

## **NEW RESEARCH REVEALS IDEOLOGY IS "ESSENTIAL" TO UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM**

*Cutting edge research forensically analyses material of 100 UK terrorists*

The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) today publishes research demonstrating that ideology plays a central role in driving terrorism.

*Sacred Violence: the enduring role of ideology in terrorism and radicalisation* by Dr Donald Holbrook forensically analyses 6,000 pieces of content consumed by 100 UK terrorists between 2004 and 2021.

The findings show that terrorists are deeply immersed in extremist ideology – consuming, debating and often producing their own material that justifies their actions.

**Commissioner for Countering Extremism, Robin Simcox said:**

"Terrorists take ideology deadly seriously. As government starts to grip the litany of challenges it faces on counter extremism, that means it must do so too.

This research provides clear evidence that ideology explains why terrorists fight, what they hope to achieve, and what they consider permissible in their struggle."

**Key findings include:**

- Terrorism and its permissive environment cannot be understood without reference to ideology. Over half the subjects in the study produced their own ideological content justifying their involvement in terrorism.
- Terrorists display broad ideological interests. Islamist ideology tends to be more theological while extreme right-wing content is often more explicitly hostile and violent.
- Half the extreme ideological material in Islamist Terrorism cases originated in the West (i.e. the UK, USA, and Europe).
- The most influential Islamist clerics among the terrorists studied were Anwar al-Awlaki, Abu Hamza al-Masri and Abdullah el-Faisal. Also popular was the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue, Sayyid Qutb.
- For the Extreme Right Wing, music groups – from folk musicians to heavy metal bands – produced the highest volume of ideological content. The most prolific authors of more substantive ideological content proved to be National Action, founded in 2013 and proscribed in the UK in December 2016.
- Counterterrorism and counter extremism policy within the UK must incorporate an understanding of ideology and its function in transitions to terrorism.

The full report is available on the [Commission for Countering Extremism website](#).

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#### **Notes to editors:**

1. The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) provides independent advice to the government on countering extremism in all its forms.
2. Dr Donald Holbrook is an Associate Fellow at ICCT. He also runs a research consultancy working with governments and law-enforcement on matters relating to counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. He is an Honorary Senior Research Associate at the Department of Security and Crime Science, University College London, and a member of the RESOLVE Network Research Advisory Council, part of the United States Institute of Peace. He serves on the editorial board of the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence* and holds a PhD from the University of St Andrews, Scotland.
3. For more information, please contact the Senior Communications Manager, [tim.parker@counteringextremism.gov.uk](mailto:tim.parker@counteringextremism.gov.uk) or [info@counteringextremism.gov.uk](mailto:info@counteringextremism.gov.uk).

#### **About the CCE**

The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) provides the government with impartial, expert advice and scrutiny on the tools, policies and approaches needed to tackle extremism.

The CCE supports the public sector, communities, and civil society to confront extremism wherever it exists; and promotes a positive vision around core, shared values.

Robin Simcox is the Commissioner for Countering Extremism. He was appointed as Interim Commissioner in March 2021 and on a substantive basis in July 2022.

The Commissioner is a public appointee of the Home Office and operates independently from government, supported by a small secretariat of civil servants.