



## THE RECRUITMENT OF YOUTH INTO TERRORIST GROUPS: PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL AND SECURITY ASPECTS

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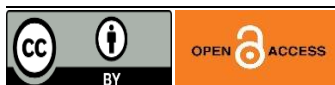
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### ABSTRACT

*The recruitment of youth into terrorist groups represents a multidimensional security challenge that integrates psychological vulnerability, social instability and the increasing influence of digital environments. Based on the established radicalisation frameworks (Moghaddam, Kruglanski, Borum, Wiktorowicz), this article examines the complex mechanisms through which adolescents become susceptible to extremist narratives and recruitment strategies. The analysis introduces an Integrated Multidimensional Model of Youth Radicalisation (IMMRM), which conceptualises radicalisation as the interaction of unmet psychological needs for identity and significance, weakened family and community ties, and exposure to algorithmically reinforced online spaces that normalise extremist content. The study identifies the key risk factors specific to Generation Z and highlights how digital platforms, emotional manipulation and online grooming accelerate the recruitment process. The findings underline the need for systemic, evidence-based prevention combining psychological support, educational interventions, digital literacy and early detection of risk signals. The article advances the argument that an effective safeguarding framework against youth radicalisation and terrorist recruitment must be grounded in a coordinated, interdisciplinary, and technologically informed approach.*

### KEYWORDS

*recruitment; youth; terrorism; radicalization; online recruitment*



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### INTRODUCTION

The recruitment of young people into terrorist groups is becoming increasingly topical and more complex security issue. The dynamics of globalisation, the rise of digital technologies and the spread of social media have significantly influenced the ways in which terrorist organisations reach out to potential members. In this context, young people appear to be an extremely vulnerable group – they are in the process of forming their identity, searching for their place in society, and are often exposed to various forms of social and psychological pressure.

Terrorist groups deliberately exploit this vulnerability and apply sophisticated recruitment strategies – from ideological propaganda to psychological manipulation (known as grooming). The aim of these strategies is to secure long-term loyalty and create a network of followers and potential perpetrators of violent acts.

This phenomenon threatens not only individuals, but also broader social stability and national security. The aim of this article is to present the recruitment of youth as a multidimensional phenomenon and to highlight its deeper psychological, social and technological roots. The theoretical part will explain the concept of radicalisation as a precursor to involvement in extremist structures and analyse the main factors that influence the vulnerability of young people.

The aim of this article is to present youth recruitment as a multidimensional phenomenon and to analyse its deeper psychological, social, and technological roots. The theoretical part will explain in detail the concept of radicalization as a precursor to involvement in extremist structures, followed by an analysis of the main factors that influence the increased vulnerability of youth to these influences. In writing this article, the authors used scientific methods – analysis, synthesis, analytical comparison, deduction, and abstraction. In the concluding section of the article, the authors reflect on the use of the analysed findings on the issue in question and present proposals for possible practical solutions.

## **1 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE PROBLEM**

Terrorism is a complex social phenomenon, the definition of which often varies depending on the cultural, political and historical context. Etymologically, the term "terrorism" comes from the Latin word "Terrere", which means to threaten, frighten or cause terror<sup>1</sup>. In the broadest sense, terrorism can be defined as the organised use of violence to instil fear and achieve political goals. The essence of terrorist activities is the illegal use of force against individuals or property with the intention of intimidating the government, the civilian population or a specific part of it, and fulfilling political, religious or social ambitions. Terrorism can also be understood as the use of threats or violence directed against the constitutional order of states, whereby the states themselves are not its direct victims.

The victims of terrorism can be anonymous persons, specific individuals or strategic and cultural objects. A key aspect of terrorist acts is the intention to cause fear and intimidate the wider society through attacks on innocent victims. In international law and political discussions, terrorism is often understood as asymmetric warfare, where non-state

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<sup>1</sup> Horror is a feeling of fear, anxiety, and dread. It refers to a state in which someone is exposed to something extremely negative, dangerous, or frightening. It can refer to real events, but also to imaginary ideas. Horror encompasses fear, dread, despair, and terror. The context in which the word horror is used is often related to danger, violence, tragedy, or supernatural phenomena.

actors attack civilian targets in order to achieve a psychological effect on the public and political leaders. According to the UN definition, terrorism is *"any act intended to cause death or serious injury to civilians or unarmed persons with the aim of intimidating the population or compelling a government or international organisation to perform or refrain from performing any act"*. (Kubrina, 2018)

There are various definitions of terrorism in Slovakia. The Small Slovak Encyclopaedia from 1993 defines terrorism as *"methods of gross intimidation of political opponents through the threat of violence"* (Kulasik, 2002). The Security Policy Dictionary understands terrorism as *"politically motivated acts, including bombings, kidnappings and other violent acts aimed at intimidating political opponents, influencing public opinion or exerting pressure on individuals or groups of the population"* (Kulasik, 2002). Currently, there is no single or universal definition of terrorism. Some critics argue that it is a *"rhetorical weapon"* to eliminate opponents of the established order. According to Brzobohatý, the perception of terrorism is very vague, ambiguous and subjective. This term evokes various associations, which makes it difficult to analyse this phenomenon. (Smolík, 2020)

### 1.1 Recruitment and enlistment

The recruitment and enlistment in the context of terrorism represent a key process through which terrorist organisations acquire new members who subsequently become involved in their activities, including terrorist attacks. This process has various stages, starting with approaching potential recruits, continuing with persuasion, and ending with the actual acceptance of the individual into the organisation. It is important to distinguish between recruitment, which focuses on finding potential candidates, and enlistment, which involves their active integration into the organisation. The main objective of the recruitment process is to maintain and expand the membership base of a terrorist organisation, which is essential for its long-term functioning. Terrorist organisations often target individuals with weak social ties, such as young people, individuals with strongly radical or fundamentalist views, lonely individuals, or mentally unstable people. These individuals are considered more susceptible to manipulation and acceptance of radical ideologies.

The recruitment process currently makes extensive use of modern technologies, particularly the internet and social media. These platforms provide anonymity and are ideal tools for spreading radical ideas and recruiting new members. Terrorist organisations use the internet to disseminate propaganda, videos and ideological materials, thereby reaching a wider audience. The internet allows not only for the passive reception and sharing of this information, but also for active participation in communities that support radical views. Recruiters use various psychological techniques, including emotional manipulation and offering simple solutions to complex global problems, which contributes to the radicalisation of individuals.

The recruitment process often targets factors such as the search for identity, the desire for a higher meaning in life, or the need for uniqueness that membership in a terrorist organisation can seemingly offer. The persuasion process is often sophisticated and involves not only verbal communication but also non-verbal techniques such as eye contact or gestures, which have a strong emotional and ideological impact on individuals. An important aspect of the recruitment process is the ability of terrorist organisations to use the media, including reports of terrorist attacks, which can elicit sympathy or interest in the ideology among some people. Some organisations also use preachers who spread extremist ideologies in various communities, such as schools or religious centres, thereby directly addressing potential new members. (Lichner et al, 2018)

## **1.2 The Psychological and digital determinants of youth radicalization**

The process of youth radicalisation cannot be explained in isolation as an ideological or political phenomenon, but as the result of complex interactions between psychological, social and digital factors. Due to their developmental characteristics, young people are more susceptible to adopting extreme ideas that offer them a sense of identity, meaning and belonging. According to the "Three Pillars of Radicalisation" model (Kruglanski, Bélanger & Gunaratna, 2019), this process is based on needs, narratives and social networks, which together form a framework in which radical attitudes are internalised.

### **The psychological determinants**

From a psychological perspective, radicalisation is closely linked to young people's need to find meaning, significance and belonging. Adolescents face various developmental challenges – the search for identity, separation from parental authority and the pursuit of autonomy make them vulnerable to the offers of groups that provide them with clear answers and a sense of certainty (Smolík, 2020). Terrorist and extremist organisations exploit these psychological needs by offering a narrative of a 'higher purpose', heroism or revenge, which resonates particularly with individuals with low self-esteem or frustration with their social status. (Lichner et al, 2018)

Kruglanski (2019) describes the concept of the "need for significance", which can lead to radicalisation in situations where an individual experiences feelings of humiliation, rejection or loss of dignity. Combined with a collective narrative that legitimises violence as a "morally justified act", this creates a psychological basis for extremist behaviour. According to Moghaddam (2005), radicalisation proceeds as a "psychological staircase to terrorism", where individuals gradually move from perceiving injustice to believing that violence is the only effective solution.

Group identity is also an important psychological factor. The process of socialisation in radical communities reinforces so-called ingroup-outgroup thinking ("us" versus "them"), which reduces empathy towards others and increases tolerance for violence. Cognitive

dissonance (Festinger, 1957) also plays a significant role, leading individuals to rationalise their actions in line with their new beliefs. Young people in such an environment become convinced of their own moral superiority and perceive violence as a legitimate means of protecting "justice" or "faith".

### **The digital determinants**

The digital environment is a key factor that fundamentally changes the nature of radicalisation. The internet and social networks create virtual communities in which radical ideas spread quickly, anonymously and without territorial boundaries (Conway, Scrivens & Macnair, 2019). At the same time, social media algorithms promote the phenomenon of echo chambers and filter bubbles, which reduce contact with different opinions and reinforce the belief in the "truth" of radical ideologies.

The recruitment strategies of terrorist groups in the online environment often use emotional manipulation, personalised propaganda and grooming, i.e. building trust between the recruiter and the young person. The targeted use of visual and game-oriented elements – so-called "gamification of radicalisation" – makes it possible to transform ideological content into an attractive experience. Videos, memes and interactive applications are designed to evoke a sense of adventure and social recognition.

Cyber anonymity also plays an important role. Platforms such as Telegram, Signal and Rocket Chat allow the creation of closed groups where young people can become radicalised beyond the reach of the authorities. These spaces often serve as so-called incubators of extremism – environments in which extremist identities and collective narratives are formed.

From a psychological point of view, it is dangerous that young users often lack sufficiently developed media and critical skills, which makes them susceptible to disinformation, conspiracy theories and propaganda. The inability to distinguish credible sources from manipulative ones increases the risk of accepting extreme attitudes as "authentic truths".

### **The synergistic effect of psychology and technology**

The psychological and digital determinants of radicalisation work synergistically – young people's psychological needs for identity, meaning and belonging find ideal conditions for fulfilment in the online environment through extremist communities. The digital space is thus not only a platform for spreading propaganda, but also a psychosocial space for the formation of a new identity that can become entrenched in violent forms of behaviour.

Understanding these determinants is key to developing effective prevention strategies. Interventions should aim not only to prevent access to radical content, but also to strengthen the mental resilience, critical thinking and social integration of young people. The combination of psychological knowledge and digital security provides a modern framework for responding effectively to the changing forms of radicalisation in the 21st century.

### 1.3 Radicalization as a precursor to terrorism

Radicalisation is a process that usually precedes recruitment and may or may not lead to violent activities. In the context of the internet and social media, this process plays a crucial role, as the digital environment allows for the faster spread of radical ideologies and the formation of closed groups with shared beliefs. Unlike recruitment itself, radicalisation is a long-term process during which opinions and attitudes that can lead to violent acts. This process can take place individually or collectively – within groups, communities or wider society . (Lichner et al, 2018)

According to Koomen and Plight's definition, radicalisation is *"the development of opinions, beliefs and ideas that lead individuals to ultimately accept the commission of a terrorist act"* (Koomen and Plight, 2016). In this context, social media plays a key role, as it facilitates interaction between already radicalised individuals and those who are susceptible to adopting extreme views.

Radicalization in the online environment can be reinforced by several factors, such as:

1. Developmental factors: Adolescence is characterised by experimentation and the search for one's own identity, which can lead to the rejection of the values of parents and society. Radical attitudes may appear attractive because they differ from traditional norms (Borum, 2011).
2. Social factors: A lack of a sense of belonging, growing up in broken families, or social exclusion can lead to seeking refuge in extremist groups that provide a sense of "belonging" and compensate for the need to be part of a community (Mølmen, M. H., & Ravndal, J. A., 2021; Ranthorp, M., & Meines, M. R., 2024).
3. Technological factors: The current generation is growing up in an environment of modern technology and social media, which gives them access to a wide range of information, but they often lack the ability to critically evaluate this information, which can contribute to their susceptibility to manipulation and the acceptance of radical ideas. (Conway, 2017, Žúborová, V., Borárosová, I., & Vašečka, M., 2019; Binder, J. F., & Kenyon, J., 2022).
4. Economic and political factors: Young people live in a time of economic and political uncertainty, which can lead to concerns about national identity and social stability.
5. Personal experiences: Personal experiences of social exclusion, aggressive upbringing, experiences of violence, or frustration with one's social status can contribute to the emergence of extremism. (Koomen & Pligt, 2016).

Acts of terrorism do not usually appear suddenly and without warning. They are almost always preceded by a process of radicalisation. The process of radicalisation itself does not necessarily lead to terrorist acts, but it represents a phase in which it is possible to prevent the further development of terrorist acts or to reverse them completely. Radicalism

can be seen as the final stage of the process of radicalisation. This process can take place at the individual level (intrapersonal radicalisation), but also within a group, community or subculture. Radicalisation can also affect society as a whole. Radicalisation processes are present in all forms of terrorism, whether political, religious, separatist, environmental or ethno-nationalist (Borum, R., 2011).

#### **1.4 Young people as a target group**

Young people, especially during adolescence, are considered a high-risk target group that is prone to accepting simplified and often distorted views on complex social issues. This age group is characterised by developmental and psychological factors that significantly influence the formation of young people's identities and attitudes. Sympathy for extremism can be manifested in various ways among adolescents, such as violent acts against certain social groups, participation in illegal events, wearing prohibited symbols or founding extremist organisations.

In addition to external manifestations of behaviour, extremism also influences young people's overall view of the world and their way of thinking. Adolescents with extremist tendencies often have unconventional views on social issues and seek simple solutions to complex questions, which can lead to radicalisation.

There are several reasons why young people are more susceptible to such attitudes. The developmental and social psychology explains that adolescence is a period of experimentation and a search for one's own identity, which can lead to a rejection of the values of parents and society. In this context, radical attitudes may appear attractive because they differ from traditional norms.

Another important factor is a lack of a sense of belonging. Young people who grow up in broken families or experience social exclusion may be prone to seeking refuge in extremist groups that give them a sense of "belonging" and compensate for their need to be part of a community. The current generation of adolescents, referred to as Generation – Z or the digital generation, is growing up in an environment of modern technology and social media, which gives them access to a wide range of information. However, they often lack the skills to critically evaluate this information, which increases their vulnerability to manipulation and accepting radical ideas.

Young people also live in a time of economic and political uncertainty, which can lead to concerns about national identity and social stability. Factors that can contribute to the emergence of extremism include personal experience of social exclusion, aggressive upbringing, experiences of violence or frustration with one's own social status. According to the modernisation concept, the younger generation is often considered to be victims of rapid social change, which can lead to disorientation and frustration. This process can influence their propensity for radical behaviour.



An interesting finding is that supporters of extremism include young people who have stable jobs, not just the unemployed. This suggests that the causes of extremism are not only social and economic, but also psychological and cultural. Adolescents who join extremist groups often organise public events such as concerts and marches and contribute to websites with extremist themes. At the same time, there are also sympathisers who identify with these groups only in their opinions or through external manifestations, such as wearing extremist symbols, but do not participate in active activities. (Koomen & Pligt, 2016; Ondrejko, 1994, 2003, Lichner et al, 2018)

## 2 POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND TECHNOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The issue of recruiting young people into terrorist groups requires a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to solving it. Based on the theoretical principles identified in the previous section, we can propose several strategies and measures that could contribute to the prevention and resolution of this serious security problem.

Given that young people are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation due to developmental and psychological factors, it is necessary to focus on preventive measures that strengthen young people's resilience to extremist ideologies. One key aspect is to promote the development of critical thinking, which will enable young people to better evaluate the information they encounter online. Strengthening identity and a sense of belonging to society is also an important element of prevention.

As the analysis shows, young people who suffer from a lack of belonging are more likely to seek refuge in extremist groups. It is therefore essential to create opportunities for meaningful youth participation in social life and to support them in building positive social ties. Psychological support and counselling for young people who are going through crisis situations or experiencing frustration can be another effective prevention tool. These services should be easily accessible and focused on helping young people cope with the emotional and social challenges that can contribute to radicalisation. (Binder, Kenyon, 2022)

Education plays a key role in preventing radicalisation and the recruitment of young people into terrorist groups. It is necessary to implement educational programmes focused on developing media and digital literacy, which will enable young people to better recognise the manipulative techniques used in the online space.

Schools should also include topics related to extremism, terrorism and radicalisation in their curricula, with an emphasis on critical analysis of these phenomena and their social impact. Such educational initiatives should be tailored to the age of the students and should help them understand the complexity of social issues, thereby reducing the likelihood of accepting simplistic and extremist solutions. Raising awareness about the recruitment mechanisms and techniques used by terrorist organisations can also contribute to the prevention of radicalisation. This includes information campaigns targeting young people,



their parents and educators, explaining how terrorist organisations specifically target young people and what psychological techniques they use to manipulate them. (Conway, 2017, Žúborová, Borárosová, Vašečka, 2019; Binder, Kenyon, 2022)

As the internet and social media are the main platforms for spreading extremist ideologies and recruiting new members, regulating the online space is an essential part of addressing this problem. This includes monitoring and removing extremist content, as well as identifying and disrupting recruitment activities in the online space. Cooperation with social media operators and technology companies is key to developing and implementing effective strategies to identify and limit the spread of radical content. At the same time, it is important to ensure that these measures respect fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression.

Given the global nature of terrorism and terrorist organisations, international cooperation is an essential part of effectively addressing the problem of youth recruitment. This cooperation should include the exchange of information, best practices and experiences between countries and international organisations. Coordinated efforts to combat terrorist propaganda and recruitment activities in the online space can increase the effectiveness of preventive measures. At the same time, it is important to support research into radicalisation and youth recruitment, which will contribute to a better understanding of these processes and the development of more effective countermeasures. (Conway, 2017, Žúborová, Borárosová, Vašečka, 2019; Binder, Kenyon, 2022)

### **3 MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, AND DIGITAL DETERMINANTS OF ADOLESCENT RADICALIZATION**

The radicalization of adolescents is the result of an interplay between individual psychological needs, the social environment, and the specific characteristics of the digital world. To gain a deeper understanding of this process, it is appropriate to draw on several established models of radicalization and integrate them into a synthetic framework adapted to the Slovak context.

This analytical section is based on the “psychological staircase to terrorism” model (Moghaddam, 2005), the “Three Pillars of Radicalization” concept (Kruglanski, Bélanger & Gunaratna, 2019), Borum’s four-stage model of radicalization (2011), and Wiktorowicz’s theory of joining extremist groups (2005).

The following table provides a schematic comparison of the key characteristics of each model and their relevance to adolescent radicalization (table.1).

Table 1 At-Risk vs. Resilient Adolescents

<b>Domain</b>	<b>At-risk adolescent (higher susceptibility to radicalization)</b>	<b>Resilient adolescent (higher resistance to radicalization)</b>
<b>Need for meaning and identity</b>	Strongly felt need to "be someone," feelings of insignificance, often seeks identity outside family and school	Relatively stable sense of self-worth; identity supported by family, school and extracurricular activities
<b>Self-esteem</b>	Low self-esteem, frequent self-devaluation or, conversely, fragile "inflated" confidence	Adequate self-esteem; ability to acknowledge weaknesses without excessive shame
<b>Identity</b>	Conflicted, fragmented identity; sense of "I don't belong anywhere"	Integrated identity; sense of belonging to multiple positive groups (family, school, clubs)
<b>Emotion regulation</b>	Impulsivity; difficulty managing anger, frustration, and shame	Ability to delay reactions; use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies
<b>Perception of injustice</b>	Perceives the world as deeply unfair; feelings of victimhood; blaming specific groups ("them")	Differentiates between personal adversity and systemic injustice; open to multiple explanations
<b>Family relationships</b>	Weak emotional connection, conflict, distrust or disinterest; lack of support	Relatively stable, supportive relationships; space for dialogue and sharing problems
<b>School environment</b>	Experiences of bullying, academic failure, frequent criticism, lack of recognition	Minimal or adequately addressed bullying; experiences success and recognition (academic/extracurricular)
<b>Peer relationships</b>	Often marginal member of peer groups or part of "protest" subcultures; contact with radicalized peers	Accepted by peer groups that promote prosocial values
<b>Online behavior</b>	High amount of time in online environments with polarized or extremist content; anonymous identities	Balanced online activity; exposure to diverse content; basic media literacy
<b>Personality traits</b>	Higher sensation-seeking, impulsivity, neuroticism; low frustration tolerance	Higher conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to dialogue; higher frustration tolerance
<b>Coping and stress response</b>	Predominantly maladaptive strategies (escape into online world, aggression, substance misuse)	Adaptive strategies (seeking help, conversation, sports, creative activities)
<b>Attitude toward authority and norms</b>	Strong opposition; rigid "anti-system" views; black-and-white worldview	Critical thinking combined with ability to engage in dialogue and accept plurality of viewpoints

Source: own processing - modified according to Kruglanski, Bélanger & Gunaratna, 2019

These models complement one another: Moghaddam highlights the vertical process of escalation, Kruglanski emphasizes the need for significance and social networks, Borum analyzes cognitive frames, and Wiktorowicz describes the mechanisms of group entry. When applied to the Slovak Gen Z context, it is essential to add the digital dimension (social media, algorithms, online communities).

Based on the theoretical approaches analyzed, an Integrated Multidimensional Model of Adolescent Radicalization (IMMRM) can be proposed for the needs of security and prevention practice in Slovakia. The model draws from the psychological concept of the need for significance (Kruglanski et al., 2019), the dynamics of frustration and perceived injustice (Moghaddam, 2005; Borum, 2011), the theory of social bonds in joining extremist groups (Wiktorowicz, 2005), and the influence of the digital environment on the formation of extremist identities (Conway, Scrivens & Macnair, 2019). It assumes three interconnected dimensions – psychological, social, and digital.

The psychological dimension includes the need for significance, recognition, and identity (Kruglanski et al., 2019), experiences of injustice, humiliation, or marginalization (Moghaddam, 2005; Borum, 2011), and low self-esteem or identity conflict typical of adolescence.

The social dimension is based on the assumption that the risk of radicalization increases in dysfunctional family environments, in situations marked by conflict, neglect, or weak emotional attachment. The school environment also plays a significant role — especially experiences of bullying, academic failure, or lack of support. Peer groups and local subcultures are also important, as they may normalize extremist patterns of behavior. The radicalization process accelerates in cases of personal contact with radicalized individuals or recruiters (Wiktorowicz, 2005).

The digital dimension reflects the specifics of the online environment in which adolescents spend a substantial amount of time. Dominant features include radicalizing narratives and visual propaganda circulated through social media (Conway et al., 2019), as well as the effects of echo chambers and filter bubbles, which reinforce one-sided perspectives. Online grooming, the gamification of radicalization, memes, interactive elements, and the anonymity of the internet — which enables young people to experiment with identity without immediate consequences — also play an important role.

The IMMRM model assumes that the risk of radicalization increases significantly when these three dimensions overlap synergistically — when an adolescent with an unfulfilled psychological need for significance (P) lives in a socially unstable environment (S) and simultaneously operates within digital communities that normalize radical content (D).

#### 4 RISK FACTORS FOR RADICALIZATION AMONG GENERATION Z

Within the IMMRM framework, several demonstrable risk factors can be identified for Generation Z. Psychological risks are primarily associated with an intensified need to stand out and feel “exceptional,” heightened sensitivity to humiliation or exclusion, feelings of helplessness and frustration, as well as a higher prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms. These conditions reduce a young person’s ability to process complex information and increase susceptibility to black-and-white thinking (Kruglanski et al., 2019; Moghaddam, 2005).

Social factors include weakened family bonds and a conflictual home environment, experiences of bullying (both offline and online), stigmatization, exclusion from peer groups, or living in communities with low social cohesion. Risk is further increased by contact with peers who sympathize with extremist ideologies or who are actively involved in radicalized groups (Borum, 2011; Wiktorowicz, 2005).

Digital risks relate to excessive time spent in closed online communities (gaming environments, radicalized forums, Discord/Telegram groups), repeated exposure to hateful or conspiratorial content, and interaction with radicalizing narratives presented in visually appealing forms (memes, music videos, “heroic” clips). Low media and digital literacy also plays a significant role, as it reduces the ability to distinguish manipulation from factual information (Conway et al., 2019).

Including the IMMRM in the analytical section of the article allows theoretical concepts to be linked with practical recommendations for prevention. The model also provides a foundation for developing targeted educational programs, strengthening digital literacy, and enhancing psychosocial support for at-risk adolescent groups—representing key tools for preventing radicalization in the context of the Slovak Republic.

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the multidimensional analysis, it can be concluded that the radicalization of adolescents in the Slovak context does not arise in isolation but is the result of the synergistic interaction of psychological, social, and digital determinants. The Integrated Multidimensional Model of Adolescent Radicalization (IMMRM) demonstrates that the risk of radicalization increases significantly especially when an adolescent simultaneously experiences an unmet need for identity and significance, weakened family and school bonds, and intensive exposure to online environments that normalize extremist narratives.

The analysis indicates that Generation Z is substantially more vulnerable than previous generations to online radicalization mechanisms, particularly due to phenomena such as echo chambers, algorithmic content filtering, visually appealing forms of propaganda, and the gamification of extremist ideologies. Psychological risk factors (low

self-esteem, the need to stand out, sensitivity to humiliation), social circumstances (bullying, social exclusion, weak family ties), and digital dynamics (anonymity, closed forums, conspiratorial narratives) mutually reinforce one another.

Terrorism is a complex social phenomenon involving the use or threat of violence to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives. Although definitions vary depending on cultural and political contexts, the core element is the intent to instill fear and intimidate society.

Recruitment and enlistment represent key processes through which terrorist organizations acquire new members. These processes include several stages, from identifying potential candidates to their active integration into the organization. The internet and social media significantly facilitate these processes by providing a platform for disseminating extremist ideologies and enabling terrorist organizations to reach a wider audience.

Youth are particularly vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment into terrorist organizations. This vulnerability is shaped by developmental and psychological factors, as well as social and cultural influences. Young people in adolescence seek identity and a place in society, which may make them more susceptible to extremist ideologies. Factors such as a lack of belonging, personal experiences of social exclusion, or frustration with one's social status can contribute to increased vulnerability.

In conclusion, the IMMRM provides a framework that is particularly suitable for the Slovak environment, as it integrates internationally established models of radicalization (Moghaddam, Kruglanski, Borum, Wiktorowicz) while simultaneously reflecting the rapidly changing digital contexts in which Slovak youth operate. This framework enables better targeting of preventive measures, identification of at-risk groups, and the design of interventions that respond to the needs of adolescents in the contemporary information environment.

### **Recommendations for practice**

Based on the synthetic IMMRM model, several specific recommendations can be identified that complement previous proposals and focus on the three key dimensions of radicalization. These recommendations include the implementation of comprehensive prevention programs aimed at strengthening young people's resilience to radicalization. Such programs should include the development of critical thinking, media literacy, and social skills.

Terrorism is a complex social phenomenon that involves the use of violence or the threat of violence to achieve political, religious or ideological goals. Its definitions may vary depending on the cultural and political context, but the basic element is the intention to cause fear and intimidate society. Recruitment and enlistment are key processes through which terrorist organisations gain new members. These processes involve various stages,

from approaching potential candidates to actively integrating them into the organisation. The internet and social media significantly facilitate these processes, as they provide a platform for the dissemination of extremist ideologies and enable terrorist organisations to reach a wider audience

The following recommendations correspond to the psychological, social, digital, research, and legislative dimensions of prevention:

**Recommendations in the Psychological Dimension:**

- Establish systematic programs focused on building adolescents' self-esteem, resilience, and identity, particularly within school settings.
- Strengthen the availability of psychological services, crisis intervention, and preventive programs in schools and communities.
- Implement programs aimed at reducing feelings of isolation, frustration, or shame, which, according to Moghaddam and Kruglanski, represent key triggers in radicalization processes.

**Recommendations in the Social Dimension:**

- Strengthen family-oriented interventions—parental education, counseling services, and programs aimed at improving family relationships, which reduce adolescents' vulnerability.
- Introduce school-based prevention programs addressing bullying, social exclusion, and stigmatization, as these factors are among the main entry points into radicalization according to Borum and Wiktorowicz.
- Support community-based activities for youth (sports, arts, volunteering) that enhance a sense of belonging and serve as protection against entry into high-risk peer groups.

**Recommendations in the Digital Dimension:**

- Strengthen digital and media literacy, including the ability to identify manipulative content, conspiracy narratives, and radicalization strategies.
- Create educational modules in schools and communities about the risks of online radicalization, gamified recruitment strategies, and the dangers of anonymous online spaces.
- Improve monitoring of high-risk platforms in cooperation with state and security institutions, technology companies, and social media providers.

**Recommendations for Research and Security Practice:**

- Develop a national framework for monitoring radicalization trends among adolescents in the online environment (SOCMINT/OSINT).
- Support interdisciplinary research combining psychology, sociology, security studies, and digital analytics.
- Strengthen the training of professionals (social workers, psychologists, teachers, police officers) in the early detection of radicalization signals.

- Implement evidence-based procedures inspired by international best practices (Aarhus Model, Hayat, EXIT programs) and adapt them to the Slovak context.

**Recommendations for Legislation and State Policy:**

- Update national strategic documents on the prevention of radicalization to reflect the dynamics of the digital environment.
- Introduce standardized protocols for working with radicalized adolescents, similar to existing procedures for violent behavior or addictions.
- Support security policies aimed at protecting minors in the online environment, particularly on closed platforms (Telegram, Discord, encrypted chats).

**Challenges for the future**

Despite the proposed solutions, there are several challenges that will need to be addressed in the future:

1. The rapid development of technology and communication platforms, which can provide terrorist organisations with new tools to spread their ideology and recruit new members. It is necessary to ensure that preventive measures keep pace with these developments.
2. Balancing between the need to regulate the online space and the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression. It is important to find a balance that allows for effective prevention of radicalisation without unduly restricting civil liberties.
3. The need to address the root causes of radicalisation, including socio-economic factors, political marginalisation and cultural conflicts. These deeper problems require long-term and comprehensive solutions that go beyond security measures.
4. The vulnerability of new generations of young people to radicalisation in the context of a changing global situation and new social challenges. Preventive strategies need to be continuously updated and adapted to the specific needs and characteristics of new generations .
5. The need to evaluate the effectiveness of preventive measures and interventions. It is important to develop methods for measuring the success of these measures and to use the knowledge gained to continuously improve them.

In conclusion, we can say that the issue of recruiting young people into terrorist groups is a complex security problem that requires a coordinated approach involving preventive, educational, social and regulatory measures. Only through a comprehensive approach and international cooperation can we effectively protect young people from radicalisation and recruitment into terrorist organisations and thus ensure a stable and secure society. In summary, the issue of youth recruitment into terrorist organizations represents a complex security challenge that requires a coordinated approach involving preventive, educational, social, and regulatory measures. The analysis confirms that



radicalization prevention must be multidimensional and responsive to the psychological, social, and digital determinants that shape the behavior of Generation Z. Effective protection of young people from radicalization therefore requires systematic support from schools, families, and communities, which play a key role in building resilience.

An important protective factor is the development of digital literacy and the ability to critically engage with online content, as most radicalization processes today occur within social media and multimedia platforms. The radicalization of adolescents is not the result of simple ideological indoctrination but rather a combination of developmental identity needs, experiences of frustration, and the intense influence of online environments that normalize extremist narratives.

This implies that preventive measures must be continuous, adaptive, and based on real-time monitoring of trends in the digital space. Only through such a comprehensive and long-term coordinated approach—supported by international cooperation and the sharing of best practices—can we effectively protect young people from radicalization and recruitment into terrorist organizations while strengthening the stability and security of society.

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