

CRIME AS RADICALIZATION CATALYSTS: COMPOSITE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF ESCALATION PATTERNS IN MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract: *This study examines how conventional crimes between individuals can escalate into radicalization and ideologically-motivated violence in multicultural environments. The research focuses on cases involving diaspora communities from conflict-affected regions, where normal interpersonal disputes transform into security threats when pre-existing religious, cultural or political tensions intersect with failures in the formal justice report and signalization system.*

The methodology relies on composite case study analysis using criminal intelligence and criminal psychology frameworks. The investigation synthesizes patterns observed from multiple cases involving foreign nationals in Bulgaria, where primary crimes remained unreported due to intervention from community or religious authorities. The analysis combines operational investigative materials, open-source information and behavioral profiling, based on the author's professional experience as a criminal intelligence officer working directly on cases like this.

The key findings identify a four-stage escalation pattern: first, the initial crime gets concealed through informal authority structures instead of official reporting to the government authorities. Second, attempts at vigilante justice trigger secondary violence. Third, ethnic groups mobilize using ideological framing connected to their home country conflicts. Fourth, external radical actors possess the ability to exploit the situation. Religious schisms and active international conflicts between the home countries work as force multipliers that accelerate the radicalization process.

The study proposes actionable indicators for early identification of high-risk interpersonal disputes before they escalate into threats to national security. This requires integrated operational procedures between law enforcement, diplomatic services and diaspora community leadership to address critical gaps where conventional policing should connect with preventive diplomacy.

Keywords: *criminal intelligence, criminal psychology, radicalization, multicultural environments, crime*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the world and the interconnected factors of economic, educational and cultural exchange of resources and people between countries form modern globalized cities and societies on a global scale. The merging of different cultures brings a mix of solutions and diversification of the market and science, but also a mix of problems.

Pre-existing conflict points connected to regional or local religious, political and cultural tensions can easily be transferred into the territory of the host country. The normal development of history preceded these factors in the traditional way, known to all of us through literature and education, as two neighboring countries, cultures or religions in constant struggle against one another, living this way for centuries, where every member lives in his own diaspora among those alike him.

These century-long traditions change in our modernized world. In 2023, about 9.9% of the EU population, roughly 44.7 million people, were born outside the EU, indicating significant migrant presence across member states (Eurostat 2024). Many EU countries have large shares of immigrants from non-EU countries; in 2022, 5.1 million people immigrated to the EU from outside, with Germany, Spain, Italy, Czechia, and France receiving the highest numbers (Eurostat 2024).

Major European cities such as London, Paris, Berlin, Milan, Madrid, and Frankfurt host multi-ethnic neighborhoods where migrants often constitute a large minority or even majority of the population, with diverse origins including Turkey, China, Romania, India, Bangladesh, and others (Celata 2022).

Studies highlight that European cities increasingly signal diversity as a marker of progressiveness, with many urban areas having multiple migrant communities and ethnic groups coexisting (eurocities 2022).

As this is a phenomenon of progress, it also brings the collision of the already mentioned factors of century-long historical conflicts into shared spaces within our own European countries and societies. The negative aspect of this trend can be represented by the fact that first - or second-generation migrants connected to criminal or terrorist activity (Bekker 2006) have been observed both in continental Europe and the United States (Bergen 2017).

In recent years, Bulgaria as a developing country has also become a destination for non-European citizens brought here to work, study, or as illegal immigrants looking for safer routes to central and Western Europe, or as refugees.

The criminal aspect of radicalization and terrorism is closely connected (Europol, 2021) to conventional criminal activities and deviant behavior (Colomina et al. 2017), but it requires additional study and examination of the underlying processes so we can clearly understand the different stages and development of this behavior and how it leads to these outcomes. This study does not propose a full and comprehensive examination of the topic, but it presents a clear example through case study analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employs qualitative data analysis of open-source materials, including academic literature, news reports, investigative journalism, and institutional literature from law enforcement agencies. The analysis is informed by the author's direct professional experience as a criminal intelligence investigator in the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior, providing operational insights into radicalization patterns and escalation dynamics within diaspora communities.

The research framework integrates publicly accessible sources with professional observations derived from classified operational materials, which cannot be explicitly cited due to confidentiality requirements under the Bulgarian Classified Information Protection Act. This composite case study approach synthesizes patterns from multiple investigations conducted over the past five years, reflecting current trends in interpersonal crime escalation and radicalization pathways.

This methodology offers the advantage of bridging academic analysis with field-level intelligence, providing perspectives typically inaccessible through open-source research alone. The limitation lies in the inability to verify certain operational observations through citation, requiring reader reliance on the author's professional credibility. However, all analytical claims supported by open-source data are appropriately referenced, ensuring transparency where confidentiality constraints permit.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Predisposing Factors

The predisposing factors are the first and most formidable threat assessment indicators that must be taken into account by law enforcement and national security intelligence authorities. In these specific case studies, they include several long-term formed processes. Their relative importance to one another cannot be ranked with the current study methodology, but their significance to the dynamics of social and interpersonal relationships is substantial from the perspective of the development of criminal and post-criminal behaviors that afterwards escalate into group radicalization.

Mental and personal state. In one of the cases, the victim himself is a long-term citizen who suffers from depression, for which he was even hospitalized in a professional medical facility. His social and family status directly affects his economic position and power dynamics within his community, and also positions him as a soon-to-be victim of financial crime by his employer. He would later seek revenge in his own way, using his religious beliefs as a force multiplier for confidence and power so that he can "step up" against the perceived injustice in his pay, working hours, and conditions, fulfilling what he perceives as his duty. A clear example between the connection of vulnerable mental state and terrorism (Corner, E. and Gill, P., 2015).

Religious narratives and paradigms. As mentioned in one of the cases, the specific religion is used as a personal support mechanism, but afterwards it is also used as a weapon with affiliation to radicalized terrorist groups from this religion, including claims that a terrorist act will be committed in the manner and methods seen in other parts of the world. In another case, the religious dogma is used as a dividing line to set one group of people against others. In this manner, one of these two religious groups even expelled a member of its own community who stood up to protect the victim of a crime already perpetrated by a member of his group. The interesting and important fact is that this expelled member was previously part of the religious group of the victim. Essentially, we witness a model where a crime occurs between two members of different religious groups, affecting one of them. The perpetrator of the crime is then connected to and recruited by another religious group, and membership is offered to him, which leads to the exclusion of another member of the same group who defends the victim—a victim who is not part of this group's religion. The whole dynamics of these actions revolve around the criminal act and how it is perceived by the different religious groups. The missing element for the picture to be fully understood is the political connection.

Political views and ethnicity. Continuing from the previous paragraph, the factor connecting the perception of the criminal act and the approval of the perpetrator by the religious group is their shared ethnicity. This is especially significant in this case, as these are people with different national passports who share the same ethnicity in a region of predominant religious influence of one religion over others. Without giving too much information regarding the sensitivities of the case, I must mention that this region has religious dynamics opposite to the current state of Bulgaria. Essentially, the dominant religion there is not Christian, while the victim's connection is to the Christian religion, which is also the dominant one in the host country. The perpetrator also used this to establish close relationships with the victim due to her strong belief in this religion, but he was never truly engaged in this faith. The ethnicity connection between the victim and the perpetrator in this and the other mentioned case differs. As for specific political views, they are usually connected to the long-standing regime ruling the countries from where the different ethnicities originate or have relatives from. The strong point is the connection between the religion and the local political leadership influenced towards this specific ethnicity group from that region.

PRIMARY CRIMINAL ACT

In all of the observed cases, we witness a criminal act. In one case, we have a long-term investment in a relationship between two people that ended with an unreported serious criminal assault from one side to the other. In the other case, we have a perceived violation of human and labor rights from the stronger side to the weaker side within a company, from a superior to his worker. The important aspect of analyzing this factor is that these are crimes that happen regularly and are subject to systematic conventional crime mechanisms between people from one culture who share the same political and religious beliefs and way

of life. Unfortunately, in these cases they unlocked a chain of events that escalated into a series of threatening developments.

Informal Justice Mechanisms

As already mentioned, in both of these cases unofficial and, as it was proven, ineffective mechanisms were applied to resolve the arising problem that led to the criminal act and the criminal act itself. In the case of the committed serious crime, we have an almost year-and-a-half-long problem of interpersonal relationships that involved ethnicity, religion, and politics in the context of a local diaspora between two people. Different groups and different individuals tried to intervene or to bring a lasting resolution, but in the end, it resulted in a serious crime, a pattern already observed into migrant societies from non-EU countries who moved into the EU (UNODC 2020). In the case of the crime against working conditions, or as it was perceived as such by the perpetrator, the situation was the opposite—nobody wanted to intervene, and most of the people in the collective silently supported the boss's decisions.

After the escalation of both situations, in one of the two scenarios third-party authorities that were not government, national security, or law enforcement entities were involved. Unfortunately, motivated by economic gain from both sides of the conflict, they refused to take a decision or take a side against one or the other.

Escalation Dynamics

The ineffectiveness of informal justice led to major escalation, at which phase law enforcement services intervened as information was obtained through official and unofficial criminal intelligence and national security intelligence sources. In one case, where multiple people were informed and in contact about the situation, the interpersonal conflict that resulted in a serious crime emerged into revenge and hate crimes between more and more persons from both groups. Initially, the conflict was between two people, but it managed to expand to more than 20 individuals, of which around 30% were involved in direct physical violence against one another. In this dynamic, third-party neutral witnesses and people who did not have primary involvement in the problem were drawn in or forced to act to preserve their own personal health and security. In the final stage of this escalation, the conflict resulted in racist threats and messages and group violence. Threatening statements against specific ethnic and national groups were made, along with acts of organizing these groups to be met with violence. Now the escalation developed not as a person-to-person conflict, but as a discrimination and racism campaign from one group to another with a call to violence, a pattern (McCauley, C. and Moskalenko, S., 2008), which corresponds to one of the definitions of terrorism (US Department of State 2011).

In the other case, the perpetrator, who felt himself to be a victim of his boss, started to publish online religiously motivated threatening messages to him, his ex-coworkers and staff, and to other persons unconnected to these events who had some connection to the company. This, of course, resulted in a mass effect of emotional fear and the threat of a terrorist act.

Radicalization Pathways

The path to radicalization in the case of the group conflict emerges from the long history of traditions between these two ethnicities and nations along shared borders, as there were wars even in recent years prior to the events that developed. They have different primary religions, but they also share communities that include the religion and ethnicity of the other country, so we can make the assumption that there is significant predisposition (Lyons-Padilla, S. et al 2015), especially in the case of a conflict from recent years where there is tension—as existed in their countries' official politics toward one another, but also in their families and societies—a conflict that is unlocked and escalated by an unresolved interpersonal problem which transferred into a criminal act.

The radicalization pathway of the other case follows almost the same pattern: different ethnicities between the worker and his boss, different religions with a historically long conflict that resulted in aggression from the worker toward his former staff. The members of the staff were also from a different ethnicity than the perpetrator and believed in a different religion than his own.

SYSTEMIC GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Identified Systemic Gaps

The primary systemic gap lies in insufficient information exchange between the responsible sides to the multicultural environments. The intelligence community must empower their OSINT, HUMINT, and TECHINT capabilities and mechanisms specifically designed for monitoring high-risk diaspora communities where informal justice mechanisms operate parallel to official systems. Intelligence indicators remain fragmented across disconnected sources—government agencies, NGOs, and private sector entities with direct community access—preventing effective early detection of escalation patterns. The absence of structured informant networks within communities practicing informal justice creates critical blind spots where interpersonal disputes evolve undetected into group radicalization. Enhanced coordination between intelligence services and non-governmental actors who maintain regular contact with these communities would enable identification of warning signs before conflicts escalate beyond intervention capacity.

Another significant gap exists in the relationship between diplomatic missions and diaspora communities. Embassies and consulates typically maintain limited engagement with diaspora religious and community leadership structures, operating without established bilateral protocols for information sharing on interpersonal crimes involving foreign nationals. This disconnect means diplomatic missions remain unaware or with the refusal to share information of the underlying tensions until violence manifests publicly, missing critical windows for preventive intervention. Regular communication channels between consular services and diaspora leadership could facilitate early awareness of community dynamics that may develop into security threats.

The most critical gap identified in the observed cases involves informal authority structures functioning as blind spots within host country security frameworks. Religious leaders and community mediators exercise de facto judicial functions without accountability, oversight, or integration into official legal systems. Economic incentives from conflict parties systematically corrupt these informal resolution processes, while victims face community pressure and fear of institutional discrimination that deter official reporting. These parallel justice systems create environments where criminal acts remain concealed, allowing grievances to accumulate and escalate without any intervention from authorities with both the mandate and capability to prevent radicalization.

Recommendations

Law enforcement agencies should develop enhanced intelligence gathering capabilities through HUMINT, OSINT, and TECHINT methodologies for early detection within diaspora communities.

Diplomatic services should establish direct, regular communication with diaspora communities, creating systematic information exchange frameworks on community tensions and security-relevant developments.

Policymakers should develop risk mitigation mechanisms requiring NGOs and private sector entities operating within diaspora communities to facilitate information sharing and cooperation with authorities, strengthening the overall intelligence picture without pre-selection of information by non-specialized personnel.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how conventional interpersonal crimes within multicultural environments can escalate into ideologically motivated violence and group radicalization when predisposing factors intersect with systemic failures in detection and intervention. The composite case analysis reveals a recurring pattern where unreported criminal acts, concealed through informal justice mechanisms, trigger escalation dynamics that transform personal grievances into ethnic and religious group conflicts. Mental health vulnerabilities, religious narratives, political tensions, and shared ethnicity function as force multipliers, compressing radicalization timelines and amplifying the severity of outcomes.

The critical finding is that radicalization in diaspora communities does not emerge in isolation but develops through identifiable stages where intervention opportunities exist. The failure of informal authority structures to resolve disputes legitimately, combined with insufficient intelligence gathering capabilities and inadequate diplomatic engagement with diaspora leadership, creates an environment where interpersonal violence predictably evolves into threats meeting terrorism definitions. The observed cases confirm that homeland conflicts between nations directly fuel radicalization pathways in host countries when diaspora communities from warring regions coexist without systematic monitoring or preventive engagement.

This research contributes to the broader understanding of radicalization processes by documenting the specific mechanisms through which conventional crime transforms into ideologically motivated violence within multicultural contexts. Future research should examine the effectiveness of AI-assisted monitoring systems in detecting escalation indicators within diaspora social networks, as well as comparative analysis of successful preventive interventions across different European contexts. The challenge for law enforcement, diplomatic services, and policymakers is not merely responding to radicalization after it occurs, but building intelligence and engagement frameworks that identify and disrupt escalation pathways at their earliest stages so the safety of our citizens and the national security of our European union can be one step ahead of crime.

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