sup> Others seek belonging in broader identities, such as ethnicity or religion. While ethnicity has been the preferred identity in the past, religion has taken the lead in recent decades, especially among second-generation

Muslim migrants in Europe. However, as Olivier Roy shows, the religious identity itself is revamped in the process to suit the needs of the young generation. According to Roy, the second-generation Muslim youth undergo a process of *deculturation*, during which they reject the cultural Islam and ethnic identification of their parents in favor of Salafism—a form of Islam simpler in its rigidity and lacking the nuances of cultural Islam.<sup>17</sup> Often, this process is limited to increased external visibility of religiosity.<sup>18</sup> In other—fewer—cases, it progresses to more violent outlets.

Aggressive reactions to ostracism have been associated, also, with the feeling of reduced meaningfulness of self and the threat to control that an individual exerts (or feels entitled to exert) over his family, status, and future.<sup>19</sup> For Olivier Roy, these reactions grow out of a narcissistic crisis,<sup>20</sup> which leads to a new type of Islamized radical, for whom Islam is merely a vehicle to express their radicalism.<sup>21</sup> The coincidentalness of Islam in the radicalization of Muslim youth is best expressed in the words of a German national, who fought in Syria with the “Islamic State”: “If I had been picked up by a rocker gang in Jamaica or by Hell’s Angels in America or something, I would have gone along with it.”<sup>22</sup>

Martha Crenshaw, in the past, has identified the motive of individual glory and the need to “acquire social status and reputation” as central to the radicalization process.<sup>23</sup> Louise Richardson has dubbed these motivations as “motives of renown.”<sup>24</sup> While there is no doubt that among the radicalized there are thrill and status seekers,<sup>25</sup> one should acknowledge that most radicalized act upon collective group grievances. Certainly, these might be nothing but a smoke-screen to conceal religious ignorance and narcissistic motives. For some, though, social self and identity are highly fused with their personal identity.<sup>26</sup> In this case, the suffering of the (religious) community equates to personal suffering. Even when the radicalized individual does not endure these hardships and injustices, he feels obliged to become a self-appointed champion of the persecuted members of the community, with whose fate and suffering he identifies.<sup>27</sup> This collective suffering is an inextricable part of the “politicized social identity” that, according to Marc Sageman, the radicalized share—a social identity that under certain circumstances might turn “martial” and violent.<sup>28</sup>

While the radicalized second-generation migrants try to find meaning in the suffering of their brothers and sisters around the world, for refugees this personal and collective victimization is all too real. There is a temptation to treat refugees as if they were *tabula rasa*, devoid of any past, grievances, or expectations. However, when refugees cross the borders, together with their few belongings, they carry collective baggage that links them to the events back home. In some cases, this baggage remains cached inside a forbearing hope of eventual return to their homeland and their previous lives. In other cases, however, it takes the form of feverish impatience to redress the injustices and humiliation they suffered—militarily, if necessary.

Aristide Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo tentatively suggest that the predisposition to choose either path lies in their initial cause of flight.<sup>29</sup> Sarah Lischer distinguishes among three types of refugees according to the cause of displacement: situational, persecuted, and state-in-exile refugees. Situational refugees flee generalized violence and share no particular affiliation with either side of the conflict. Persecuted refugees flee because they are specifically targeted due to their religious, ethnic, or any other identity. State-in-exile refugees flee fearing an annihilation after failure to seize power or change

the status quo. Situational refugees have the lowest, whereas state-in-exile the highest, propensity to militarize.<sup>30</sup>

Under the prism of micro-level radicalization factors, the cause of flight affects refugees' personal and collective emotional baggage. In this sense, factors such as personal victimization and desire for revenge can be traced back to one's circumstances of flight. Collective grievances, with or without personal victimization, are equally linked to the experience of flight. Likewise, forced displacement and flight experience strengthen in-group identification.

Hence, when assessing the prospect of refugee radicalization in Europe, we should consider why they left their countries in the first place. Given that Europe receives a mixed refugee population from several countries, the initial propensity to radicalization is not uniform. In other words, Syrian refugees, who are mostly Sunni Muslims and can be described as persecuted refugees, present a different radicalization dynamic, compared to refugees from Afghanistan, who largely resemble situational refugees.

Furthermore, migration, in general, creates "acculturative stress," which is more acute in migrants who flee their countries due to "push" factors (refugees) than those who leave due to "pull" factors.<sup>31</sup> Being a refugee creates additional feelings of distress and helplessness as many are separated from family members. In refugee populations "survivor guilt," which has been identified as a powerful motive for participating (and remaining) in violent groups,<sup>32</sup> is accentuated. Among male refugees from traditional societies, feelings of desperation and reduced sense of control are intensified, as they feel devoid of their role as breadwinners and decision-makers—roles largely assumed by relief organizations and the host state.

In sum, refugees enter the host state with a pre-existing set of grievances against the sending state. Whether they become mitigated or new grievances arise and forge a collective identity of suffering in exile is largely determined by the existence of a framework or milieu that can redirect their anger and their overall experience as refugees in the receiving state.

### **The meso level**

The initial stages of radicalization seem to affect the way an individual perceives the world and his place in it. McCauley and Moskaleiko describe it as a certain state of mind, where the feeling of *superiority* (the idea of being a "special or chosen group") is complemented with the feelings of *injustice* (to which the group is unfairly subjected), *distrust* (towards out-group), and *vulnerability* (danger of extinction).<sup>33</sup> This gradual progression from the identification of what "is not right" and how "it is not fair," to finding whose "fault it is" and demonizing the "other,"<sup>34</sup> is common in several radicalization models. Moghaddam traced this thought progression in the first *floors* of his staircase model.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Wiktorowicz identified a stage, which he dubs "cognitive opening," when an individual becomes receptive to a new belief system that can provide a new meaning to his frustration.<sup>36</sup> However, these initial steps into radicalization cannot materialize in actual violent acts in the absence of mobilization networks and structures that can capitalize on the frustration and provide a fitting narrative that will resonate with recruits' personal experiences. Otherwise, individual radicalization prospects will remain largely unexploited.



Hence, if the micro level creates a “terrorist” potential, the meso-level drivers cultivate it to its fullest. The radicalization drivers at the meso level boil down to the existence of a radical milieu that can act as a conveyor belt. While the idea of self-radicalization remains popular, pure self-radicalization is rare and often there is some association with a radical organization or group of “followers.”<sup>37</sup> Even seemingly self-radicalized individuals claim to be a part of “a larger intellectual movement.”<sup>38</sup>

Although the importance of the radical milieu seems indisputable, it is not always clear what type of milieu encourages radicalization. According to Peter Neumann, for contemporary radicalization, this radical milieu consists of the salafi sub-culture.<sup>39</sup> However, while all jihadi militants come from the salafi sub-culture, not all members of this culture become militants. Does this mean that a non-violent radical subculture might deter the descent into violence? In other words, can non-violent salafism assume the role of “moderates”? For instance, does the presence of neighborhoods “run” by *quietist* salafi norms engender conditions fertile for further radicalization? Likewise, do other forms of political Islam, such as associations close to the Muslim Brotherhood, provide a firewall against jihadi groups and narratives?

The short answer is that the demarcation of the radical milieu depends on what a state wishes to achieve.

If the state interest in counter-radicalization programs is to prevent terrorist attacks, then . . . engagement [with nonviolent Islamists] might bear fruit. . . . But if success in counter-radicalization is deemed the almost complete marginalization of extremist and anti-integration ideas among young Western Muslims, then many believe that partnering with non-violent Islamists is counterproductive.<sup>40</sup>

The role of mosques in radicalization is another highly debated question. Finsbury Park Mosque, under Imam Abu Hamza al-Masri, is a typical example of mosques acting as mobilization networks. The experience of the Finsbury Park Mosque, however, shows that the problem does not rest with mosques per se, but with situations where mosques are hijacked by radical Imams or factions. Increased surveillance in the past two decades has reduced their number and freedom of action, despite the fact that places of worship (mostly unofficial) have been increasing steadily.<sup>41</sup> However, according to Roy, while in some countries such as Austria mosques have played a role, in others such as France, most radicals had little to no connection with a mosque and had no prior involvement in political or religious activism.<sup>42</sup> The lack of interaction with “conventional” mobilization structures is compensated by the elevated importance of kith and kin as mobilization networks. Sageman has been one of the most influential proponents of the idea that radicalization is a bottom-up process founded on family and friendship bonds.<sup>43</sup>

Either as a top-down or a bottom-up process, radicalization involves a stage of frame alignment and socialization into a specific interpretation of what are the ills of the current situation and *what is to be done* to remedy the injustice. According to Wiktorowicz, when frame alignment is achieved, an individual becomes convinced that a radical group or narrative provides a credible source to answer the aforementioned questions and resonates with his interpretive framework. What follows is further socialization with the ideology and members of the movement—a process during which an individual becomes a “student of the radical movement.”<sup>44</sup>



Once socialization into radical ideas has begun, there are several different paths that bring individuals or groups further up the radicalization ladder. Some gradually slide down the “slippery slope” towards terrorism, while others are caught into self-fueled group dynamics.<sup>45</sup> This occurs because radicalized individuals search for camaraderie—beyond a new identity. The quest for community and “social solidarity” often explains why terrorism persists, when it rarely achieves its main objectives. According to Max Abrahms, people join and stick to communities and groups because they gratify their need to “develop strong affective ties with other terrorist members.”<sup>46</sup> As Richard English notes, success in fulfilling these “inherent rewards of struggle” constitutes a lesser—yet important—type of victory for violent organizations:<sup>47</sup> a success that encourages self-sustainment and the continuation of violence.

Refugees do not have to look for a radical milieu; often they are in direct contact with it. Militants, former fighters, and their families often form part of the refugee population. Their presence and transnational connections is one of the main factors for refugee militarization. In fact, the level of political cohesion and military organization is the underlying factor for increased militarization probability among persecuted and particularly state-in-exile refugees.<sup>48</sup> In the case of the latter, political leaders and defected military officers bring with them organizational skills and relatively developed structures that can be put to immediate use. While there are organized political and military formations among Syrian refugees in neighboring countries such as Turkey and Jordan, no indications are found that these organizational structures have been transferred to Europe. However, the lack of prior political organization does not preclude the creation of organizational structures in exile. Besides, sometimes the experience of displacement unsettles established power structures and enfeebles traditional elites.<sup>49</sup> The formation of organizational structures is more feasible in persecuted refugees, who share a pre-formed collective identity as a result of the collectively endured oppression. However, a collective identity can be carved as part of the displacement experience, particularly if it is a negative one.

Refugees are “suitable” candidates for the “salafi sub-culture,” as they present signs of vulnerability, detachment from previous self and life, and an identity shift towards religion, due to the sectarian nature of the conflict. Efforts by non-violent salafi groups to approach refugees have been documented in European countries such as Germany.<sup>50</sup> For violent salafi networks, refugees present an additional value, since several have some type of past military experience as members of the army or rebel group—a useful asset for a possible recruit.<sup>51</sup> Several studies have shown that war veterans often join gangs or criminal groups, partly due to the “useful” skills they possess.<sup>52</sup> These skills are of great importance to radical groups as well.

Although refugees in Europe do not seem to carry along organized political and military formations, we should account for the fact that there are former fighters among them and, hence, the radicalization potential is heightened. At the same time, the enfeeblement of traditional elites and authority structures inevitably creates a power vacuum in refugee communities. Failure to (re)create these structures might allow radical groups, either violent or non-violent, to fill the need of refugees to have a point of reference. In light of the privatization trend in refugee relief initiatives, often with little supervision from official authorities, the access the radical milieu has to vulnerable refugees is of particular importance. Hence, the

leeway available to radical groups to capitalize on individual frustration is delimited by the wider political opportunity structure and the policies of the host state.

### ***The macro level***

At the macro level, radicalization drivers assume a more structural character, focusing on systemic and environmental influences over radicalization.<sup>53</sup> The main assumption here is that radicalization is a reciprocal process; it “happens to them and us.”<sup>54</sup> On the one hand, it demonstrates that it is not only the radicalized that slide towards more extremist views. The host state and society also adopt more extreme attitudes in the process. On the other hand, reciprocity denotes that radicalization factors can be a reaction to perceived injustices, intergroup competition, state pressures, and assumed opportunities.<sup>55</sup> Here, radicalization is often linked to the “lack of opportunity for political participation”<sup>56</sup> and a general “disappointment with peaceful means of political protest” that render violence a choice of “last resort.”<sup>57</sup>

Radicalization reciprocity does not develop in a void. Structural—inherent or established—features of host states strongly affect this interaction. For instance, it is well-documented that socially heterogeneous states—or states with ethnic and religious minorities—demonstrate higher frequency of civil unrest.<sup>58</sup> Other less studied factors, though, also appear to impact radicalization frequency. For one, a host state’s administrative model affects the arrangement of the state’s preventive and repressive capacity. Federal states or states with problematic inter-agency cooperation are of main concern in this regard.

Moreover, church-state relations and the overall approach to secularism also appear to affect radicalization. The two extremes, states with “national churches”<sup>59</sup> (e.g., Britain, Greece) and states with an aggressive approach to secularism (e.g., France’s *laïcité*),<sup>60</sup> seem to be less welcoming and hostile to “new religions” and more prone to radicalization.<sup>61</sup> These states often lack a regulatory framework for religious institutions and associations—a situation which allows unofficial places of worship and an underground religious subculture to spread.<sup>62</sup>

Traditional immigration patterns and policies also seem to impact future radicalization. For example, one of the main differences between Europe and the U.S., which partly explains Europe’s higher levels of homegrown radicalization, is their different initial immigration policies that *welcomed* the parents of the today radicalized. The U.S. received mainly highly educated migrants who entered the country as students or young professionals, whereas Europe received low-skilled migrants who were accepted as short-term contributors in Europe’s reconstruction.<sup>63</sup> In essence, “second-generation Muslims in Europe are the offspring of a misunderstanding: their parents [were] never really intend [ed] to become Europeans.”<sup>64</sup> This *misunderstanding* had a cascading effect on various state policies that define the Muslim reality in Europe—from citizenship rights to education and employment.

This type of misunderstanding is inherent in refugee situations, since refugees are always expected to return to their countries of origin when hostilities end. These expectations define the host state response, which rests both on static and dynamic features that frame the state’s “receptivity” to militarization. Inherent features, such as ethno-religious composition and the existence of dormant political rifts, interweave with volatile

developments such as economic or political crises to form a host state's militarization propensity.

Refugee flows have a durable impact on various aspects of the life of their host communities. Although in the long term, refugees often benefit the host state and population,<sup>65</sup> frictions, contagions, and counter-contagions are inevitable. Issues such as livelihood sustainment, health, education, environment,<sup>66</sup> food and labor, all are directly or indirectly affected by the refugee presence.<sup>67</sup> Failure to alleviate local communities' concerns builds up grievances on both sides: refugees and indigenous population. Actual or perceived state services towards refugees foster an image of "favoritism" among certain local communities, especially if they experience economic hardships. If the host state fails to quell this climate of semi-concealed hostility, widespread animosity and occasionally deadly attacks might ensue. Attacks of this kind already have been reported in several European countries.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, feelings of injustice and preferential treatment can stir violence between different refugee groups. The idea that some communities enjoy favorable treatment, while others are left to linger, can lead to inter-refugee clashes. For example, the provision of a fast-track asylum process to Syrian refugees or some particular groups naturally creates frustration to other communities (e.g., Iraqis, Afghans) who feel that, although the causes for their displacement are similar, they are not considered worthy of protection.<sup>69</sup>

The level of hostility, violence, and militarization rests on two pivots: state **capacity** and **will** to create an effective system and avert violent escalation.<sup>70</sup> The host state's **capacity** consists of its economic, organizational, and human capital, which is called to "manage" refugees' arrival. Not all states possess the same capacity. Turkey is different from Lebanon. Likewise, Greece, for instance, which is heavily strained and constrained by a prolonged economic crisis, does not have the same capacity as Sweden.

Security fallouts are not always the product of lacking state capacity. Equally as often, the host state—or some elements within the state—lack the **will** to effectively prevent militarization. In some cases, this lack of will is driven by the host state's desire to turn refugees (young men and children) into a dependent military force that can either boost the host state's overall defense capacity and regional influence or be used against internal or external threats and enemies.<sup>71</sup> Lebanon in the past and Turkey today are perfect examples of this practice. In other cases, states are driven by a desire to stir national and religious feelings to gain short-term political or electoral benefits.<sup>72</sup>

In the current refugee crisis, this translates into a shift towards far-right rhetoric in the debate about Muslims in Europe. From inflammatory rhetoric to semi-official sanctioning of violence, the lack of will in certain parts and political forces in Europe is a significant determinant of radicalization. Hence, the prospect of radicalization of refugees in Europe is not uniform despite some external similarities, such as the rise of far-right groups and rhetoric. On the contrary, it is highly dependent on the balance between the capacity and will of each state to deal with the refugee crisis' implications.

### **External actors**

Host state policies are not always formed independently. Sometimes, they are influenced by external forces or global trends, leaving little maneuver room for the states to mitigate their effects. In this regard, global trends or foreign policy concerns can influence local dynamics

and policies.<sup>73</sup> Sudden developments, such as global economic crises, or long-term processes (e.g., modernization)<sup>74</sup> might become challenging for some—less resilient—states. State capacity might be also reduced as a result of external military obligations.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, a state's *will deficiency* can often result from foreign policy concerns. From hostage-taking and aircraft hijacking to secure the release of comrades held in a third country to attacks to influence foreign policy choices (e.g., withdrawal of troops from Iraq), militant groups have often tried to manipulate the host state's foreign policy.<sup>76</sup>

In refugee situations, one should add the *concerns* deriving from the bilateral relations between the host and the sending state. The friendlier the relations, the more hostile the stance of host state institutions or certain groups towards refugees.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the larger the threat the sending state poses to the host state, the more hesitant is the latter to be seen as accommodating the incoming refugees. In this second case, however, a lack of will often is an indication of diminished state power and, by extension, capacity. Bilateral relations and threat perceptions often are influenced by ethnic and religious affiliations on either side of the conflict. “Brotherly” populations tend to receive a warmer welcome.

Outside the bilateral nexus, host state capacity can be significantly improved or hopelessly restricted, and likewise, its will to act can be positively monitored or hazardously strengthened or redirected.<sup>78</sup> External actors, such as humanitarian organizations, third states, and supra-state organizations, might have significant influence over the host state and its policy-making—an influence which is inversely proportional to state capacity. In cases of struggling low capacity states, external dependency and influence are usually more pronounced.

On some occasions, external actors, mostly concerned with promoting certain interests, consciously sabotage or simply disregard host state efforts.<sup>79</sup> Third states' interests might reflect direct hostility towards the host state or an ill-fated effort to “protect” their territory and system from a massive refugee inflow. While power asymmetry is always the final arbiter, in highly institutionalized regimes such as that of the E.U., the influence is channeled through supra-state institutions. Migration regime provisions, such as the Dublin regulation, and the refusal of some European states to accept refugees in line with the agreed quota system, are indications of such influence. As a result, first-entry states such as Italy and Greece are called to shoulder a larger burden. Weaker states, such as Greece, which already suffer from diminished state capacity, are even more vulnerable to external pressure, due to their economic or political dependence on E.U. funds for needs beyond the refugee crisis.

International relief organizations and NGOs are not immune to external influence. Their financial dependence, amidst increasing operational costs, on state contributions render them vulnerable to co-option or manipulation. From UNHCR to local partner NGOs, their mandate is at least equally (or more) dependent on the priorities of their funders as much as on the priorities and limits set by the host state. Yet self-interest is not always the case. External actors might inadvertently exacerbate conflict and deteriorate conditions.<sup>80</sup> There are a handful of occasions where due to an internal glitch within the international relief regime, a combination of compartmentalized misguided policies and a blind reluctance to see the situation on the ground, have brought more havoc than peace—Rwandan refugees being the most oft-cited example.

In the current refugee crisis, humanitarian organizations' role is elevated, as relief activities are often outsourced by state and supra-state authorities—often with significant

mandate overlapping. The complex nexus of little-supervised relief operations and groups that constitute the current relief regime in Europe sprang out in the *emergency conditions* of the early stages of the refugee inflow (2015–16). The lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework created an *opportunity environment* open to possibly radical actors to approach refugees under the guise of relief activities.

Regulation of relief activities has improved over time. Yet the early mishaps of the European refugee regime and persisting problems of cross-country cooperation and coordination and mandate overlapping highlight the influence external actors might hold on the construction of effective refugee regimes that are immune to radicalization—both at the meso and macro level. On the one hand, the ease of movement and access available to the radical milieu is linked to the effectiveness of the Europe-wide framework that regulates relief activities to “keep refugees out of radicals’ reach.” On the other hand, external actors (including the E.U.) hold important influence over the two pivots that define host state policy at the macro level: capacity and will. This influence is higher for first-entry, weaker, and struggling states, which are more economically dependent and hence more malleable to external pressure. In this case, external actors not only affect state capacity and will to address refugee and indigenous grievances, but they also co-formulate the overall refugee experience from which grievances and radicalization arise.

### **Socioeconomic indicators**

At the intersection between state policies and individual grievances lies a series of socioeconomic factors that act as a catalyst in the radicalization process. They set the wider environment—the objective conditions—for the radical imperative and subjective interpretations to resonate with real-life references and experiences.

Relative deprivation lies at the center of radicalization. At the micro level, radicalization rests on the feeling that individual or group status seems to decline or not improve as fast as others’.<sup>81</sup> The basic notion behind the relative deprivation argument is that it is not the “have-nots” but rather the “want-mores” who choose the radical path.<sup>82</sup> The relative prism appears to be important in other socioeconomic indicators, such as education. While education is presumed to have a pacifying effect on conflict, since for well-educated individuals participation costs are higher,<sup>83</sup> education with no pay-off in terms of employment or improved status tends to have an opposite effect. The feeling that one is stuck at the bottom of society, despite remarkable studies and skills, might turn into increased frustration and lower opportunity costs for participation in violent groups. The latter can thus benefit from a more skilled pool of recruits, which translates into more committed and effective members.<sup>84</sup>

Well-educated members have been a definitive feature of the jihadist movement’s second wave of militants, which spearheaded global jihad during the 1990s.<sup>85</sup> This trend changed after 2003. School dropouts and individuals tethering between legal and illegal economic activities have gradually become the norm. Indeed, as the cases of Belgium and France demonstrate, educational inequality between migrant and native populations seems to correlate with increased segregation and higher per capita cases of radicalization.<sup>86</sup>

Employment inequality, measured in terms of unemployment rate, has a similar effect on radicalization. McCants and Meserole found that a 10–30% youth

unemployment rate is correlated with a rise in Sunni militancy globally.<sup>87</sup> Belgium appears to experience the widest inequalities, with youth unemployment at 21.9% among second-generation migrants (and only 6.3% for native-born Belgians).<sup>88</sup> France appears also to foster similar inequalities in the access to gainful employment, as Muslim candidates appear to be 2.5 times less likely to get a job interview than Christian candidates with identical skills,<sup>89</sup> and those employed are predominantly low-skilled (and low-paid) workers (32.9%).<sup>90</sup>

Refugees are particularly susceptible to relative deprivation, as difficult living conditions, despair, and lack of prospects easily render involvement in militant organizations a socially meaningful and economically rewarding activity.<sup>91</sup> As the refugee crisis protracts, the question of appropriate living conditions is supplemented by the issues of access to health and education, employment opportunities, crime and safety, discrimination, and eventually integration prospects.

Living conditions—in line with the relative deprivation theory—matter both in absolute and relative terms. Hence, economic conditions both in sending and receiving states are important to assess refugees' economic grievances and suitable employment opportunities. As Mike Lebson notes, the provision of the right to work might be meaningless if the two countries have a different economic base and refugees possess non-transferable skills. The economic base of the sending state affects militarization by determining also the economic orientation of refugees. Refugees who are more economically attached to the land they left behind (e.g., farmers) are more prone to experience adjustment problems.<sup>92</sup>

Demoralization, despair, and resentment, amidst a web of uncertainty and purposeless ennui, is endemic in refugee populations, but children and young people are particularly vulnerable. Youth bulges have been linked to social unrest.<sup>93</sup> In the case of refugee youth, this threat is more pronounced, either because they assume the role of breadwinners<sup>94</sup> or because they see no future. Access to education, which provides skills that are usable in the labor market, can partly mitigate this effect. Otherwise, “lost generations,” with incomplete or no education and no prospects, continue to breed candidates for criminal or militant activities.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, the segregation inside ever-extending camps with inherent propensity to insecurity fosters the long-term institutionalization of refugees, which creates an environment conducive to radicalization.<sup>96</sup>

Residential patterns and inequalities have been linked to radicalization. Urbanization appears to foster radicalization, as it allows more opportunities to connect with the radical milieu.<sup>97</sup> Residential segregation, or self-segregation—common among migrant populations (in Europe)—may further assist radicalization.<sup>98</sup> Crowded, suboptimal housing, lack of productive outlets and prospects are prevalent in many ghettoized migrant neighborhoods—features that facilitate negative coping mechanisms to take root. In turn, segregation reduces socialization between migrants and local populations, which increases “taste-based” discrimination against migrants and negative representations of the native-born population among the ghettoized.<sup>99</sup>

Refugee settlement patterns are of even greater importance as they might preserve the link to the hostilities back home. For instance, the proximity to borders of refugee settlements seems to affect militarization. Refugee camps a short distance from the conflict zone tend to become a magnet for militants across the border, who see camps as places of temporary respite, recruits, and resources.<sup>100</sup> After several cases of cross-border refugee



militarization, UNCHR has decided to set—rather arbitrarily—50km as a safe distance to build refugee settlements.<sup>101</sup>

The size and type of settlements seem to have an equally important impact. According to UNHCR, refugee camps should not exceed a capacity of more than 20,000–30,000.<sup>102</sup> Larger refugee camps are less manageable and more prone to sub-optimal security and humanitarian standards, anti-social behavior, crime, and militarization, especially in less wealthy countries.<sup>103</sup> Data is far less conclusive in the question of settlement types, such as closed camps, open camp facilities, and self-settlement. Closed camps, which are often the first type of facility refugees encounter, offer short-term security, in terms of more effective screening and surveillance.<sup>104</sup> However, in the long run, “warehousing refugees”<sup>105</sup> fosters more grievances and despair, especially if the initial examination of refugees’ status takes more time than anticipated. These grievances might translate into tensions and clashes between (ethnically, religiously, and demographically) disparate refugee communities, which are forced to cohabit, often in appalling conditions.

Moreover, refugee concentrations in areas with low indigenous population tends to increase the sense of threat among locals, who see the increase in the relative size of the refugee population as alarming.<sup>106</sup> In general, the more segregated the refugee settlements are, in terms of forced encampment or distance from urban centers, the higher the militarization threat.<sup>107</sup>

Settlement policies are one of the first indicators of a host state’s **will and capacity** to address refugee needs. Settlement best practices, however, often collide with state preferences. In anticipation of an *imminent* return to their country of origin, states prefer to keep refugees closer to the border to facilitate repatriation<sup>108</sup> and tend “to advance temporary solutions, to prevent refugees from integrating with the local populations.”<sup>109</sup> However, when “temporary” turns permanent and the refugee crisis lingers, “temporary” policies become unsustainable. The refugee experience ceases to be a matter of basic needs provision; it becomes a question of integration and equal rights.

The lack of employment opportunities and means of sustainment often lead to negative coping mechanisms, such as crime, prostitution, and substance abuse.<sup>110</sup> The congregation of refugees in cordoned off camps often creates parallel economies where conflict and crime flourish. Illegal activities thrive particularly in environments where there are exploitable resources or profitable smuggling routes. For the current European refugee crisis, that would be mainly activities linked to migrant smuggling. Crime can also indirectly lead to militarization by breeding insecurity and small arms circulation in the refugee settlements.<sup>111</sup> Generalized insecurity might also give rise to vigilante groups, which aspire to restore security and order.<sup>112</sup>

The link between crime and radicalization is a complex one. On the one hand, the underlying grievances that push individuals to radicalism or crime are quite similar, placing them in the same demographic pool for recruitment. On the other hand, the parallel trajectories of the “crime-terror nexus” extend beyond the level of malleable grievances, as former criminals can cross over to radical Islamist groups in search of a “redemption from past sins”—a redemption that does not “require any change of behavior,” since one can still experience “power, violence, adventure . . . a strong identity, and a sense of rebellion and being anti-establishment.”<sup>113</sup> The newly redeemed differ from *regular* recruits, as they offer experienced human capital with useful skills and



connections. They know how to stay under the radar, procure forged documents, weapons, and funds and, most importantly, they possess tried-and-tested familiarity with violence.<sup>114</sup> This type of cross-over has been a distinct feature of jihadist radicalization among the current wave of those radicalized.<sup>115</sup>

Al Qaeda, in the past, and the “Islamic State,” more recently, have justified involvement in crime not only in terms of *redemption* but also as a necessity—the tools and the spoils (*ghanimah*) in the fight against the “unbelievers.”<sup>116</sup> Indeed, many foreign fighters and militants involved in attacks in Europe have a criminal background. Interestingly, several, especially among those involved in local terrorism, appear to *specialize* in violent crimes and have been incarcerated at some point.<sup>117</sup>

Incarceration and restricted re-integration options after release create a large pool of mentally and physically vulnerable young men who need a point of reference to go through their sentence.<sup>118</sup> While prison gangs often fill this void, in some cases intermixing with individuals convicted for offences related to—Islamist—terrorism presents a different vehicle for redemption.<sup>119</sup>

Personal redemption often follows the need for collective redemption. As Martha Crenshaw has noted, sometimes radicalization belies a desire to “make up for their parents’ failure to resist evil.”<sup>120</sup> For “second-generation” refugees, their parents’ failure to resist the forces that displaced them is a constant reminder in the *temporary settlements* and *temporary lives*. The weaker their parents appear in their effort to cope with displacement in the long run, the stronger their incentive to appear proactive, resorting either to crime or radicalization.

## Conclusions

This paper attempts to advance the discussion regarding the implications of the refugee crisis beyond the “jihadi wolf in refugee clothing” narrative and into the future. The main argument of the article is that long-term radicalization of refugees presents a bigger challenge, which requires a reassessment of our understanding of the radicalization process that has been based on examples of radicalized second-generation migrants. On the contrary, we should consider that refugees and the challenges they pose are inherently different.

This paper presents a model that accounts for the particularities of refugee populations. It traces refugee radicalization across several layers: from personal grievances at the micro level, to the salafi radical milieu and state features and policies across specific socio-economic indicators. Furthermore, the model highlights the “abnormalities” of refugee militarization/radicalization, compared to the radicalization of second-generation migrants, which has been the norm.

The paper shows that in refugee populations, radicalization factors such as personal and collective grievances are different and more pronounced in comparison to second-generation economic migrants. Moreover, other factors such as relative deprivation vis-à-vis poverty and employment opportunities should be assessed not only in relation to the host country but also to the country of origin.

More importantly, the paper shows that there are important factors in refugee radicalization that are absent in traditional radicalization models, such as the **cause of refugees’ flight**, their **prior political organization**, and the **presence of militants** among civilians.

Likewise, the host state's **will and capacity** to address grievances among refugees and the local population and state policies in domains such as settlement, crime, security, and education are defining factors. Moreover, the paper highlights that **external actors** might influence refugee radicalization, especially in weak or struggling host states—an influence that is limited in the case of second-generation economic migrants.

One of the implications of this study is that the policies adopted by host states at an early stage largely predetermine future radicalization. Another implication is that the possibility of refugee radicalization is not the same for every refugee population and in every (European) country. Each presents different characteristics and challenges. Thus, the policies adopted by the E.U. or member-states should be tailored to the specific needs of each community or state.

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76. Richardson, *What Terrorists Want* (see note 24), 78.
77. Karen Jacobsen, "Factors Influencing the Policy Responses of Host Governments to Mass Refugee Influxes," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 3 (1996): 665; Loescher, *Refugee Movements and International Security* (see note 9), 36–8.
78. Jacobsen, "Factors Influencing the Policy Responses of Host Governments to Mass Refugee Influxes" (see note 77), 662–64.
79. Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries* (see note 30); Mike Lebson, "Why Refugees Rebel: Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Refugee Militarization," *International Migration* 51, no. 5 (2013): 141.
80. Lischer, "Collateral Damage" (see note 48); Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).
81. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Jan Oskar Engene, *Terrorism in Western Europe: Explaining the Trends since 1950* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2004), 87–88.
82. Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), 368. Poverty alone, despite popular belief, has shown to be a poor predictor of radicalization and conflict. See for example Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malečková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003): 119–44; Alberto Abadie, "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism," *American Economic Review* 96, no. 2 (2006): 50–6.
83. Alexander Lee, "Who Becomes a Terrorist?: Poverty, Education, and the Origins of Political Violence," *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (2011): 203–45.
84. Krueger and Malečková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism" (see note 82); Christopher Blattman and Laura Ralston, "Generating Employment in Poor and Fragile States: Evidence from Labor Market and Entrepreneurship Programs," *SSRN* (2015): 29–30, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2622220> (accessed February 12, 2018).
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86. Philip Verwimp, "Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq and the Socio-Economic Environment They Faced at Home: A Comparison of European Countries," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016): 68–81. For the implications of the inequalities born out of the French educational system, see Adida, Laitin, and Valfort, *Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian-Heritage Societies* (see note 60), 167–72.
87. McCants and Meserole, "The French Connection" (see note 61).
88. Verwimp, "Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq and the Socio-Economic Environment They Faced at Home" (see note 86), 73.
89. Adida, Laitin, and Valfort, *Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian-Heritage Societies* (see note 60), 24.
90. Andre, Mansouri, and Lobo, "A Fragmented Discourse of Religious Leadership in France" (see note 18), 297.
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