



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

March 2024

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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 the UK. 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

In the UK, 15.14% of participants reported not knowing their political attitudes. This variable was subsequently excluded from the model, keeping all participants and resulting in a final sample of $n = 317$.

Descriptives

Breakdown by age and sex

Mean age (SD)	Sex					
	Male		Female		Other	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
25.10 (5.66)	149	47.00	168	53.00	0	0.00

Breakdown by religious affiliation.

	n	%
Christian	114	35.96
Agnostic/Atheist	102	32.18
Muslim	79	24.92
Other	13	4.10
Sikh	6	1.89
Buddhist	2	0.63
Hindu	1	0.32
Jewish	0	0.00
Bahá'í	0	0.00

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

	n	%
Yes	104	32.22
No	193	60.18
Don't know	20	7.60

Breakdown of belonging to a group that is discriminated against.

On what grounds is your group discriminated against?

	n	%
Colour or race	60	57.69
Religion	55	52.88
Ethnic group	38	36.54
Nationality	31	29.81
Gender	26	25.00

Language	11	10.58
Sexuality	9	8.65
Disability	9	8.65
Age	4	3.85
Other	3	2.88

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		Missing value	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Church or religious organization	86	27.13	95	29.97	135	42.59	1	0.32
Sport or recreational organization	116	36.59	84	26.50	116	36.59	1	0.32
Art, music or educational organization	103	32.49	78	24.61	135	42.59	1	0.32
Labour union	61	19.24	78	24.61	177	55.84	1	0.32
Political party	54	17.03	79	24.92	183	57.73	1	0.32
Environmental organization	65	20.50	65	20.50	186	58.68	1	0.32
Professional association	86	27.13	67	21.14	163	51.42	1	0.32
Humanitarian or charitable organization	83	26.18	68	21.45	165	52.05	1	0.32
Consumer organization	68	21.45	65	20.50	183	57.73	1	0.32
Self-help group or mutual help group	70	22.08	72	22.71	174	54.89	1	0.32
Women's group	70	22.08	66	20.82	180	56.78	1	0.32
Other organization	30	9.46	47	14.83	239	75.39	1	0.32

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	104	32.81	190	59.94	23	7.26
Worked in a political party or action group	50	15.77	244	76.97	23	7.26
Worked in another ideological organization	64	20.19	234	73.82	19	5.99
Displayed a campaign badge/sticker	94	29.65	202	63.72	21	6.62
Signed a petition	211	66.56	87	27.44	19	5.99
Took part in a lawful public demonstration	78	24.61	218	68.77	21	6.62
Boycotted certain products	121	38.17	165	52.05	31	9.78
Posted or shared anything about politics online	155	48.90	139	43.85	23	7.26

Predictors of realistic threat

Holding stronger beliefs about inherent group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was linked with greater perceptions of threat from migrants to the UK and its resources.

Direct predictors of extremism

Holding stronger beliefs about inherent group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was associated with more support for extremist attitudes. Increased perceptions of threat from

migrants were linked with increased support for extremist attitudes. In addition, holding stronger beliefs that one's ingroup is superior to other social groups (collective narcissism) was associated with increased endorsement of extremism. Regarding political ideology, holding more populist beliefs was linked with greater support for extremism. In terms of vulnerability, experiencing more social alienation was linked with increased support for extremism. Interestingly, experiencing less anomie was linked with more extremist beliefs.

Indirect predictors on extremism

Social dominance orientation had indirect effects on extremist attitudes via populism, realistic threat, and anomie. Increased social dominance predicted decreased populism, which, in turn, predicted decreased support for extremist attitudes. Increased social dominance orientation predicted increased perceptions of migrants as a realistic threat, which in turn predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. Finally, increased social dominance predicted decreased anomie, which in turn predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. The total indirect effect of social dominance orientation was significant in a positive direction.

Online group identity had a mediating effect via social alienation, collective narcissism, and anomie. A stronger online group identity predicted increased social alienation and increased collective narcissism, and these, in turn, predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. On the other hand, a stronger online group identity predicted increased anomie, which in turn predicted decreased support for extremist attitudes. The total indirect effect ultimately was significantly positive, with a stronger online group identity indirectly predicting increased support for extremist attitudes.

Figure 18. Respecified model for the UK



Predictors of attitudes towards Russian culture, Russian and Ukrainian migrants

Stronger beliefs about inherent group hierarchies were associated with more negative attitudes towards Russian culture. Additionally, holding a stronger online group identity was also linked with more negative attitudes towards Russian culture. Finally, feeling more embedded in one's community (social cohesion) was also linked with more negative attitudes towards Russian culture. Regarding attitudes towards Russian migrants, greater trust in the UK government (political trust) was linked with improved attitudes towards Russian migrants in the past twelve months. Additionally, perceiving that one's economic situation was more deprived relative to migrants was linked with worsening attitudes towards both Russian and Ukrainian migrants in the past twelve months. Finally, a stronger online group identity was associated with improved attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants in the past twelve months.

2. Situating the findings within the UK context

The findings of the UK sample are situated within mainstream government and media narratives which serve to reinforce intersubjective representations of idealised national identity. We focus on right-wing extremism within the UK cultural context which is one of the biggest current threats in terms of political violence, with 49% of terror arrests in 2022 linked to suspected right-wing extremism (Hope not Hate, 2023a). One of the pillars of right-wing extremism is supremacism, which is the belief that "a certain group of people sharing a common element (nation, race, culture, etc.) is superior to all other people. Seeing themselves in a supreme position, the particular group considers it to be their natural right to dominate the rest of the population" (Europol, 2019, p. 65). We tie this belief to one of the main explanatory variables of extremism, social dominance orientation, which also exerts an indirect effect on increased support for extremist attitudes via realistic threat, anomie, and populism.

Looking at national media, and as outlined in a previous report (Ozduzen et al., 2021), mainstream UK media bolster ideologies of far-right groups in the UK through making ingroup-outgroup boundaries salient, promoting an idealised and superior 'British identity', and denying dominating racial hierarchies (Cabrerá, 2014). Furthermore, we argue that the UK media, which was perceived as being the most right-wing by its populace in a survey of seven European countries (Dahlgreen, 2016), perpetuates racial and religious hierarchies which legitimise "the threat of right-wing ideology whilst simultaneously disseminating the seeds of white superiority" (Ozduzen et al., 2021, p. 15). We posit that these trends in media narratives can be understood as cultural artefacts of collective narcissism and social dominance orientation which serve to echo back and reinforce perceptions of threat from outgroups.

Narratives of realistic threat – that migrant outgroups pose a threat to the UK and its resources are reinforced in the UK media, which out of seven European countries was perceived as the most negative towards migrants; taken together that the UK was also the only country where there was indication of polarised attitudes towards media in that 29% of the sample saw media as being too right-wing on topics of refugees and immigration, 24% saw it as too left-wing (18% of the sample perceived it as about right) (Dahlgreen, 2016). This division is more recently echoed in public attitudes towards migration which are becoming more salient, with 32% of respondents surveyed seeing immigration as a very bad or a bad thing for Britain, and

52% believing that immigration should be reduced (Richards, Fernández-Reino, & Blinder, 2023).

Turning towards the government, the UK political landscape has experienced a marked upheaval as evidenced by three Prime Ministers and four different Home Secretaries holding office in 2022, with a gradual shift towards the right. This is particularly evidenced around issues of migration and refugees and asylum seekers. For example, in 2022 then Home Secretary Suella Braverman described illegal immigration as an “invasion” of the southern coast of the UK during a Commons statement, paralleling extremist language of the far-right. More recently, a policy which makes stark ingroup-outgroup boundaries and prime grievances has been calling for ‘British homes for British people’, which would prioritise British nationals for social housing (Stacey, 2024). Such policies and discourse reflect collective narcissism narratives. Collective narcissism centres on the conviction that the exceptionality of one’s ingroup is not appreciated by others, which also underlies populist rhetoric such as that used by the Conservative party (Golec de Zavala, Dyduch-Hazar, Lantos, 2019). Thus, our findings of collective narcissism predicting increased support for extremist attitudes parallel government policies and the Conservative party contemporary playbook.

Traditional far-right and mainstream right political narratives espoused by the Conservative government are converging in their focus on issues and often use the same language (Hope not Hate, 2023a). Importantly, far-right engagement has increased as a result of government policies and their coverage by tabloid media (Hope not Hate, 2023b). Indeed, research suggests that the government is “not taking the far-right threat seriously, but actively feeding it through their rhetoric... with each Government announcement, cracking down on small boat crossings... or sending people thousands of miles away to Rwanda, far-right activity spikes every time.” (Hope not Hate, 2023b). The Conservative party is using increasingly populist rhetoric, such as its focus on nativism, which displays far-right markers (Henley, 2023). These markers are conveyed effectively to the public, as a recent YouGov poll indicates that the Conservative party is now viewed as being as right-wing as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in its 2014-2016 era in the lead up to the EU referendum in 2016 (Smith, 2024). UKIP, a radical right-wing party which emerged into prominence through galvanizing public discourse around the UK’s membership in the EU played a key role in mobilizing the 2016 vote for Brexit (Whiteley et al. 2019).

In this vein, we can situate our findings of social dominance orientation predicting increased extremism: the positioning of the British ingroup and its social identity by British right-wing parties and UK media as being in conflict with, and under threat from other outgroups such as the EU, and within borders, by migrant outgroups. Indeed, our findings parallel other research which has found that social dominance orientation predicts increased prejudice and perceived threats from migrants, and in turn, pro-Brexit attitudes, voting for Brexit, and greater support for UKIP (Golec de Zavala, Guerra, & Simão, 2017; Van Assche, Dhont, & Pettigrew, 2019). Additionally, social dominance orientation should activate dislike towards outgroups who are low in power (to justify superiority and dominance) and those who are perceived as competing for the same position and status (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010), something that is reflected in the ethnic stratification of the UK’s labour market and the hierarchies imposed on migrant groups (Consterdine, 2023; Fox, 2013; Narkowicz, 2023; Wills et al., 2009; Zwysen & Demireva, 2018).

Looking at the extremism variable overall, our measure may reflect public attitudes in the UK today; for example, 73% of 20,000 respondents surveyed reported that they felt that the UK is heading in the wrong direction (Hope not Hate, 2023). Our findings linking populism with support for extremism is echoed in wider public opinion, with a recent poll of 20,000 British individuals by Hope not Hate (2023a) showing that 67% of respondents believing that the political system is broken and politicians do not speak to them. Further, 27% would support an authoritarian leader who eschews democratic processes such as parliament or elections. This parallels other research which reveals that only 35% of the UK population trust the national government, at a rate lower than the OECD average (ONS, 2022).

One group difference on scores of extremism that we would like to highlight is for sex, with men reporting more support for extremist attitudes than women. As extremism was measured using a general measure, we argue that it can pertain to specific ideologies such as misogyny. This difference may reflect the increase of misogynistic extremist ideologies in the UK. For example, a recent poll by NGO Hope not Hate found that half of their male sample had positive views of Andrew Tate, with the main reason given that Tate “wants men to be real men” (Hope not Hate, 2023a), implying dissatisfaction with contemporary perceived progressive gender roles and their representation in British society. Our measure captures the desire to dismantle existing societal structures, which parallels the misogynistic rhetoric that is spread by Tate and his followers. Tate, an online influencer who rose rapidly to fame in 2022 through his promotion of toxic masculinity disguised as traditional masculine virile narratives, has become a key concern for extremist attitudes in young men and boys, with many teachers in the UK reporting that schools are unprepared with dealing with the overwhelming infiltration of Tate’s misogyny (Weale, 2023).

Finally, we can tie some of our findings of the indirect effect of online group identities on increased extremism via increased collective narcissism. Online extremism is increasing (Vali, 2023) with right-wing content on social media platforms such as TikTok “a symptom and symbol of wider mainstream patterns and... widespread systemic racist discourse within the British public sphere (Ozduzen, Ferenczi, & Holmes, 2023, p. 846). A qualitative analysis of far-right content on TikTok revealed themes of nostalgic reinterpretations of historical events, idealised white British culture, and neo-colonialism (Ozduzen et al., 2023), which embody collective narcissism narratives of British in-group superiority and discontent that the exceptionality of the British ingroup is not appreciated sufficiently. Additionally, recent research on fifteen cases of extremism in the UK that online spaces provided more opportunities for radicalisation through enabling communication and connection with like-minded others and through serving as an echo chamber (von Behr, Reding, Edwards, & Gribbon, 2013), supporting the importance of online group identities for endorsement of extremist attitudes.

In conclusion, the UK findings can be situated within the increasingly right-wing public and political sphere bolstered by UK media narratives which make salient an idealised British identity rooted in nostalgia, ingroup-outgroup boundaries, and outgroup threat. The individual-level processes reported in the model parallel the populist scripts that have been adopted by a right-wing government and perpetuated by mainstream media. Our findings can also be interpreted from the perspective of the increasing threat of online misogyny, represented by Tate, which is reaching young men and schoolchildren. Taken together, the patterns of

variables show several processes through which outgroups are perceived as threats and extremist attitudes such as dismantling the status quo come to be endorsed.

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