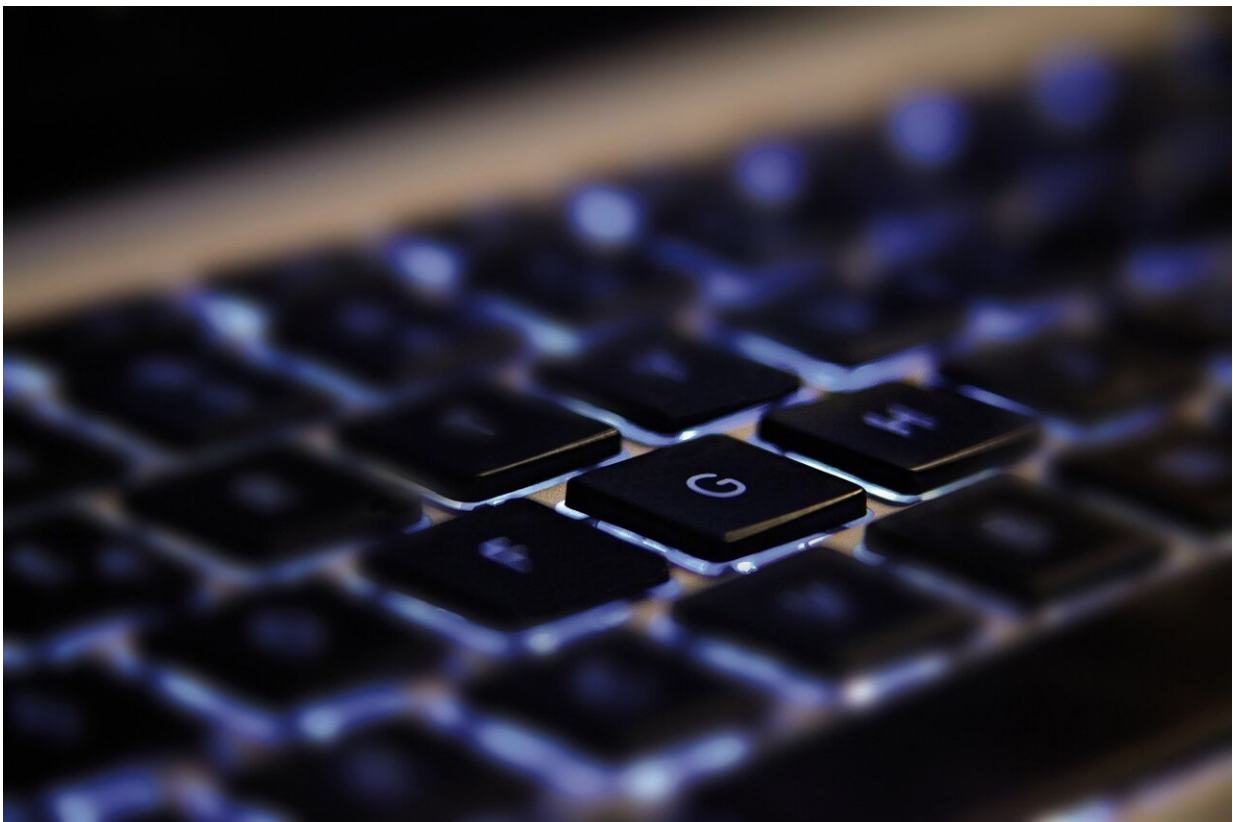


# Study of convicted extremists shows open social media platforms play an increasing role in radicalisation

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The internet is playing an increasingly prominent role in radicalisation, with a particular rise in the use of open social media platforms,

according to a comprehensive analysis of the online activity of convicted extremists in England and Wales.

The research by Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) was the first to use closed source data and has been published in a parliamentary report by the Ministry of Justice.

Researchers were given access to more than 230 detailed post-conviction assessments to investigate online and offline activities in the build-up to the offense, together with ratings of risk levels and further characteristics of each individual and case.

The study explored the relationship between online activity and the type of offenses committed among three groups: those who primarily radicalized online; those who primarily radicalized offline; and those radicalized through both online and offline influences.

Findings show that since 2005 the proportion of offenders radicalized online has increased, while at the same time those who were subject primarily to offline influences were found to have decreased.

The types of websites, platforms and applications used by those who are convicted of extremist offenses were found to have changed over time, moving away from specific extremist websites towards the use of open social media platforms.

The research, which included reports containing assessments of overall levels of engagement, intent and capability, also reveals that those who had radicalized mainly or solely online were the least likely to be engaged with an extremist group, cause or ideology, and least willing and able to perpetrate violent extremist acts. They were also less likely to be socially connected to other extremists offline in the context of the

offense and more likely to display strong signs of mental illness or personality disorder.

Conversely, those who had radicalized primarily offline were more likely to take on the role of attacker compared against the other two groups and were less likely to follow an Islamist extremist ideology as opposed to another ideological cause.

When analyzing the perceived risk of committing future violent extremist offenses, the 'hybrid' group, which included those who were subject to both online and offline influences, were found to have the highest levels of engagement and intent to commit future extremist offenses, compared to the other pathway groups.

The group primarily radicalized offline were found to have the highest levels of capability to commit future extremist offenses likely to cause serious or significant harm, again compared to the other pathway groups.

Dr. Jonathan Kenyon, HMPPS National Specialist Lead for Extremism, carried out the research as part of a Doctorate in Forensic Psychology. He said: "This current study, using a large and unique dataset, provides a number of interesting and novel insights into the way convicted extremists in England and Wales have used the internet and engaged in online activities in the context of their offending. As such, it makes an important contribution to the literature which up until now has been largely reliant on open-source data or small numbers of case studies drawing from primary data."

Co-researcher, Dr. Jens Binder, senior lecturer in Psychology at NTU's School of Social Sciences, said: "Online radicalisation as a route towards extremist offending is on the rise, and the pace of development is in line with the expansion of the Internet into all domains of everyday life. We can see from our findings that the pathway to radicalisation individuals

take can make a crucial difference in terms of the risks they pose—this highlights the need for a more systematic investigation of online dynamics in the context of radicalisation.

"Sustained efforts in the profiling of online and offline pathways into radicalisation can contribute to counter-terrorism measures and more effective offender assessment and treatment with the prison system."

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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