



Evidence Briefing

Published October 2017



Youth Extremisms

Youth, Political Violence, and Terrorism

In response to recent political events in Europe and North America through 2016 and several instances of extraordinary violent extremism involving young people in particular, the third of our six seminars on 'Youth Extremisms: Understanding across Ideological and Religious Contexts' was dedicated to understanding processes and cultures leading to young people's participation in such acts and practitioners' perspectives on preventing such political violence.

Participants from a wide range of academic disciplines and from European NGOs working in the counter-violent-extremism area considered: the role of technologies; modern cultures of young people's participation in acts of political violence; how women and children fit into narratives of violent extremism; and different approaches that have been taken by practitioners towards preventing young people's involvement in such acts.

Key Discussion Points

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- The distinction between **extremist views and behaviour** retains its importance. In some cases while sharing the ideological standpoints of an extremist group, young people may not join the group or engage in its actions because of the negative image (stigma) associated with it.
- Some extreme groups use **online branding** to engage young people and create an attractive ideology and image. Young people might perceive membership in these groups as giving them the opportunity to 'do something extraordinary' or 'be someone special'.
- Socio-demographically, young men are the most frequent perpetrators of acts of violent extremism. This does not mean they have a biological propensity to such behaviour but does suggest we need to consider how this socio-demographic group has experienced the very **specific set of circumstances** of growing up in a post 9/11 world.
- When it comes to young people and violent extremism, we are constantly torn between considering them as **victims or perpetrators** of terrorism. We can see a gendered element to this dichotomy where the press often present young women as victims and young men as perpetrators. This framing also draws on a distinction between violent and non-violent acts of extremism and the different ways men and women are punished legally and socially.
- We need to be careful not to remove **agency** from extremists even when they are young (and/or female). Feedback from some CVE initiatives tells us that they do not see themselves as vulnerable.
- In the discussion of **motivation** it was suggested that distinguishing between different motivations (ideology, thrill-seeking, community membership etc.) would be helpful in de-radicalisation efforts. This is because of a notable shift away from ideological to more complex sociological motivations in trajectories into violent extremism.
- **Ideology** has been a useful way of talking about motivations without talking directly about religion, but using the notion of ideology is helpful inasmuch as it helps to explain trajectories into and out of extremism.

Implications for Policy

- An effective preventative strategy is to put people into a different context where their beliefs are shared but not enacted in an extreme way.
- One of the most successful counter-narratives has been shown to be the employment of Muslim women's family based authority. Videos of women openly berating people for joining extremist organisations on the street have proven highly effective.
- This is somewhat paradoxical given how women are often portrayed as victims of recruitment into extremist groups.
- Former extremists' knowledge/ideology can be used constructively in de-radicalisation strategy where the aim is to change an individual's behaviour rather than their entire belief system. Engagement with a CVE initiative is often a good middle ground for former extremists who struggle to adopt a 'normal' life if they disengage entirely.
- Exit programmes provide support to individuals who have cognitively broken from an extremist ideology but need help in practically breaking away. Such people may be vulnerable to their former co-members whose own coping strategy is to present them as a traitor to the group.

About the Project

Youth Extremisms: Understanding across Ideological and Religious Contexts seminars are funded under the ESRC Research Seminar Series (Grant Reference: ES/N008812/1). The seminar series runs January 2016-December 2017 and consists of six thematically focused one-day seminars on issues concerning youth engagement in radicalism and extremism across ideological and religious contexts. The seminars bring together academic researchers, civil society actors, policy-makers, government and community actors from across Europe and North America and facilitate constructive dialogue on some of the most serious challenges facing society today.

The seminar series is co-organised by Hilary Pilkington (hilary.pilkington@manchester.ac.uk), Cynthia Miller Idriss (cynthia@american.edu), Graham Macklin (g.d.macklin@c-rex.uio.no) and Fabian Virchow (fabian.virchow@hs-duesseldorf.de).

Further information can be found at:

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/sociology/research/projects/youth-extremisms/>.

Registration for future seminar events can be obtained from the Seminar Series administrator, Stephanie Rinaldi (Stephanie.Rinaldi@manchester.ac.uk).

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