

PhD in Political Science

Exclusion and Segregation While Living Together: Factors associated with cohesion and violent intentions among Brussels adolescents and young adults

Elham Mansoury Babhoutak

Supervisors: prof. Dimokritos Kavadias, PhD en prof. Bram Spruyt, PhD

Abstract

Which factors influence social cohesion and violent intentions among adolescents and young adults in Western societies? There is a widespread assumption among scholars, policymakers, and the public that “radicalization” is mainly linked to specific groups, such as right-wing, left-wing, and Muslim extremists. Consequently, this creates blind spots regarding the factors associated with social cohesion and violent intentions within the larger society, increasing the risk of adopting an overly narrow view of these processes. The relationships between these factors among adolescents and young adults before violence occurs remain unclear.

By combining quantitative (survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) research designs with an in-depth case study of the Brussels Capital Region, this dissertation investigates (1) how Brussels adolescents experience social cohesion through controversial topics in the classroom, (2) the extent to which perceived discrimination attitudes are related to the rejection of representative democracy and violent intentions, (3) the existence of a “silent majority” regarding violent intentions and its association with feelings of disconnectedness and revolutionary preferences, and (4) how segregation leads to

isolation and influences the development of strong Islamic and Islamist identities. The findings suggest that structural societal conditions largely determine how adolescents perceive and experience everyday life. Ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity is not experienced as a “melting pot” or a “salad bowl,” but rather as an “archipelago” that metaphorically stands for limited or virtually non-existent bridging. Additionally, the studies show that rejecting representative democracy, favoring revolutionary preferences, and violent intentions are processes that begin at an early age in adolescence.

In sum, this dissertation offers an in-depth study of the factors influencing social cohesion and violent intentions in times of uncertainty and terror threats in Western Europe. The findings also provide a touchstone for various policies to develop effective strategies to prevent violent intentions and the erosion of social cohesion among adolescents and young adults.