



TTSRL – Policy Brief

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RADICALISATION AND RECRUITMENT IN EUROPE

Policy recommendation for the Commission

Research on radicalisation should be conducted in which the individual and his or her social environment are the central focus of analysis. More specifically, we point to the necessity of empirical research that investigates the role that social identification plays in the emergence of radicalisation. This social factor appears to intervene in practically each and every relationship between external factors and radicalisation.

1 RADICALISATION IS AN INDIVIDUAL PROCESS

First and foremost, there is no single explanation for radicalisation. The causes of radicalisation are as diverse as they are abundant. On the one hand, this implies that independent factors are insufficient to result in radicalisation. On the other, radicalisation can only be the outcome of a complex interaction between factors.

Radicalisation is an individual process of socialisation, which is prominently caused by a combination of social and individual causal factors. What we are facing is that individuals involved in violent radicalisation leading to terrorism come from a range of different social, cultural, educational and professional backgrounds. They enter into individual paths of radicalisation according to their specific background and personal history. Furthermore, each individual is motivated by a specific combination of reasons for entering violent radicalisation and is exposed to different triggers and catalysts.

Secondly, causal factors differ in the extent to which they contribute to radicalisation. More explicitly, we argue that external factors like political, economic and cultural conditions indeed shape and constrain the individual's environment but that they do not have a direct effect on individual behaviour. At the social and individual level, dynamics in which the individual is directly involved need to be started in order for external factors to lead to radicalisation.





In addition to these three measurement levels, causal factors are further distinguished into *causes* that set the foundation for radicalisation, and *catalysts*, which abruptly accelerate the radicalisation process.

Common traits

The complexity and uniqueness of the causal factors of radicalisation signal that it is hard to define social groups that are vulnerable to radicalisation. The proportion of potentially radical individuals is so small and diverse, that it is hard if not impossible to categorise them into groups with specified social boundaries. Furthermore, research with the intention of profiling specific "ideal types" of individuals, who are more susceptible to enter into violent radicalisation, seems difficult if not futile.

However, certain common traits and patterns for people who get involved in violent radicalisation are discernable, which might open up the possibility of identifying counter-measures.

- Processes of radicalisation are social processes which are inherently individual in nature and depend on the specific background, situation and personal characteristics of the person involved.

The complex, multidimensional nature of the processes of radicalisation demand scientific research investigating the underlying mechanisms that lead to individual radicalisation and radical behaviour. Under which conditions will individuals be willing to change their attitudes and behaviour to the extent that violent radicalisation is the outcome? Research should be conducted in which the individual and his or her social environment are the central focus of analysis.

- Social identification with allegedly harmed groups is an important indicator of vulnerability to radicalisation. In particular for people for whom group membership of the relevant group is central to the individual's self-identity, threats towards the group are likely to increase radicalisation tendencies.

Social identification appears to intervene in practically each and every relationship between external factors and radicalisation. For example, the degree to which people identify with a relevant social group





determines the extent to which they are affected by political, economic, and cultural circumstances. Whereas observing an Afghan Muslim in absolute deprivation is not very likely to lead to radicalisation of a non-Muslim European, a similar observation can be a very painful and provocative experience for a European Muslim who strongly identifies with Afghan Muslims. In other words: it is the *perception* rather than the objective situation that is relevant in the emergence of radicalisation. In order to gain further insight into the relationship between direct and indirect causes of radicalisation it is essential to map the complex interactions between causal factors at different levels and dimensions. Thus, we point to the necessity of empirical research that investigates the role that social identification plays in the emergence of radicalisation.

- Two frequently mentioned causes of radicalisation are western foreign policies in the Middle East and the poor integration of Muslims in European societies. However, we hypothesise that the relationship between western foreign policies and radicalisation is moderated by social identification and that the stronger people identify with the relevant social group, the stronger the radicalising effect of western intervention in conflicts involving Muslims will be. Furthermore, we hypothesise that the fact that Muslim communities are poorly integrated in European societies can lead to individual feelings of social exclusion and rejection and that in turn, these feelings can contribute to radicalisation.

Thus, young second generation European nationals, who a) are Muslim and who can be classified as identity seeking and as high-identifiers with the perception of Muslims around the world being humiliated, who b) are poorly integrated and politically, socially and culturally marginalised would as individuals have a higher than normal incentive to be drawn towards radical Islamism.

Research should determine how these factors relate to other causal factors and via which mechanisms they lead to radicalisation. If we want to thoroughly understand why a very small proportion of young, western Muslims turn to radicalism we should pay close attention to what inspires and motivates them. Not only should we listen to what grieves them, we should most prominently understand their aspirations.





- Network dynamics (especially group dynamics) appear to play a central role in most processes of radicalisation. This is not surprising, since the process of radicalisation essentially is a process of socialisation. Some 'network places' deserve further attention: radical mosques and places of religious training, prisons, internet, etc., as does the influence of peers.
- Although every terrorist is a radical, not all radicals are terrorists – or will ever become terrorists. Processes of radicalisation are individual and may evolve in many different directions, including non-violent ones.
- Recruitment can only enhance the speed of ongoing radicalisation processes, not initiate them.
- Here, radical ideologies or radical interpretations of religion are not seen as direct causes of violent radicalisation. The reason for this is that people differ in the extent to which they are susceptible to or appealed by radical ideologies – only a few of those exposed to radical ideologies become violently radicalised. Instead, a person adhering to a radical ideology is here seen as a sign that this person has undergone a process of radicalisation. However, radical ideologies may become a driving or guiding factor for an already radicalised person, thus giving impetus to what action is acceptable and necessary and what the targets are.





The TTSRL project

The project entitled Transnational Terrorism, Security and the Rule of Law (TTSRL) is a research project, conducted by a consortium of research institutes for the European Commission in Brussels. The project is part of the 6th framework program specifically that of priority 7 entitled: 'Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society'. More information about this program can be found here.

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Transnational terrorism is one of the most substantial threats to security and the Rule of Law within the European Union. Approaches towards this problem, however, diverge. As Member States implement different policies based on differing basic assumptions, a structured, univocal strategy towards transnational terrorism is absent. Considering the continuing integration within the European Union, a Union-level strategy with regards to terrorism is imperative. In order to support the formulation of such a strategy, this project will study both the conceptual nature of the problems identified here, and the possible measures flowing from these assumptions.

This project will entail the conducting of a structured, well-founded survey into the various response options towards transnational terrorism and the theoretical assumptions on which they are based. A holistic approach has been chosen in which policy-areas specifically dealing with terrorism as well as affected policy-fields are taken into account. In this respect, this project is unique in that it integrates diverse aspects of the issue into one comprehensive and multidisciplinary project.

The TTSRL project proposes to start bridging the gap between the new daunting challenges posed by transnational terrorism and our current conceptual and policy deficiencies. It addresses what we see as the key issues involved: new notions of security and the role played in it by transnational terrorism; the definition and etiology of terrorism; the societal impact of terrorism; its economic impact; and - last but not least - the policy options available to deal with it.





The main added value of the project will lie in the benchmarking of approaches and policy-options in use in the various Member States. Combined with the conceptual underpinnings of this benchmarking exercise, the project will yield insights into the appropriateness and effectiveness of various approaches and measures from a national and a European perspective, the ethical issues related to this field, and cost-benefit considerations.

For more information on the recommendations in this policy brief of the TTSRL project at large, visit our website or contact the COT:

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