



Countering Online Radicalisation A Strategy for Action

A policy report carried out by ICSR
In partnership with the Community Security Trust

Executive Summary

Political extremists and terrorists are using the internet as an instrument for radicalisation and recruitment. This report – resulting from the first systematic effort to bring together industry, experts and government on the issue of online radicalisation – examines **what can be done by governments, industry and civil society** to counter their activities.

Most governments have focused on technical solutions, believing that removing or blocking radicalising material on the internet will solve the problem. Yet, this report shows that **any strategy that relies on reducing the availability of content alone is bound to be crude, expensive and counterproductive**. Radicalisation is largely a real-world phenomenon that cannot be dealt with simply by ‘pulling the plug’.

The **analogy with countering child sexual abuse on the internet is flawed**, because much of the material involved in child sexual abuse is clearly illegal and there are no political constituencies which might be offended if repressive action is taken against it.

Any strategy that hopes to counter online radicalisation **must aim to create an environment in which the production and consumption of such materials become not just more difficult in a technical sense but unacceptable as well as less desirable**.

Elements of this strategy include:

- ***Deterring the producers of extremist materials***
- ***Empowering online communities to self-regulate***

- ***Reducing the appeal of extremist messages***
- ***Promoting positive messages***

The report thus develops concrete proposals for action within each of the four strands:

- **Deterring producers:** The *selective use of takedowns in conjunction with prosecutions* would signal that individuals engaged in online extremism are not beyond the law.
- **Empowering online communities:** The *creation of an Internet Users Panel* in order to **strengthen reporting mechanisms and complaints** procedures would allow users to make their voices heard.
- **Reducing the appeal:** *More attention must be paid to media literacy*, and a comprehensive approach in this area is badly needed.
- **Promoting positive messages:** The *establishment of an independent start-up fund* would provide seed money for grassroots projects aimed at countering extremism.

Efforts to counter online radicalisation must view new technologies and modes of interaction not as a threat but as an opportunity. Relying on government alone is not sufficient: It is vital to capitalise upon the potential **contributions of all stakeholders**, including internet companies and internet users.

The report can be downloaded free of charge at www.icsr.info.

Hardcopies can be ordered via mail@icsr.info.