



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

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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 Turkey. 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

Only 1.57% of participants in Turkey did not know their political attitudes. Thus, these participants were dropped, and the variable was kept, resulting in a sample of  $n = 315$ .

## Descriptives

### Breakdown by age and sex.

Mean age (SD)	Sex					
	Male		Female		Other	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
26.27 (4.68)	157	49.06	163	50.94	0	0.00

### Breakdown by religious affiliation.

	n	%
Muslim	285	89.06
Agnostic/Atheist	25	7.81
Other	8	2.50
Christian	2	0.62
Jewish	0	0.00
Buddhist	0	0.00
Bahá'í	0	0.00
Hindu	0	0.00
Sikh	0	0.00

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

	n	%
Yes	93	18.04
No	205	75.95
Don't know	22	6.01

### Breakdown of belonging to a group that is discriminated against.

**On what grounds is your group discriminated against?**

	n	%
Religion	33	35.48
Gender	28	30.11
Nationality	24	25.81
Language	19	20.43
Ethnic group	14	15.05
Colour or race	13	13.98

Other	12	12.90
Age	9	9.68
Sexuality	9	9.68
Disability	2	2.15

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	38	11.88	60	18.75	222	69.38
Sport or recreational organization	105	32.81	81	25.31	134	41.88
Art, music or educational organization	111	34.69	61	19.06	148	46.25
Labour union	57	17.81	65	20.31	198	61.88
Political party	59	18.44	55	17.19	206	64.38
Environmental organization	70	21.88	65	20.31	185	57.81
Professional association	64	20.00	66	20.62	190	59.38
Humanitarian or charitable organization	85	26.56	80	25.00	155	48.44
Consumer organization	48	15.00	66	20.62	206	64.38
Self-help group or mutual help group	70	21.88	67	20.94	183	57.19
Women's group	57	17.81	54	16.88	209	65.31
Other organization	38	11.88	56	17.50	226	70.62

**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	63	19.69	242	75.62	15	4.69
Worked in a political party or action group	40	12.50	266	83.12	14	4.38
Worked in another ideological organization	42	13.12	260	81.25	18	5.62
Displayed a campaign badge/sticker	48	15.00	247	77.19	25	7.81
Signed a petition	111	34.69	189	59.06	20	6.25
Took part in a lawful public demonstration	76	23.75	222	69.38	22	6.88
Boycotted certain products	109	34.06	187	58.44	24	7.50
Posted or shared anything about politics online	108	33.75	193	60.31	19	5.94

**Predictors of realistic threat**

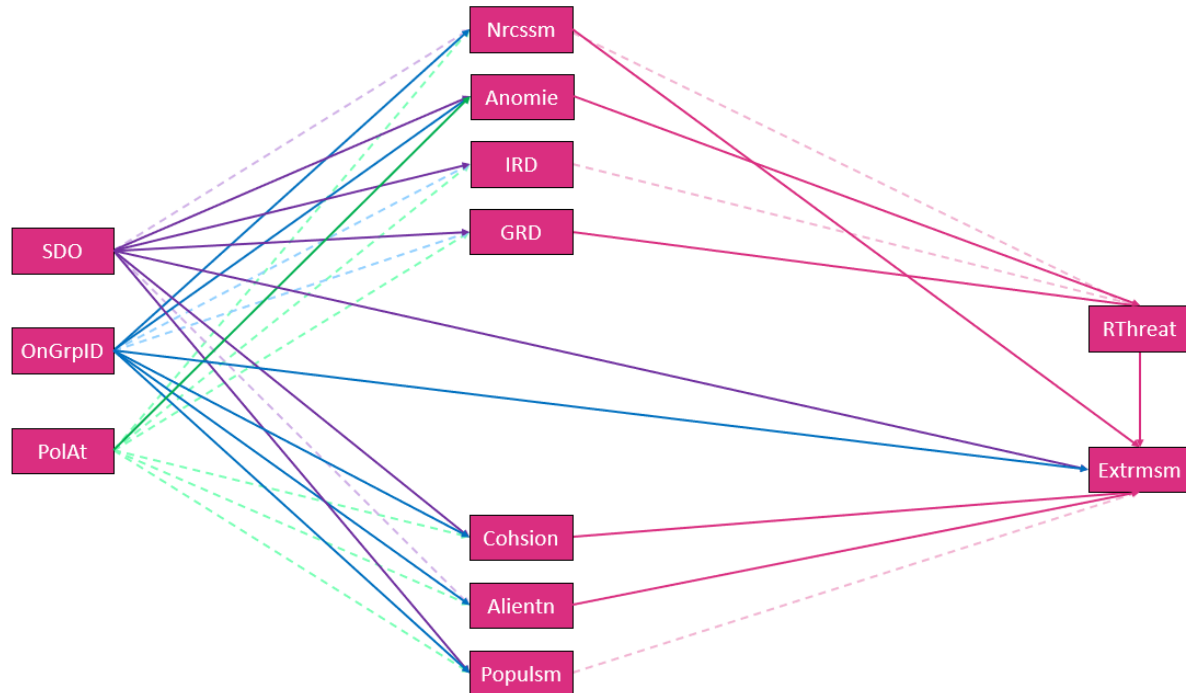
Feelings of anomie were associated with an increased perception of threat from migrants to one's national ingroup and its access to resources, welfare, and power. Perceiving that one's ingroup was more economically deprived relative to migrants was also linked with increased perceived threat from migrants.

**Direct predictors of extremism**

Holding stronger beliefs about inherent group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was associated with more support for extremist attitudes. Additionally, a stronger online group identity was also linked with more support for extremist attitudes. Perceiving one's social group as being superior to other groups was associated with increased support for extremism.

Interestingly, increased perceptions that migrants pose a threat to Turkey and its resources (realistic threat) predicted less support for extremist attitudes. This was the only country where this relationship was observed; for other country samples, if there was a relationship between realistic threat and extremism, it tended to be a positive relationship such that increased realistic threat predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. In terms of vulnerability, experiencing more social alienation was linked with greater support for extremism. Unexpectedly, experiencing more social cohesion acted as a buffer in that increased social cohesion was associated with more support for extremism.

**Figure 17. Respecified model for Turkey**



### Indirect predictors on extremism

Social dominance orientation had a significant indirect effect on extremist attitudes via social cohesion and group relative deprivation and subsequently realistic threat. The total indirect effect of social dominance orientation was significant in the negative direction (i.e., as social dominance orientation increased, extremism decreased). However, looking at the direct effect, greater social dominance orientation was linked with increased support for extremist attitudes. The total effect (i.e. the sum of the total indirect effect and the direct effect) was ultimately significant and positive. This happened despite the mediating effects of social dominance orientation on extremism being buffered so that greater social dominance orientation (SDO) indirectly predicted decreased extremism because SDO increased people’s experiences of social cohesion (protecting against extremism). Still, the direct relationship between higher SDO and higher extremism was strong enough to override any indirect relationships that may lower support for extremist attitudes.

Online group identity had significant indirect effects on extremist attitudes via collective narcissism, social cohesion, and social alienation, and the total indirect effect was significant (i.e., as online group identity increased, so did extremism). A stronger online group identity also directly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. The total effect (i.e., the sum of the indirect and direct effects) was positive: a stronger online group identity predicted increased support for extremist attitudes directly and through its effect on other variables, which then predicted greater support for extremist attitudes.

Political attitudes had a positive mediating effect on extremism via anomie and, subsequently, realistic threat. However, the total indirect effect was insignificant, indicating that political attitudes did not predict support for extremist attitudes when considering all combined mediating effects.

### Predictors of attitudes towards Russian culture, Russian and Ukrainian migrants

Perceiving that one's ingroup was superior to other social groups was linked with increased negative attitudes towards Russia. Additionally, increased support for extremist attitudes was linked with greater negative attitudes towards Russia. Perceiving migrants as a threat to Turkey and its resources was linked with more positive attitudes towards Russia.

## 2. Situating the findings within the Turkish context

Findings of the survey results of Turkey need to be evaluated within the overall radicalisation context of Turkey and the conditions during the period the survey was conducted (December 2022- February 2023). In the last two decades, the Turkish political landscape has been increasingly polarised under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) governments. The decades-old conflict between the state security forces and the Kurdish minority had evolved into a social conflict long before AKP came to power. In the 2011-2015 period, AKP engaged in negotiation with the leadership of the Kurdish social movement; however, the peace talks failed to bring resolution. On the contrary, AKP, in alliance with the far-right Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP*), fuelled the racist attitudes towards the Kurds while undermining the movement's organisational power through imprisonment. AKP's expanding Islamization policies reinforced the fault lines in Turkish politics by deepening the secular-Islamist cleavage. The period in which the survey was conducted was shaped by both these two major politicised cleavages, exacerbating economic crises, and the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, which were later held on the same day, May 14, 2023.

AKP's election campaign was built upon an aggressive nationalist-Islamist discourse. The party and its more minor partner, MHP, accused the opposition led by the social democratic Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) of being complicit with PKK (the Kurdish militia) and the foreign powers at the same time. At the time, the opposition's presidential candidate was not determined. Istanbul metropolitan mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu was considered to be among the strongest potential candidates. A December 14, 2022 court decision put a political ban on İmamoğlu based on fabricated evidence to prevent him from running for presidency (France 24, 2022). The amended Internet Law further pressured



national and international media platforms to induce self-censorship. Furthermore, the misinformation law passed in October 2022 started to be executed to intimidate journalists and academics by accusing them of spreading misinformation (“Turkey: Dangerous, Dystopian New Legal Amendments”, 2022).

The survey findings provide intriguing insight and raise further questions about the radicalisation trends in Turkey. Those who reported being members of one or more discriminated groups both reported stronger perceptions of anomie and had greater populist attitudes compared to participants who were not members of any discriminated groups. That is, those who feel discriminated against also perceive a breakdown in the social fabric and leadership and believe that society is ultimately separated between the people (who are “pure and good”) and the elite (who are “corrupt and evil”), arguing that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. These findings, especially when considered with the descriptive statistics, appear counter-intuitive. Those who feel discriminated against refer to religion, gender, nationality and language. In other words, these people are probably Alevi, women, Kurdish, and/or Arab. It is difficult to understand why a person from a minority group would feel that the social fabric or leadership is being broken. Similarly, there does not seem to be any reason to justify the argument that minorities would argue that the majority should rule politics. In fact, it is the people belonging to the majority groups who identify themselves as natives or locals tend to cling to dichotomic categorisations at the societal level and be in constant fear of threats to the social fabric and political leadership (Ionescu, Tavani, and Collange 2021). In the Turkish case, we also know that especially the Alevis and the Kurds tend to vote for social democratic and socialist parties rather than far-right populist parties (Başlevent, Kirmanoğlu, and Şenatalar 2005; Shankland 2003).

Findings on the predictors of attitudes and views about Russia are interesting: 1) Increased collective narcissism and increased support for extremist attitudes predicted increased attitudes against Russia (e.g., “We should break all cooperation with Russian academics, artists, and athletes.”). 2) Increased perceptions of migrants as a realistic threat predicted decreased attitudes against Russia (i.e., improved attitudes towards Russia). The first finding about attitudes against Russia is pretty straightforward. If one thinks that their group is superior to other groups, as a Turkish person, they might have negative attitudes towards Russia and the Russians. However, the following finding adds a new layer. Those who think that migrants pose a threat to the welfare and resources, the political and economic power, and the physical and material well-being of the local group appear to be more positive towards Russia. In fact, we observe an increasingly positive attitude towards the Russian and Ukrainian migrants in Turkish society, especially when the locals make this evaluation in comparison to other migrant groups with lower education and income levels, such as Syrians and Afghans.

In terms of the predictors of extremist attitudes, the survey finds that having a higher SDO, a stronger online group identity, increased collective narcissism, increased perceptions of social cohesion and increased feelings of social alienation predicted stronger support for extremist attitudes. However, analysing the paths to extremism in Turkey yields some contradictory and counter-intuitive findings. Increased perceptions that migrants pose a realistic threat to Turkey and its resources predicted less support for extremist attitudes. This was the only country where this relationship was observed; for other country samples, if there was a relationship

between realistic threat and extremism, it tended to be a positive relationship such that increased realistic threat predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. In a similar vein, increasingly right-wing political attitudes predicted decreased perceptions of anomie.

Survey findings on Turkey in the period from December 2022 to February 2023 show that people mostly feel discriminated against in terms of their religious, gender, national and language belongings. Extremist attitudes tend to be more common among people who approve of social hierarchies, identify strongly with certain online groups, believe that their group is superior to others, and desire social conformity and cohesion. Especially when these people feel socially alienated due to the changes (e.g. due to migration), they tend to become extremists.

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