



Originally published by [openDemocracy](#)>>

Author: [Prof. Umut Korkut](#), Project Coordinator, Professor of International Politics,
Glasgow Caledonian University

Every time there is a violent attack in the Global North, such as the suicide bombing in Liverpool this weekend or the recent [stabbing](#) of a British MP or the [attack](#) in Norway last month, we see discussions about violent radicalisation and the dangers posed by

radicalised individuals. But this conversation rarely addresses the role of state institutions in fomenting such violence.

Around the world, we increasingly see politicians triggering radicalised action either by inciting violence against their political enemies or marginalised social groups, or by state institutions failing to protect minorities.

The knife [attack](#) against a woman wearing a mask symbolising her rejection of the Hungarian government's control over universities is an example of the former. The self-assigned moral police role that right-wing groups have assumed in [Georgia](#) under the guidance of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and their attacks against LGBTIQ and religious minorities that lack police protection, reveals the latter.

The making of a violent extremist

For many, 'radicalisation' implies the process by which individuals are attracted to extremist ideologies that encourage heinous criminal attacks. Western European countries have seen many such actual or planned attacks, including in [Germany](#) and [Austria](#), with many more in France.

Recently, an [increasing](#) wave of protests against pandemic-related lockdowns and vaccines could have the potential to evolve into radicalised action. In Italy, for example, the police recently raided the homes of anti-vax activists who plotted violent [attacks](#) using Telegram. And although its protests are not violent, Extinction Rebellion has also drawn interest from radicalisation scholars in light of the attack by the '[Green Robin Hood](#)' that killed the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002.

In general, however, the prevailing popular image of a violent extremist is that of a self-radicalised, home-based jihadist or right-wing nationalist, who commits 'lone-wolf' [terror acts](#). This image is largely accurate, although there are many complex trends and stakeholders at work in the radicalisation process – including the state.

When we approach radicalisation within a political context of feelings of injustice, grievance and alienation, and of state agents taking sides amid growing political polarisation, we get a fuller picture.

In the European Commission-funded [D.Rad: Deradicalization in Europe and Beyond](#) project, we can follow radicalisation through what is known as the I-GAP spectrum: a vicious circle of 'injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation', which can then trigger radicalisation. Within this circle, the state plays a role.

How states promote radicalisation

There are myriad ways in which states become party to radicalisation. These include weak state autonomy, where states have limited control over security forces and their impartiality. In some cases, states could be in the grip of a political elite seeking to increase its political and economic gains by using its control over state institutions to alienate and punish certain elements.

The latter can be seen in the emergence of paramilitary groups allied to the state, both historically, as within the '[deep state](#)' in Turkey, or recently in Bulgaria in the shape of [vigilantes](#). In 2016, amid the 'migration crisis', the [Hungarian](#) state appeared to actively commit violent acts against migrants at its border with Serbia by recruiting 'border hunters' to serve alongside the regular security forces.

Migrants were not the only ones that state agents [targeted](#). The security forces also neglected to protect Roma and LGBTIQ populations when they were attacked by radicalised agents from the extreme Right.

Ignorance and incompetence, institutional racism and lack of hate-crime awareness embedded in police occupational culture may compromise the state's ability to protect and deradicalise. In Hungary, for example, amidst a chauvinist political narrative targeting migrants, Roma and the LGBTIQ community, the security forces are [crippled](#) both by their occupational culture and the dominant political discourse.

Yet police culture is not the only marker of state complicity in radicalisation. It can also be manifested by public officers playing down attacks on minorities. In Turkey, for example, the authorities' failure to investigate attacks against non-Muslim minorities, secular groups or the Kurdish minority shows how the state takes sides within the country's [polarised](#) political system and alienates some groups.

State agency in Poland also lacks impartiality, in this case by pursuing a constant national injustice narrative, in which real and imaginary injustices pervade Poland and Polish society on a permanent basis. The Polish government has assigned itself a role as the defender of Poland from its imaginary enemies. In this context, it has defined the terms of grievance against such 'enemies' as migrants, gender activists and the LGBTIQ community by condoning extremism in the shape of LGBTIQ-free zones in over 100 [localities](#) or [violence](#) against irregular migrants at Poland's eastern borders.

In Iraq and Jordan, too, we find the complicity of the state in radicalisation. In the absence of state authority, or with state collapse, there may be no public body to mediate

contesting injustice claims and resolve grievances. The resulting [alienation](#) of groups from each other in such cases can lead to violence, while the state remains a bystander or even a party to factionalism.

States can even become a party to radicalisation by failing to recognise it and by being too confident in their own consensual political cultures. Such is the case with Finland. Its political culture prevents the [discussion](#) of issues deemed to be difficult or controversial on the understanding that Finland is a safe country where bad things don't happen.

These examples show how we need to move away from conceiving radicalisation simply from a perspective of how states, political authorities and societies are challenged by extremists.

A definition of deradicalisation that merely covers how state and public actors can build resilience against extremism by catering for certain vulnerabilities and feelings of injustice also fails to tackle the issue in a comprehensive way.

Considering the state as both a target of and a solution to radicalisation is not a very useful approach either. This ignores how the state itself condones and even triggers radicalisation with chauvinist discourses, compromised impartiality, institutional complicity and denial. In response to radicalisation, we need to first ask whether we can trust the state and its agents or not.

Cover photo: Emergency services outside Liverpool Women's Hospital after a suicide bombing, 14 November 2021 |

PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo

Categories: Blog | Tags: [blog](#), [radicalisation](#), [violent extremist](#)

< De-radicalization: legal and policy framework in Slovenia

Legal and policy framework – recent developments and upcoming reforms >

D.Rad

DeRadicalisation in Europe and Beyond:
Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate



The Glasgow Caledonian University

Cowcaddens Rd, Glasgow G4 0BA, United Kingdom

PROJECT COORDINATION

Prof. Umut Korkut | Glasgow School for Business and Society, Glasgow Caledonian University | Umut.Korkut@gcu.ac.uk

Marcus Nicolson | Glasgow School for Business and Society, Glasgow Caledonian University | Marcus.Nicolson@gcu.ac.uk

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

University:

SUBSCRIBE

Copyright © 2025 By DradProject.com

