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DeRadicalisation
in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate

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

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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 Finland. 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

Finland had 25.95% of participants reporting not knowing their political attitudes. This variable was subsequently excluded from the model, keeping all participants and resulting in a final sample of *n* = 316.

Descriptives

Breakdown by age and sex.

	Sex					
	Male		Female		Other	
Mean age (SD)	n	%	n	%	n	%
24.84 (4.57)	152	48.10	163	51.58	1	0.32

Breakdown by religious affiliation.

	n	%
Christian	240	75.95
Agnostic/Atheist	59	18.67
Other	7	2.22
Jewish	4	1.27
Muslim	4	1.27
Buddhist	2	0.63
Bahá'í	0	0.00
Hindu	0	0.00
Sikh	0	0.00

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

	n	%
Yes	57	18.04
No	240	75.95
Don’t know	19	6.01

On what grounds is your group discriminated against?

	n	%
Sexuality	19	33.33
Colour or race	16	28.07
Gender	14	24.56
Nationality	11	19.30
Religion	10	17.54

Language	10	17.54
Age	9	15.79
Ethnic group	7	12.28
Disability	7	12.28
Other	3	5.26

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	58	18.35	150	47.47	108	34.18
Sport or recreational organization	81	25.63	90	28.48	145	45.89
Art, music or educational organization	63	19.94	98	31.01	155	49.05
Labour union	78	24.68	121	38.29	117	37.03
Political party	37	11.71	77	24.37	202	63.92
Environmental organization	50	15.82	72	22.78	194	61.39
Professional association	51	16.14	89	28.16	176	55.70
Humanitarian or charitable organization	40	12.66	84	26.58	192	60.76
Consumer organization	42	13.29	77	24.37	197	62.34
Self-help group or mutual help group	42	13.29	80	25.32	194	61.39
Women's group	46	14.56	76	24.05	194	61.39
Other organization	31	9.81	47	14.87	238	75.32

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	75	23.73	212	67.09	29	9.18
Worked in a political party or action group	55	17.41	236	74.68	25	7.91
Worked in another ideological organization	49	15.51	244	77.22	23	7.28
Displayed a campaign badge/sticker	91	28.80	195	61.71	30	9.49
Signed a petition	139	43.99	143	45.25	34	10.76
Took part in a lawful public demonstration	77	24.37	216	68.35	23	7.28
Boycotted certain products	157	49.68	128	40.51	31	9.81
Posted or shared anything about politics online	106	33.54	187	59.18	23	7.28

Predictors of realistic threat

Holding stronger beliefs about inherent group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was linked with perceiving migrants as a greater threat to one's national ingroup. Stronger feelings of anomie were also linked with increased perceived threat from migrants.

Direct predictors of extremism

Holding stronger beliefs about inherent group hierarchies (social dominance orientation) was also linked directly with increased support for extremist attitudes. Interestingly, and in contrast to our predictions, perceiving that one's economic situation was more deprived relative to migrants was associated with lower support of extremist attitudes. Regarding political ideologies, greater endorsement of populism was linked with more support for extremist

ideologies. In terms of vulnerability, experiencing greater social alienation was linked with more support for extremist attitudes.

Indirect predictors on extremism

Increased social dominance orientation indirectly predicted decreased support for extremist attitudes via decreased populism and subsequent decreased support for extremism. On the other hand, increased social dominance orientation also predicted decreased individual relative deprivation, but decreased individual relative deprivation predicted increased support for extremist attitudes. The total indirect effect of social dominance orientation on extremist attitudes was not significant, and instead, increased social dominance orientation directly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes.

A stronger online group identity indirectly predicted increased support for extremist attitudes via increased populism. However, the total indirect effect of online group identity was not significant.

Predictors of attitudes towards Russian culture, Russian and Ukrainian migrants

In terms of vulnerability, feeling more embedded in one's community and experiencing more social alienation both separately predicted more negative attitudes towards Russia. Perceiving that one's national ingroup was economically more deprived relative to migrants was also associated with more negative attitudes towards Russian culture. Finally, increased political trust in the Finnish system of governance was predictive of more negative views towards Russia. Regarding attitudes towards Russian migrants, feeling more socially embedded in one's community and endorsing more populist ideology were both separately linked with improved attitudes towards Russian migrants in the past twelve months.

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 5. Respecified model for Finland.



2. Situating the findings within the Finnish context

This chapter contextualises the D.Rad survey findings for Finland, a Nordic welfare state with high political trust (Bäck et al. 2019) and low levels of political violence. In Finland, regional differences are relatively small, and no clear geographic pattern of radicalisation exists. Humanitarian and work- and family-related immigration have increased since the 1980s, impacting particularly big cities. In the 2000s, the traditional consensus-based political model was criticised for being ill-adapted to new issues (Saukkonen 2013). The right-populist Finns Party changed the party landscape in 2011 and moved towards a radical-right stance after it split in 2017 (Palonen 2021). New far-right parties have emerged in the 2020s (Fagerholm 2022) with a pro-Putinist fringe (Lahti & Palonen 2023). The intelligence service considers the far right and radical Islamism as the most prominent terrorism threats (SUPO 2023). When the survey was conducted, Finland prepared for parliamentary elections in April 2023; the first regional elections were held in January 2022. The war in Ukraine had a significant effect on Finnish politics and societal atmosphere with strong pro-Ukraine and pro-NATO undertones. The topic of violent youth gangs, mainly consisting of immigrant youth, was also present in the media (e.g., Kirsi 2021). The elections amplified the political debate on security, economy, social policy, immigration, climate and energy.

316 participants (48.10% male, 51.58% female, 0.32% other), on average 24.84 years old (+/- 4.57 years), completed the survey. While their organisational memberships reflect the Finnish tradition of registered associations (Siisiäinen & Kankainen 2009), the high amount of political party members – almost one in three – is surprising, as the general population amounts to five percent (Helminen 2020). Although the “political” survey topic could have led to an over-

representation of party members, a more plausible explanation is a misinterpretation of the question because of the option of choosing between “passive” and “active” (11.71%) membership. The respondents had participated in various political activities during the last 12 months, possibly due to the proximity of several elections. The participants’ age may account for the boycotting products (almost half of the respondents) being higher than among the wider population (see Haerpfer et al. 2022).

Approximately one-fifth of the participants described themselves as members of at least one discriminated group. Among these 57 respondents, one-third mentioned sexuality, every fourth race or gender and one-fifth nationality, largely in line with previous research (e.g., Helsingin kaupunki, kaupunginkanslia, osallisuus ja neuvonta 2021). Participants who reported being members of one or more discriminated groups were less right-wing compared to those who did not do so. They also reported lower perceptions of social cohesion (mutual trust, shared values and solidarity) in their neighbourhood and community, which might be related to their feelings of discrimination. They had higher collective narcissism, a belief in the superiority of one’s group associated with a need for external validation and sensitivity to perceived threats or criticisms of the group, which can be related to group identity but, in more pronounced forms, can lead to negative outcomes like prejudice, hostility towards outgroups, and intergroup conflict. The results can be compared with a study among Finnish Russian speakers that distinguished more positive forms of ingroup identification from perceived ingroup *superiority* that was negatively associated with outgroup attitudes (Mähönen et al. 2014). In extreme forms, the idea of the ingroup’s superiority combined with a sense of victimhood has been visible in Finnish cases of political violence (Lounela et al., 2021).

As in earlier Finnish studies (*e.g.*, Grigaitytė et al. 2019, Benjamin et al. 2023), men had harsher attitudes regarding migrants and social hierarchies and were more prone to extremist views than women. They reported greater political trust, although earlier research has not shown gender differences (Bäck et al. 2019). Women reported stronger populist attitudes than men. All participants were young adults, but older respondents reported lower political trust and stronger attitudes against migrants and Russia than younger ones, while earlier Finnish research on the topic has been mixed (Kuusisto & Kallioniemi, 2014; Grigaitytė et al., 2019; Nshom & Croucher 2017).

The participants’ attitudes towards Russian migrants had worsened a little, but those towards Ukrainian migrants had improved in the last 12 months. Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has affected the political atmosphere in Finland, which has a long border and a history of past wars with Russia. A recent study showed worsened attitudes towards Russia but relatively positive ones towards Russians (Haavisto 2022). Russian speakers form the biggest group of people with a foreign national tongue in Finland (94,000 people or 1.7% of the Finnish population; Official Statistics of Finland n.d.). In a recent survey, four-fifths of Russian speakers in Finland reported not having experienced discrimination or hate speech caused by the war (Cultura-säätiö 2023).

In the D.Rad survey, higher social dominance orientation (SDO, the approval of group-based hierarchies and inequalities) predicted decreased individual relative deprivation (individual relative deprivation; a perception of the self as worse off compared to others) but increased

group relative deprivation (group relative deprivation; a perception of one's ingroup as less fortunate than the outgroup). Neither individual relative deprivation nor group relative deprivation predicted perceptions of migrants as threats. Surprisingly, increased individual relative deprivation predicted *decreased* support for extremist attitudes, as relative deprivation theory typically predicts increased support for extremism among those who feel deprived (Kunst & Obaidi 2020). Higher SDO predicted decreased feelings of social cohesion and decreased populism in one's neighbourhood and community. It also directly predicted greater perceptions of migrants as a threat to Finland and greater support for extremist attitudes. These findings align with studies suggesting that higher SDO correlates with negative attitudes towards outgroups and supports social hierarchies (Benjamin et al., 2023).

Increased social alienation predicted increased support for extremist attitudes, also shown in earlier studies (Bélanger et al. 2019). Populism also predicted increased extremism but had a negative correlation with SDO, although SDO also predicted extremism. As populism refers to an expression of the general will of the people and antagonism between the people and the elite, it can be incoherent with more authoritarian positions despite its anti-establishment character. Increased anomie or the perceived breakdown of social norms predicted a stronger perception of migrants as a threat, in line with studies linking anomie to increased prejudice and hostility towards outsiders (Legge & Heitmeyer 2012). A stronger online group identity was associated with increased collective narcissism, increased perception of social cohesion in one's neighbourhood and community and increased populism. This can be seen as consistent with social identity theory, which suggests that individuals derive self-esteem and identity from their group memberships (Tajfel et al. 2004[1979]).

Higher SDO, increased populism and feelings of social alienation directly predicted greater support for extremist attitudes. While SDO had a direct relationship with extremist attitudes, its indirect effects through populism and individual relative deprivation were complex and ultimately non-significant. This indicates that the preference for social dominance associated with high SDO plays a more direct role in supporting extremism rather than being mediated by feelings of relative deprivation or populist views. The non-significant total indirect effect suggests that other variables not included in this study might impact extremist attitudes. Altogether, 28.90% of the variability in participants' extremist attitudes could be explained by the path model developed in D.Rad.

Finland's characteristics – the Nordic welfare state model, high political trust, a consensual political culture and a low level of political violence – can act as a buffer so that perceived relative deprivation does not lead to a perception of migrants as a threat or to increased extremism. Participants who reported being members of discriminated groups were also less right-wing and did not belong to such groups, possibly affecting the results. In the survey, anomie increased the perception of migrants as a threat, possibly reflecting the political debate on immigrant youth gangs. The connection of SDO with both extremism and views on migrants as a threat aligned with previous research, although the survey did not necessarily capture all the factors at play. Populism correlated negatively with SDO but predicted increased extremism, possibly because of its simultaneous anti-elitist and anti-establishment character. This finding is also interesting considering a move from an anti-elitist discourse towards a far-right one within the Finnish party populism (Palonen 2021).

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