

A COMMON LANGUAGE? EMIC PERSPECTIVES ON 'EXTREMISM', 'RADICALISM' AND 'RADICALISATION'

Summary of Key Findings

- ✦ What constitutes (violent) extremism in academic, policy and public debate (etic concepts) varies and changes over time and place. How actors in radical(ising) milieus themselves understand these phenomena (emic concepts) also differs across and within milieus and is shaped by external debate.
- ✦ Etic and emic perspectives converge in understanding these concepts as relational but diverge regarding who, or what, is considered 'extremist'. Both Islamist extremist (ISE) and 'right-wing' extremist (RWE) milieu actors in this study largely dissociate themselves from both extremism and radicalism.
- ✦ Milieu actors articulate what constitutes 'extremism' primarily in relation to proximity to violence. Support, for violence is rare but found more often in the ISE than the RWE milieus.
- ✦ 'Extremism' and 'radicalism' are used interchangeably. Where a distinction is made, 'radicalism' may be considered a potentially positive force for change.
- ✦ Actors in both ISE and RWE milieus view extremism as non-ideologically specific and recognise the presence of 'extremists' or 'radicals' in their own milieus. They often articulate their own non-extremism in relation to those perceived as 'too extreme'.
- ✦ How actors in radical(ising) milieus themselves understand and deploy 'extremism', 'radicalism' and 'radicalisation' is critical to engaging them in dialogue and establishing channels for their situated knowledge to inform Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) policy and practice.
- ✦ Failure to recognise disjuncture between etic and emic concepts can lead milieu actors to feel unfairly labelled 'extremists' and entrench existing grievances. It can also undermine the credibility of the concepts. Either way, it may mean milieu actors feel they might as well be extremist if already labelled as such.

The DARE Research

This research briefing is based on qualitative data collected and analysed as part of the DARE (Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality) project. The project focuses on young people (loosely defined as those aged 15 to 30 years) and on two strands of extremism, which we refer to as 'Islamist' extremism (ISE) and 'right-wing' extremism (RWE).

The DARE project uses a mixed-methods approach and has multiple research strands. In this research briefing, data are drawn primarily from 19 milieu-based ethnographic case studies (10 of ISE milieus, 9 of RWE milieus) in 12 countries including just under 400 semi-structured interviews.

We cannot do justice to the complexity and contentious nature of many terms used in this briefing. For brief conceptual definitions, see: <http://www.dare-h2020.org/concepts.html>. For critical discussion and contextualisation of these terms, please consult the individual research reports: <http://www.dare-h2020.org/research-reports.html>



Further information on the project and participating institutions can be found at the end of this briefing.

emic

'Emic' refers to concepts and categories rooted in actors' self-understanding and is often associated with the study of social phenomena using 'insider accounts'.

etic

'Etic' refers to concepts and categories devised and deployed by external, scientific or policy/practice communities and is associated with the study of social phenomena using theory and concepts meaningful to those communities.

Is radicalisation a socio-political construct or a real societal threat? Etic debates

What constitutes (violent) extremism is discursively constructed. Etic understandings of it, and related concepts, thus change over time and place and are contested. Since 2001, *terrorism* has been re-configured as the study of *violent extremism*, with the terms often used interchangeably to refer to violent behaviours in support of a shared ideology or belief. *Extremism* is increasingly considered to relate to attitudes, opinions and beliefs as well as behaviour, making it a societal as well as security threat. *Radicalism* is generally understood as active support for fundamental political change (Beck, 2015: 18-20) but is distinguished from extremism and viewed, historically, as having acted as 'a force for progress' (Schmid, 2013: iv).

Extremism and radicalism may be understood as relative or relational terms - situating individuals or positions on a continuum of organised opinion in a particular time and place (Bouhana, 2019: 7; Sedgwick, 2010: 481). Berger (2018: 44-48) characterises 'extremism' in more absolute terms as the belief that an in-group's success or survival is integrally connected to the need for hostile action - from verbal attacks and discrimination to violence - against an out-group. The centrality to this definition of the perceived threat of an 'out-group' to the 'in-group', however, makes this understanding of extremism also relational.

The concept of *radicalisation* has been subject to particular critique. Sedgwick (2010) suggests that its overlapping but differing use (in security, integration and foreign policy contexts) and the failure to clearly identify the continuum of organised opinion referred to, has rendered the concept a source of confusion. There is a growing body of work that critically deconstructs the political framing of notions of 'extremism' and 'radicalisation' (Kundnani, 2012; Kühle and Lindekilde, 2012) in relation specifically to 'Islamist' extremism (see Box 1). A number of studies have documented the consequences for Muslim communities of the application of these concepts in the development of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policy and practice (Thomas, 2016; Kundnani, 2014; Abbas, 2019; Pilkington and Acik, 2020). Emic perspectives on what constitutes 'extremism' are drawn on in some of these studies as well as in Pilkington's (2021) study of 'extreme right' actors.

This Research Briefing draws on 19 ethnographic studies with young people in 'Islamist' milieus and 'Right-wing' extremist milieus to explore how they understand, and act on, what constitutes 'extremism', 'radicalism' and 'radicalisation' and the implications of this for how to prevent or counter radicalisation.

Box 1: Critiquing the concept of 'radicalisation' using an emic approach

Kühle and Lindekilde' (2012: 1608) interrogate the concept of 'radicalisation' through 'listening and respecting how the actual target groups reflect on the phenomenon'. They do this through the study of a friendship-based Muslim milieu in the city of Aarhus referred to by those outside it as the 'radical' Muslim milieu. They find that this etic understanding conflates three distinctions within the narratives of the interviewees and fails to capture their complex opinions (e.g. on terrorism). They argue that this etic discourse of radicalisation, envisaging 'a slippery slope from individual violent sympathies to membership of groups and engagement in collective violence' could hinder rather

Convergence and divergence of etic and emic understandings of key concepts

There remains no agreed definition of 'radicalisation' (Neumann, 2013: 874). At the most general level, it refers to the *process* by which individuals or groups come to embrace attitudes, or engage in actions, that support violence in the pursuit of extremist causes. However, this makes its definition dependent upon what is understood as 'extremism' (the continuum question raised by Sedgwick) and, in particular, whether 'extremism' can be manifest in attitudes alone or only if translated into violence or support for violence.

'You can't defend a terrorist. Doesn't matter if he's on the right or left, does it, he's a terrorist. He's planning terrorist acts, so...' Dan (UK, RWE)

At this broad level - the understanding of radicalisation and associated concepts as relational in nature and active discussion of whether extremism relates to attitudes as well as actions - emic debates reflect etic ones.

However, significant divergences emerge when etic and emic understandings are compared on what, and who, is considered 'extremist'.

Terrorism: other people's violence

In RWE milieus, etic perspectives are articulated and largely upheld by respondents in relation to the concept of *terrorism* i.e. milieu actors assign terrorism a distinctive place in the discourse arising from both the use of violence and the separation of the target for political action

(governments, institutional powers) and victims (often civilian bystanders). For these reasons, right-wing terrorism alongside all forms of terrorism is condemned.

Etic perspectives are also confirmed in as much as (violent) extremism is strongly associated with *Islamist* terrorism by actors within the RWE milieus studied. However, some milieu actors rationalise their own violent acts in a way that dissociates self from 'terrorism' even where they have been convicted of terrorist acts (see Box 2).

For actors in the Islamist milieus studied, in contrast, 'terrorism' is an etic concept that is rejected as a notion that is politically deployed within a securitising discourse targeting Muslim communities in the West. When acts of a similar nature are committed by Muslim actors, on the one hand, and western states, on the other, respondents say, only those committed by Muslims will be considered 'terrorist acts'.

FRANK (NORWAY, ISE)

'[...] on a global basis, generally, it is like Muslims can be seen as a group which are treated incredibly unfairly. And... for example, if a Muslim kills a non-Muslim, suddenly it's a terrorist attack. But if America, for example, blows up five hundred people, then it's allowed – then it's just a war against terrorism. [...] to say "the Jews were never gassed", that's not true, that's total delirium, that's radicalisation, that's indoctrination and that's brainwashing. This is political extremism. Conspiracy in general is extremism, it's radicalisation.'

Box 2: Dissociation of (own) violence from terrorism – defending Corsican culture

An illustrative case here is a research participant in the French case study, whose immediate association with the word radicalisation is 'Islam'. Although, at the time of interview, Bobby was serving a prison sentence for nationalist (Corsican) terrorism, he neither considers himself 'radical' nor imagines that he might himself have undergone a process of 'radicalisation'. His rationale for not considering his own violence (which has included the use of explosive devices) as terrorism but considering actions of Islamists to constitute such is two-fold. First, the target of the violence is crucial; *'they'* [Islamists], he says *'attack civilians'*. Second, while Bobby sees his own actions as defensive (of his culture and society) rather than supporting an ideological mission. *'I didn't have an ideal'*, he says, while *'they'* (Islamists) are *'fighting for Islam'* (Bobby, France, RWE).

What is extremism? Ideas vs actions

Across both RWE and ISE milieus, the greatest divergence between etic and emic debates concerns who or what should be considered 'extremist' or 'radical'.

Etic categorisations of 'extremism' increasingly include not only behaviour but also ideas that differ from established norms and have potentially dangerous or harmful consequences (see, for example, Kruglanski and Orehek, 2012: 12; CCE, 2019). This potentially creates a form of equivalence between the two when, in fact, only a small proportion of those who hold radical, or even extreme, ideas go on to commit acts of violence and not even all of those who engage in violent behaviour have radical beliefs (Horgan, 2012; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017: 211). For this reason, some models of radicalisation – such as the 'Two-Pyramids model' (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017) – maintain the non-determinacy of opinion and action.

The DARE project findings on how milieu actors understand the relationship between 'ideas' and 'actions' leads us to broadly support McCauley and Moskalenko's (2017: 211) conclusion that there is only a 'weak relation between attitude and behavior'. This is evident in the fact that the use of, or support for, violence as a means to bring about change appears in research participants' narratives as the most widely held marker of passage across the threshold into extremism. In interpreting this finding, however, it is important to remember that the majority of research participants in the DARE project, while active in radical(ising) milieus, had not themselves crossed this threshold to violent extremism. Moreover, the milieu approach we adopt is premised precisely upon the recognition of the importance of the presence of a non-violent but vocal and visible wider milieu – sharing many of the views articulated by those prepared to enact those views through non-democratic or violent means – to legitimising violent extremism. We cannot conclude therefore that there is no relation between radicalisation of attitudes and the manifestation of such attitudes in action, as some of our research participants suggest.

Violence as the marker of extremism: RWE milieus

Across RWE milieus, the use of, or support for, 'using violence towards people who think differently' (R2,

Netherlands, RWE) is the most consistently cited marker of extremism or radicalisation towards extremism. It follows that actors in the RWE milieus studied mainly seek to dissociate themselves from violence, seeing it as acceptable only in direct self-defence. Gareth (UK, RWE) draws this line simply as that you should be able to say what you want but to 'throw a brick at someone because he has a different point of view to yours' is wrong.

FREDERIC (GERMANY, RWE)

'I think it's extremist when people try to impose their views on you without caring about the consequences. Not giving a shit if someone gets hurt or killed or worse. The main thing is to get your point across. I think that's extremist.'

The lines become more blurred when milieu actors reflect on what might constitute 'extremism' that does not involve physical violence or acts of terrorism. In a number of milieus, actors understood extremism to be enacted when people sought to impose their views even if they used means short of violence to do so. Taking into account the consequences of extreme opinions is important to both Frederick and Paul although while the former is concerned to warn against articulating ideas that might lead to harm, the latter emphasises the distinction he believes should be made between ideas and action to promote them.

PAUL (UK, RWE)

'[...] opinions aren't extremism. But they [extremists] try to bring about their opinions [...] through violence, through terror. So you can be somebody who believes in multiculturalism. But if you go around stabbing people who don't, you are an extremist. You can believe in an absolute Islamic caliphate. That's not really extremism. Extremism is going out and blowing somewhere up, because you believe in the caliphate. [...] you can have people who believe in the Third Reich or Adolf Hitler. Now that's not extremism until you start attacking people and imposing your will on others. And extremism isn't a belief system, it is how you try to bring that belief system into the real world [...] extreme ideas and extremism are different'

Some individuals in our study believe that, ideas alone could be considered 'extremism'. Gary believes Holocaust denial can be considered extremism while Will (UK, RWE) argues that if violence is implicit in the views held – for example of neo-Nazis who see a race-based 'civil war' as necessary to achieve their aims - then this constitutes extremism.

GARY (FRANCE, RWE)

'[...] to say "the Jews were never gassed", that's not true, that's total delirium, that's radicalisation, that's indoctrination and that's brainwashing. This is political extremism. Conspiracy in general is extremism, it's radicalisation.'

The rejection of violence in principle does not mean that violence is absent from RWE milieus in practice. In the Polish and UK milieus, in particular, some actors engaged in football-related fighting, with its own rituals and rules of engagement.

Support for, or participation in, violence related to political activism was encountered mainly in the Greek and Russian milieus. In the Greek milieu, there is widespread acceptance of violence, a strong militarisation of the movement and a stated readiness *'to shed our blood for our fatherland, our religion and our relatives'* (Father Gabriel, Greece, RWE). Thomas, who leads a Greek-Orthodox armed paramilitary group believes civil war - between those who defend national values and 'internationalists' who defend immigrants - is imminent and he is preparing and training his members for armed clashes with immigrants, who he sees as ready to attack the Greeks (Field diary, Greece, RWE).

In the Russian milieu of young Cossacks, research participants often justify the use of violence against social

groups they see as threatening the current social order and political regime such as political groups opposing the government, migrants, LGBT+ communities and feminists. This violence might take place during Cossack participation in the dispersal of oppositional protests or raids conducted in collaboration with the police on places where drugs are sold or consumed.

'I believe that appropriate physical action can be applied against private citizens if you see a direct threat [...] a threat to the Fatherland.'

(Alexandr, Russia, RWE)

Violence as a response to violence: ISE milieus

Among ISE milieus, the term 'extremism' (and sometimes 'radicalism') is ascribed where violence is present and perceived to be indiscriminate and illegitimate. Such violence elicits strong negative responses such as that of Ousmane, talking about the attack on the Bataclan theatre in Paris (13 November, 2015).

OUSMANE (FRANCE, ISE)

Ousmane recalls that he cried when the attack on the Bataclan took place *'Because it's incredible to do that in the name of God, in the name of Allah. It's incredible. It is not possible.'*

However, the use of violence is sometimes considered justified – especially in self-defence. Such justifications were mainly encountered in the Russian and French ISE milieus. A number of respondents talked about the attack on the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo as understandable and explained terrorist attacks, such as those in Paris in November 2015, as a response to ongoing violence directed by western forces against Muslims (see Box 3).

Box 3: Justifications of violence

'Everything they experienced there, on the 13th of November in one evening, Muslims experience it every day. Every day they live it. What they experienced in a few hours, Muslims have been experiencing for years.' Romain (France, ISE)

'It is war. But, we can't play it holy. America doesn't either. Performing executions. For example, the Kurds in Iraq, the court in Iraq, where the young people are now being convicted for what they have committed in Syria, they are all being murdered. Hung. Yes, that's bad too. We cannot say one thing is less bad and another more bad. Do you understand? Both are bad.' R14 (Netherlands, ISE)

While participants in ISE milieus were more likely to justify violence than respondents in the RWE milieus, they were also more likely to consider those adopting some ideological positions – such as '*takfiris*', '*jihadis*' and '*kharijites*' – as expressions of 'extreme' or 'radical' values, beliefs and behaviours, with or without their express support for or involvement in violence.

Radicalism and extremism: do milieu actors differentiate?

So far the terms 'extremism' and 'radicalism' have been used largely interchangeably but a key distinction is drawn in academic discourse between *extremism* and *radicalism*. 'Radicals' are understood as being open-minded and employing critical thinking rather than displaying the closed-minded, rigid and dogmatic characteristics ascribed to 'extremists' (Schmid, 2013: 9-10). Schmid's distinction between 'radicals' and 'extremists' is applied across the ideological spectrum and extremists of all persuasions are seen to have a propensity towards the use of force/violence over persuasion in achieving their political aims (ibid.: 9). These differences between 'radicals' and 'extremists' are

important, Schmid argues, because 'Radicalism is redeemable – radical militants can be brought back into the mainstream, extremist militants, however, much less so.' (ibid.: 10).

Across the milieus studied, research participants saw radicalism and extremism as related in one of three main ways (see Figure 1). Across the RWE milieus studied, many research participants use the terms 'radicalism' and 'extremism' interchangeably, understanding them as '*the same thing*' (Mona, Germany, RWE). Both terms are understood negatively and as applied to de-legitimise the ideas of those on the Right and close down the space for their expression. In ISE milieus, when radicalism is viewed negatively, it is also used interchangeably with extremism.

Where milieu actors do distinguish radicalism from extremism they often map these terms against the distinction between 'ideas' or 'beliefs' and 'action' discussed above. Thus, extremism is understood as the violent enactment of radical ideas (see Figure 2).

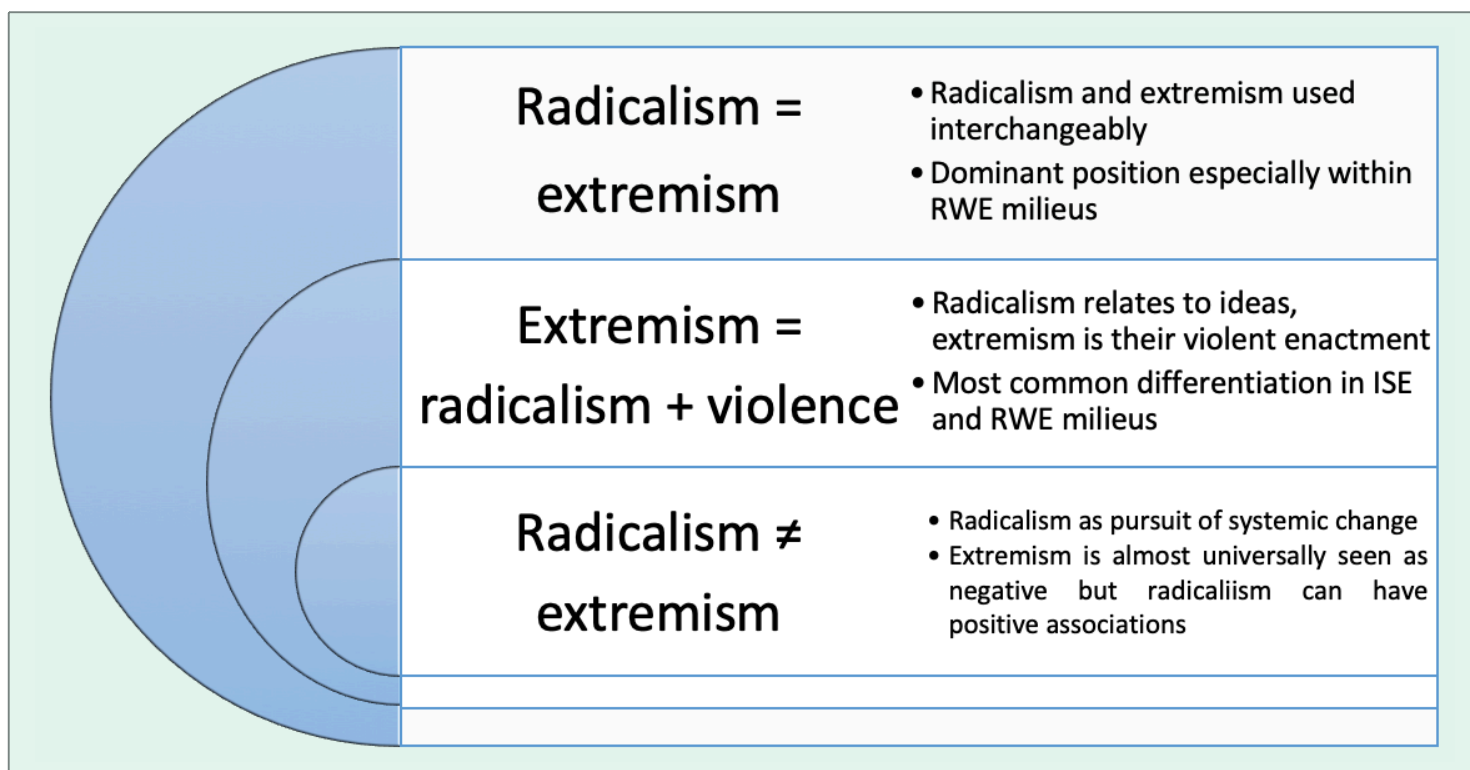


Figure 1: Milieu actors' configuration of the relationship between radicalism and extremism

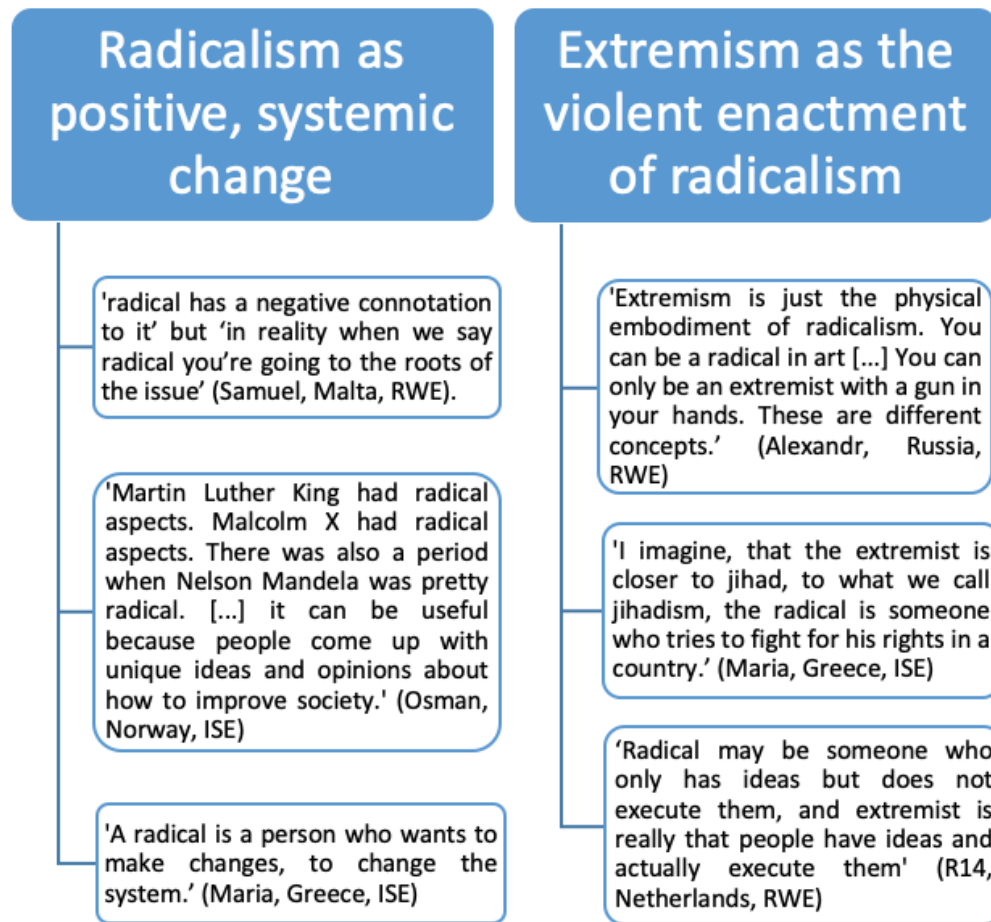


Figure 2: Milieu actors' distinctions between extremism and radicalism

In some cases, milieu actors express positive associations with radicalism (see Figure 2). When

'I didn't say I wasn't radical. I did say I wasn't extreme.' Will (UK, RWE)

RWE actors do this, they often refer to its etymological origins - *'going back to the roots'* (Mikaël, France, RWE) – and see something positive

in someone *'who thinks against the system'* (Michael, Germany, RWE).

For ISE milieu actors for whom 'radical' has positive connotations, being radical means being strict, principled, and passionately committed. Radical may be seen as an *act of resistance* by the young Muslims who want to free the term from its association with the use of violence and reclaim it for something positive and good. This distinction means that, in a few cases, milieu actors accept that they might be radicals but they are certainly not extremists.

'I may have radical views, but I don't want to fight. I can be radical, but not an extremist'
Ramzan (Russia, ISE)

KOSTAS (GREECE, RWE)

Radicalism is *'any kind of ideology or movement which is inspired by old or new ideas and is characterised by a tendency to change the existing order of things and bring about something new.'*

However, statements about what constitutes radicalism must be interpreted in context. For example, for research participants in the Greek case study, radicalism is associated with the pursuit of profound change in the existing order but with the aim of creating something 'new'. This understanding reflects a wider invocation of palingenetic ideologies that envisage a national rebirth and lie at the core of fascism (Griffin, 1991: 26). Vaggelis (Greece, RWE) illustrates this, citing both *'the Nazis'* and *'the Communists'* as examples of *'radicals'* who *'wanted to change the status quo of Europe'*.

Box 4: Indiscriminate labelling of right-wing actors as extremist

'[...] if you say something bad against a foreigner, then you are often called a Nazi and this is not so, this is not a Nazi. A Nazi is much more extreme, much worse and I think it's similar with the two terms 'extremism' and 'radicalism.' That is too often [...] used, when it is not yet the case.' Maurice (Germany, RWE)

'A Muslim extremist is a Muslim that advocates violence or carries out violence. But a nationalist is always an extremist. There's not nationalists and nationalist extremists.' Paul (UK, RWE).

'[...] the nation is the extension of the family, so if you love your own people, your own ethnicity, your own culture, you would be following nature's path. I think it's something positive [...] if a father or a mother love their own child more than they love their neighbour's child, it's not something which is unfair or discriminatory, you know, like a lot of the mainstream media tries to portray patriots, trying to demean them, especially if they're on the right side of the political spectrum. They try to portray them as Nazis, as skinheads, when in fact it's not true...' Alex (Malta, RWE)

These differences in interpretation capture the tension between and within extreme right milieus between traditionalist or conservative ideologies and those looking to construct a new order.

Who is extremist? How actors in radical(ising) milieus see themselves and others

In our research milieu actors across both ISE and RWE milieus rarely recognise their own views, beliefs, values or actions as 'radical' or 'extremist'. They describe themselves, rather, as socially conservative, traditional or orthodox. In dissociating themselves from 'extremism', however, they may attribute this characteristic to others. This applies to oppositional 'others' but also to those within their milieu who they view as being 'more extreme' than them. It is the latter with which we are concerned here.

RWE milieus: dissociation from 'extremism'

Actors in right-wing milieus recognise the presence of extremist ideas and actors within their immediate milieu or on the wider right-wing spectrum. However, they distance themselves from extremism by declaring the

term to be a 'label' indiscriminately applied to those on the Right to automatically deem them 'far right' or 'extreme right'. Within the UK milieu, a play on words - *'I'm not far right, just right'* (Johnny, UK) – is often used to express this whilst making claims to moderation and truth. When talking about themselves, milieu actors often do not spontaneously refer to 'right/left' distinctions at all, preferring terms such as 'patriot', 'traditionalist', 'nationalist' or 'conservative' (see Box 4).

RWE actors also dissociate themselves from extremism by distinguishing themselves from those who are 'too extreme' such as movements, ideas and individuals associated with 'Nazis' or 'neo-Nazism', 'white supremacism', 'racism' or 'anti-Semitism' (see Box 5).

A small number of actors in the RWE milieus acknowledge that their views are extreme. An older member of the Greek milieu accepts the characterisation of him and his fellow Golden Dawn supporters as nationalists, fascists and neo-Nazis and says he is proud to be called a nationalist: *'[...] I prefer to be called a fascist, I prefer to be called a neo-Nazi than doing nothing for the sake of my country'* (Father Daniel, Greece, RWE).

Box 5: 'Too extreme' is....

'Nazism. Neo-Nazism. Nazi like, that's extreme in my opinion. [...] when you're willing to align yourself with [...] a group that killed, you know, six and a half million people, innocent people. [...] And that happened all across Europe really, so if they want to align themselves with those groups, then they are extremist. They're not welcome; they're not welcome in any country, any state [...] sooner we get rid of neo-Nazis, the better.' Jermaine (UK, RWE)

'[...] they [Nordic Resistance Movement] are concerned with race and keeping Scandinavia white and that is not my concern at all! That is definitely to cross a line.' Anita (Norway, RWE)

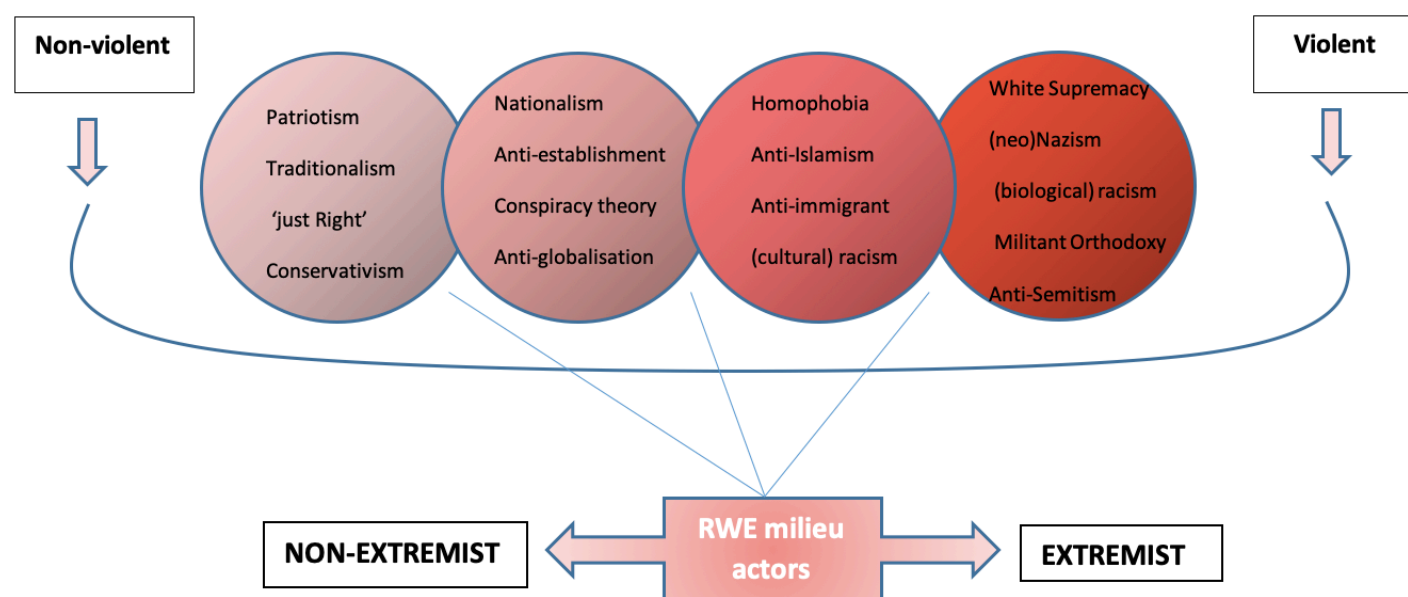


Figure 3: RWE actors' understandings of extremism and its proximity to violence

How RWE milieu actors talk about themselves, 'others' who are 'too extreme' and how this relates to their understanding of what constitutes extremism and violence is visualised in Figure 3 (above).

ISE milieus: Is there a 'moderate', 'radical', 'extreme' or 'only one' Islam?

Actors in the ISE milieus studied also expressed deep frustration with what appears to them as the arbitrary nature of what constitutes 'radical' or 'extreme' in etic discourse. Figure 4 (below) illustrates the associations ISE milieu actors in our study have with 'extremism' and 'moderation' and how they position 'Salafism' and 'Islamism' differently, or ambivalently, between the two.

For Rodin (Turkey, ISE) the notion of 'radical Islam' is nonsensical because 'there is only one Islam and there is no such thing as radical, social or cultural Islam.' Ihsan

(Turkey, ISE) also complains that the term 'moderate Islam' was invented by western powers and makes sense only in relation to so-called 'extreme' or 'radical' Islam; for him 'moderate Islam is a Trojan horse put in by Western Imperialism'.

Osman (Norway, ISE) critiques the practice of linking *Islam* the religion (belief) rather than *Islamism* the political ideology (behaviours) with extremism and terrorism.

OUSMANE (FRANCE, ISE)

'[...] for me the word "radicalisation" reflects an invention [...] It doesn't exist for me, because what we are is radicalised people, radicalised Muslims, and I call them "non-Muslims". They are not Muslims, they are not Muslims at all.'

OSMAN (NORWAY, ISE)

'I can say that, with my background and culture and religion and everything, it [homosexuality] is not an acceptable thing [...]' 'The first thing people connect with it are Islam and Islamist terror, and people... The Islam word is used so much that it isn't easy for your average person to distinguish between normal Muslims who follow normal Islam and those who follow extreme interpretations of Islam.'

For Fatma (Turkey, ISE) and Ousmane (France, ISE), 'radicalism' and 'Islamic faith' are so contradictory that their co-existence is not possible. Fatma rejects the very idea of 'Islamic radicalisation' because, she says, Islam is a religion of balance (*wasatiyya*) and tolerance. Ousmane concludes simply that a 'radicalised Muslim' is not a Muslim.

This is not to say that milieu actors reject that there are radical ideologies, beliefs and behaviours in their milieus. Respondents refer, in particular, to '*takfiris*', '*jihadis*' and '*kharijites*' as having values and beliefs that position them

Box 6: ISE milieu actors' views on Salafism

'I wouldn't put them [Salafis] in this category [extremism], they are like...like factions, dissenters. It's a bit like having Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox. Does that make them extremists? It doesn't...' Nikos (Greece, ISE)

Sevgi (Turkey, ISE) knows and admires Salafis and argues that *'Salafism has nothing to do with ISIS...'* However, she also associates Salafis with violence and says they are often *'too takfiri'*.

'*kharijites*' as having values and beliefs that position them at the most 'extreme' end of the ISE spectrum. These are positions from which milieu actors distance themselves.

However, terms such as 'Salafi' evoke a range of different reactions. Luha (Turkey, ISE) associates radical Islamists with Salafism and Zehra (Turkey, ISE) uses Salafi and radical interchangeably. Participants in the Greek milieu tend to place Salafis at the extreme end of the spectrum whilst not openly calling them extremist and not associating them with violence and terrorism (see Box 6).

Some respondents empathise with those who had been misled by others into believing going to Syria would allow them to erase past misbehaviour. Others are more critical of their lack of knowledge of Islam.

R3 (NETHERLANDS, ISE)

'They have been fooled, lovely guys with whom you normally get along well.... They were enticed with promises of gold and silver in the afterlife. So there are some who have been misguided and, otherwise good, guys who have felt they have misbehaved in the past; they are looking for an opportunity to erase everything from the past... [...] Later I heard that they were dead... I really did worry about that; they have become victims of that ideology. I spoke to one who said: look, our brothers are being slaughtered by Assad, we must do something. They weren't extremists... you can't apply a single measure to all. They had good ideals, but were disappointed.'

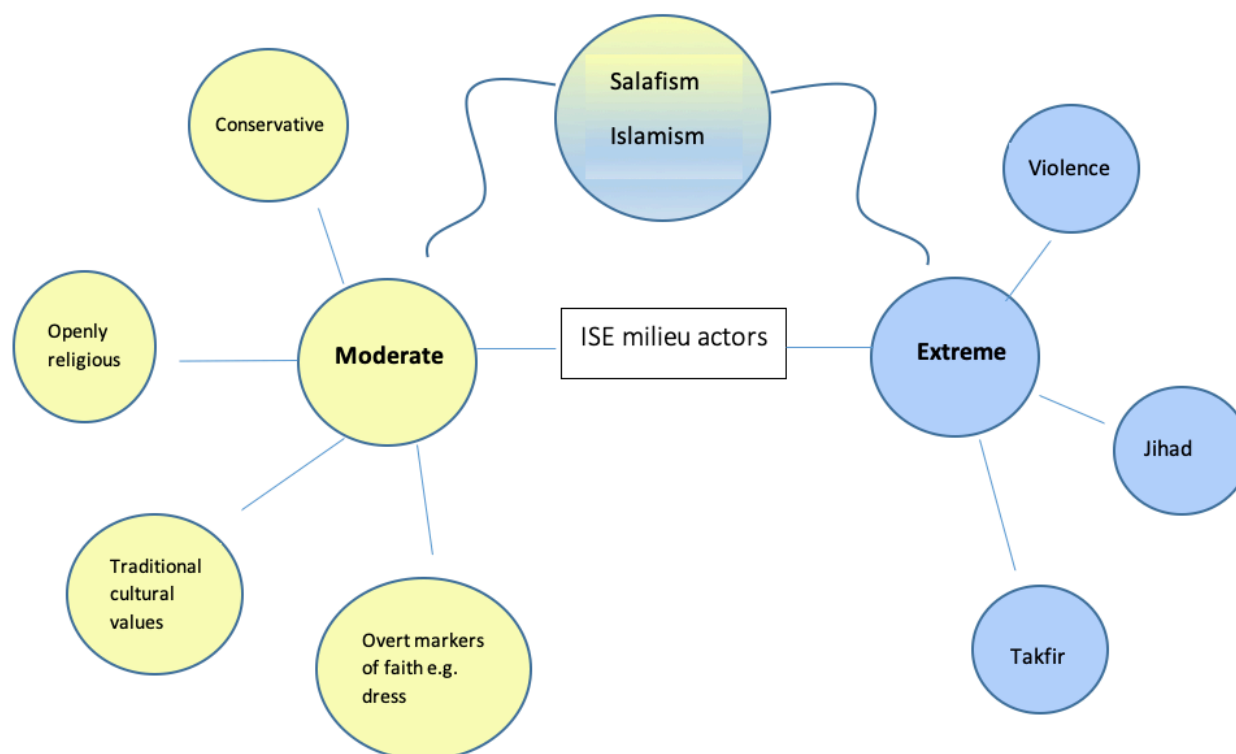


Figure 4: ISE milieu actors' understandings of 'extreme' and 'moderate' Islam and their relationship to Salafism and Islamism

Finding a common language: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism

Recognising the disjuncture between etic and emic understandings of 'extremism', 'radicalism' and 'radicalisation' is not only an academic issue. The failure to learn how actors in radical(ising) milieus themselves understand, reflect on and deploy these terms reduces our ability to generate meaningful dialogue with them. Moreover, the situated knowledge of actors in these milieus is crucial to the design and development of more effective P/CVE interventions.

Two consequences of the disjuncture between etic and emic understandings of extremism are identified in the findings of the DARE project. The first is the danger that the indiscriminate labelling of actors in radical(ising) milieus as 'extremists' further entrenches grievance and empties the term of meaning. It follows that milieu actors feel that they might as well become extremist if they are already labelled as such. The second is that the potential for the situated knowledge of these actors in informing better P/CVE policy and practice may be lost.

Consequences of labelling: entrenching grievance and emptying 'extremism' of meaning

The growing literature on the unintended consequences of P/CVE policy and practice points to the danger that it results in the labelling of Muslim communities as inherently prone to radicalisation and entrenches a sense of 'suspect' status. This is exacerbated, we find, by the disjuncture between etic and emic understandings of what constitutes 'extremism'. For example, ISE milieu respondents frequently complain that visual markers of religious adherence (dress, personal appearance) are automatically associated with 'extremism'. Drawing on

his wife's experience, Zakir (Norway, ISE) states, *'In Norway it's almost like career suicide to defend the niqab...as soon as you wear a niqab, you're an extremist.'*

R3 (NETHERLANDS, ISE)

'I am starting to understand more and more what a 'moderate' Muslim is and what an 'extreme' Muslim is. I have the feeling that if you want to practise your faith moderately, pray five times a day, no alcohol, then people tend to say you are radical. [...] Moderate is often understood as not practising religion and going to discotheques. [...] If that's the definition of moderate, then I am not moderate. That's why I say, "Come up with definitions, don't attach labels without explaining what you mean by them." That's unfair, but it happens a lot.'

The ensuing sense of injustice can embed existing grievances rooted in wider experiences of discrimination and misrecognition. The concepts of 'extremist' are also undermined when, in public discourse 'extremism' is associated with the everyday practices of faith such as praying five times a day and abstaining from alcohol.

A similar perception that 'extremism', specifically 'right-wing extremism', had become emptied of meaning was encountered among RWE milieu actors. As in the ISE milieu, RWE milieu actors are angered by the 'injustice' of being labelled 'fascist' (see Christopher, France, Box 7) and see this as counterproductive as it can back people, who already feel 'silenced', into corners from which they have no other place to go and little to lose (see Dan, UK, Box 7).

Box 7: Extremism as empty signifier in RWE milieus

'[...] if it's fascism to say that I see more veiled women than we used to see, then I'm a fascist. It's not the fear of being called a fascist, I don't give a fuck, but it's the injustice I can't stand [...] when you express your ideas, even with the greatest diplomacy, we will call you a fascist because you don't have the same ideas as them.' Christopher (France)

'Well extremists now, the word extremist is just, to me doesn't matter anymore. Because they're classing everyone as an extremist, you know what I mean. You've got... they class me, obviously, they'd probably class me as a right-wing extremist. Which is, which is pathetic, 'cause I'm not. But they are just throwing that word about now. It's like the racist word – it just doesn't mean nothing to me anymore. Someone calls me a racist, I couldn't give a flying fuck, to be fair.' Dan (UK)

Situated knowledge of milieu actors: a lost potential?

Actors in both the ISE and RWE milieus largely dissociate themselves from extremism in general as well as those they consider to be 'too extreme' within their own milieus. While this might be interpreted as deviance disavowal, actors in some milieus demonstrate a proactive concern with preventing or constraining radicalisation.

ESPEN (NORWAY, RWE)

'I have some contact with a group of youngsters that I try to keep a little bit on the straight and narrow. [...] ... I mean when the Nordic Resistance Movement is growing it is easy for some young people to be attracted to them... I try to turn them towards a more peaceful and democratic path through Snapchat and such channels.'

Across both ISE and RWE milieus we found individual and group declarations of openness to difference, disagreement and challenge to their views as well as a recognition of the importance of dialogue in reconciling disagreement and preventing extremism (see Figure 5).

Individuals also talk about their own role in preventing or countering extremism through informal practices. Paul

(UK, RWE) and Espen (Norway, RWE) both talk about their active engagement with younger people in their milieus who they try to divert away from 'real' violent extremist actors. Among ISE milieus, similarly, Jalil (UK, ISE) recounts how he had intervened when he saw another milieu actor become 'brainwashed'.

JALIL (UK, ISE)

'He told me, and I got him, I go, "you don't need to... the people trying to recruit you, they're trying to brainwash you, they're trying to look at the people who's most vulnerable and try to tell lies about them, saying this is nice, you know" [...] I go to him, "anyone can recruit you, but you have to say no. Because you, you're taking your own life. This is quite serious."

In some RWE milieus studied, the movements or organisations milieu actors belonged to took an active role in countering extremism. For example, the Marksmen's youth organisation (known as the 'Federation of the St. Sebastianus Marksmen's Youth') organised an official campaign called 'Marksmen against the Right', which declared its 'rejection of all forms of radicalism'.

Openness to difference and dialogue

'In normal circumstances people can solve their differences through dialogue [...] I can understand both the point of view of an Islamist extremist and of an extremist right-winger. Both of them are partially right, but the point is to strike a balance so that neither need to exist [...] I want things to be resolved on the basis of dialogue...' (Takis, Greece, ISE)

'More dialogue! The goal is to find the truth. Instead of talking about each other and pointing fingers... Dialogue to come closer together and have more understanding... That is better than being prejudiced against each other (R4, Netherlands, ISE)

'You don't have to agree, but you have to accept the other, yes. [...] More acceptance, more tolerance. [...] That's exactly what I'm talking about with extremism, radicalism, too, that it is a lack of open-mindedness and openness towards other topics and other opinions. (Michael, Germany, RWE)

'If I'm wrong on these things, let's have a conversation. Don't just shoot me down. Do not call me a Nazi, do not call me a racist – have a conversation with me.' (Cara, UK, RWE)

Figure 5 Openness to difference and dialogue in ISE and RWE milieus

and included activities aimed at 'sensitising children and young people to the dangers of political extremism' (see: https://www.bdsj.de/projekte_aktionen/aktiongegenrechts/). In the course of the campaign against the Right, wristbands with the slogan 'Marksmen Against the Right' ('Schützen gegen Rechts') were also produced and distributed to marksmen at various events (see Plate 1).



Plate 1: Wristband with slogan 'Marksmen against the Right' ('Schützen gegen rechts')

UK members of the Democratic Footballs Lads Alliance believed their movement had a distinct role to play in countering extremism (see Plate 2). As Mikey (UK, RWE) explains, 'One of our logos is "Against all extremism" and that includes obviously the usual suspects, things like IRA, Islamists, but also far-right groups like National Action. We just basically condemn extremism in all its forms.'



Plate 2: DFLA placard, Telford action, 30.03, 2018)

Within ISE milieus there was an awareness of the need for communities to be alert to the danger of extremists 'within' and a view that it was important that young

people be educated in Islam through authentic sources of Islamic scholarship rather than 'random' internet sites. To this end, one research participant in the UK milieu, acted as a kind of street pastor and had established a weekly informal gathering for young people where just listening to those whose ideas are 'different' was seen as crucial to preventing extremism.

ABU YAHYA (UK, ISE)

'Like I said before, there's been brothers... there's always brothers with different ideas, different views of things, including people like that. They've come and gone over the years, yeah. But we make it a point to, once we find out about those kind of things, sit them down, get their view of it, because it's important to listen, that they have someone to listen to, and to deal with the issues head on, instead of brushing it under the carpet. And I think they like that, 'cause they're just looking for someone, just like all young people, to listen to them.'

In drawing attention to emic understandings of extremism, radicalism and radicalisation, we do not suggest that these 'insider' accounts should be privileged or deemed uniquely authentic. The ethnographic data on which this Research Briefing is based is constrained by what spaces the researchers can access and observe and which actors are willing to engage and what they choose to say. However, the reflections of milieu actors provides important insight into where etic and emic conceptualisations of what and who constitutes extremist or radical and helps inform policy and practice in preventing or countering extremism.

TONYA (UK, RWE)

Reflecting on how we might prevent radicalisation by 'listening to' so-called extremists, one research participants states simply,

'If you've tried to humanise them and actually speak to them, they're more likely to listen.'

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Participating Institutions

- The University of Manchester, UNITED KINGDOM
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- École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, FRANCE
- Anadolu University, TURKEY
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- Teesside University, UNITED KINGDOM
- Collegium Civitas University, POLAND
- Panteion University of Social and Political Science of Athens, GREECE
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