DeRadicalisation
in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate

7.1 Country Brief: A social psychological perspective on trends of extremism in France

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About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and broader social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) to move towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. We intend to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, including a sense of being victimised, being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures and coming under the influence of "us vs them" identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts, including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation-states adapt to new security challenges. Mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts is crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that radicalisation processes often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national justice frameworks. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing and devising solutions to online radicalisation is central to the project's aims.

Executive Summary

This country brief summarises the survey findings for France. It then embeds the survey findings within a national and cultural context for each country. The aim of these summaries is to situate the findings within their respective sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts. The literature review and rationale for the proposed model, analysis of the full dataset, and discussion can be found in the full 7.1 report, which also contains the country briefs.

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1. Results

France had 20.36% of participants who did not know their political attitudes. The path model keeps these participants but excludes this variable, having a final sample of *n* = 329.

Descriptives

Breakdown by age and sex.

	Sex					
	Male		Female		Other	
Mean age (SD)	n	%	n	%	n	%
24.55 (5.01)	154	46.81	174	52.89	1	0.30

Breakdown by religious affiliation.

	n	%
Christian	111	33.74
Muslim	107	32.52
Sikh	46	13.98
Agnostic/Atheist	46	13.98
Other	15	4.56
Jewish	3	0.91
Bahá'í	1	0.30
Buddhist	0	0.00
Hindu	0	0.00

Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in this country?

	n	%
Yes	106	32.22
No	198	60.18
Don't know	25	7.60

Breakdown of belonging to a group that is discriminated against.

On what grounds is your group discriminated against?

	n	%
Religion	70	66.04
Colour or race	43	40.57
Nationality	36	33.96
Ethnic group	17	16.04
Language	14	13.21

	n	%
Sexuality	11	10.38
Gender	8	7.55
Other	4	3.77
Age	3	2.83
Disability	1	0.94

Note: participants were allowed to select multiple groups. As such, proportions will not necessarily add to 100%

Breakdown of different organizations participants reported being members of (active or inactive) or not.

	Active		Inactive		Not a member	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Church or religious organization	74	22.49	132	40.12	123	37.39
Sport or recreational organization	95	28.88	104	31.61	130	39.51
Art, music or educational organization	48	14.59	95	28.88	186	56.53
Labour union	46	13.98	73	22.19	210	63.83
Political party	37	11.25	78	23.71	214	65.05
Environmental organization	50	15.20	95	28.88	184	55.93
Professional association	68	20.67	81	24.62	180	54.71
Humanitarian or charitable organization	65	19.76	89	27.05	175	53.19
Consumer organization	51	15.50	79	24.01	199	60.49
Self-help group or mutual help group	65	19.76	93	28.27	171	51.98
Women's group	52	15.81	80	24.32	197	59.88
Other organization	46	13.98	45	13.68	238	72.34

Breakdown of different political actions participants reported taking in the last 12 months.

	Yes		No		Missing value	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Contacted a politician or government official	89	27.05	186	56.53	54	16.41
Worked in a political party or action group	57	17.33	225	68.39	47	14.29
Worked in another ideological organization	67	20.36	207	62.92	55	16.72
Displayed a campaign badge/sticker	85	25.84	189	57.45	55	16.72
Signed a petition	126	38.30	151	45.90	52	15.81
Took part in a lawful public demonstration	149	45.29	136	41.34	44	13.37
Boycotted certain products	142	43.16	144	43.77	43	13.07
Posted or shared anything about politics online	127	38.60	154	46.81	48	14.59

Predictors of realistic threat

Holding stronger beliefs about group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was linked with increased perceptions of threat from migrants. Although we did not hypothesise any links between political ideologies and perceptions of threat, holding lower populist beliefs predicted lower perceptions of migrants as a threat.

Direct predictors of extremism

Holding stronger beliefs about group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was also associated directly with increased support for extremist attitudes. A stronger online group identity was also directly linked with increased support of extremist attitudes. Perceiving that migrants were a threat to one's national ingroup (realistic threat) was linked with increased support of extremist attitudes. In terms of vulnerability, experiencing more social alienation was associated with increased support for extremism.

Indirect predictors on extremism

Social dominance orientation indirectly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes via increased perceptions of realistic threat. More intricately, increased social dominance orientation predicted decreased populism, decreased populism subsequently predicted increased perceptions of realistic threat, and increased perceptions of realistic threat subsequently predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. The total indirect effect of social dominance orientation was not significant; instead, increased social dominance orientation directly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes.

A stronger online group identity predicted increased populism, which subsequently predicted decreased perceptions of realistic threat, which in turn predicted decreased support for extremist attitudes. The total indirect effect was insignificant; instead, a stronger online group identity directly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes.

Predictors of attitudes towards Russian culture, Russian and Ukrainian migrants

Experiencing more social alienation and endorsing more extremist attitudes were both separately associated with more negative attitudes towards Russia. Regarding Russian migrants, feeling more embedded in one's community (social cohesion) and perceiving migrants in general as a larger threat to France were both separately associated with worsening attitudes towards Russian migrants in the past twelve months. On the other hand, having stronger beliefs about group hierarchies and having greater political trust predicted improved attitudes towards Russian migrants.

None of the variables of interest (i.e. social dominance orientation, online group identity, collective narcissism, anomie, individual and group relative deprivation, social cohesion, social alienation, populism, political trust, perceptions of migrants as realistic threats, support for extremist attitudes) reliably predicted attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants.

Figure 6. Respecified model for France.

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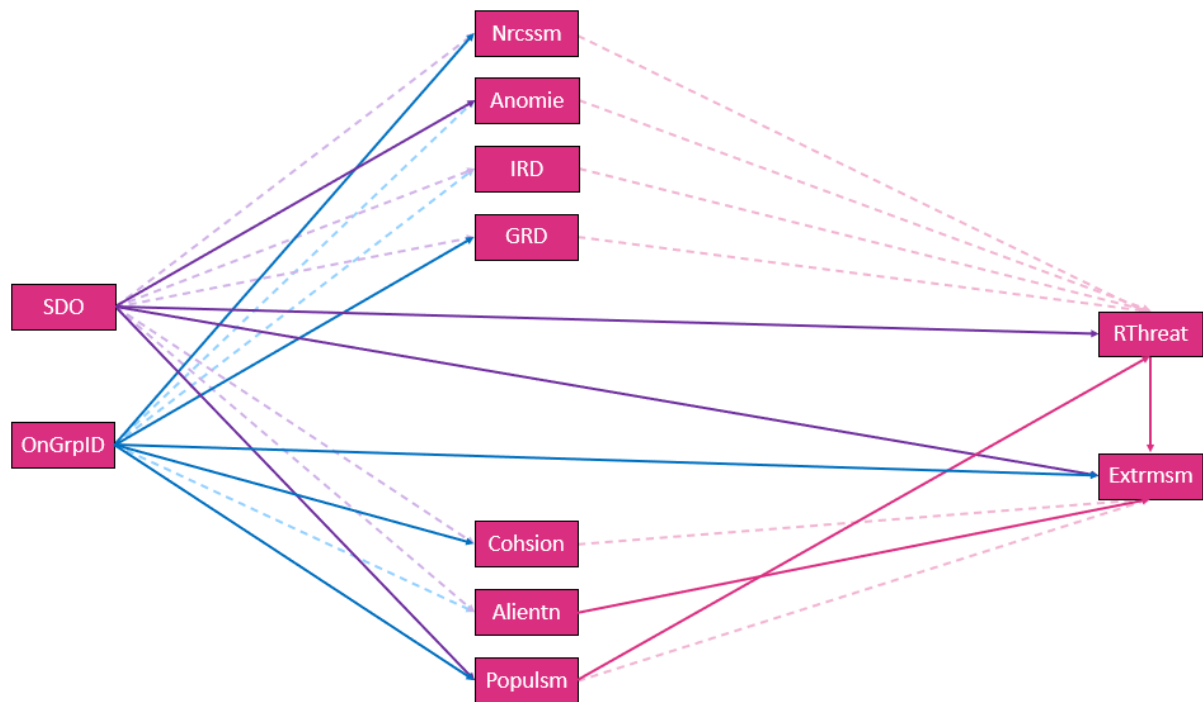
2. Situating the findings within the French context

The survey results corroborate many of the findings in our reports and observations in the French case study.

Disproportionate representation of religious adherence

To contextualise the discussion, it is important to note that there are some surprising results within the survey. Most importantly, the breakdown of the participants by religious affiliation is (very) non-representative of actual religious distribution in France. According to the survey, one-third of its participants identified as Christian, another third as Muslims, only ~14% as atheists/agnostic and another ~14% as Sikh. While the percentage of Christians in the survey reflects their estimated proportion in the population, recent studies of religious affiliation show that 51% of the population aged 18 to 59 in metropolitan France say they have no religion. In contrast, only 10% identify as Muslim, and the Sikh population is estimated to be less than 0.05% of the population (Bhavya Dore, 2017; Insee, 2023).

Far-right's appeal to women

The survey recorded no differences in political attitudes or support of extremist attitudes between men and women. These findings corroborate other studies conducted in France on the far-right's success in attracting female voters. As we note in WP5.2 on France, far-right movements in France have managed to close the "Radical Right Gender Gap" and find support among women. The major success in attracting female voters was achieved by Marine Le Pen, who has "managed to garner the same level of support in her male and female constituencies" for three consecutive presidential elections (in 2012, 2017, and 2022) (Mayer, 2015, 2022). The fact that an upcoming leader of the far-right, Marion Maréchal (Le Pen) – the niece of Marine Le Pen and member of the extreme-right political party *Reconquête* led

by Eric Zemmour – is female as well, has further consolidated this support among women voters.

There is also no established difference between genders on the range of sensitive political issues, from Russia to migration. This, too, may be tied to the fact that women are strongly represented in the far right and that since 1999, French law has established gender electoral quotas in national and municipal elections (with fines imposed on parties when gender parity is not respected). However, the platform of the far-right is clearly seen as being at least partially hostile to migration since migrants tend to support left-wing politics. This is demonstrated in the platforms where the left and especially the far-left (such as the *La France Insoumise* party founded by Jean-Luc Mélenchon) have been increasingly calling for regularisation of the status of all migrants whereas the far-right and the centre-right has made stopping all migration and controlling migration (respectively) an essential part of their political platform. Thus, Mélenchon has recently declared that as president, he "would start with a wave of massive regularisation" of migrants in France. In contrast, Marion Maréchal considers the EU migration policy as "totally unreasonable" and calls to replace it with the Australian "No Way" uncompromising approach against "families, children, unaccompanied children, qualified workers" ("Immigration," 2023, "Qu'est-ce que la politique migratoire « no way » que Marion Maréchal appelle à mettre en place ?," 2023).

Discrimination against Muslims

The percentage of Muslim participants in the survey (32.52%) roughly equals the share of participants who identified as belonging to a group discriminated against in France (32.22%). This suggests that the Muslim population is the largest religious group that experiences sentiments of discrimination (primarily in comparison with the French Christian population).

On the other hand, the percentage of participants in the survey reporting that their group is discriminated against on religious grounds (66%) is significantly higher than those recorded in a recent study. A poll conducted in 2019 revealed that only 42% of Muslims in France had experienced at least one form of discrimination linked to their religion (the percentage of Muslims reporting to have experienced discrimination on religious grounds in the five years before the poll was 32%) (Ifop, 2019). The survey's findings match the 2019 data only regarding veiled women, 60% of whom reported having been discriminated against, versus 44% of non-veiled women. The differences in the two sets of data might be partially due to the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment in France or to similar sentiments among other participants in the survey who affiliated as Sikh, Jewish or "Other".

Discrimination against women

The obtained results are also surprising with respect to the sentiment of discrimination against women in the general population. While more than 50% of the survey's participants were women, less than 8% reported being discriminated against based on gender. Even when accounting for the higher proportion of this sentiment among women, this percentage is significantly lower than that obtained in other studies. In a recent survey conducted among a representative sample of the French population on the opinions and knowledge about gender equality, only 8% of the respondents said that "women and men are treated the same", and

42% of French women (versus 27% of men) said that a lack of laws is a major reason for gender inequality (Focus 2030, 2023). Similarly, a 2023 government report on "the state of sexism in France" showed that "situations of discrimination, violence and harassment [against women] are experienced in alarming proportions. The report, based on a representative sample of 2,500 participants, showed that 23% of women have experienced a pay gap with a male colleague in an equal position or with equal skills, and 13% have experienced discrimination in employment, rates that rise to 34% and 21% for managers. Moreover, 37% of the surveyed women reported having experienced non-consensual sexual relations (Sylvie Pierre-Brossolette, 2023).

Although the survey allowed them to choose more than one group affiliation based on which they consider themselves to be discriminated against, this discrepancy may be related to the high percentage of participants who experienced discrimination based on their religion. The data may suggest that a strong contingent of Muslim women and women of colour consider that they are discriminated against *more* for their religion and/or race than for their gender.

Participation in social organisations

The high participation in religious, recreational, educational and other associations recorded in the survey corroborates the fact that despite the history of Jacobin centralisation and anti-associationalism in France, the French maintain a very strong inclination towards group affiliation—which has been confirmed in political sociology over the last 40 years (Michel Forsé, "Les créations d'associations : un indicateur de changement social," *Revue de l'OFCE*, 1984). Financial investment on the part of the state presumably has an important impact on French participation in sports as France devotes most of its money to sports in the European Union (*"Sports Economy"*). This may be reflected in the survey, which shows that more than 60% of the participants say they are actively or inactively involved in a sport or recreational organisation. Sports programs have been an important entry point for deradicalisation programs organised by the state and associations involved in preventing radicalisation in partnership with the government (WP3.1, WP10). This data is also confirmed by a 2005 report according to which "immigrants often engage in cultural associations in France [and] some group members from Arab and Asian origins are also engaged in religious associations" (Alexandre Kirchberger, 2005).

(Dis)trust in political institutions and civic activism

The survey shows that almost one-third of the participants contacted a politician or government official in the last 12 months, which may reflect a certain level of trust in the proper functioning of the country's political institutions by only 35% of the population. This finding correlates with the data obtained in a recent study by the OpinionWay Institute for the *Centre de Recherches Politiques de Sciences Po*, according to which almost two-thirds of the French believe that "democracy is not working well". The study points to "a general decline in the level of confidence in institutions, reaching the lowest point since the Yellow Vests" (Elsa Conesa, 2023).

Likewise, the survey seems to reflect the longstanding French tradition of active civic engagement and participation in political protests, but also the rising levels of pessimism

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among the French and the instability in French politics due to the series of reforms advanced by the current administration. According to the survey, more than 45% of the participants have recently taken part in a lawful public demonstration, almost 40% signed a petition, about 25% displayed a campaign badge/sticker, and about 38% posted or shared anything about politics on social media. In the same vein, a recent study has shown that 74% of people say they are pessimistic about their future or that of their children (*L'état d'esprit des Français*, 2023).

Populism and policies concerning immigrants

According to the survey's analysis: "SDO *was* indirectly related to realistic threat, but via populism; a stronger SDO predicted decreased populism, and decreased populism, in turn, predicted *increased* perceptions of migrants as a realistic threat." This finding corresponds to the centrist political platforms of *Renaissance*, the current party in power led by President Macron, and its larger governing coalition, *Ensemble*, which includes the Democratic Movement (*Modem*)*, Horizons*, and the environmentalist party *En Commun*. Their supporters would perceive populism as an extremist – far-right or far-left – mode of political engagement. As a result, this electorate may perceive the Republican centre and centre-right as being anti-populist at the same time that migration increasingly finds its way into the political platforms of these parties. For example, an immigration bill currently presented by Macron's party aims, according to the French Minister of Interior, to "facilitate deportation, simplify dispute procedures" and to "establish a form of double penalty" against illegal migrants. The bill, however, includes a provision allowing some undocumented migrants to gain full legal status in France. The bill is likely to be approved in the Senate only with the support of the right-conservative party *Les Républicains* whose members are opposed to the proposed regularisation measures and are likely to pressure Macron to remove them from the bill (Clément Guillou and Alexandre Pedro, 2023; Graulle, 2023). Hence, the fact that "Increased perceptions of migrants being a threat to the country's resources predicted greater support for extremist attitudes" correlates to the fact that centre-right parties now see this as a potential area to win elections. In other words, there is a general move on the right toward far-right political positions on migration.

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