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Preventing Institutional Radicalization in Policing: Reconstructing the Staircase through Multi-Level Governance Framework

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Abstract

Radicalization has long been framed as a phenomenon emerging outside the state within civilian communities, informal networks, and marginalized social spaces, while security institutions are typically positioned as counter-actors presumed to be relatively immune from ideological infiltration. This article challenges that assumption by advancing the concept of *institutional radicalization*: a gradual and latent process through which extremist ideologies develop within formal state organizations and potentially reshape their normative orientation and operational capacity. By reconstructing the *Staircase to Terrorism* within the context of policing institutions, this study extends radicalization theory from the individual level to the institutional domain. Drawing on a qualitative institutional case study based on multi-actor interviews, document analysis, and thematic coding, the findings reveal that radicalization within policing organizations cannot be reduced to individual ideological deviance. Rather, it emerges from the convergence of three mutually reinforcing dynamics, such as vertical psychological escalation triggered by perceived injustice and professional identity dissonance; horizontal legitimation through closed relational networks and ideological solidarity; and structural facilitation through access to coercive authority and institutional resources. Institutional risk intensifies when ideological commitment intersects with organizational capacity. Building on this synthesis, the article develops the Integrated Multi-Level Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention, reframing radicalization as a governance vulnerability rather than a purely individual pathology. Normatively, the study cautions against excessive internal securitization and emphasizes the necessity of proportionate, multi-level prevention strategies grounded in organizational justice, relational inclusivity, and accountable oversight. By extending radicalization theory into the institutional sphere, this article contributes to critical terrorism studies while offering an analytical framework for strengthening ideological resilience within security organizations.

Keywords: Institutional Radicalization, Staircase to Terrorism, Security Governance, Policing, Institutional Vulnerability, Multi-Level Prevention, Ideological Resilience

1. Introduction

Radicalization has classically been understood as a social and psychological process unfolding within civilian communities and non-state networks. Mainstream terrorism scholarship explains how individuals move from perceptions of injustice toward the internalization of extremist ideology and, under certain conditions, engagement in violence (Hoffman, 2006). This perspective conceptualizes radicalization as an escalatory process rooted in identity dynamics, marginalization, and social conflict (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017), often associated with relative deprivation and grievance formation (Gurr, 1970). Despite the extensive development of research on pathways into extremism, attention to radicalization within formal state institutions, particularly policing organizations, remains comparatively limited.

At the macro-security level, terrorism has increasingly been recognized not merely as episodic violence but as a defining non-traditional security threat in the post–Cold War era. Yunanto and Damayanti (2017) argue that the end of bipolar ideological confrontation shifted global security typologies from conventional military threats toward asymmetric and non-traditional challenges, with terrorism emerging as a primary concern in national and international security policymaking. In this framing, terrorism is not only an extraordinary crime but also a crime against humanity, given its capacity to destabilize political order, erode social trust, and polarize societies. Moreover, effective counterterrorism requires a strategic balance between coercive security measures (hard approach) and interventions addressing ideological, social, and psychological root causes (soft approach). This dual strategic logic is analytically significant. If terrorism is both a security threat and an ideological phenomenon requiring governance-sensitive responses, then radicalization cannot be conceptualized solely as an external societal problem. The question becomes more complex when ideological processes unfold within institutions entrusted with coercive authority. Despite the extensive development of research on pathways into extremism, attention to radicalization within formal state institutions, particularly policing organizations, remains comparatively limited.

Moghaddam's (2005) *Staircase to Terrorism* provides one of the most systematic frameworks for understanding radicalization as a staged process. The model conceptualizes radicalization as a progression beginning with perceived injustice (the ground floor), followed by frustration and the search for alternatives, displacement of aggression, moral engagement with extremist narratives, and ultimately terrorist action. Radicalization is thus portrayed as progressive and selective, shaped by structural and social contexts that condition movement between stages (Moghaddam, 2005).

However, subsequent scholarship suggests that while the staircase model remains analytically robust, its linear progression may not fully capture contemporary radicalization dynamics. Prindani and Syauqillah (2025), in their study on digital-era radicalization in Indonesia, argue that radicalization processes increasingly unfold through interconnected and overlapping phases, particularly under the influence of social media ecosystems and encrypted communication platforms. Rather than moving strictly step-by-step, individuals may experience accelerated cognitive and relational reinforcement due to algorithmic exposure and online network clustering. This digital compression effect challenges purely sequential interpretations of escalation. Therefore, although Moghaddam's framework offers a powerful psychological architecture, its application in contemporary institutional contexts requires integration with network-based and digitally mediated radicalization dynamics (Prindani & Syauqillah, 2025). Subsequent theoretical syntheses have emphasized that radicalization reflects the interaction of cognitive, relational, and environmental mechanisms rather than a simple linear pathway (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

However, the staircase model has been predominantly applied to individuals operating within broader society. Formal organizations such as the police possess hierarchical structures, institutional cultures, and legally sanctioned coercive authority that significantly differentiate internal radicalization dynamics. Policing institutions are not ordinary social arenas; they hold access to armed force, control over sensitive intelligence, and state-legitimized authority to use violence (Kraska, 2007). In this context, radicalization cannot be treated solely as an individual deviation but may shift the normative and professional orientation of the institution itself. Organizational identity and justice theories suggest that members internalize institutional norms and respond to

perceived fairness or injustice within hierarchical systems (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tyler, 2006), potentially creating openings for ideological realignment.

Contemporary radicalization literature further indicates that pathways to extremism involve interactions among cognitive shifts, group dynamics, and environmental exposure (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Individuals rarely radicalize in isolation; they progress through stages of identification, moral justification, and solidarity formation (Wiktorowicz, 2005). Group processes and social networks reinforce ideological commitment and normalize radical narratives (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When such processes unfold within formal institutions, internal networks and subcultures may function either as accelerators or restraints of radicalization.

In the digital era, these dynamics have become increasingly complex. Sageman (2008) stated that contemporary extremist networks operate through decentralized online communication, while Silber and Bhatt (2007) highlight the role of virtual platforms in facilitating radicalization pathways. Digital transformation enables the internalization of extremist narratives without physical group presence (Neumann, 2013). Members of policing institutions remain embedded within the same digital ecosystem as the broader public and, therefore, are not immune to exposure to extremist ideologies.

The concept of radicalization itself remains contested. Kundnani (2012) critiques policy approaches that reduce radicalization to a linear progression toward violence, arguing that such simplifications risk legitimizing excessive securitization. This critique is particularly relevant within policing organizations, where overly repressive responses to suspected internal radicalization may generate distrust and legitimacy paradoxes. A more comprehensive conceptual framework is therefore required, one that explains escalation processes while also accounting for governance implications and proportional intervention.

Empirical evidence from Indonesia demonstrates that radicalization within state security institutions is not merely theoretical but documented. Data collected in this study indicate that personnel within the Indonesian National Police have been identified as exposed to radical ideologies across ranks, with the majority concentrated at the non-commissioned officer level (128 personnel), followed by seven junior officers, one senior officer, and one civil servant, respectively. Additionally, in 2019, a national survey by the SETARA Institute reported that nearly 4% of military and police personnel were exposed to radical ideologies (SETARA Institute, 2019). These findings illustrate that radicalization is not confined to civilian society but has penetrated institutions normatively mandated to uphold national stability.

Concrete cases further reinforce the urgency of this issue. The dissertation documents instances of police personnel allegedly affiliating with extremist organizations, including the case of Brigadier S, reported to have joined ISIS, the arrest of a police woman affiliated with Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), and indications of intolerant narratives disseminated through internal communication groups involving regional police officials. Moreover, data from Densus 88 and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) indicate a significant increase in violent extremist content in digital spaces, with thousands of accounts and tens of thousands of pieces of content identified in recent years (BNPT, 2023). These developments demonstrate that radicalization within policing institutions unfolds through the interaction of ideological narratives, social networks, and digital ecosystems.

Although internal measures, such as the formulation of intolerance and radicalism indicators by the Professional and Security Division (Propam) and ideological screening during recruitment, have been implemented, responses remain largely reactive and enforcement-oriented. A systematic conceptual framework explaining how radicalization develops gradually within formal organizational structures, and how psychological, relational, and structural dimensions interact in that process, remains underdeveloped. This gap underscores the need to integrate escalation-based radicalization theory, particularly the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005), with organizational theory in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of institutional radicalization and a stronger foundation for governance-based prevention strategies.

Building upon this problem, this article reconstructs radicalization within the institutional context by integrating the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005) with group radicalization scholarship and theories of security organization (Borum, 2011; Kraska, 2007). It advances the concept of institutional radicalization as a staged process of extremist ideological internalization within formal organizations, mediated by the interaction of psychological escalation, relational legitimation, and institutional operational structures. Radicalization is thus conceptualized as a multi-level dynamic capable not only of affecting individuals but also of transforming the normative orientation and operational capacity of security institutions.

As a conceptual implication, this article develops a multi-level risk and prevention model. If radicalization follows an escalatory pattern as described in Staircase Theory (Moghaddam, 2005), and if relational and structural dynamics reinforce that escalation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Kraska, 2007), then prevention must be designed simultaneously across three levels: psychological, social-relational, and operational-institutional. This approach extends radicalization studies into the domain of state organizations while offering a proportionate, governance-based, and risk-sensitive framework for institutional resilience.

2. Theoretical Framework

Radicalization in contemporary terrorism literature is understood as a gradual process involving cognitive, affective, and normative transformations prior to the adoption of violent behavior (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Within this framework, radicalization is not a singular event but a dynamic progression shaped by the interaction between individuals and their environments. Moghaddam's (2005) *Staircase to Terrorism* provides one of the most systematic representations of this dynamic. The model places perceived injustice at the "*ground floor*," which may evolve into frustration, displacement of aggression, moral legitimization of violence, and ultimately terrorist action. At each stage, fewer individuals proceed to the next level, rendering radicalization both selective and context-dependent (Moghaddam, 2005). This staged understanding is further supported by theoretical syntheses emphasizing that radicalization involves the interplay of grievance, identity, and environmental conditions rather than a simple linear pathway (Gurr, 1970; Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

However, the staircase model remains conceptually centered on individuals operating within broader societal contexts. A critical yet underexplored question concerns how escalation mechanisms function when individuals are embedded within formal organizations characterized by hierarchical structures, normative cultures, and coercive authority. In policing institutions, individuals interact not only with external social environments but also with promotion systems, internal relational patterns, and professional norms that shape institutional identity. Organizational identity theory suggests that members internalize institutional values and norms (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), while organizational justice theory underscores the role of perceived fairness in shaping institutional legitimacy (Tyler, 2006). Consequently, perceived injustice at the "*ground floor*" may stem not only from external socio-political dynamics but also from internal bureaucratic experiences such as dissatisfaction with promotion processes, perceptions of discrimination, or conflicts between professional and personal value systems.

Group radicalization theory further emphasizes that social legitimation plays a central role in accelerating ideological commitment (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). When individuals encounter support or resonance within their social networks, extremist ideas are no longer perceived as deviant but as collectively validated identities. Processes of identification and moral alignment within groups facilitate what Wiktorowicz (2005) describes as cognitive openings that deepen ideological engagement. In policing organizations, internal relational networks, both formal and informal, may function as arenas for the normalization of extremist discourse, particularly when formed within closed groups or ideological affiliations. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), such dynamics can generate strong in-group cohesion and ideological solidarity. This process produces what may be termed "*horizontal escalation*," whereby ideological commitment is reinforced through social legitimation, operating alongside the "*vertical escalation*" described in Moghaddam's staircase model.

Beyond psychological and relational dimensions, organizational structure plays a decisive role in determining radicalization risk. Policing institutions possess distinctive characteristics, including access to weapons, control

over sensitive intelligence, and legally sanctioned authority to use force (Kraska, 2007). When individuals who have undergone psychological escalation and obtained social legitimation gain access to operational resources, the potential transformation of ideology into actionable capacity increases significantly. In this sense, organizational structure may function as a high-risk facilitator when control mechanisms and oversight structures are insufficiently effective.

Based on this integration, this article reconstructs radicalization as a multi-level phenomenon involving three primary dimensions: (1) a psychological dimension that follows the pattern of vertical escalation articulated in the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005); (2) a social-relational dimension that reinforces ideological legitimation through networks and collective identity (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979); and (3) an operational-institutional dimension that determines the capacity for ideological actualization within formal structures (Kraska, 2007). These dimensions do not operate independently but interact dynamically. Institutional radicalization emerges when vertical individual escalation converges with horizontal network legitimation and structural opportunity within the organization.

Accordingly, the concept of institutional radicalization proposed in this article is defined as a staged process of extremist ideological internalization within formal organizations, shaped by the simultaneous interaction of individual cognitive escalation, group-based social legitimation, and institutional operational structures. This reconstruction extends Moghaddam's staircase model from the individual level to the institutional domain and provides the theoretical foundation for the development of a multi-level risk and prevention framework discussed in the subsequent section.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using an institutional case study design to reconstruct the dynamics of radicalization within policing organizations. This approach was selected because the primary objective is not merely to identify the presence of radical ideological exposure, but to understand how ideological escalation unfolds gradually within the formal structure of the state. The research paradigm is descriptive-analytical, oriented toward the development of conceptually grounded constructs based on empirical data. Accordingly, the study does not seek statistical generalization but rather analytical generalization, namely, the development of theoretical propositions that may be examined and potentially replicated within other security institutions.

Data collection was conducted through a combination of in-depth interviews, document analysis, and contextual observation. Interviews were carried out with diverse categories of informants to ensure perspectival variation and minimize single-source bias. These included police personnel identified as exposed or vulnerable to radical ideologies, internal police officials, representatives from counter-terrorism agencies, academic experts, and former terrorism convicts. This multi-actor approach enabled the exploration of radicalization dynamics from individual, organizational, and external ecosystem perspectives. In addition, internal policy documents, institutional regulations, and preventive indicators implemented within the organization were analyzed to understand structural responses to radicalization risks. Observations of mentoring practices and internal oversight mechanisms were conducted to contextualize the findings and assess the consistency between normative policy frameworks and implementation practices.

Data analysis followed an interactive analytical model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Thematic coding was supported by NVivo software to identify recurring patterns and interrelationships across categories. The coding structure was developed iteratively based on three primary analytical dimensions: psychological, social-relational, and structural-operational, which were subsequently synthesized with the *Staircase to Terrorism* framework (Moghaddam, 2005). The first stage of analysis focused on identifying gradual escalation patterns within informants' narratives and experiential accounts. The second stage reconstructed the interaction among dimensions in order to conceptualize institutional radicalization as a multi-level phenomenon. To ensure credibility, the study employed source triangulation and cross-verification among informants. Given the sensitivity of researching security institutions, informant identities were

anonymized, and data were presented categorically to preserve institutional integrity and adhere to ethical considerations.

4. Results

The findings indicate that radicalization within policing organizations does not unfold as a singular or isolated event but rather as a layered and gradual process involving the interaction of psychological, relational, and structural dimensions. The identified patterns of escalation are consistent with the logic of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005). However, within institutional settings, each stage is shaped not only by individual experiences but also by organizational dynamics and internal networks.

4.1. Psychological Dimension: Perceived Injustice and Cognitive Escalation

At the initial stage, institutional radicalization frequently originates from perceived injustice or dissatisfaction arising from internal bureaucratic experiences. Informants reported that factors such as dissatisfaction with promotion processes, perceptions of discrimination, and tensions between professional norms and personal ideological convictions functioned as catalysts for what can be described as a cognitive opening. This stage corresponds to the "ground floor" in Moghaddam's (2005) model, where perceived injustice creates space for the search for alternative narratives.

The dissertation data reveal that several personnel identified as exposed to radical ideologies were situated at ranks relatively vulnerable to structural pressures, particularly at the non-commissioned officer level. This pattern suggests that organizational factors such as hierarchical stratification and unequal access to career advancement may interact with individual psychological dynamics. At this stage, radicalization does not yet manifest in overt action; rather, it develops through the internalization of narratives that morally justify dissatisfaction and reinterpret professional grievances through ideological lenses.

4.2. Social-Relational Dimension: Ideological Legitimation and Normalization

Escalation intensifies when individuals obtain social legitimation for their ideological views through relational networks. The findings indicate the formation of closed discussion groups, communication via online messaging platforms, and expressions of ideological solidarity both within and beyond institutional boundaries. This process reflects what may be termed "horizontal escalation," whereby ideological commitment is reinforced through group interaction and social validation.

In several cases documented in the dissertation, the involvement of police personnel in networks affiliated with extremist groups demonstrates how relational support can function as an accelerator of ideological commitment. At this stage, extremist narratives are no longer perceived as deviant but as morally legitimate expressions of collective solidarity. This dynamic aligns with group radicalization literature emphasizing the role of collective identity and network reinforcement in intensifying ideological commitment (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). The normalization of discourse within closed networks reduces cognitive dissonance and lowers the psychological threshold for further escalation.

4.3. Structural-Operational Dimension: Institutional Access and Capacity

The most critical phase within policing organizations emerges when psychological escalation and relational legitimation intersect with structural access to operational resources. Policing institutions provide access to firearms, intelligence information, and legally sanctioned authority to use force. In such contexts, the risk of radicalization increases substantially because ideologically internalized beliefs may be translated into actionable capacity.

The dissertation documents instances in which ideological exposure among police personnel did not remain confined to belief systems but extended to indications of support for extremist networks or the dissemination of intolerant narratives within internal spaces. Furthermore, data from national counter-terrorism authorities indicate a significant increase in violent extremist content circulating within digital environments in recent years. These developments illustrate how digital ecosystems expand opportunities for ideological infiltration even within formal institutions. When ideological commitment intersects with institutional authority, radicalization acquires structural leverage.

4.4. Multi-Level Interaction: Vertical and Horizontal Escalation

The central finding of this study is that institutional radicalization does not follow a strictly linear progression. Rather, it evolves through the simultaneous interaction of vertical escalation psychological stages corresponding to Moghaddam's staircase—and horizontal escalation, whereby ideological commitment is socially reinforced through networks. These two dynamics acquire heightened risk when they intersect with the operational structure of the organization.

Institutional radicalization thus occurs when three conditions converge: (1) individual cognitive escalation, (2) relational legitimation through group networks, and (3) structural opportunity within the organization. This configuration demonstrates that radicalization within policing institutions is not merely a matter of individual ideology but a matter of institutional governance. Organizational structures may function as brakes through effective oversight and normative reinforcement, yet they may also act as accelerators when oversight gaps or permissive subcultures remain undetected.

4.5. Integrated Multi-Level Model: Risk and Prevention of Institutional Radicalization

As a synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical reconstruction, this article develops an Integrated Multi-Level Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention (see Figure 1). The model emerges from the integration of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005), group radicalization literature (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017), and theories of organizational vulnerability within security institutions (Kraska, 2007). The diagram conceptualizes institutional radicalization as a multi-level process consisting of three interacting layers of risk: psychological, social-relational, and operational-institutional. These levels do not unfold linearly; rather, they form a dynamic configuration that determines the intensity of escalation and the likelihood of operational actualization.
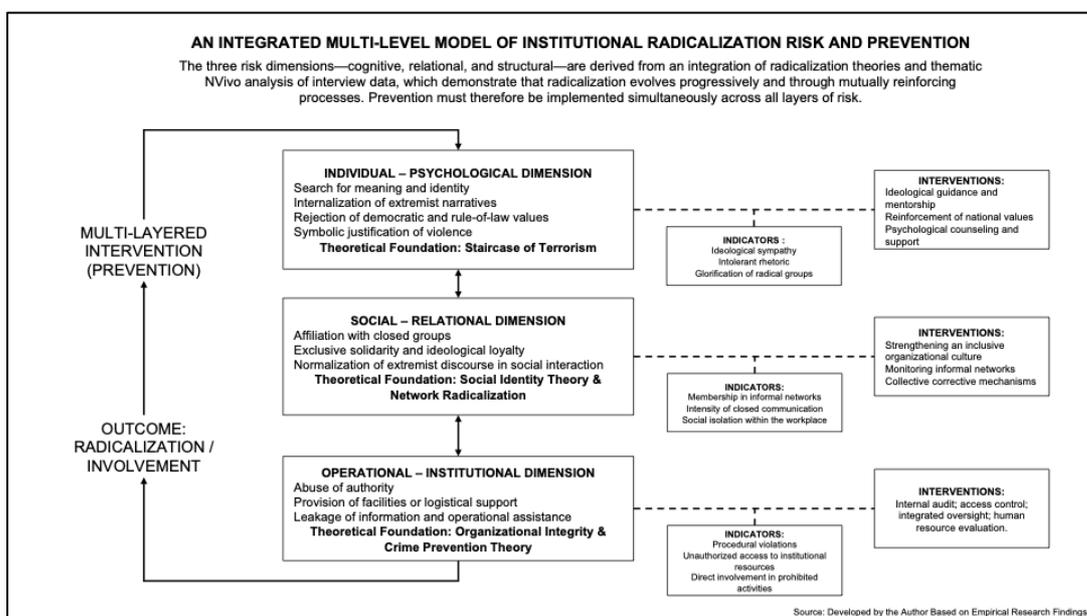

Figure 1: Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention
Source: processed by the author

At the top of the diagram lies the individual-psychological level, explicitly grounded in the theoretical foundation of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005). Indicators at this level include identity-seeking, internalization of extremist narratives, rejection of democratic values, and glorification of radical figures. These elements represent stages of vertical escalation within the radicalization staircase. The empirical findings demonstrate that early stages of radicalization are frequently linked to perceived injustice and bureaucratic dissatisfaction within the organization. In institutional settings, the "*ground floor*" may derive not only from external socio-political inequalities but also from internal dynamics such as promotion systems, distribution of authority, and conflicts between professional norms and personal convictions. The model positions the psychological dimension as the initial risk layer, but not as a sufficient determinant on its own.

The second layer of the diagram represents the social-relational level, drawing upon scholarship on network radicalization and group identity formation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Borum, 2011). Indicators at this level include affiliation with closed groups, social exclusivity, and the normalization of extremist discourse in internal interactions. The diagram illustrates how psychological escalation acquires horizontal legitimation through relational networks. Empirical findings reveal instances of closed communication channels and ideological solidarity that reinforce commitment to extremist narratives. At this stage, extremist ideology is no longer perceived as individual deviation but as a socially validated collective identity. This layer functions as a bridge between cognitive internalization and structural actualization, amplifying the risk trajectory.

The third layer constitutes the operational-institutional level, depicted in the diagram as the highest-risk domain. It is at this level that radicalization gains structural capacity to transform into action. Indicators include access to authority and operational resources, potential information leakage, misuse of institutional power, and operational support for extremist networks. These indicators reflect the coercive and strategic characteristics of policing institutions (Kraska, 2007). Empirical evidence documents cases involving the dissemination of intolerant narratives within institutional spaces and indications of personnel connectivity with extremist networks. Moreover, the documented rise in violent extremist digital content expands opportunities for ideological infiltration into formal organizational structures. The model visualizes that when psychological escalation and relational legitimation intersect with structural access, radicalization risk reaches a critical threshold.

At the bottom of the diagram appears the concept of multi-layered intervention, representing the governance implications of the model. Interventions are structured into three categories, including pre-emptive (value-based education and ideological literacy), preventive (monitoring relational risk and auditing organizational culture), and corrective (targeted intervention and strengthened structural oversight). This structure is derived directly from the logic of the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005), which emphasizes that the higher the stage of escalation, the narrower the window for effective intervention. The diagram, therefore, not only depicts the architecture of risk but also asserts that effective prevention must operate simultaneously across multiple levels.

Overall, the model illustrates that institutional radicalization occurs when three conditions converge: vertical escalation at the psychological level, horizontal legitimation at the relational level, and structural opportunity at the operational level. By extending Moghaddam's staircase from the individual to the institutional domain, the model demonstrates that the highest risk lies not in ideology alone, but in the convergence of ideological commitment and institutional capacity. The proposed Integrated Multi-Level Model thus serves not merely as a descriptive schema, but as an analytical framework for developing early warning systems and proportionate governance-based prevention strategies within security institutions.

5. Discussion

5.1. Extending the Staircase: From Individual to Institution

The principal contribution of this article lies in reconstructing the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005) from an individual-centered framework to an institutional one. In its original formulation, the staircase model

depicts a psychological process through which individuals move from perceived injustice toward the moral legitimization of violence. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that when individuals are embedded within formal organizations characterized by hierarchical structures and coercive capacity, escalation is no longer purely individual. Instead, it is mediated by internal relational networks and facilitated, or constrained, by organizational structures.

Institutional radicalization, therefore, is not merely the radicalization of individuals who happen to work within state institutions. Rather, it emerges from the interaction among vertical escalation (psychological dynamics), horizontal legitimation (relational reinforcement), and structural opportunity (operational capacity). This reconstruction extends radicalization scholarship by demonstrating that organizations may function either as accelerators or as containment mechanisms within the escalation process. The institutional context shapes how grievances are interpreted, how identities are reinforced, and how ideological narratives acquire operational relevance.

In this sense, institutional radicalization challenges the assumption that the state and its security apparatus stand outside the spectrum of ideological vulnerability. Security institutions are themselves social spaces shaped by identity dynamics, frustration, and ideological solidarity (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). By extending the staircase model to the institutional level, this article positions state organizations not merely as counter-radicalization actors but as components within the broader ecosystem of radicalization processes.

5.2. Institutional Radicalization and the Politics of Security

From the perspective of critical terrorism studies, these findings carry broader implications for the politics of security. The concept of radicalization has frequently been mobilized as a policy instrument to justify surveillance, intervention, and preventive governance targeting specific communities (Kundnani, 2012; Neumann, 2013). When radicalization is understood as a phenomenon that may also unfold within state institutions, the security narrative becomes more complex. The state can no longer be positioned as wholly neutral or immune to processes of ideological escalation.

The multi-level model advanced in this article demonstrates that the highest institutional risk does not arise from ideological belief alone, but from the convergence of ideology and structural capacity. Within policing organizations, access to firearms, intelligence resources, and legally sanctioned coercive authority amplifies the potential consequences of ideological escalation (Kraska, 2007). Institutional radicalization thus becomes not only a matter of individual deviance, but a matter of governance over power within organizations entrusted with legitimate force.

At the same time, acknowledging internal vulnerability introduces a normative dilemma. Efforts to prevent radicalization within security institutions may inadvertently encourage excessive internal securitization. Ideological surveillance of personnel can generate climates of distrust and potentially infringe upon principles of intellectual freedom and professional rights. Kundnani's (2012) critique of radicalization as an elastic and politically instrumentalized concept is therefore particularly relevant in this context. The model proposed here explicitly emphasizes proportional intervention and the distinction between personal belief and operational threat, thereby seeking to avoid conflating ideological heterogeneity with actionable risk.

5.3. From Securitization to Institutional Resilience

The findings further suggest that preventing institutional radicalization cannot rely solely on repressive measures or intensified surveillance. If radicalization originates in perceived injustice and bureaucratic dissatisfaction as identified in the psychological "ground floor," then control-oriented strategies may reinforce the very conditions that initiate escalation (Moghaddam, 2005). Excessive securitization may therefore prove counterproductive.

Instead, the multi-level framework directs attention toward strengthening institutional ideological resilience. Such resilience is cultivated through a combination of organizational justice, inclusive relational culture, and transparent

structural oversight. Organizational justice theory underscores that perceptions of fairness influence legitimacy and compliance (Tyler, 2006), suggesting that fair promotion systems, equitable treatment, and accountable leadership may function as preventive safeguards. Moreover, group radicalization scholarship emphasizes that early intervention and collective norm reinforcement can limit escalation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Prevention, in this sense, should be understood not as the expansion of security control, but as the reform of internal governance structures that reduce structural vulnerabilities.

This article offers two primary contributions. First, it expands the analytical focus of radicalization studies from civilian populations to state institutions, thereby enriching debates about reciprocal security vulnerability. By foregrounding institutional contexts, the analysis disrupts the conventional dichotomy between the radicalized "other" and the securitizing state.

Second, the article avoids reductionism by rejecting the framing of radicalization as purely individual deviance. Instead, it demonstrates how organizational structures and power relations mediate escalation processes. By integrating the *Staircase to Terrorism* (Moghaddam, 2005) with group radicalization theory and organizational vulnerability perspectives, the study argues that institutional radicalization is a multi-level phenomenon requiring reflective and proportionate governance responses.

In doing so, the article shifts the analytical debate from the question of "who is radical?" toward the more structural question of "how do institutional power configurations mediate ideological escalation?" This reframing contributes to a more nuanced and governance-oriented understanding of radicalization within security institutions.

6. Conclusion

This article began from a significant gap in radicalization scholarship, which has largely concentrated on individuals and civilian communities, while the vulnerability of formal state institutions, particularly policing organizations, remains insufficiently theorized. By reconstructing the Staircase to Terrorism (Moghaddam, 2005) within the context of formal organizational structures, this study advances the concept of institutional radicalization as a gradual and latent process mediated by the interaction of individual psychological escalation, social legitimation through networks, and structural opportunity embedded within the institution.

The primary contribution of this article is both conceptual and analytical. First, it extends the staircase model from an individual-centered framework to a multi-level institutional perspective, demonstrating that organizations may function either as accelerators or containment mechanisms of ideological escalation. Second, through the development of the Integrated Multi-Level Model of Institutional Radicalization Risk and Prevention, the study argues that the highest institutional risk lies not in ideology alone, but in the convergence of ideological commitment and structural capacity within security institutions. Institutional radicalization, therefore, is reframed not merely as personal deviance but as a governance issue concerning the management of power and authority within organizations entrusted with legitimate force.

From a normative standpoint, the findings underscore that preventing radicalization within security institutions cannot be reduced to repressive ideological surveillance. Excessive internal securitization may inadvertently reinforce perceptions of injustice, thereby strengthening the very "ground floor" conditions identified in the staircase model (Moghaddam, 2005). Effective prevention must instead be multi-layered and proportionate, emphasizing organizational justice, inclusive relational culture, and transparent structural oversight. Within this framework, institutional ideological resilience emerges as a broader agenda of security governance reform.

Ultimately, this article argues that radicalization is not solely a social phenomenon external to the state, but also a latent possibility within state structures themselves. By shifting analytical attention from the question of "who is radical?" to "how do institutional structures mediate ideological escalation?", the study contributes to critical debates on terrorism and security governance. It invites further research into ideological vulnerability across

diverse state institutions and encourages a more reflexive understanding of the relationship between power, organization, and radicalization.

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