

CASE STUDIES OF INTERACTIVE RADICALISATION

Introduction



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DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality


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1. Introduction

One of the objectives of DARE is to understand radicalisation trends in historical, spatial and political context, including their interaction and potential for cumulative effect. This report focuses on the nature of ‘cumulative extremism’ as viewed over time and through spatial comparison. It examines contemporary radicalisation processes through the theoretical frame of ‘cumulative extremism’ in order to understand historic instances of violent escalation, de-escalation and indeed non-escalation. To test many of the assumptions that scholars, policy makers and the media often make when discussing ‘cumulative extremism’, the five country-level reports that comprise this report on historical case studies of interactive radicalisation, examined the phenomenon in a range of different geographical areas and indeed sites of contestation from the street to the institutional level. As well as examining the phenomenon at both the micro and macro level, these reports also differed in the time-frames that they adopted, some focusing upon longitudinal time-spans, whilst others focused on comparatively short bursts of activity, in order to determine whether and how the dynamics of such contests have changed.

1.1 Theoretical framework

The starting point for this strand of research in DARE was the recognition that ‘radicalisation’ must be understood not simply in terms of individual, psychological characteristics or structural, socio-economic, ‘drivers’ but as a situational, relational or interactional phenomenon. We explored this proposition by utilising the concept of ‘cumulative extremism’ through which the interaction between extremist groups, either at a rhetorical or behavioural level, or both, is key to understanding the relational nature of extremist violence. Social science has adopted a multitude of terms to describe the interactional nature of violence between social movements and small political groups. Donatella della Porta for instance has shown that radicalisation leading to violence is the result of ‘competitive escalation’ between movement activists and opponents and *within* social movement families (della Porta, 2014: 94). Understandings of the dynamic between *opposing* social movements, as well as state agencies, have often drawn on what political scientist Roger Eatwell called ‘cumulative extremism’, which he described as ‘the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms [of extremism]’ (Eatwell, 2006:205). Several ideational variants have since emerged to describe essentially the same broad phenomenon: ‘cumulative radicalization’ (Bartlett & Birdwell, 2013), ‘connectivity between extremisms’ (Ranstorp, 2010), ‘tit-for-tat radicalization’ (Jackson, 2011), ‘reactive co-radicalisation’ (Pratt, 2015) or ‘reciprocal radicalization’ (Bailey & Edwards, 2017).

The idea behind ‘cumulative extremism’ has gained particular traction within some policy fora in recent years (Busher & Macklin, 2015:885) because of fears that clashes between Islamist and anti-Islamist/extreme right actors could produce a spiral of violence, not to mention having a powerful social impact, further polarising already divided communities. The latter, it is feared, could be more damaging, in the long run, than any actual reactive processes between extremist groups themselves, though the two are not mutually exclusive. Recent critical interventions into the debate have suggested the need for further empirical testing and conceptual clarification of notions of cumulative radicalisation. The starting point for the stream of work on interactive radicalisation in DARE was that the empirical evidence, even for the supposedly paradigmatic cases of interactions between extreme Islamist and anti-Muslim/extreme right-wing groups producing ‘spirals’ of violence or community polarisation, was at best mixed (Bartlett & Birdwell, 2013; Macklin & Busher, 2015).

The central research question posed, therefore, was ‘how can the historic comparison between, and within, these national contexts enhance our understanding of the dynamics by which contests between opposing movements and the state escalate, deescalate or fail to escalate?’ Within this larger research question, and depending on the nature of the case study and the empirical data available, researchers also explored the question of in what circumstances radical milieus (when compared across geographical-cultural and historical contexts) might contribute to the escalation of violence, or help limit it. This enabled some – though not all – of the case studies to further elaborate on some of

the principal questions driving the parallel strand of work examining the nature of ‘radical milieus’ in their historical context. This strand of work considered, inter alia, the role of historical memory, within which were contained a variety of narratives of ‘grievance’ and/or ‘humiliation’ within the radicalisation process as well as conspiratorial beliefs. Where the ‘radical milieu’ constituted the unit of analysis for the study of ‘cumulative extremism’, researchers were able to use the opportunity to explore and develop our understanding of how movement cultures and identities can be transformed by the escalation of violence and also, importantly, but often overlooked, how they might also serve to constrain violence. By delineating the points of tension or fracture within and between violent groups and the radical milieus from which they emerge, the case studies reported here also explored some of the strategic, moral and social logics that might facilitate or inhibit greater violence. Where such dynamics and logics could be addressed, this helped to highlight the complexity of violent interactional dynamics rather than simply assuming that opposing groups will automatically enter a ‘spiral’ of violence whenever they encounter one another.

1.2 Case study rationale and description

Researchers adopted a case study approach for both strands of work. The selected case studies cover a broad range of very different geographical areas. The five country level reports in this report cover three western European countries (UK, France, Germany); one Mediterranean country (Greece); and one non-EU country (Turkey). This broad geographic distribution was intended to facilitate the broadest possible scope for observing how ‘cumulative extremism’ might be observed across a range of different national contexts and cultures, not to mention the differences in organisational and institutional formations and how these might inform how escalation, de-escalation and non-escalation play out on the ground.

Aside from their very different national specificities, the case studies themselves explored very different types of actors and interactions as a means of seeking to tease out the many nuances that violent escalation may or may not entail. The UK report tests theories and assumptions about the nature of ‘cumulative extremism’ through a study of violent interaction at political demonstrations between extreme right, anti-fascist and latterly Islamist activists (from late 1960s until the present day). The German report explores a similar phenomenon – the radicalisation impact of clashes between right-wing militants and Salafists in Germany albeit within a much shorter time frame than the British case; specifically, the two years of 2012-2013. The French report meanwhile shifts the unit of analysis from the street to the institutional level to examine the dynamics of cumulative radicalisation between Islamist prisoners and the prison authorities themselves. The Turkish case study again employs a different setting for its analysis – the treatment of Syrian refugees by the Turkish state as well as other societal actors. The Greek case meanwhile consists of a micro-level case study of ‘cumulative extremism’ surrounding the polarised and polarising reactions to proposals to construct a mosque in Athens from 2000 onwards.

1.3 Contribution and future analysis

Taken as a whole, what these very different reports provide is a range of vantage points from which the dynamics of ‘cumulative extremism’ can be tested and indeed teased out since, despite being a regular talking point for scholars and policy makers, to date there has been surprisingly little empirical work undertaken to test our theoretical assumptions. In short, what each of these case studies provide collectively are a blend of longer and shorter time-periods that can help us to elaborate on the difference between ‘spikes’ and ‘spirals’ of violence when such clashes are contextualised historically over a longer period of time than has heretofore been the case. They also provide different scales of analysis consisting of micro and macro studies drawn from a range of national contexts and environments that can also provide a deeper understanding of the impact of the broader social and historical context upon the dynamics of political violence. Importantly, each of the case studies also expands its horizon to look beyond a binary clash of two opposing sets of political actors to consider the impact that the ‘state’ – whether in the shape of the police, the local authority or indeed the

national government – has upon the dynamics of political violence. The case studies themselves also feature a range of outcomes which allow for a more considered evaluation of ‘cumulative extremism’ since the cases themselves involve episodes of escalation, de-escalation and, importantly, non-escalation. Indeed, the researchers also selected their case studies in order to illuminate such diverse outcomes from political interaction between conflicting groups rather than simply selecting on the dependent variable i.e. only choosing instances where violence had indeed escalated. However, even where case studies did indeed explore instances of violent escalation, these were also considered within their wider historic arc. As a result, such instances could be more clearly seen for what they were – ‘spikes’ in violence rather than ‘spirals’. This highlights the need for more care to be taken with regard to the terminology employed to describe such episodes, to ensure it does not fuel the extremist narrative itself vis-à-vis an apocalyptic ‘clash’ of civilisations.

A transnational cross-case comparative report synthesising the findings of the five separate reports is to follow and will highlight the commonalities and differences in processes of violent escalation, de-escalation and non-escalation. Thus, the reports that follow here should be seen as five historically situated research reports which both stand alone but also serve to inform other aspects of the DARE project (specifically the ethnographic studies of Islamist and anti-Islamist/extreme right milieus) with regard to what might be ‘new’ about contemporary patterns of radicalisation and interactive radicalisation.

1.4 Methods and sources

Each of the case studies in D2.2 relied upon desktop research. Whilst primary sources were used to a greater or lesser degree by each of the research teams, secondary academic literature was the principal source of data collection, which ranged across historical and sociology, broadly defined. ‘Grey’ literature was also drawn upon where relevant. Whilst several broader theoretical articles detailing the dynamics of ‘cumulative extremism’ were shared across the research teams, each team also collected and collated their own bespoke literature reviews of the relevant secondary source literature germane to their own case studies. This included academic publications, government reports, newspapers, blogs, memoirs and other such reports. Some reports utilised searchable news databases (i.e. Factiva/Gale) for gathering information whilst others drew more heavily upon archival material.

Given the differing types of data gathered by the research teams, conditioned by the differing nature of each individual study, data analysis varied from case to case. The Greek and UK cases relied heavily on historical and sociological methods of enquiry and data analysis whilst in the Turkish case critical discourse analysis was the principal methodological tool utilised in order to understand the nature of anti-Syrian narratives, their production and legitimisation.

1.5 References

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