

***Polarisation and Radicalisation in European societies
as the outcome of the migration- refugee crisis***

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Polarisation and Radicalisation in European societies as the outcome of the migration- refugee crisis

Introduction

The refugee crisis poses a number of challenges for the EU. One, in particular, is in relation to its impact on polarisation, radicalisation and extremism. The terrorist attacks in Paris on November 2015 and the sexual assaults in Cologne on January 2016 are the two trigger events that bring polarisation as main outcome of the refugee crisis. In this new landscape migration raises at the top of the security agenda perceived as a threat to national and international security, mainly connected with the Islamist terrorism. Shift in the political landscape. Polarisation is clearer on the political landscape where populist and far-right groups in Europe have sharpened their rhetoric, using tougher, more enforcement-laden language. Furthermore, we have an important escalation of right-wing extremism with violent far-right militias and gangs targeting immigrants. In this deeply polarised environment, we have numerous tensions and even use of violence as the outcome of rioting. The aim of this paper is to explore the dynamics of polarisation in the European societies as an outcome of the refugee crisis and also to highlight the risk from the potential radicalisation of refugees' diaspora, since rising social tensions between communities have the potential to generate secondary conflict in host countries and possible participation in radical collective action and crime.

The Concept of Polarisation

Recent developments around the world have shown that ideological, economic or religious polarisation between contending groups is a major source of conflict and, hence, one of the key impediments to social and political progress. The process of increasing social and political polarisation seems to go hand in hand with economic polarisation. In recently published work, polarisation is equated with, for instance, income inequality (Keefer & Knack, 2002), the range of political positions taken by party supporters (Layman & Carsey, 2002), the electoral strength of post-communist parties in transition countries (Frye,

2002), and highly aggregated index measures including information on income, ethno-linguistic fractionalization and institutional quality (Woo, 2005).

In Detail, Keefer and Knack argue that social polarisation reduces the security of property and contract rights and, through this channel, reduces growth. To support this hypothesis the authors indicate that polarisation in the form of income inequality, land inequality, and ethnic tensions is inversely related to a commonly-used index of the security of contractual and property rights. For Keefer and Knack, when the security of property rights is controlled for in cross-country growth regressions, the relationship between inequality and growth diminishes considerably¹.

Layman and Carsey argue that party politics in the United States has experienced “conflict extension”, with the Democratic and Republican parties in the electorate growing more polarised on cultural, racial and social welfare issues, rather than conflict displacement. According to them, the failure of the literature to account for conflict extensions results from incomplete assumptions about individual-level partisan change². If party-based issue conversion does occur, the aggregate result can be conflict extension rather than conflict displacement. Layman and Carsey show that when Democratic and Republican elites are polarised on an issue, and party identifiers are aware of those differences, some individuals respond by adjusting their party lies to conform to their issue positions, but others respond by adjusting their issue positions to conform to their party identification³.

According to Frye, political polarisation has shaped economic outcomes in two ways. First, it has heightened uncertainty about future economic conditions because businesses expect a potential turnover in government to bring sharp swings in policy⁴. The author says that “businesses have shied away from productive long-term investments, preferring instead asset stripping, intensive lobbying of state officials and highly profitable but semi legal business deals. More broadly, political polarisation has made it difficult for governments to make credible commitments to respect existing and future property rights”⁵.

¹ Keefer P. Knack S., (2002), “Polarization, politics and property rights: Links between inequality and growth”, *Public Choice*, No. 111, pp. 127-154.

² Layman G.C., Carsey T., (2002), “Party Polarization and Party Structuring of Policy Attitudes: A Comparison of Three NES Panel Studies”, *Political Behavior*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 199-236.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Frye T., (2002), “The Perils of Polarization: Economic Performance in the Postcommunist World”, *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 308-337.

⁵ Ibid.

Furthermore, Frye argues that political polarisation has led to a war of attrition in which ex-communist and anti-communist factions have failed to agree on coherent measures to address the economic crisis. In the polarised countries, anti-communist factions have attempted some version of neoliberal reforms, and traditional ex-communist factions have attempted some version of gradual reform, but neither has been able to impose its preferred policy. The resulting war of attrition has led to incoherent policy and slow growth⁶.

Woo presented a dynamic model of fiscal policy in a simple growth framework where social polarisation (of preferences) plays a central role in the evolution of fiscal instability and growth collapse. In a highly polarised society, a deficit occurs endogenously, fiscal spending path becomes more volatile, output collapses, and economic growth rate is reduced along the transition path to a new lower level of output. One novel feature is that the size of fiscal deficit, the magnitude of fiscal volatility, and the size of reduction in output and growth rate are explicitly shown as increasing functions of the degree of social polarisation⁷. This is because of the positive relationship between the polarisation of preferences and the incentive for policymakers (or socio-economic groups) to overexploit the government resources in a common pool setting (polarisation eject). Thereby, according to Woo, fiscal instability channel that negatively links social polarisation and growth, which is an alternative yet distinct explanation for the empirical finding that social polarisation is harmful to growth. In conclusion, Woo argues that polarisation and political uncertainty are shown to be distinct but yet critical to the dynamic coordination failure in the common pool setting⁸.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Woo J., (2005), "Social polarization, fiscal instability and growth", *European Economic Review*, Vol. 49, pp. 1451-1477.

⁸ Ibid.

Political Polarisation and Conflict Situations

Although, economy is a crucial factor for polarisation, the phenomenon is more complex and there are a number of reasons leading to polarisation increase:

- Economic Crisis
- Political Crisis
- Populism
- Conspiracy Theories
- Social exclusion
- Generation gap
- Identity Crisis

The concept of polarisation was primarily developed in relation to the distribution of income (Duclos, Esteban & Ray, Esteban & Ray, Wolfson)⁹. Duclos, Esteban and Ray argue that polarisation is related to the alienation that individuals and groups feel from one another, but such alienation is fuelled by notions of within-group identity. By concentrating on such phenomena, we do not mean to suggest that instances in which a single isolated individual runs amok with a machine gun are rare, or that they are unimportant in the larger scheme of things. It is just that these are not the objects of our enquiry¹⁰. The authors are interested in the correlates of organised, large-scale social unrest — strikes, demonstrations, processions, widespread violence, and revolt or rebellion. Such phenomena thrive on differences, to be sure¹¹. But they cannot exist without notions of group identity either. This brief discussion immediately suggests that inequality, as much as it concerns itself with interpersonal alienation, captures just one aspect of polarisation. To be sure, there are some obvious changes that would be branded as both inequality- and polarisation enhancing. For instance, according to Esteban and Ray, if two income groups are further separated by increasing economic distance, inequality and polarisa-

⁹ Wolfson M.C., (1994): “When Inequalities diverge,” *American Economic Review* No. 84, Papers and Proceedings, pp. 353–358. Esteban, J. and D. Ray (1991) “On the Measurement of Polarization,” Boston University, Institute for Economic Development, Working Paper 18 Esteban, J. and D. Ray, (1994) “On the Measurement of Polarization,” *Econometrica* 62, pp. 819–852. Esteban, J. and D. Ray, (1999), “Conflict and Distribution,” *Journal of Economic Theory* 87, pp. 379–415. Esteban, J. and D. Ray, (1999) “Conflict and Distribution,” *Journal of Economic Theory* 87, pp. 379–415. Esteban, J. and D. Ray, (2001): “Collective Action and the Group Size Paradox,” *American Political Science Review* No. 95, pp. 663–672.

¹⁰ Duclos J.Y., Esteban J. and Ray D., (2004), Polarization: Concepts, Measurement, Estimation, *Econometrica*, Vol. 72, Is.6.

¹¹ Ibid.

tion would presumably both increase. However, local equalizations of income differences at two different ranges of the income distribution will most likely lead to two better-defined groups — each with a clearer sense of itself and the other. In this case, inequality will have come down but polarisation may be on the rise¹².

Specifically, Esteban & Ray identified a set of criteria associated with a polarised society:

1. Polarisation is a group attribute. Isolated individuals should therefore have little weight in the calculation of social polarisation.
2. There should be a high degree of homogeneity within each group.
3. There should be high degree of heterogeneity across groups.
4. The number of groups is relatively small, and each group is of significant size¹³.

According to Esteban and Ray's definition, polarisation results from the interaction of within group identity and across-group alienation¹⁴. While the group members show identification with each other in a polarised society, they feel socially or ideologically separated from the members of other groups. Furthermore, Esteban and Ray show that the level of conflict increases with the magnitude of polarisation. If there are two groups, the intensity of conflict is most pronounced, with a bimodal distribution of the population over opposing goals¹⁵.

The phenomenon of polarisation is closely linked to the generation of tensions, to the possibilities of articulated rebellion and revolt, and to the existence of social unrest in general. A society that is divided into groups, with substantial intra-group homogeneity and inter-group heterogeneity is likely to exhibit in unrest. The majority of scientists conclude that:

- A society is the most polarised when there are two equally large groups that are quite dissimilar from each other while being internally homogenous.
- High levels of polarisation render societal conflict more likely.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Esteban, J. and D. Ray, (1994), op.cit.

¹⁴ Ibid.

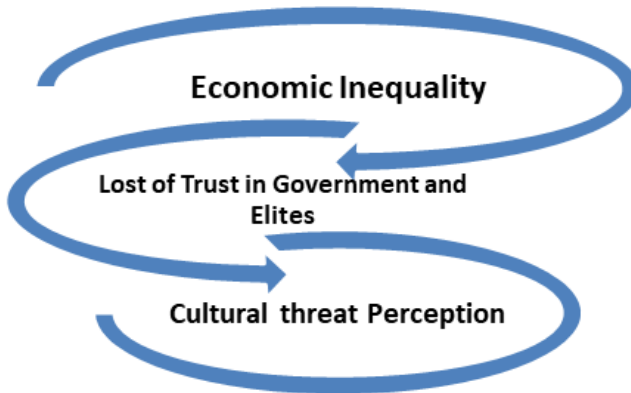
¹⁵ Esteban, J. and D. Ray, (1999), op.cit.

In other words, by polarisation we mean the extent to which the population is clustered around a small number of distant poles. This notion of polarisation is particularly relevant to the analysis of conflict, because it stands for the idea that the tensions within a society of individuals or states result from two simultaneous decisions:

1. Identification with other subjects within the own group of reference
2. and distancing oneself from one or several other competing groups.

Polarisation in European Societies

Polarisation in European societies during the last three years is the outcome of a complex breeding ground:



There are two main trigger events of this situation the last years: a) the terrorist attacks in Paris- November 2015 and b) the sexual assaults in Cologne- January 2016. The migration- refugee crisis and terrorist attacks creates a new landscape, which has the following main characteristics:

- Migration issues at the top of the security agenda
- Migration as a threat to internal and national security
- Interconnection between migration flows and international (jihadist) terrorism.

If we want to understand the dynamics of polarisation in European societies today, we need to answer the following basic questions:

1. What is the relationship between polarisation and social conflict-tensions?
2. How do groups form in polarised societies and how does coalitionbuilding under the shadow of diversity affect political decision-making?
3. How are interstate and internationalized conflicts and polarisation related?

The Migration- Refugee Crisis

The first important observation is the political polarisation and the shift in the political landscape. Populist and far-right groups in Europe have sharpened their rhetoric, using tougher, more enforcement-laden language. These reactions have not been limited to the far right, as mainstream politicians have co-opted such rhetoric in a bid to recapture votes from rising nationalist and anti-immigration opposition parties. Stronger language has gone hand-in-hand with knee-jerk policy responses to restrict refugee flows. Some mainstream governing parties in Europe have attempted to balance a more welcoming position toward refugees with a pragmatic security focus, distancing themselves from populist stances. The diversity of policy responses and reactions and the intensity of emotion surrounding the topic have made clear the deepening polarisation of Western politics. As populist parties gain new support in European countries mainstream politicians have embraced, rather than rejected, some of their language and demands in order to rally constituents and maintain power. One important outcome of this situation is the rise of the far right extremism through violent far-right militias and gangs targeting immigrants.

In many countries, polarisation - especially when it is linked with the migration and refugee situation - is leading to tensions and violence with different forms:

1. Host communities and migrant- refugee populations
2. Host communities and Law Enforcement Agencies Personnel
3. Use of Violence between refugees and migrants based on their condition and nationality
4. Violent protests from refugees and migrants

5. Violent protests from nationalist and far-right organizations and groups
6. Tensions and violence between Antifa/ anarchist groups and far right groups
7. Attacks against Law Enforcement Personnel in the aftermath of violent protests.

As tensions rise, for example, isolation becomes an unfortunate coping mechanism for displaced populations – keeping women at home and children out of school. With economic competition leading to frustration, scapegoating and discrimination, access to equitable employment opportunities decreases among refugee men. This may also contribute to domestic violence and participation in radical collective action and crime. According to EUROPOL “...the real and imminent danger, however, is the possibility of elements of the (Sunni Muslim) Syrian refugee diaspora becoming vulnerable to radicalisation once in Europe and being specifically targeted by Islamic extremist recruiters”¹⁶.

Furthermore, according to RAND, there are a number of factors that could possibly lead to refugees’ radicalisation:

1. Poor socioeconomic conditions
2. Extreme deprivation (impoverishment, lack of access to higher education, and limited employment opportunities)
3. Level of politicisation, or political cohesion, of the refugee group at the outset of the crisis
4. Refugee/migrants crises become protracted
5. Geographic factors and centres design¹⁷.

In this complex and tentative situation polarisation could lead to radicalisation, especially as a defensive reaction of vulnerable individuals:



Chart 1: Linkages between Polarisation & Radicalisation

The main challenges for European decision makers and Law Enforcement Agencies are listed in the following chart:

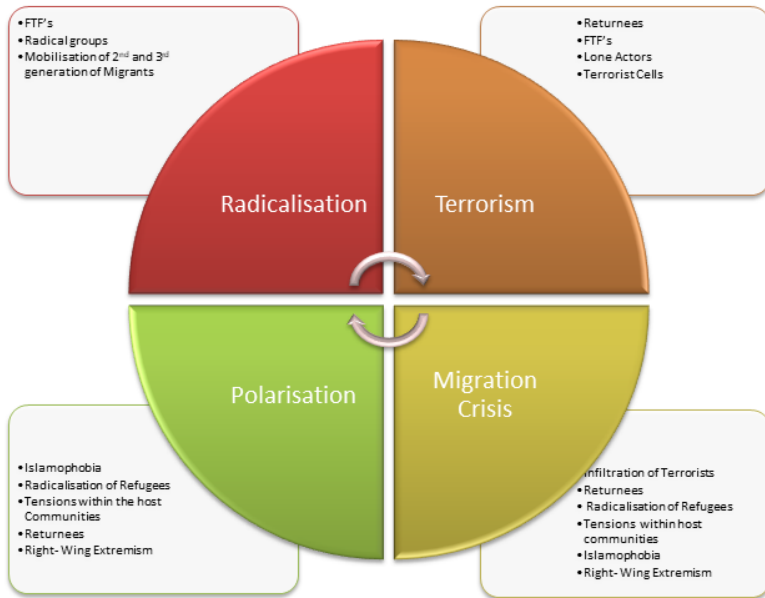


Chart 2: Challenges for EU

Another important issue is reciprocal radicalisation, which occurs when different extremist groups feed off each other, occasionally escalating into violence against what each group perceives as the “other”. The main forms of reciprocal radicalisation are the following:

1. Islamist extremist groups Vs. Far Right groups
2. Left Wing/ Anarchist Groups Vs. Far Right groups.

Prevention and Resilience Measures

The challenges for European cohesion and security from polarisation are very important. Within this framework, there are a number of measures and initiatives enhancing prevention and resilience that could be adopted. Among them are the following:

1. Deconstruct the linkages between Polarisation and Radicalisation in public discourse and politics.
2. Include polarisation as a crucial factor in prevention of radicalisation strategies and policies.
3. Tailor made interventions to protect vulnerable individuals under extreme polarisation situations.
4. Safeguard youngsters from radicalisation, recruitment and extremist groups.
5. Promote communication strategies for inclusiveness and for de- polarisation (deconstruct the pols and promote the concept of inclusive societies).
6. Local Authorities and LEA’s as “honest brokers” in polarised societies.
7. Train and support refugees.
8. Counter reciprocal radicalisation (politically driven, religious inspired, condition driven).
9. Enhance resilience in local level.
10. Build strategic networks of practitioners active in polarisation situations (following RAN example).

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