

Report on the conference 'New factors influencing the radicalisation of young people from a national security perspective'

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Aleksandra Komar

Independent author

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9717-5258>

'New factors influencing the radicalisation of young people from a national security perspective' conference on the issue of the radicalisation of minors took place on 23 April 2026 at the Internal Security Agency headquarters in Warsaw. The event was attended by representatives from the academic community, security experts and practitioners from the Central Cybercrime Bureau, the State Commission for Investigation of Cases against Sexual Liberty and Decency against Minors under the Age of 15 years old, the Institute of Social Safety, the Korczak University, the Civitas University, NASK, the Military University of Technology and the Internal Security Agency. The organisational structure adopted made it possible to bring together different perspectives, which shaped the conference's central theme: the tension between technological development and the psychosocial safety of young people, with particular emphasis on the mechanisms of radicalisation that may lead to terrorist actions.

The problem of radicalisation of young people and young adults is a multifaceted phenomenon, which has repercussions in almost every sphere of public life. It can be regarded as one of the most significant contemporary security threats, affecting: the state's internal security, the work of the security services and the police, international stability, cybersecurity and social policy.

As Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz, PhD, a deputy chairman of the State Commission for Investigation of Cases against Sexual Liberty and Decency against Minors under the Age of 15 years old, rightly pointed out: (...) *the age of those becoming radicalised has now fallen significantly. Children as young as 10 or 11 meet the criteria for radicalisation. We should therefore regard them as a critically important group, as a soft underbelly of the social security system.*

The conference was a response to the rapidly developing radicalisation, which defies existing analytical frameworks. In terms of the scale of the phenomenon's impact, several key areas and dimensions should be highlighted. It is worth emphasising the social and scientific aspects – radicalisation challenges existing sociological and pedagogical paradigms and requires an interdisciplinary research approach. It affects the wellbeing and development of society by directly undermining its structures, which weakens social bonds and hampers the development potential of the young generation. It should be emphasised that radical attitudes among young people are the foundation of the future political polarisation, which could destabilise democratic structures and public institutions. In its most extreme form, this phenomenon becomes a real threat to public order, which gives rise to the need for heightened vigilance on the part of security systems. The participants of the conference discussed issues such as: causes, mechanisms, consequences of youth radicalisation and methods of prevention.

Causes of youth radicalisation

Paweł Rabiej, an expert of the Polish Society for Social Policy (PTPS), presented the susceptibility of young people to radicalisation, in the light of his own research, analyses of existing data and the findings of the *Youth Diagnosis 2026* report¹.

¹ The first large-scale, holistic scientific report describing the situation and needs of young Poles (Generation Z), compiled by the experts of the PTPS on behalf of the Ministry of National Education. It forms the basis for the new National Youth Strategy. See in more

The speaker discussed the background to the radicalisation of young people and outlined its causes. He pointed out six key mechanisms of radicalisation:

- 1) a subjective sense of injustice and grievance,
- 2) crises and tensions that create a climate of pressure,
- 3) inequalities, social exclusion, violence, negative trajectories,
- 4) identity crisis and the need for a sense of belonging,
- 5) political deprivation – a sense of lacking influence and agency,
- 6) digital and information environment – exacerbates the process of radicalisation.

The research he presented shows that as many as 60% of people aged 15–18 live in a state of constant tension, complaining of severe stress, chronic fatigue and a severe lack of energy for everyday life. The suffering of the young people affects many areas of their lives – they experience stress at home (their home and family are not a safe haven) and stress at school (school is seen as a system focused on results rather than on the individual). The speaker highlighted the dramatic scale of violence in the virtual world. For many young people, the internet is a space of trauma and violence, rather than one of personal development. The research presented shows that as many as one in four teenagers has been a victim of cyberstalking and persistent harassment. Even more alarming is the fact that 20% of respondents have experienced sexual harassment online. The conclusion drawn from these figures was that experiencing violence and harassment online is a source of radicalisation. A victim who feels abandoned by institutions and adults becomes susceptible to narratives put forward by groups offering ‘strength’, ‘retaliation’ or a radical change to the system that failed to protect them.

To supplement the above findings, the crisis in the family’s educational role and the erosion of authority within school and educational institutions should be identified as significant factors in primary and secondary socialisation. Shortcomings in terms of emotional support, relationship stability and the transmission of norms and values may encourage the search for alternative, often radical role models.

detail: P. Rabiej, K. Ciesiołkiewicz, *Young people and state security. Social factors contributing to radicalisation in the Youth Diagnosis 2026 report*, “Terrorism – Studies, Analyses, Prevention” 2026, no. 9, pp. 421–435. <https://doi.org/10.4467/27204383TER.26.018.23801> (editor’s note).

Political and geopolitical factors also play a significant role, including global crises, armed conflicts and international tensions, which – through the information environment – influence young people's perception of reality and may strengthen radical narratives as well as a sense of threat and polarisation. Psychological and individual factors are also significant, such as neurodevelopmental disorders (including autism spectrum disorders), adjustment difficulties, emotional disorders and deficits in social competence. These factors may increase susceptibility to the influence of simplistic, binary narratives, as well as to the influence of groups promoting a strong identity, a sense of belonging and clearly defined system of values.

Mechanisms of radicalisation among young people

During the conference, it was repeatedly pointed out that contemporary terrorism is increasingly using decentralised channels of communication, which makes it much more difficult to monitor. Paulina Piasecka, PhD, from the Civitas University pointed out that radicalisation is not merely a collection of individual pages or posts, but also a self-perpetuating structure that shapes young people's attitudes. Based on current assessments and analyses of security, it can be described as a closed information loop in which technology intersects with psychology. The author accurately identified four pillars of contemporary digital recruitment:

- 1) algorithmic targeting (rapid spread of information – driven by the mechanisms of social platforms – that trigger strong emotions),
- 2) engineering of nostalgia (building 'imagined communities' by drawing on nostalgia, for example, for the socialist era),
- 3) digital recruitment (the use of, among other things, Tik Tok and Telegram as low-cost channels for outreach activities),
- 4) new frontiers (the use of artificial intelligence and deepfake technology as advanced tools of manipulation).

Communities associated with computer games are also significant. Communication platforms used by gamers, such as Discord, as well as forums and communities centred around online games, can constitute a social space susceptible to the influence of radical content. Due to the high level of anonymity, the ease with which closed groups can be formed, and the intensity of social interaction, such environments foster

the gradual socialisation of users within specific ideological narratives. In practice, they can be used for recruitment, participants' loyalty testing and distribution of extremist content, especially among younger users.

The speakers pointed out that contemporary mechanisms of radicalisation also involve the active exploitation of children and young people by extremist organisations that gradually draw minors into their activities. They assign them seemingly simple operational tasks, such as spreading disinformation, participating in closed groups, and carrying out propaganda-related activities. This is a phased process and leads to the gradual internalisation of radical narratives as well as the development of loyalty to the group. The speakers also pointed out that the time it takes for radicalisation to occur via social media has been significantly reduced. Under favourable conditions, it can unfold very rapidly and last for less than a month. This phenomenon is exacerbated by algorithmic mechanisms and closed communication environments, which accelerate the process of identification with extremist narrative and limit exposure to alternative points of view.

In an analysis of socio-psychological foundations of susceptibility to radicalisation, Paulina Piasecka accurately identified its key catalysts, including local resentment – that is radicalisation rooted in a sense of injustice, economic inequalities and social marginalisation. Border regions are characterised by a greater susceptibility to the initiation of conflicts by external actors and a strong need for recognition and belonging, factors that effectively draw minors toward aggressive radical narratives. These regions can also serve as a space for the influence of various extremist ideologies, including movements linked to radical Islamism, that exploit mechanisms of marginalisation, sense of injustice and identity deficit to recruit and reinforce extremist attitudes among vulnerable groups of young people.

According to Konrad Ciesiolkiewicz, the digital ecosystem has become the main radicalisation environment of children and youth, which today takes the form of fragmented, hard-to-detect networks known as Com (English: communities). Traditional radicalisation of the young generation intertwines with cyber threats – ranging from cyberbullying to organised cybercrime – and builds its own autonomous status structures. In this context, attention should also be drawn to 'violence-as-a-service' (VaaS) phenomenon, associated with the activities of specialised, decentralised criminal groups (referred to in the literature as the 764 Network). They

exploit minors as vulnerable targets for influence, and use psychological pressure mechanisms, manipulation and digital blackmail. This process often begins with exposure to content of a violent or shocking nature, leading to gradual information addiction and a lowered threshold of emotional reaction. Subsequently, the force of influence increases and extends to compelling specific behaviours or activities within the digital environment, including actions that support the development of criminal or extremist structures. This phenomenon is part of a wider trend towards the exploitation of children and young people in the context of criminal and destabilisation operations. This poses a significant challenge for state security systems and mechanisms for the protection of minors.

The topic above is closely linked to the issue of the nihilistic underpinnings of aggression among the youngest and commercialisation of aggression in the form of 'violence-as-a-service' within the context of state security. The speaker pointed out that the focus on environmental factors demonstrates the inadequacy of current institutional solutions, which fail to provide optimal protection for young people against online threats. In his view, remedying this situation requires a holistic approach to media ecology, which assesses the entire digital ecosystem. Referring to the thesis of Neil Postman that new technology changes everything, he pointed out that the digital sphere cannot be viewed merely in instrumental terms, as it has become a new living environment and public sphere.

Attention should also be paid to the growing risk of children and young people being exploited by external actors, including potential actions by foreign intelligence services and actors carrying out influence operations. Digital environment, characterised by a high level of anonymity and limited institutional control, may encourage the exploitation of minors as tools for carrying out destabilising activities, including the dissemination of propaganda content, reinforcing polarising narratives or participation in disinformation operations. This phenomenon fits into a broader trend of hybrid threats, in which the susceptibility of young generation to information manipulation constitutes a significant vector of influence on state's stability and its security systems.

Consequences of youth radicalisation

Consequences of youth radicalisation are of a cascade nature – start with the individual, and in extreme cases may lead to destabilisation of state structures. It should be emphasised that not all behaviour has an ideological basis. Some acts of violence may be autotelic in nature – that is, to constitute violence for its own sake. Based on the presentation and discussion of participants, four key areas of impact were identified:

- 1) for an individual (personal destruction),
- 2) for a society (deep polarisation, normalisation of violence, erosion of public trust),
- 3) for a state (systemic destabilisation),
- 4) digital (prevalence of hate speech, development of manipulation technology).

The most serious of these is the loss of the state's development potential. Young generation – instead of building a future – channels its energy into destructive and confrontational processes.

Paulina Piasecka emphasised the importance of identity-related mechanisms (systemic and social consequences). She indicated phenomena that are manifestations of affective polarisation – specifically the reinforcement of an 'us vs. them' dichotomy – which leads to deep social divisions. The saturation of false narratives with strong emotions, with the aim of manipulating public opinion, serves to deepen citizens' distrust of the public services and to subsequently exploit such attitudes.

The debates were dominated by the issue of how, in the long term, radicalisation could undermine the stability of the state and the international order. The speakers highlighted that it may weaken the state's stability, increase security spending, restrict civil liberties, worsen international relations and exacerbate ideological conflicts. From the perspective of internal threats, it was pointed out that radicalisation could lead to terrorist acts, political violence, riots and social destabilisation, attacks on state institutions as well as a rise in ideologically motivated crime. It can also undermine citizen's trust in the state, exacerbate social conflicts, hinder political dialogue as well as encourage disinformation and the spread of conspiracy theories. Ultimately, it can lead to political crises and the weakening of democracy.

In the analyses of the speakers, topics relating to cyberspace threats – on which Katarzyna Maniszewska, PhD from Civitas University and the University of Białystok focused in particular – took centre stage.

She discussed selected threats caused by the development of artificial intelligence, pointing out that AI is currently one of the main tools used to conduct information operations. Automated generation and mixing of data makes it easier for hostile actors to manipulate information on an unprecedented scale, ranging from propaganda to cyber attacks and the verification of vulnerabilities in security systems.

During the conference, it was emphasised that radical groups are increasingly operating online – recruiting members via social media, spreading propaganda, organising cyber attacks, disseminating extremist materials. Online radicalisation, especially among young people, can lead to a number of negative consequences, such as: the rise in cybercrime, participation in hacker attacks, spread of propaganda and use of hate speech. Young people are becoming more and more susceptible to manipulation, disinformation and the influence of extremist groups.

Prevention methods

Methods for countering radicalisation were not only the subject of a theoretic analysis but also of lively discussions. During the conference, it was pointed out that methods for countering radicalisation can be divided into three levels: from general prevention, to measures aimed at risk groups, and interventions for people already radicalised. Key strategies based on contemporary standards of security and education included: building resilience (preventive level), systemic and institutional activities as well as and intervention and deradicalisation (specialist level).

Among the most effective tools are the triad of resilience presented by Paweł Rabiej (resilience and development of psychological capital, development of relational and social skills as well as digital shield – a safe upbringing environment), as well as the triad of independence (increasing employment stability and flexibility, support for independent living, and reducing local transport barriers). The speaker also highlighted the importance of inter-ministerial cooperation in implementing changes aimed at reducing problems of teenagers identified in the report. Interinstitutional synergy should be based on: supporting the potential of young people in rural areas, health and reproductive wellbeing of youth, promoting healthy habits (nutrition and physical activity), equal opportunities and safety of young women's development, relationships

and young men's resilience, easier access to culture, sport and leisure time, entrepreneurship and innovation potential of young people, concern for the climate, environment and sustainable development.

During the debate, the speakers emphasised the special role of services carrying out intelligence and counter-intelligence operations in cyberspace, monitoring digital threats and cooperating with online platforms on the removal of harmful content. The importance of social media development was emphasised, as it created new opportunities for extremist organisations. Online platforms enable the rapid dissemination of propaganda, creation of closed ideological groups and anonymous contact with potential recruits. From the perspective of special services, cyberspace has become one of the key operational areas. It was emphasised that, in the present day, the radicalisation of young people can be exploited as part of a hybrid war. Hostile states or extremist organisations can deliberately exacerbate social divisions, support extremist political movements and destabilise the internal situation in other countries. It was unanimously agreed that this is a phenomenon that necessitates the modernisation of security systems and the enhancement of operational coordination at the national level and within cross-border structures. Cooperation within NATO, the European Union and the United Nations is particularly important. It includes the exchange of intelligence, joint counter-terrorism operations, sanctions against extremist organisations, and programmes to counter radicalisation.

Summary

'New factors influencing the radicalisation of young people from a national security perspective' conference provided a valuable forum for the exchange of views. The complexity of the problem of the radicalisation of minors was highlighted. Radical attitudes among young people are the foundation of a future political polarisation, which can destabilise democratic structures and public institutions. Effectively tackling this phenomenon requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines preventive, educational and systemic measures. A major highlight of the conference was the presence of representatives from the uniformed services and people working with young people. Their participation made it possible to examine the issues raised from an operational and highly pragmatic perspective. As a result,

methods such as triad of resilience have been analysed in terms of their actual effectiveness in the day-to-day work of law enforcement agencies and educational institutions. It remains to be seen whether the concepts presented will be effectively implemented in practice, and when legislative changes aimed at fulfilling the proposals put forward will come into effect.

Aleksandra Komar, PhD

Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the “Terrorism – Studies, Analyses, Prevention” – the scientific journal of the Internal Security Agency.

Contact: a.komar@abw.gov.pl