



Childhood Innocence?: Mapping Trends in Teenage Terrorism Offenders

Hannah Rose and Gina Vale

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Hannah Rose is a Hate and Extremism Analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, and a PhD Candidate in the Department of War Studies at King's College London. Her research focuses on far-right extremism, specialising in extreme-right youth. Twitter/X: @hannah1_rose

Dr Gina Vale is a Lecturer of Criminology in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy, and Criminology at the University of Southampton. She is also an Associate Fellow of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) and a member of Vox-Pol. Her research primarily focuses on Islamist governance, extremist propaganda, and the organisational roles and experiences of women and children. Twitter/X: @GinaAVale

CONTACT DETAILS

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact:

ICSR
King's College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
United Kingdom

T. +44 20 7848 2098

E. mail@icsr.info

Twitter: @icsr_centre

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Executive Summary

A so-called ‘new generation of extremists’ has attracted significant media attention but has suffered from a lack of transparent data and comprehensive, youth-specific analysis. Against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving threat landscape, this report presents the first in-depth research into child terrorist activity in England and Wales. Through the construction of a unique dataset of children convicted of terrorism offences in England and Wales since 2016 – published live alongside this report – it investigates how domestic policing and the criminal justice system understand child-terrorism offending.

Key Data Points

In the UK since 2016, 43 individuals have been convicted of terrorism offences they committed as minors. Of these, 42 were boys, with only one girl. While the oldest offenders were days before their respective 18th birthdays, the youngest was only 13 years old.

Two clear waves of child terrorism offending can be identified. The first, dominated by Islamist cases, runs concurrently with the peak of Islamic State’s territorial ‘caliphate’ until its collapse in 2018. The second wave predominantly comprises extreme-right cases, emerging in 2018 in the context of post-National Action and the decentralisation of extreme-right online networks. In total, 16 cases relate to Islamist activity, 25 to the extreme right, and two to unknown or unclear ideologies.

Almost a third of the children were convicted of preparing an act of terrorism, including the construction of improvised explosive devices, the plotting of complex mass-casualty attacks, and attempts by seven children to travel independently overseas for the purpose of engaging in terrorism. Eight children – five extreme right and three Islamist – planned to commit domestic acts of terrorism on UK soil.

Eleven minors were convicted of encouraging terrorism, one for providing training for terrorism, one for membership of a banned organisation and one for inviting support for a banned organisation.

The most common offence, committed by 26 minors, was the collection of terrorist propaganda. Children created their own propaganda, engaged with violent extremist literature and downloaded operational materials. 19 minors disseminated banned materials with friends, family and anonymous online networks.

Proportionally, more extreme right than Islamist offenders pleaded not guilty, with many denouncing previously held views, citing adverse childhood experiences, explaining their isolation and desire to fit in with online ecosystems, and claiming childhood innocence.

The most common sentence was non-custodial, accompanied by a rehabilitative and monitoring order, which was handed down to twelve extreme right, three Islamist and one other offender. The highest

sentence, awarded in two separate Islamist cases, was eleven years to life. The disparity in sentencing between ideological categories may be shaped by four factors: the age at sentencing, greater severity of offence, stronger mitigating circumstances among extreme-right offenders and a higher proportion of not-guilty pleas entered by Islamist defendants.

A New Threat?

Children did not merely mimic the actions or do the bidding of older individuals, but proved to be innovators and amplifiers in their own right. Many attempted and managed to recruit peers and older family members, prepare acts of terrorism without the help of adults, and create their own propaganda images, videos and manifestos. In anonymous transnational online extremist ecosystems, which are widely available and have very low barriers to participation, the potential impact of extremist minors is on a par with adults.

Children's support of terrorist networks presents a new threat. While no attack has been committed by a child in the UK to date, late-stage foiled plots and transnational activism demonstrate this potentiality.

However, children cannot merely be treated as 'small adults' with heavily securitised policies. An outcome-focused system must balance the interests of the public and targeted communities with the best interests of the child to address root causes of radicalisation and secure successful reintegration and threat mitigation.

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1 Introduction

In 2021, former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick warned of a “new generation” of child extremists.¹ Indeed, data published by the Home Office reveal that the period from June 2021 to June 2022 saw the highest number of arrests of minors for terror offences since records began. In the following and latest year to June 2023, minors now constitute approximately one-third of terrorism arrests (24 of 78, 30.8%) and convictions (3 of 9, 33.3%).² As the British terrorist threat is increasingly attributed to online, transnational and violent ecosystems,³ the barriers to participation have been lowered. It is for this reason that recent years have witnessed an increase in the number of minors arrested, charged and sentenced for terrorist offending.⁴

Child soldiers and the fate of children in conflict zones have long preoccupied global security and human rights experts. However, as the terrorism threat landscape has emphasised the potential for homegrown radicalisation, so too have children’s opportunities for domestic involvement increased. In particular, recent years have seen a wave of extreme-right activity, with 19 of the 20 minors arrested for terrorism offences in 2021 related to the extreme right.⁵

A new generation of terrorists simultaneously presents both a new security threat and a safeguarding crisis. Policies and legislation, informed by the post-9/11 hyper-focus on Islamist threats, often takes a securitised approach which fails to understand the diversity of drivers for children or sufficiently utilise safeguarding or rehabilitative solutions. Children commit acts of terrorism for different reasons, influenced by different factors and radicalised in different social circumstances.

With little research on this emerging trend, this report aims to identify the scope and scale of children’s involvement in terrorism in England and Wales since 2016. Through the creation of a unique dataset of terrorism convictions of individuals who offended as minors, this research dissects court cases and press reports to interrogate how and why children become involved in terrorism. The authors ultimately seek to understand what threat is posed by child terrorist offenders, and how this contributes to the continual shifts in the UK’s overall threat landscape. The dataset and accompanying analysis thus offer age-specific and comparative, cross-ideological insight into this ‘new generation’ of terrorist activity.

1 Lizzie Dearden, “Children Forming ‘New Generation of Extremists’ in UK, Cressida Dick Warns,” *The Independent*, 13 September 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terror-threat-uk-children-cressida-dick-b1919154.html>.

2 “Operation of Police Powers under the Terrorism Act 2000, Quarterly Update to June 2023,” Home Office, 14 September 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-june-2023>.

3 “CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023,” UK Government, July 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171084/CONTEST_2023.pdf.

4 “CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023,” 15.

5 Data is announced ad hoc and unsystematically, with no updated figures available: “UK Terrorism: 19 Children Linked to Extreme Right-Wing Ideologies Arrested as Police Reveal They Have Foiled 32 Terror Plots since 2017,” *Sky News*, accessed 26 August 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/uk-terrorism-19-children-linked-to-extreme-right-wing-ideologies-arrested-as-police-reveal-they-have-foiled-32-terror-plots-since-2017-12568389>.

2 Methodology

This dataset provides a detailed picture of children’s terrorist offending in England and Wales. Combining descriptive statistics with rich qualitative thematic analysis, the authors examine the trends of convicted cases of politically violent children – a category of actors that is often misunderstood or stereotyped, packaged into a homogenous group, or overlooked entirely. It thus assists in better understanding the profiles of children’s ‘membership’ and terrorist affiliations, their levels of involvement and connectivity in terrorist networks, and the activities carried out to support, promote or even conduct terrorist violence in the UK and beyond.

Beginning in February 2022, the authors have drawn information from multiple open sources to compile this original dataset. Official case records and reports published by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS),⁶ police services⁷ – as well as legal resource repositories such as the British and Irish Legal Information Institute (BAILII),⁸ The Law Pages,⁹ and Westlaw UK¹⁰ – were deemed most reliable; yet gaps remain.¹¹ Further cases were identified through a secondary, fixed-term search of credible academic, institutional and media publications through LexisNexis and Google. In addition, Google alerts were set up for these same search terms, enabling the authors to track ongoing cases that may, upon conclusion, be later included in the dataset. The current wave of child engagement in terrorism in England and Wales shows no sign of slowing down. Therefore, beyond this report, the authors will continue to update the dataset as convictions are confirmed. This dataset will be hosted as a ‘live’ resource by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation on a dedicated page of its website for the ‘Childhood Innocence Project’.¹²

The inclusion criteria for the study were cases of successful convictions of at least one terrorism offence (in contravention of the Terrorism Act [TACT] 2000 and subsequent legislation) perpetrated by a child. The authors therefore make a number of important deviations from the categorisation and inclusion criteria of cases collected and published by the Home Office.¹³

Firstly, for the purpose of this study to understand children’s involvement in terrorist activity *as children*, cases were only included if the offender was aged under 18 years at the time of

6 “The Counter-Terrorism Division of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) – Successful Prosecutions since 2016,” The Crown Prosecution Service, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism/counter-terrorism-division-crown-prosecution-service-cps-successful-prosecutions-2016>.

7 For example, “Year in Review 2018: All-Female Terror Plot,” Counter Terrorism Policing, 26 December 2018, <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/year-in-review-2018-all-female-terror-plot/>.

8 “British and Irish Legal Information Institute (BAILII),” accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.bailii.org/>.

9 “The Law Pages,” accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.thelawpages.com>.

10 “Westlaw UK,” Thomson Reuters, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://uk.westlaw.com>.

11 The authors would like to thank Jonathan Hall KC, the UK Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, for his assistance with fact-checking selected details and figures for the compiled cases.

12 “Childhood Innocence Project,” <https://icsr.info/childhood-innocence-project/>.

13 The UK Home Office publishes quarterly aggregated data on terrorism arrests, charges, convictions and outcomes. “Operation of Police Powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and Subsequent Legislation: Arrests, Outcomes, and Stop and Search, Great Britain, Quarterly Update to December 2022,” Home Office, 9 March 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-december-2022/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-and-subsequent-legislation-arrests-outcomes-and-stop-and-search-great-britain-quarterly-u>.

the (first, if multiple) terrorism offence. Therefore, the dataset includes cases of child offenders arrested and convicted as adults, due either to successful investigation of historical offences or a delay in judicial procedure.

Secondly, in order to examine trends in confirmed child terrorist activity, and their recognised culpability therein, the study parameters were limited to ‘successful’ convictions of child offenders. This resulted in the exclusion of cases of acquittal¹⁴ or dismissal¹⁵ of child offenders, as well as cases of adult offenders who are alleged to have held – but have not been convicted of – ideological views or commitments as a child.¹⁶

Thirdly, the dataset only includes cases of perpetration of a substantive offence under the UK TACT 2000 and subsequent terrorism legislation, rather than cases of ‘terrorism-relevant’ offences. This could include, for example, explosives, hate crime, weapons possession or public disorder. One notable exclusion is a case of two children convicted of conspiracy to murder following their Columbine-inspired school shooting plot, including attempts to access weaponry.¹⁷ Although the authors identified cases of children perpetrating these ‘secondary’ offences, the cases were not included in core repositories (such as the CPS website), thus restricting availability and comparability of data. Moreover, as discussed in greater detail in the subsequent analysis, to date, individuals who successfully travelled as children to join Islamic State in Syria and Iraq do not (yet) face criminal charges for their involvement in the group. The authors will continue to monitor any developments in this regard, as any future terrorism conviction for travel, membership or activity in the group will be relevant for inclusion in the dataset.

Fourthly, the authors took the decision to exclude cases that were convicted prior to 2016 – the point at which the CPS began to publish its data. Publications and data repositories hosting more historical cases are either inconsistent or incomplete. For example, a commendably detailed report by Hannah Stuart covering 1998 to 2015 presents a number of problems for this study.¹⁸ It provides age information only at the time of conviction, and is limited to cases of Islamist terrorism. By contrast, while the authors necessarily omit interesting and high-profile cases of children convicted of terrorism offences up to 2015, greater data availability thereafter enables representation and comparability across ideological divides.

14 A salient example is a 15-year-old boy who was found not guilty of planning a jihad-inspired terrorist act after becoming radicalised by online material. “Boy, 15, Found Not Guilty of Terror Plot,” *BBC News*, 9 October 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-54450013>.

15 A high-profile case is that of a teenage girl who was alleged to hold extreme right-wing beliefs and was accused of possessing instructions for homemade firearms and explosives. Her case was dismissed after the Home Office determined that she had been a victim of human trafficking. Daniel De Simone, “Terror Case Dropped against Trafficking Victim, Aged 16,” *BBC News*, 27 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60132861>.

16 Also excluded is the case of Ben John, who, at the age of 13, downloaded *The Anarchist Cookbook*, for the possession of which he was later sentenced to two years (originally suspended in August 2021, then changed to custodial on appeal in January 2022). However, the indictment period began in April 2019, when John transferred the document onto a hard drive. At this point, he was aged 19, and therefore the offending timeline as detailed in court records was not when John was a minor. The Royal Courts of Justice, *Regina v Ben John*, No. 202103079/A2 (The Court of Appeal Criminal Division, 19 January 2022).

17 Judiciary of England and Wales, “R. v Thomas Wyllie & Alex Bolland Sentencing Remarks,” No. T20177821, Leeds Crown Court, 20 July 2018).

18 Hannah Stuart, “Islamist Terrorism: Analysis of Offences and Attacks in the UK: (1998-2015),” The Henry Jackson Society, London, 5 March 2017, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/islamist-terrorism-analysis-of-offences-and-attacks-in-the-uk-1998-2015/>.

Limitations

No dataset is perfect, and the above inclusion criteria are somewhat constrained and shaped by the challenges of conducting open source research into terrorism cases in England and Wales. As such, the authors acknowledge a number of limitations faced during the data collection and analysis for this report.

By nature of research concerning children, there was particular difficulty in identifying and distinguishing cases that are anonymised by automatic reporting restrictions. In some instances, later media coverage revealed the identity of the offender after their transition to adulthood at 18 years. In other cases, cross-referencing multiple data points such as location, age, offence and sentence was required in order to separate anonymised teenagers with otherwise similar offending profiles. It is important to note here that the authors are committed to upholding the highest ethical research standards in line with their institutions' research ethics and data management policies.¹⁹ As such, the authors took the decision to anonymise all individuals in the dataset and analysis, irrespective of available public reporting.

Unsurprisingly, the greatest methodological constraint on this study was the opacity and unavailability of open source data. For example, cases included solely on the basis of media reporting presented challenges in determining the age of the individual at the time of offence rather than at conviction or sentencing, which was the predominant focus of news coverage. A notable example is an 18-year-old man convicted in 2019 of ten counts of collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism. He was arrested only three months after his 18th birthday, with a large cache of extreme right-wing and Satanist documents.²⁰ While it is likely that these were compiled over a period of months starting when he was still a minor, available public reporting cannot verify this. Therefore, this case, and others in question, are excluded from the dataset at this time until conformity with the inclusion criteria can be confirmed. Moreover, media coverage provides limited detail and only select quotations from court proceedings. For more extensive qualitative analysis, the authors have largely focused on cases with publicly available court transcripts (either of a judge's sentencing remarks or record of appeal) or detailed case profiles published by the CPS or The Law Pages. Greater quantitative and qualitative data accessibility, along with disaggregation for analysis, is among the driving motivations for conducting this study, and remains an ongoing issue and key policy recommendation.

19 The research project received full approval from the ethics review boards of the authors' respective academic institutions: King's College London, REMAS ref. LRS-22/23-34126, and University of Southampton, ERGO ref. 78317. The researchers also completed a full data protection impact assessment, approved and filed by both institutions in line with UK GDPR.

20 Neil Walker, "Extreme Right Wing Teenager Jailed for Terrorism Offences," Border Security Report, 6 October 2019, <https://www.border-security-report.com/extreme-right-wing-teenager-jailed-for-terrorism-offences/>.

The Dataset

Despite these limitations, the resulting dataset contains 43 cases of child terrorism offenders convicted between 1 January 2016 and the time of writing (October 2023). Direct comparison to Home Office figures is not possible, on account of the government's inclusion of terrorism-related offences and the inability to determine the proportion of child offenders within recorded young adult (aged 18–20) convicts. However, it is estimated that the authors' dataset currently includes the majority of the relevant cases recorded by the Home Office during the period of study. To these macro-level figures, this report adds rich qualitative analysis of each individual child's case.

The raw data collected for each case, presented in chronological order of conviction in Table 1,²¹ can be divided into three overarching sections. The first is the children's demographic information, including their approximate location identifier, case ID and gender. The second is the offence details, covering the ideological category, counts and types of terrorism offence(s), the offender's age at (first) offence, the offending timeline, and group affiliation or membership. The third section covers the conviction process and record, including the offender's age at and date of arrest, number of co-defendants, plea(s) entered, age at and date of conviction, age at and date of sentencing, sentence issued, and parole eligibility date (PED) or expected/actual release date. Not every data point is known for every case.

The following sections provide the raw dataset and examine its key quantitative trends, before diving deeper into qualitative case details in order to discuss the circumstances, impacts and potential threat of children's terrorist activity in England and Wales since 2016.

²¹ This dataset is accurate up to the print date of 6 November 2023. Any updates thereafter will be amended on the live dataset on the ICSR website only. The data has been collated and made available with explicit consideration of potential risk to individuals' rights and freedoms under the Data Protection Act 2018 and associated regulations. It should only be used in accordance with the lawful basis under which the original research was undertaken: archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes, or statistical purposes.

Table 1: Children Convicted of Terrorism Offences in England and Wales 2016–Present

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details					Conviction Process and Record									
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count)	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
1	East London		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism Dissemination of a terrorist publication [2 counts] ¹	15 ²	Summer 2016–February 2017 ³	Islamist ⁴	Islamic State ⁵	15 ⁶	21/02/2017 ⁷	–	Guilty ⁸	15 ⁹	07/06/2017 ¹⁰	15 ¹¹	31/07/2017 ¹²	1 year IRO ¹³	N/A
2	South West London	201705301/A1	M	Preparation of terrorist acts ¹⁴	17 ¹⁵	December 2016–February 2017 ¹⁶	Islamist ¹⁷	Islamic State ¹⁸	17 ¹⁹	21/02/2017 ²⁰	S London teen (below) ²¹	Guilty ²²	17 ²³	06/07/2017 ²⁴	17 ²⁵	03/11/2017 ²⁶	4 years, 2 months + 4 year licence ²⁷	January 2022 ²⁸
3	South London		M	Preparation of terrorist acts ²⁹	16 ³⁰	December 2016–February 2017 ³¹	Islamist ³²	Islamic State ³³	16 ³⁴	21/02/2017 ³⁵	SW London teen (above) ³⁶	Guilty ³⁷	16 ³⁸	09/06/2017 ³⁹	16 ⁴⁰	03/11/2017 ⁴¹	2 years, 8 months ⁴²	July 2020 ⁴³
4	High Wycombe	T20160477	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism Dissemination of a terrorist publication [12 counts] ⁴⁴	17 ⁴⁵	September–October 2015 ⁴⁶	Islamist ⁴⁷	Islamic State ⁴⁸		10/03/2016 ⁴⁹	–	Not Guilty ⁵⁰	19 ⁵¹	20/12/2017 ⁵²	19 ⁵³	26/01/2018 ⁵⁴	3 years, 6 months ⁵⁵	28/10/2019 ⁵⁶
5	Llantrisant	T20177691	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [2 counts] Encouragement of terrorism [2 counts] Preparation for acts of terrorism ⁵⁷	16 ⁵⁸	Summer 2016–June 2017 ⁵⁹	Islamist ⁶⁰	Islamic State ⁶¹ / al-Qaeda ⁶²	17 ⁶³	30/06/2017 ⁶⁴	–	Not Guilty ⁶⁵	17 ⁶⁶	27/11/2017 ⁶⁷	17 ⁶⁸	02/03/2018 ⁶⁹	Life (11 years) ⁷⁰	30/02/2029 ⁷¹

List of Abbreviations

CBO – Criminal Behaviour Order
 CO – Community Order
 DTO – Detention and Training Order
 IRO – Intensive Referral Order

SCPO – Serious Crime Prevention Order
 SHPO – Sexual Harm Prevention Order
 XRW – Extreme Right-Wing
 YRO – Youth Referral/Rehabilitation Order

Data Usage Statement

This dataset has been collated and made available with explicit consideration of potential risk to individuals' rights and freedoms under the Data Protection Act 2018 and associated regulations.

It should only be used in accordance with the lawful basis under which the original research was undertaken: archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes.

All citations are included at the end of this report.

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details					Conviction Process and Record									
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count)	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
6	West London		M	Preparation of terrorist acts Dissemination of a terrorist publication ⁷²	16/17 ⁷³	Spring 2016–February 2017 ⁷⁴	Islamist ⁷⁵	Islamic State ⁷⁶	17 ⁷⁷	21/02/2017 ⁷⁸	Older brother (age 20) ⁷⁹	Guilty ⁸⁰	18 ⁸¹	11/01/2018 ⁸²	18 ⁸³	17/05/2018 ⁸⁴	2 years, 3 months ⁸⁵	August 2020 ⁸⁶
7	East London		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [2 counts] Dissemination of a terrorist publication [6 counts] ⁸⁷	16/17 ⁸⁸	October 2016–December 2017 ⁸⁹	Islamist ⁹⁰	Islamic State ⁹¹	17 ⁹²	September 2017 ⁹³	–	Guilty ⁹⁴	18 ⁹⁵	16/02/2018 ⁹⁶	18 ⁹⁷	05/06/2018 ⁹⁸	1 year, 6 months DTO ⁹⁹ + 5 year CBO ¹⁰⁰	06/03/2019 ¹⁰¹
8	Sutton Coldfield	S20180403	M	Preparation of terrorist acts Possessing an article for terrorist purposes Training for terrorism Dissemination of a terrorist publication [2 counts] ¹⁰²	15 ¹⁰³	June 2017–January 2018 ¹⁰⁴	Islamist ¹⁰⁵	Jabhat al-Nusra ¹⁰⁶	15/16	12/06/2017; 03/02/2018 ¹⁰⁷	–	Guilty ¹⁰⁸	16 ¹⁰⁹	27/03/2018 ¹¹⁰	16 ¹¹¹	06/07/2018 ¹¹²	6 years + 3 year licence ¹¹³	05/07/2024 ¹¹⁴
9	South London	T20177137	F	Preparation of terrorist acts [2 counts] ¹¹⁵	16 ¹¹⁶	January 2016–April 2017 ¹¹⁷	Islamist ¹¹⁸	Islamic State ¹¹⁹	17 ¹²⁰	12/04/2017 ¹²¹	Older sister (age 22); Mother (age 44); Family friend (age 21) ¹²²	Not Guilty ¹²³	18 ¹²⁴	04/06/2018 ¹²⁵	18 ¹²⁶	03/08/2018; 16/04/2019 (Appeal) ¹²⁷	Life (11 years) ¹²⁸	31/07/2029 ¹²⁹
10	Harrow	T20180087	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [6 counts] Dissemination of a terrorist publication [7 counts] ¹³⁰	17 ¹³¹	June 2017–May 2018 ¹³²	Islamist ¹³³	Islamic State/ Al-Qaeda ¹³⁴	18 ¹³⁵	17/05/2018 ¹³⁶	–	Guilty ¹³⁷	18 ¹³⁸	07/11/2018 ¹³⁹	18 ¹⁴⁰	17/12/2018 ¹⁴¹	3 years, 4 months ¹⁴²	23/01/2020 ¹⁴³

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details				Conviction Process and Record										
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count) ¹⁴⁴	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
11	West London	T20187422	M	Encouragement of terrorism [2 counts] ¹⁴⁴	17 ¹⁴⁵	August–September 2018 ¹⁴⁶	XRW ¹⁴⁷	Sonnenkrieg Division; ¹⁴⁸ System Resistance Network (SRN); ¹⁴⁹ National Action (pre-ban) ¹⁵⁰	17 ¹⁵¹	06/12/2018 ¹⁵²	Teen group member (age 19) ¹⁵³	Guilty ¹⁵⁴	17 ¹⁵⁵	20/12/2018 ¹⁵⁶	18 ¹⁵⁷	18/06/2019 ¹⁵⁸	1 year, 6 months DTO ¹⁵⁹	18/03/2020 ¹⁶⁰
12	Redhill	T201773893/ T20170585	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism Preparation of terrorist acts Preparation of terrorist acts (assisting another) Dissemination of a terrorist publication [4 counts] ¹⁶¹	16 ¹⁶²	July 2016–July 2017 ¹⁶³	Islamist ¹⁶⁴	Islamic State ¹⁶⁵	17 ¹⁶⁶	July 2017 ¹⁶⁷	1 – Acquitted ¹⁶⁸	Not Guilty – Preparing terrorist acts; Guilty – all other offences ¹⁶⁹		April 2018; 8 March 2019 ¹⁷⁰	19 ¹⁷¹	28/06/2019 ¹⁷²	6 years ¹⁷³	27/06/2022 ¹⁷⁴
13	Bradford		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [3 counts] (Making an explosive device) ¹⁷⁵	15 ¹⁷⁶	June 2018 ¹⁷⁷	Other ¹⁷⁸	N/A	15 ¹⁷⁹	August 2018 ¹⁸⁰	–	Not Guilty ¹⁸¹	16 ¹⁸²	May 2019 ¹⁸³	16 ¹⁸⁴	20/09/2019 ¹⁸⁵	5 years + 4 year licence ¹⁸⁶	September 2024 ¹⁸⁷
14	Bradford	T20190675	M	Possessing an article for terrorist purposes [8 counts] Dissemination of a terrorist publication ¹⁸⁸	16 ¹⁸⁹	October 2017 ¹⁹⁰	Islamist ¹⁹¹	Islamic State ¹⁹²		03/07/2019 ¹⁹³	Older brother (age 21) ¹⁹⁴	Guilty ¹⁹⁵	18 ¹⁹⁶		18 ¹⁹⁷	29/11/2019 ¹⁹⁸	3 years, 6 months ¹⁹⁹	29/08/2021 ²⁰⁰

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details					Conviction Process and Record									
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count)	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
15	Durham	T20197374 / U20190578	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [3 counts] Possessing an article for terrorist purposes Preparation of terrorist acts Dissemination of a terrorist publication ²⁰¹ (Sexual assault by touching [5 counts]) ²⁰²	14 ²⁰³	October 2017– March 2019 ²⁰⁴	XRW ²⁰⁵	N/A	16 ²⁰⁶	March 2019 ²⁰⁷	–	Not Guilty ²⁰⁸	16 ²⁰⁹	20/11/2019 ²¹⁰	17 ²¹¹	07/01/2020 ²¹²	6 years, 8 months + 5 year licence ²¹³	09/05/2024 ²¹⁴
16	Kent		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [2 counts] ²¹⁵	17 ²¹⁶	January– February 2018 ²¹⁷	XRW ²¹⁸	N/A		18/06 2019 ²¹⁹	–	Guilty ²²⁰	20 ²²¹	18/05/2020 ²²²	20 ²²³	20/05/2020 ²²⁴	1 year, 8 months suspended, 5 year probation ²²⁵	N/A
17	Nottingham	T20180636/ 202001697 A4	M	Membership of a proscribed organisation ²²⁶	15 ²²⁷	December 2016– September 2017 ²²⁸	XRW ²²⁹	National Action ²³⁰	17 ²³¹	05/09/2018 ²³²	Three other group members (ages 23, 24, 25) ²³³	Not Guilty ²³⁴	19 ²³⁵	19/03/2020 ²³⁶	19 ²³⁷	09/06/2020; 20/11/2020 (Appeal) ²³⁸	9 months ²³⁹	20/01/2021 ²⁴⁰
18	South West London	S20200072	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [12 counts] Encouragement of terrorism Dissemination of a terrorist publication (Making and possessing indecent images of children [2 counts]) ²⁴¹	16 ²⁴²	January 2019 ²⁴³	XRW ²⁴⁴	Sonnenkrieg Division ²⁴⁵	17 ²⁴⁶	19/06/2019 ²⁴⁷	–	Guilty ²⁴⁸	18 ²⁴⁹	02/09/2020 ²⁵⁰	18 ²⁵¹	02/11/2020 ²⁵²	2 years suspended + SCPO (5 years) ²⁵³ + 10 year deradicalisation programme ²⁵⁴	N/A

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details					Conviction Process and Record									
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count)	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
19	Rugby	T20197814	M	Preparation of terrorist acts Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [9 counts] ²⁵⁵	16 ²⁵⁶	April–September 2019 ²⁵⁷	XRW ²⁵⁸	Feuerkrieg Division, ²⁵⁹ League of Nationalists ²⁶⁰	16 ²⁶¹	03/09/2019 ²⁶²	–	Not Guilty – Preparing terrorist acts; Guilty – all other offences ²⁶³	16/17 ²⁶⁴	02/10/2020; 23/03/2020 ²⁶⁵	17 ²⁶⁶	06/11/2020 ²⁶⁷	5 years, 6 months ²⁶⁸	07/07/2023 ²⁶⁹
20	Cornwall		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [10 counts] Dissemination of a terrorist publication [2 counts] ²⁷⁰	13 ²⁷¹	July 2018–July 2019 ²⁷²	XRW ²⁷³	Feuerkrieg Division ²⁷⁴	14 ²⁷⁵	23/07/2019 ²⁷⁶	–	Guilty ²⁷⁷	16 ²⁷⁸	01/02/2021 ²⁷⁹	16 ²⁸⁰	08/02/2021 ²⁸¹	2 year YRO ²⁸²	N/A
21	Newcastle		M	Inviting support for a proscribed organisation [4 counts] Encouragement of terrorism [3 counts] (Stirring up racial and religious hatred [4 counts]) ²⁸³	15 ²⁸⁴	July–September 2019 ²⁸⁵	XRW ²⁸⁶	National Action, ²⁸⁷ Blutkrieg Division ²⁸⁸		October 2019 ²⁸⁹	–	Guilty ²⁹⁰			16 ²⁹¹	30/03/2021 ²⁹²	1 year IRO ²⁹³	N/A
22	Bartley Green		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [3 counts] ²⁹⁴	15 ²⁹⁵	May–June 2020 ²⁹⁶	Unknown ²⁹⁷		15 ²⁹⁸	June 2020 ²⁹⁹	–	Guilty ³⁰⁰	15 ³⁰¹	11/03/2021 ³⁰²	16 ³⁰³	21/05/2021 ³⁰⁴	1 year YRO ³⁰⁵	N/A
23	Gloucestershire		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [11 counts] ³⁰⁶	15 ³⁰⁷	2019 ³⁰⁸	XRW ³⁰⁹	N/A	16 ³¹⁰	December 2019 ³¹¹	–	Guilty ³¹²	17 ³¹³	12/07/2021 ³¹⁴	17 ³¹⁵	29/07/2021 ³¹⁶	1 year YRO ³¹⁷	N/A
24	Bromley		M	Dissemination of a terrorist publication ³¹⁸	15 ³¹⁹	August 2020 ³²⁰	XRW ³²¹	British Hand ³²²	15 ³²³	22/09/2020 ³²⁴	Derby teen (below) ³²⁵	Guilty ³²⁶	16 ³²⁷	28/06/2021 ³²⁸	16 ³²⁹	09/09/2021 ³³⁰	1 year YRO ³³¹	N/A

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details					Conviction Process and Record									
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25	South Derbyshire		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism Encouragement of terrorism Dissemination of a terrorist publication ³³²	14 ³³³	August–September 2020 ³³⁴	XRW ³³⁵	British Hand ³³⁶	14 ³³⁷	22/09/2020 ³³⁸	Kent teen (above) ³³⁹	Guilty ³⁴⁰	15 ³⁴¹	28/06/2021 ³⁴²	16 ³⁴³	09/09/2021 ³⁴⁴	2 year YRO, 3 year CBO ³⁴⁵	N/A
26	Ingatestone	T20217010	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [4 counts] Preparation of terrorist acts Dissemination of a terrorist publication ³⁴⁶	17 ³⁴⁷	Autumn 2020 ³⁴⁸	XRW ³⁴⁹	British Hand ³⁵⁰	17 ³⁵¹	29/12/2020 ³⁵²	–	Guilty – 4 counts possession Not Guilty – Preparing terrorist acts; Dissemination of terrorist publication ³⁵³	18 ³⁵⁴	24/08/2021; ³⁵⁵ 03/09/2021 ³⁵⁶	18 ³⁵⁷	19/10/2021 ³⁵⁸	11 years, 4 months ³⁵⁹	18/10/2026 ³⁶⁰
27	Wiltshire		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism ³⁶¹			XRW ³⁶²	N/A		18/06/2021 ³⁶³	–	Guilty ³⁶⁴			17 ³⁶⁵	06/01/2022 ³⁶⁶	2 year YRO ³⁶⁷	N/A
28	Manchester		M	Encouragement of terrorism ³⁶⁸	16 ³⁶⁹	January–March 2018 ³⁷⁰	Islamist ³⁷¹	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham ³⁷²	16 ³⁷³	17/03/2018 ³⁷⁴	Manchester teen (below) ³⁷⁵	Not Guilty ³⁷⁶			20 ³⁷⁷	12/02/2022 ³⁷⁸	CO ³⁷⁹	N/A
29	Manchester		M	Encouragement of terrorism ³⁸⁰	16 ³⁸¹	January–March 2018 ³⁸²	Islamist ³⁸³	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham ³⁸⁴	16 ³⁸⁵	17/03/2018 ³⁸⁶	Manchester teen (above) ³⁸⁷	Not Guilty ³⁸⁸			20 ³⁸⁹	12/02/2022 ³⁹⁰	CO ³⁹¹	N/A
30	Leeds		M	Disseminating a terrorist publication Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism ³⁹²			XRW ³⁹³	N/A		May 2021; July 2021 ³⁹⁴	–	Guilty ³⁹⁵	16 ³⁹⁶	17/02/2022 ³⁹⁷	16 ³⁹⁸	14/03/2022 ³⁹⁹	1 year YRO + CBO until 18th birthday ⁴⁰⁰	N/A

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details				Conviction Process and Record										
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count)	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
31	Preston		M	Encouragement of terrorism [3 counts] (Stirring up religious or racial hatred [2 counts]; Making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of a child [2 counts]) ⁴⁰¹	17 ⁴⁰²	March– November 2020 ⁴⁰³	XRW ⁴⁰⁴	N/A		November 2020; (February 2021) ⁴⁰⁵	–	Guilty ⁴⁰⁶	19 ⁴⁰⁷	December 2021 ⁴⁰⁸	19 ⁴⁰⁹	08/04/2022 ⁴¹⁰	2 years + 1 year licence + 10 year SHPO (+ sex offenders register) ⁴¹¹	April 2024 ⁴¹²
32	Bootle		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism; (Racial hatred by distributing a recording [2 counts]; Publishing material to stir up racial hatred [3 counts]; Sending an offensive message) ⁴¹³	14/15 ⁴¹⁴	2020– May 2021 ⁴¹⁵	XRW ⁴¹⁶	N/A	15 ⁴¹⁷	28/05/2021 ⁴¹⁸	–	Guilty ⁴¹⁹			16 ⁴²⁰	27/04/2022 ⁴²¹	1 year IRO ⁴²²	N/A
33	Darlington		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [3 counts] ⁴²³	13 ⁴²⁴	July 2021 ⁴²⁵	XRW ⁴²⁶	N/A	13 ⁴²⁷	01/07/2021 ⁴²⁸	–	Guilty ⁴²⁹	14 ⁴³⁰	18/01/2022 ⁴³¹	14 ⁴³²	20/05/2022 ⁴³³	1 year IRO ⁴³⁴	N/A
34	Widnes		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [2 counts] (Possession of an extreme pornographic image) ⁴³⁵	17 ⁴³⁶	November 2020– January 2021 ⁴³⁷	XRW ⁴³⁸	N/A	17 ⁴³⁹	08/01/2021 ⁴⁴⁰	–	Guilty ⁴⁴¹			19 ⁴⁴²	01/06/2022 ⁴⁴³	2 years, 6 months ⁴⁴⁴	December 2024 ⁴⁴⁵

#	Demographic Information			Offence Details					Conviction Process and Record									
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count)	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
35	Glossop	T20220334	M	Encouragement of terrorism [5 counts] Possession of an article for terrorist purposes ⁴⁴⁶	17 ⁴⁴⁷	February 2021– March 2022 ⁴⁴⁸	XRW ⁴⁴⁹	N/A	18 ⁴⁵⁰	16/05/2022 ⁴⁵¹	–	Not Guilty ⁴⁵²	19 ⁴⁵³	20/11/2022 ⁴⁵⁴	19 ⁴⁵⁵	27/01/2023 ⁴⁵⁶	11 years, 6 months + 3 year licence ⁴⁵⁷	July 2034 ⁴⁵⁸
36	Watlington		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [3 counts] Dissemination of a terrorist publication (Sending a grossly offensive message) ⁴⁵⁹	16 ⁴⁶⁰	August 2020– October 2021 ⁴⁶¹	XRW ⁴⁶²	N/A	17 ⁴⁶³	12/10/2021 ⁴⁶⁴	–	Guilty ⁴⁶⁵	18 ⁴⁶⁶	11/07/2022 ⁴⁶⁷	19 ⁴⁶⁸	31/03/2023 ⁴⁶⁹	3 year CO ⁴⁷⁰	N/A
37	Liverpool	T20220294	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [3 counts] Encouragement of terrorism ⁴⁷¹	17 ⁴⁷²	December 2019 ⁴⁷³	XRW ⁴⁷⁴	N/A	17 ⁴⁷⁵	03/12/2019; 12/12/2020 ⁴⁷⁶	–	Guilty – possession [3 counts] Not Guilty – Encouraging ⁴⁷⁷			20 ⁴⁷⁸	09/05/2023 ⁴⁷⁹	2 years, 6 months ⁴⁸⁰	08/05/2024 ⁴⁸¹
38	Washington	T20227006	M	Preparation of terrorist acts ⁴⁸²	17 ⁴⁸³	October 2020– October 2021 ⁴⁸⁴	XRW ⁴⁸⁵	N/A	18 ⁴⁸⁶	28/10/2021 ⁴⁸⁷	–	Not Guilty ⁴⁸⁸	19 ⁴⁸⁹	16/05/2023 (retiral) ⁴⁹⁰	20 ⁴⁹¹	11/07/2023 ⁴⁹²	4 years + 1 year licence ⁴⁹³	07/01/2026 ⁴⁹⁴
39	Preston	T20220345	M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [4 counts] Dissemination of a terrorist publication [4 counts] ⁴⁹⁵	17 ⁴⁹⁶	March– September 2022 ⁴⁹⁷	Islamist ⁴⁹⁸	Islamic State ⁴⁹⁹	17/18 ⁵⁰⁰	29/06/2022; 05/10/2022 ⁵⁰¹	–	Guilty ⁵⁰²	18 ⁵⁰³	13/02/2023 ⁵⁰⁴	18 ⁵⁰⁵	02/08/2023 ⁵⁰⁶	3 years, 9 months ⁵⁰⁷	01/02/2025 ⁵⁰⁸

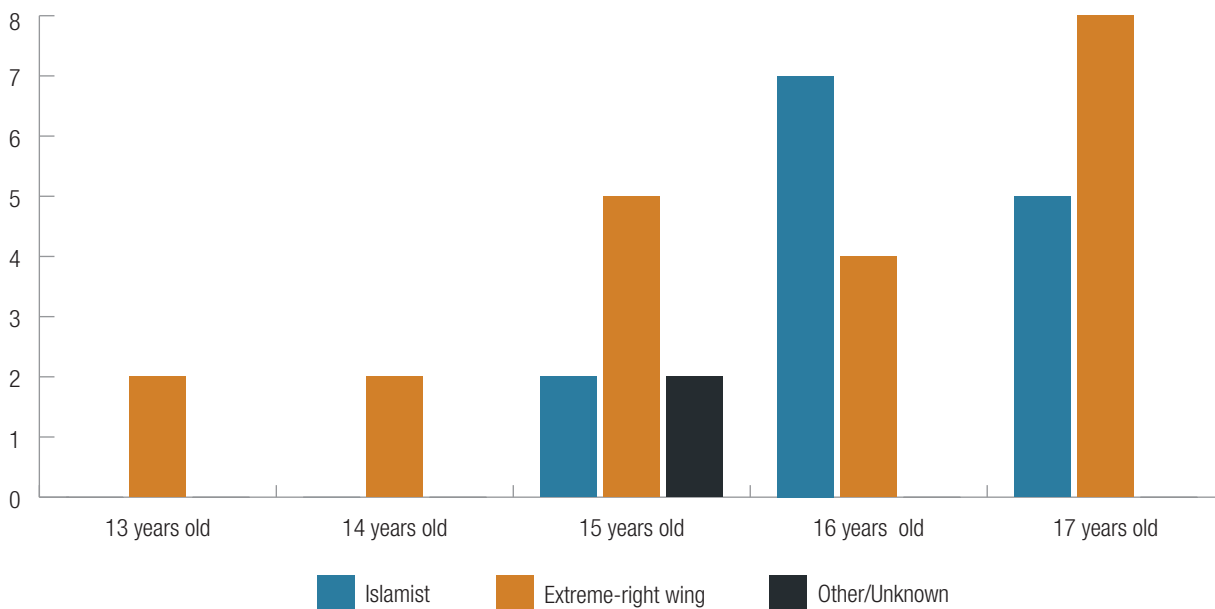
#	Demographic Information			Offence Details					Conviction Process and Record									
	Location	Docket No.	Sex	Offence (type and count)	Age at (first) Offence	Offending Timeline	Ideological Category	Group Affiliation or Membership	Age at Arrest	Date of Arrest	Co-defendants	Plea(s)	Age at Conviction	Date of conviction	Age at Sentencing	Date of sentencing	Sentence	Parole Eligibility Date (PED)/ Expected Release Date
40	Haworth		M	Preparation of terrorist acts Encouragement of terrorism Dissemination of a terrorist publication [4 counts]; (Possession of a bladed article) ⁵⁰⁹	15 ⁵¹⁰	June 2022 ⁵¹¹	XRW ⁵¹²	N/A	15 ⁵¹³	21/06/2022 ⁵¹⁴	–	Not Guilty – Preparing terrorist acts Guilty – all other offences ⁵¹⁵	16 ⁵¹⁶	30/03/2023 ⁵¹⁷		Awaiting sentencing		
41	Port Talbot		M	Dissemination of a terrorist publication [3 counts] Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [2 counts] (Racially aggravated criminal damage [2 counts]; Homophobically aggravated criminal damage) ⁵¹⁸	16 ⁵¹⁹	October 2022 ⁵²⁰	XRW ⁵²¹	N/A	17 ⁵²²	19/04/2023 ⁵²³	–	Guilty ⁵²⁴	17 ⁵²⁵	07/06/2023 ⁵²⁶	17 ⁵²⁷	21/09/2023 ⁵²⁸	1 year, 7 months + 1 year licence + 3 year CBO ⁵²⁹	April 2025 ⁵³⁰
42	Birmingham		M	Preparation of terrorist acts ⁵³¹	17 ⁵³²	March– November 2022 ⁵³³	Islamist ⁵³⁴	Islamic State Khurasan Province ⁵³⁵	17 ⁵³⁶	02/11/2022 ⁵³⁷	Older brother (age 21) ⁵³⁸	Guilty ⁵³⁹	18 ⁵⁴⁰	10/07/2023 ⁵⁴¹		Awaiting sentencing		
43	Swindon		M	Collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism [3 counts] Dissemination of a terrorist publication [3 counts] ⁵⁴²			XRW ⁵⁴³	N/A	16 ⁵⁴⁴	May 2021 ⁵⁴⁵	–	Not guilty ⁵⁴⁶	18 ⁵⁴⁷	13/09/2023 ⁵⁴⁸	18 ⁵⁴⁹	03/11/2023 ⁵⁵⁰	6 years + 1 year licence ⁵⁵¹	November 2029 ⁵⁵²

3 Data Analysis

Age and Gender

The first and most stark pattern in the data is the gender imbalance of teenage terrorism convictions. 42 boys and only one girl (case 9) comprise the 43 total cases analysed here. This may be, in part, due to the inclusion criteria of the dataset. For example, a case that predates the study is that of a 16-year-old girl from Manchester who, in October 2015, was sentenced to a twelve-month referral order after admitting possession of bomb-making instructions and a desire to travel to Syria.²² Similarly, the requirement of a secured conviction necessitates the omission of a 14-year-old girl, whose case of six charges of extreme right-wing terrorism offences was discontinued on ‘conclusive grounds’ that she had been a victim of trafficking and exploitation.²³ However, for the Islamist cohort, the absence of female convicts is reflective of a much larger issue. To date, Tareena Shakil is the only British woman to have been convicted of terrorism offences upon return from Islamic State territory.²⁴ While many

Figure 1: Age at First Offence of Minors under TACT



²² "Schoolgirl Arrested by Anzac Day Terror Plot Police Spared Jail," *BBC News*, 15 October 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-34532351>.

²³ De Simone, "Terror Case Dropped against Trafficking Victim."

²⁴ "Tareena Shakil Jailed for Six Years for Joining IS," *BBC News*, 1 February 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-35460697>.

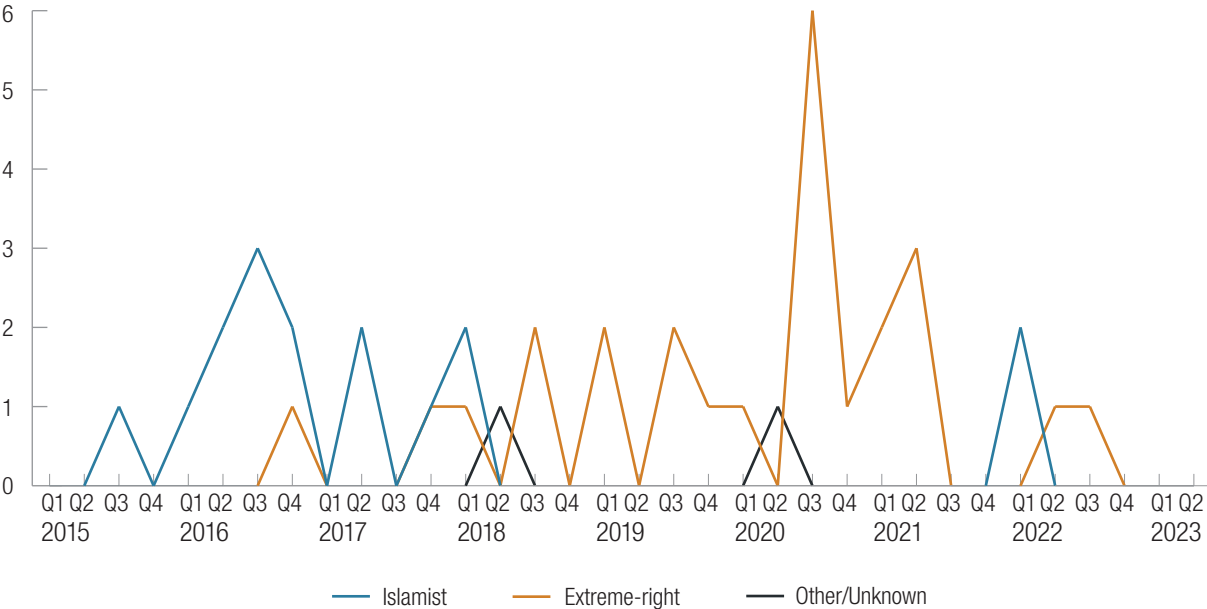
teenage girls also travelled to join the group,²⁵ almost all remain in Kurdish detention camps in Syria.²⁶ Unless or until the time comes for the UK government to approve their repatriation, it is unlikely that these women will enter the British criminal justice system, and thus they are excluded from the study at the time of writing. As such, while there is only one female minor included in the dataset, this does not discount the wider involvement of girls in terrorism.

Greater variation can be found upon examination of the children’s ages. Of the 37 cases where the age at the time of the offence could be verified, the average was 15.8 years. However, the distribution was uneven between Islamist and extreme right-wing offenders. Figure 1 shows that while the former category offended from the age of 15, the latter includes particularly young offenders – two aged 13 and another two aged 14. Importantly, when combined with the timeline of convictions, the trend in particularly young extreme-right wing offenders continues to be a significant concern.

Ideology

Data can largely be ideologically categorised as relating to Islamist or extreme right-wing terrorism. Figure 2 tracks the cases in chronological order of date of offence, resulting in two visible ‘waves’.

Figure 2: Date of (First) Offence of Minors under TACT



25 Data from author two and Joana Cook find that 150 British women and 50 children joined IS in Iraq and Syria. However, like the majority of states grappling with their IS-affiliated citizens, the UK has not provided gender-disaggregated data for minors. See Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 6 (July 2019): 30–45, <https://ctc.usma.edu/daesh-diaspora-challenges-posed-women-minors-fall-caliphate/>.

26 Thomas Renard and Rik Coolsaet, "From Bad to Worse: The Fate of European Foreign Fighters and Families Detained in Syria, One Year after the Turkish Offensive," Security Policy Brief, The Egmont Institute, October 2020, 5, https://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2020/10/SPB130_final.pdf?type=pdf.

The first wave is dominated by Islamist cases. While the term ‘Islamist’ is used in line with UK ‘CONTEST’ counterterrorism strategy,²⁷ the ideology to which the groups covered in this report adhere is that of Salafi-Jihadism. Salafi-Jihadism is a violent transnational religious-political ideology based on a puritanical and literalist approach to Sunni Islamic doctrine and practice.²⁸ In an effort to return to the ‘true Islam’ of the Prophet Muhammad and his contemporaries, adherents “call for violent action against the existing political order and for the establishment of a unitary state in the form of the caliphate”.²⁹ Groups such as Islamic State or Al-Qaeda and their affiliates draw on this ideology to justify the perpetration of terrorist violence against any individual, institutional or (inter)national ‘enemy of Islam’.

Despite the traditionalist ideological tenets of Salafi-Jihadism, scholars have observed that groups such as Islamic State have sought to reverse age-hierarchical norms.³⁰ Both on the ground and in its digital propaganda, the group projects a revolutionary cause led by young, hypermasculine militants supported by blossoming families that can guarantee the movement’s future. In many cases, even pre-teen children are depicted as – and celebrated for – adopting adult roles within its ‘caliphate’ project.³¹ It is therefore embedded into the group’s aims that children will connect with its rhetoric and explicit instructions for political violence, in many cases venerating and seeking to replicate the actions of their adult forebears.

Extreme right-wing cases form the second ‘wave’, beginning with the first offence in 2016 (case 17). However, the lack of association with clearly defined groups or organisations presents definitional – and proscriptive – challenges. The extreme right, in its embrace of ultra-nationalism and extreme racism, often manifests through neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, white supremacist and white nationalist ideologies.³² Wider literature on the far right is hampered by the interchangeable employment of ‘radical’, ‘far’ and ‘extreme’ right terms. This report understands the ‘far right’ as a useful umbrella term for two different sub-expressions: the radical right and the extreme right.³³ The extreme right can be differentiated through two main factors: its opposition to all forms of democracy and its overt endorsement of terroristic violence.³⁴ All cases of far-right extremism in the dataset relate to the extreme right.

The more nebulous, young extreme right promotes many of the same associated attitudes as older offenders, including antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and anti-immigrant rhetoric, as well as glorification of Adolf Hitler and extreme-right terrorists

27 “CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023,” 12.

28 Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: Hurst & Co, 2016).

29 Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co, 2009), 48.

30 Brynjar Lia, “The Jihādī Movement and Rebel Governance: A Reassertion of a Patriarchal Order?,” *Die Welt des Islams* 57, no. 3–4 (17 October 2017): 458–79, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700607-05734p09>; Gina Vale, *Gender-Sensitive Approaches to Minor Returnees from the So-Called Islamic State*, (Berlin: German National Committee on Religiously Motivated Extremism, June 2022), 4, <https://t.co/ekWFPtDMia>.

31 Gina Vale and Charlie Winter, “Children and Daesh: Learning from the Past to Protect the Future,” *AtTahalof – Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition Quarterly Magazine* 9, November 2021, <https://imctc.org/en/eLibrary/Articles/Documents/CHILDREN AND DAESH - LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO PROTECT THE FUTURE.pdf>.

32 Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2000).

33 Andrea L P Pirro, “Far Right: The Significance of an Umbrella Concept,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 27 June 2022, 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12860>.

34 Pirro, “Far Right,” 5; Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses,” International Centre for Counter Terrorism, The Hague, September 2019; Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (Houndmills, London: Macmillan, 1994).

Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant. Specifically relevant to young extreme-right expressions is Siege Culture, centred on James Mason's *Siege*, which promotes a decentralised and leaderless form of accelerationism.³⁵ Siege framings and emergent aesthetic culture form the basis of young networks associated with terrorist convictions, stemming from Atomwaffen Division and online forums.³⁶ A further relevant ideological element relates to Satanism and the left-hand path, with four cases relating to sexual offences in addition to extreme-right terrorism.

As terrorist ideologies become increasingly diverse and muddled, the traditional dichotomy of extreme-right vs Islamist for understanding terrorist motivation is increasingly challenged. The UK government's Prevent data is evidencing an uptick of 'mixed, unclear and unstable' (MUU) ideologies, ranging from incels and school shooters to those with diverse non-traditional ideologies.³⁷ What is defined as MUU depends on what is not defined as extreme right or Islamist. For example, it is not uncommon to find Islamist propaganda or manuals in extreme-right group chats, but whether this constitutes ideological mixing or merely operational knowledge exchange is a key question. Furthermore, some have suggested that occultist activities may qualify for their new conceptual 'compositive violent extremism' framework, such as the case of a young boy who "fundamentally embraced neo-Nazi ideology" but "appeared to be infused with Satanism".³⁸ It is also notable that the dataset includes no cases of separatism (perhaps due to the exclusion of courts outside England and Wales) or left-wing, anarchist and single-issue terrorism (LASIT).

Two cases in this dataset sit outside the two main ideological 'waves', and are labelled by the authors as 'other/unknown'. The first relates to a boy from Bartley Green (case 22), whose scarcely reported case included no detail of his ideological motivation, which remains unknown. The second case is that of a 15-year-old British boy (case 13), who attempted to build a bomb, and was convicted for making an explosive substance and on three counts of possession of a document likely to be useful to a person committing an act of terrorism.³⁹ The boy had engaged with a range of online material, including videos of the Columbine school shooters and the English Defence League, and had used the username "White Terrorist" to praise Hitler. He was arrested after telling his peers of plans to commit a school shooting. Despite some engagement with far-right activity, his actions do not evidence a high level of ideological coherence. Sentencing, the Judge confirmed that he does "not appear to hold any particular ideology", and "it is unclear whether you were motivated by any extremist ideology".⁴⁰ The boy's case raises questions of how a non-ideological crime was convicted under terrorism legislation, how we understand the consumption of

35 Hannah Rose and A C, "We Are Generation Terror!: Youth-on-Youth Radicalisation in Extreme-Right Youth Groups," ICSR and CST, December 2021, 1–68; H. E. Upchurch, "The Iron March Forum and the Evolution of the 'Skull Mask' Neo-Fascist Network," *CTC Sentinel* 14, no. 10 (December 2021): 27–37.

36 Bethan Johnson and Matthew Feldman, "Siege Culture After Siege: Anatomy of a Neo-Nazi Terrorist Doctrine," *ICCT*, July 2021, 1–29.

37 "Individuals Referred to and Supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2021 to March 2022," Home Office, 26 January 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2021-to-march-2022>.

38 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross et al., "Composite Violent Extremism: Conceptualizing Attackers Who Increasingly Challenge Traditional Categories of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (29 March 2023): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2194133>.

39 Lizzie Dearden, "Kieran Cleary: Boy with Extreme Right-Wing Views Tried to Build Bomb and Threatened to 'Kill Many People'," *The Independent*, 20 September 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/kieran-cleary-bomb-kill-right-neo-nazi-bradford-jacek-tchorzewski-a9113946.html>.

40 Dearden, "Kieran Cleary."

extremist material in the context of ideology, and the motivations of school shooter ecosystems.

Given growing ideological hybridisation, the ‘other/unknown’ category is not intended for every example of ideological divergence, including cross-posting of extreme-right and Islamist operational materials. It is also not intended to include individuals who have exhibited ideological innovations, such as an increasing crossover between neo-Nazism and left-hand path occultism, where the proponent clearly exhibits extreme-right beliefs.⁴¹ Ideological categories should be understood as broad tents, intended as a tool to demonstrate trends and generate cross-comparison. The ‘other/unknown’ category has only been applied where no discernible ideological motivation whatsoever has been evidenced.

Types of Offence

Minors were convicted of nine offences under TACT, as well as non-TACT offences, which are pictured in Figure 3. The following sections explore each offence in turn.

Figure 3: Offences Committed by Minors under TACT (excluding multiple counts by the same individual)



⁴¹ Gartenstein-Ross et al., “Composite Violent Extremism.”

Preparation of Terrorist Acts

Almost a third of the children in the dataset (13 of 43 or 30.2%) have been convicted of preparation of terrorist acts, which is defined by Section 5 of the TACT 2006 as engagement in “any conduct in preparation for giving effect to” the intention of “a) committing acts of terrorism or b) assisting another to commit such acts”.⁴² The offence encompasses a range of activity, from a minor role in support of intended acts through to planned or attempted mass murder. Within this comprehensive legal definition are two main sub-types of offence captured and analysed below. The first is preparation for an act of terrorism overseas, commonly known as the ‘foreign terrorist fighter’ phenomenon.⁴³ Seven children are included in this category, all of whom are classified as Islamists who planned to travel to conflict theatres in the Middle East and North Africa. The second sub-type of offence is conduct to prepare or carry out a terrorist act within the UK. Eight of the child offenders fall into this category, divided unevenly between extreme right-wing (5) and Islamist (3) ideologies. Two teenagers occupy both sub-groups. One boy was convicted of providing the details of an IS contact to facilitate an adult man’s travel from Nigeria to fight in Libya in 2015 (case 12).⁴⁴ The boy later attempted his own domestic attack. The only girl in the dataset is also an example of a ‘frustrated traveller’, whose failed journey to Syria incentivised her UK attack plot (case 9).

Attempted Travellers

For those planning to engage in terrorism overseas, Syria was the primary destination, with only one case of planned travel to Afghanistan (case 42), and another with Libya identified as a secondary option (case 6). All the teenagers had expressed the aim of their planned travel as participation in jihad. This includes the only girl in the dataset (case 9), who had expressed the intention to carry out a suicide operation in Syria on behalf of Islamic State (IS),⁴⁵ although at this point such roles were not officially open to female supporters.⁴⁶ Three boys were arrested separately as part of a coordinated counterterrorism policing operation. Their practical preparations reflected their intended participation in active combat and desire to “obtain martyrdom on the battlefield”.⁴⁷ One of the boys (case 6) had invested time in physical training, including joining a gym and attending the Blind Fire paintballing camp in Surrey with his older brother. There, the brothers recorded a video of themselves wearing camouflage overalls and sending a message that “if we do not come back safe and sound, look after our families, that’s all”.⁴⁸ Other teenagers made similar preparations for time in active conflict zones, with police searches revealing bags packed with

42 “Terrorism Act 2006,” 2006, emphasis added, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/11/section/5>.

43 “Guidelines for Addressing the Threats and Challenges of ‘Foreign Terrorist Fighters’ within a Human Rights Framework,” OSCE, Warsaw, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2018, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/7/393503_2.pdf.

44 Lizzie Dearden, “Teenage Isis Supporter Who Bought 15-Inch Hunting Knife Jailed for Preparing Act of Terrorism,” *The Independent*, 29 June 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/haider-ahmed-isis-supporter-knife-attack-surrey-jailed-a8980726.html>.

45 Counter Terrorism Policing, “Year in Review 2018.”

46 Charlie Winter and Deborah Margolin, “The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State,” *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 7 (August 2017): 23–28, <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-mujahidat-dilemma-female-combatants-and-the-islamic-state>.

47 The Royal Courts of Justice, *Regina v Mohammed Ali*, No. 201705301/A1 (The Court of Appeal Criminal Division, 25 May 2018); Lizzie Dearden, “Terrorist Brothers Who Wanted to ‘become Martyrs’ for Isis in Syria Practiced with Paintballing,” *The Independent*, 18 April 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brothers-isis-yousif-ahmed-alsyed-martyrs-terrorist-group-a8311156.html>.

48 Jack Hardy, “Footage of Aspiring Terrorist Fighter at Surrey Paintball Centre,” *Surrey Live*, 25 April 2018, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/footage-emerges-aspiring-terrorist-fighter-14551078>.

equipment, including a water purification device and a first aid kit,⁴⁹ as well as completed application forms for enlistment into a local jihadist group.⁵⁰

The timing of their offences is consistent with their planned activity. Between August 2016 and June 2017, all the teenagers (except case 42) had either made reservations or at least reached out to online contacts to arrange their travel. During this time, militant groups controlled significant cities and pockets of territory across northern Syria. Although by mid-2015 greater powers were introduced to restrict the travel of would-be jihadists leaving Britain,⁵¹ IS continued to publish propaganda encouraging migration to join its ranks. By December 2017, the group's Levantine 'caliphate' had all but collapsed, including the loss of Mosul in July and Raqqa in October that year. That same month, around 50 children were reported to have been recruited in Darzab, Afghanistan, where Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) had established a training site for foreign nationals.⁵² Since then, ISKP's activities have accelerated. The destabilisation of the US withdrawal and the Afghan government collapse in 2021, coupled with the Taliban's limited capacity to govern, has created "the most permissive environment yet" for ISKP to rebuild and expand.⁵³ The latest case of (planned) travel in 2022 evidences Afghanistan's re-emergence as a conflict theatre to which British teenagers are seeking to contribute.

Among the prospective travellers, group 'affiliations' are divided between IS and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN).⁵⁴ Compared to the hundreds of Britons who attempted or managed to travel to IS' 'caliphate',⁵⁵ the few who sought to join JN may garner less attention but still represent a concerning trend. One example is a 15-year-old boy from Sutton Coldfield, who had sent an encrypted email, entitled 'Hijra' (Migration), to a JN official laying out his travel plans. On the way to Birmingham Airport he made a video of himself saying that he "hoped to be in the land of Jihad" in a matter of days.⁵⁶

It is important here to mention case 7, which is a boy who, although not prosecuted for preparation of terrorist acts, had expressed the clear intention and even preliminary plans to wage jihad in Syria.⁵⁷ In November 2016, he sent messages suggesting a desire to travel to join IS. The following month, he informed a friend that his "decision to go" reflected his perceived obligation. In April 2017, he wrote to a new acquaintance, stating:

49 The Royal Courts of Justice, *Regina v Mohammed Ali*.

50 Andy Giddings and Press Association, "Birmingham Brothers Completed IS Application Forms, Trial Hears," *BBC News*, 5 July 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-66113791>.

51 UK Government, "Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015," 2015, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/enacted/data.pdf>.

52 "French Fighters Appear with Islamic State in Afghanistan," *The Local France*, 10 December 2017, <https://www.thelocal.fr/20171210/french-fighters-appear-with-islamic-state-in-afghanistan>.

53 Amira Jadoon, Abdul Sayed, and Andrew Mines, "The Islamic State Threat in Taliban Afghanistan: Tracing the Resurgence of Islamic State Khorasan," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 15, no. 1 (2022): 33–45.

54 The group is commonly known by its original name, Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). However, the group name has been changed several times since its establishment. In July 2016, leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani dissolved JN and established a new group, Fatah al-Sham. In January 2017, the group rebranded again as part of a merger with other factions to become Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

55 For the latest figures of travellers and returnees disaggregated for men, women, and children, see Cook and Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora; II," 30–45.

56 Ross McCarthy, "Teen Tried to Go to Syria Then Showed How to Share Beheading Videos," *Birmingham Mail*, 6 July 2018, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/teenager-tried-syria-showed-how-14875949>.

57 Details of the Thaqi case can be found in "R v Arbias Thaqi" of the 2018 subsection of the Crown Prosecution Service website: "The Crown Prosecution Service, Successful Prosecutions Since 2016."

"I may make H[ijrah] soon to Sinai, Egypt and then get smuggled to Sham [Syria] [...] I am supposed to be going any week now or next week. I'm awaiting a message from that brother that already went and then I'll meet him at Sinai with some people from Dawlah and then get smuggled over."

Why he did not make practical inroads into travel is unknown. However, his interest in IS-inspired violence appeared to intensify and turn to the group's guidance for attack perpetration. In June 2017, he messaged his acquaintance: "Not every knife attack is a few stabs. Some are beheadings done on the road. Depends on the preference of the attacker. I'd personally go for a nice cut on the throat, it's quick and effective...I like how Jihadi John does it."⁵⁸ Without the means and practical preparations, the boy was not charged with the intention to prepare terrorist acts, either in the form of a domestic attack or travel to fight in Syria. However, his engagement with extremist material was not merely passive, and his communications suggest that, at that time, he held an unfulfilled desire to act on the instructions of the propaganda he consumed. The details of this case point to the broader threat of failed travellers and potential plotters whose preparations did not (yet) meet the threshold for prosecution.

Foiled Plotters

The second sub-type of terrorist acts prepared or planned by the teenagers in the dataset is domestic attack plotting. The eight plots – five extreme right-wing and three Islamist – demonstrate variation in intended target and method.

Continuing from the failed travellers above is the concerning trend of the 'frustrated traveller'.⁵⁹ In 2018, Cook and Vale highlighted a frequently overlooked and underestimated segment of the foreign terrorist fighter contingent: (women and) minors prevented or intercepted from intended travel.⁶⁰ Although their numbers were unclear, the potential domestic security risk posed by these individuals was already apparent. In April 2017, a girl (case 9) planned to carry out a terrorist attack after police seized her passport, preventing her travel to Syria to join her jihadist boyfriend. Upon learning of his death in an airstrike, her "determination was strengthened" and she unwittingly enlisted the assistance of undercover police officers in continuing their plan to attack the British Museum.⁶¹ Her case contributes to a concerning trend of (female) 'frustrated travellers'. Indeed, she is one of nine females out of a total 25 'frustrated travellers' (36%) who plotted or conducted attacks in Europe between January 2014 and June 2019.⁶²

Case 12 provides an interesting variation on the traveller-plotter phenomenon. Rather than a 'last resort', the boy's attack plot was intended to raise money for his intended travel to Syria. Having purchased a 15-inch hunting knife online, he planned to conduct

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Robin Simcox, "When Terrorists Stay Home: The Evolving Threat to Europe from Frustrated Travelers," *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 6 (July 2019): 46–55.

⁶⁰ Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), London, July 2018, 34–35, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf>.

⁶¹ Lizzie Dearden, "Britain's Youngest Female Terror Plotter Jailed for Life after Planning Isis-Inspired Attack on British Museum," *The Independent*, 3 August 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/isis-british-museum-terror-attack-plot-safaa-boular-jailed-life-youngest-uk-tea-party-a8476416.html>.

⁶² Simcox, "When Terrorists Stay Home," 51–54.

a robbery of a fellow college student's Rolex watch. He also entertained the option of a suicide attack, as he explained in a message to extremist sympathisers in September 2016: "I wanna do inghamasi [martyrdom operation] here inshallah, I'm 100% serious. I came home on train today and even imagined doing it."⁶³

Case 5 is the only Islamist domestic attack planner who did not attempt travel to participate in jihad overseas; his was also the largest-scale plot. He is also the only Muslim convert in the dataset. Aged 17 and with a provisional driving licence, he planned to steal a car to conduct an IS-inspired vehicle attack at a Justin Bieber concert in Cardiff's Principality Stadium on 30 June 2017. His intention was not to survive the operation. Upon his arrest, his school rucksack contained a 'martyrdom letter' claiming that he was a "soldier of the Islamic State" and warning that "there will be more attacks in the future".⁶⁴ Interestingly, police also recovered a photo of the boy holding a gun while raising his index finger – a gesture commonly associated with IS militants' commitment to the group's monotheistic ideology.⁶⁵ It is not clear whether the gun was artificial or real, or whether he intended to incorporate the weapon in the attack.

Following the general trend of teenage terrorism offending, those connected to an extreme right-wing ideology outnumber Islamist adherents. While there is a clear ideological divide, and alongside some tactical and technological innovations, there are some notable convergences in attack plans. A salient example is that of a boy from Haworth (case 40), who stole his father's car to conduct a scouting trip to a mosque in Keighley. Unlike case 5 above, the boy was aged only 15 at the time of his offence and did not even have a provisional licence.⁶⁶ Notes found on the boy's phone indicate his plans to murder his ex-girlfriend and attack two mosques while dressed as a police officer, with the intention to purchase online a firearm and a GoPro camera to record the attack. A search of his bedroom revealed a screwdriver and a knife hidden under his mattress as backup. Chillingly, in his school exercise book, the boy had written a 'manifesto', explicitly stating his ideological and tactical inspiration: Christchurch attacker Brenton Tarrant, whom the boy called a "hero" and a "saint", in line with the commonplace deification of extreme-right terrorists in online ecosystems and the inspiration Tarrant provides for copycat manifestos and attacks.⁶⁷ He was not the only one to draw on Tarrant for a planned attack. In November 2021, a 17-year-old boy (case 38) reportedly 'idolised' Hitler and Tarrant, researched how to make explosives, and photographed Forth Banks Police Station in Newcastle – one of three police stations scoped out in an act deemed as 'hostile reconnaissance'.⁶⁸

At 15 years old, case 15 became the youngest person in the UK to plan a terrorist attack – a title now shared with the teen from Haworth above. In among a series of childish scrawled handwritten notes and

63 Dearden, "Teenage Isis Supporter."

64 Lizzie Dearden, "Autistic Teenager Who Planned Isis-Inspired Terror Attack in Cardiff Jailed for Life," *The Independent*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/isis-attack-plot-cardiff-justin-bieber-concert-lloyd-gunton-wales-online-radicalisation-a8237366.html>.

65 Nathaniel Zelinsky, "ISIS Sends a Message: What Gestures Say About Today's Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, 15 September 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-03/isis-sends-message>.

66 "Right-Wing Haworth Teenager Idolised Convicted Terrorists," *BBC News*, 30 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-65069082>.

67 Duncan Gardham, "Far-Right Teenager Found Guilty of Plotting Terror Attack on Mosques and Ex-Girlfriend," *Sky News*, 30 March 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/far-right-teenager-found-guilty-of-plotting-terror-attack-on-mosques-and-ex-girlfriend-12845560>.

68 "Luke Skelton: Jury Fails to Reach Verdict on Wearside Student Accused of Terror Plot," *BBC News*, 13 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-61423015>.

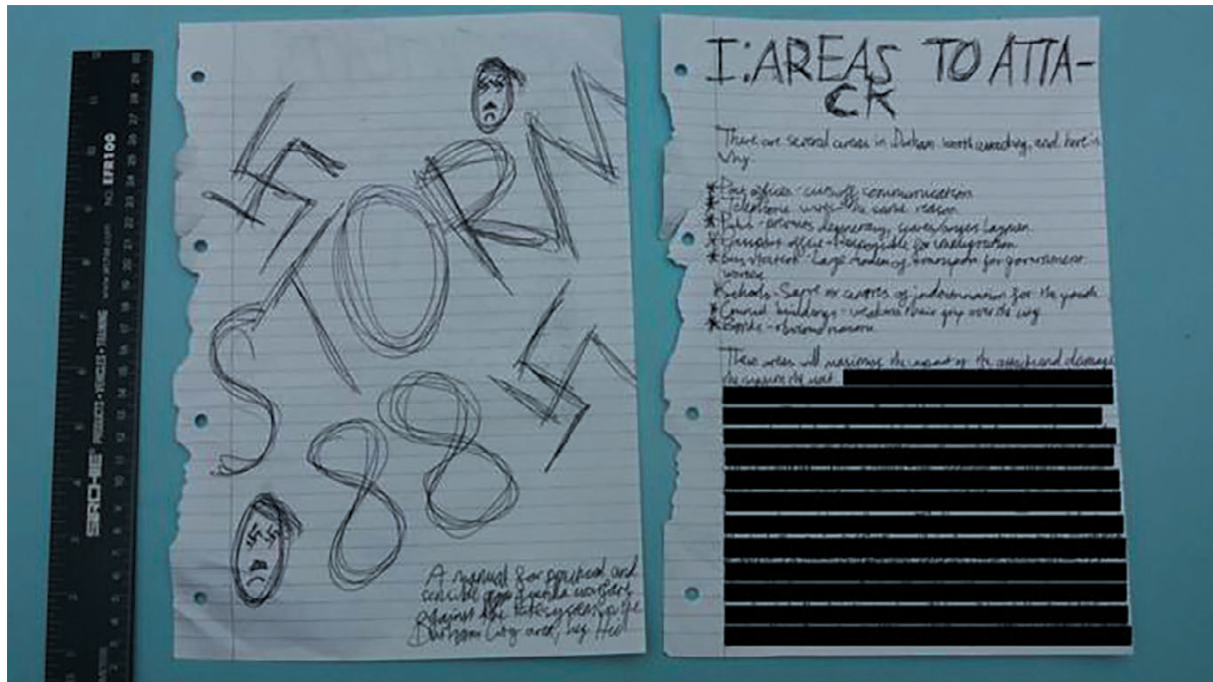


Figure 4: “Storm 88” and “Areas to Attack”, Handwritten Notes and Sketches by Case 15. Source: Daniel De Simone, “Terror Plot,” *BBC News*, 11 January 2021

sketches (Figure 4), he detailed plans to launch an arson spree with Molotov cocktails on synagogues in Durham,⁶⁹ with listed “areas to attack” to include schools, pubs and council buildings. Each potential target was given a reason for its selection. This included the passport office (Home Office) where his mother worked,⁷⁰ which was deemed to be “responsible for immigration”.⁷¹ However, reporting on the case suggests that his mother was not an intended target. Codes such as ‘88’ – referring to H, the eighth letter of the alphabet, and therefore intended to represent ‘Heil Hitler’ – are symbolic for the wider accelerationist movement and constitute an in-group language which cements identity formation.

By contrast, the plans of case 26 were personal. The boy’s intention was to shoot an Asian schoolfriend, who, he claimed, had boasted of sleeping with three white women. On 18 December 2020, inadvertently communicating with an undercover officer, he stated: “I’ve found someone I want to execute”.⁷² At the age of 17, the boy drew up plans for a storage bunker, and transferred funds and provided information for the manufacture of two 3D-printed firearms – an FGC-9 and a Cheetah – to use in his attack. Even though his plans were “not far advanced”, the judge concluded that he had played a “leading role in terrorist activity”.⁷³

69 Gavin Engelbrecht, “Nazi Terrorist Who Planned Durham Attack Named as Jack Reed,” *The Northern Echo*, 11 January 2021, <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/19002190.nazi-terrorist-planned-durham-attack-named-jack-reed/>.

70 John Simpson and Charlotte Wace, “Neo-Nazi Teenager Jack Reed Plotted to Attack His Mother’s Office,” *The Times*, 16 January 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/neo-nazi-teenager-jack-reed-plotted-to-attack-his-mothers-office-j8v7s2hbx>.

71 Daniel De Simone, “Terror Plot: Durham Teenage Neo-Nazi Named as Jack Reed,” *BBC News*, 11 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tyne-55618747>.

72 Judiciary of England and Wales, “R. v Matthew Cronjager Sentencing Remarks,” No. T20217010 (Central Criminal Court, 19 October 2021).

73 Judiciary of England and Wales, “R. v Matthew Cronjager Sentencing Remarks,” No. T20217010.

Perhaps an exception among the extreme right-wing plotters is case 19, in which online research and communications not only aided the defendant's own potential attack, but also focused on providing "significant advice and encouragement" to others to accelerate an "inevitable race war".⁷⁴ The boy was a member of various online chat groups, including the now banned terrorist network Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) and an administrator for the League of Nationalists. On 22 July 2019, he indicated that he was working to convert a blank firing pistol into a viable firearm.⁷⁵ That same day, a member by the name of 'EksD' posted an image of a partly assembled homemade rifle and asked for help. The boy responded with advice on how to build a functioning barrel.⁷⁶ It has been revealed that 'EksD' was a teenager who has since been convicted of planting a bomb at a Western Union building in Vilnius, Lithuania.⁷⁷ The British boy left the forum in August to focus on getting his "own operations off the ground", guided by his own drawings of firearms and facilitated by websites offering blank-firing guns and selling metal tubing for gun barrels.⁷⁸ He explained: "I'm getting armed and getting in shape. I'd urge everyone to do the same."⁷⁹

Consistent across the eight planned attacks was the self-perception of the teenagers as contributors to – or active soldiers in – a conflict, framed through the language of a 'race war' or 'jihad'. Extreme-right teenage plotters' target selection mirrors a trend among violent extremist actors of all ages: the targeting of minority communities or 'white traitors'.⁸⁰ High-profile adult-perpetrated attacks that have targeted the perceived future of the complicit political left in Oslo, and Muslim and Jewish communities directly in Christchurch and Pittsburgh – a deadly white supremacist attack on a synagogue – remain influential in extreme-right ecosystems that motivate young people to violence. Target selection among teenagers demonstrates a similar pattern, influenced by antisemitic and Islamophobic conspiracy theories, including the perceived genocide of white people, where Siege Culture influences its proponents to accelerate a race war. By contrast, Islamists often aim for mass-casualty attacks or locations of cultural or national significance. Following the example of their adult forebears, the teenage plotters continue to defend or retaliate against a 'war against Islam'.⁸¹ Their selected targets of rich peers, concert stadia and museums strike at the heart of perceived Western financial, moral and imperial 'corruption'.

Common cross-ideological driving factors for planned attacks included vengeance, anger, perceived humanitarianism, and also a sense of duty to protect or defend 'innocents' – often women and children from the plotter's own ethnic or religious group. This is

74 Lizzie Dearden, "Teenage Neo-Nazi 'obsessed' with Mass Shootings Jailed for Preparing Acts of Terrorism," *The Independent*, 6 November 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/neo-nazis-uk-rugby-teenager-paul-dunleavy-feuerkrieg-division-jailed-b1647248.html>.

75 "Teen Sentenced for Right Wing Terrorism Offences," Warwickshire Police, 6 November 2020, <https://www.warwickshire.police.uk/news/warwickshire/news/2020/november/teen-sentenced-for-right-wing-terrorism-offences/>.

76 Richard Vernalls, "Boy, 17, Sentenced to Detention for Preparing Neo-Nazi Acts of Terrorism," *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 November 2020, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/boy-17-sentenced-to-detention-for-preparing-neo-nazi-acts-of-terrorism/39715622.html>.

77 Duncan Gardham and Fiona Hamilton, "Paul Dunleavy: School Pupil Obsessed by Mass Shootings Jailed over Neo-Nazi Terror Attack Plans," *The Times*, 7 November 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/paul-dunleavy-school-pupil-obsessed-by-mass-shootings-jailed-over-neo-nazi-terror-attack-plans-f5tq3l1lw>.

78 Vernalls, "Boy, 17, Sentenced to Detention."

79 Dearden, "Teenage Neo-Nazi."

80 Jacob Ware and Colin P. Clarke, "How Far-Right Terrorists Choose Their Enemies," *The Soufan Center*, December 2022.

81 Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter, *The Isis Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement* (London: Hurst & Co, 2020), 186–90.

consistent with the broader adultification of teenagers and youth in extremist networks.⁸² These teenagers do not self-identify as children to be protected, but rather as soldiers and activists who are responsible for the protection of others. While some involved adults – either family members or online connections – as assistants or ‘consultants’ in their plans, others worked independently. Irrespective of their accomplices and the attacks’ viability (discussed below), all eight teenagers played the driving role in their respective plots.

Encouragement of Terrorism

Eleven minors have been convicted of encouraging terrorism, legally understood as the publication of a statement which, directly or indirectly, encourages another person to “commit, prepare or instigate acts of terrorism”.⁸³ Of these individuals, eight relate to extreme-right ideologies, and three to Islamism. Common to all these cases is the ideological and operational innovation shown by young people, who created their own content, often to a high level, with the intention of inspiring others, including their peers, to commit their own attacks. All extreme-right cases relate to the sharing of views and information on social media; while other minors handwrote plans, it is the intended dissemination of material for the purpose of inspiring terrorism that sets such cases apart.

Examples include a teenager who authored Sonnenkreig Division posters inciting against Prince Harry, labelling him a “race traitor” for his marriage to a person of colour (case 11). Referring to the image, the judge commented that “the posts I have seen and read are abhorrent as well as criminal by reason of their clear intention to encourage terrorist acts”.⁸⁴ Similarly, another individual created and shared propaganda for Sonnenkrieg Division, as well as an ‘idiot’s guide’ for extremist propaganda dissemination, commenting online that “the time for discussion is over, the time for action is now”.⁸⁵ Also intending to inspire others to commit acts of terrorism were 16-year-olds from Derby and Newcastle who, in unconnected cases, began the process of forming their own terrorist networks, The British Hand and Blutkrieg Divisions respectively (cases 25 and 21).⁸⁶ In these networks, they created – or directed the creation and dissemination of – propaganda that promoted terrorist violence, often specifically targeting Muslim and Jewish people.

The young Muslim convert (case 5) who plotted a terror attack on a concert in Cardiff was also convicted of encouraging terrorism against the same concert in posts on social media, including “Cardiff, are you prepared [for terror]?” (Figure 5).⁸⁷ Two other Islamist offenders were convicted of encouraging terrorism for posting statements on Instagram that were “likely to be understood”

⁸² Vale, “Gender-Sensitive Approaches to Minor Returnees from the So-Called Islamic State,” 4.

⁸³ “Terrorism Act 2006,” Expert Participation, Text (Statute Law Database), accessed 1 September 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/11/section/1>.

⁸⁴ Press Association, “Teenager Who Called Prince Harry a ‘Race Traitor’ Sentenced,” *The Guardian*, 18 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/18/michal-szewczuk-sentenced-prince-harry-online-post-far-right>.

⁸⁵ Lizzie Dearden, “Neo-Nazi Teenager Spared Jail for Encouraging Terror Attacks,” *The Independent*, 2 November 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/neo-nazis-uk-terrorism-attacks-harry-vaughan-b1536489.html>.

⁸⁶ “Schoolboys from Derbyshire and Kent Admit Terrorism Offences,” *BBC News*, 28 June 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-derbyshire-57639176>; Rose and C, “‘We Are Generation Terror!’”

⁸⁷ Sophie Jamieson, “Baby-Faced Teenage Terrorist Came within Hours of Attack on Justin Bieber Concert, Judge Says,” *The Telegraph*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/02/baby-faced-teenage-terrorist-radicalised-bedroom-came-within/>.



Figure 5: Threat Posted on Social Media by Case 5.

Source: Sophie Jamieson, "Baby-Faced Teenage Terrorist Came within Hours of Attack on Justin Bieber Concert," *The Telegraph*, 2 March 2018

as "direct or indirect encouragement" of terrorism or actions that "endangered life", using accounts named 'thefightersofthetruth' and 'supporterofmujahideen'.⁸⁸

Alongside collection and dissemination offences, one individual, a teenager from Sutton Coldfield, was convicted of providing training for terrorism. Specifically, this relates to a "mujahdeen channel" on Telegram, on which he created or distributed 40 videos and 26 lessons about cyber and hacking, including how to create fake Facebook and Twitter accounts, one lesson on how to make a Molotov cocktail, and logistical support for those wishing to travel to Syria.⁸⁹

It is notable, while not surprising, that all cases of encouraging terrorism relate to posting on social media, using both mainstream and fringe platforms. While there were varying likelihoods of malicious actors receiving and being motivated by such messages, the posts were deemed severe enough both in intent and content for judges to identify that a mere social media post could encourage terrorism. Posts encouraging terrorism were made in vast ecosystems to individuals of unknown names and quantities, the reach of which is inestimable. Statements encouraging terrorism were often vague, with targets only identified as minority groups or cities, and no specific attack plan indicated. The offence of 'encouraging terrorism' can

88 Nicole Wootton-Cane, "Pair Convicted of Terror Offences Handed Community Orders after 'Powerful Mitigation'," *Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 2022.

89 McCarthy, "Teenager Tried to Get to Syria."

be seen as a step between spreading propaganda and planning a specific attack. With anonymous online accounts and easily accessible subcultures which motivate such behaviours, it is becoming easier for children to mimic the posting behaviour of their adult contemporaries, leading to very serious convictions.

Group-Related Offences

While a number of young terrorist offenders were inspired by, or involved in the online activity of terrorist groups, only one minor has been convicted for group-related terrorism offences. A teenage boy (case 17) was a member of post-proscription National Action at the age of 15, significantly younger than both National Action's typical university-age target audience and his co-defendants who were all in their early 20s. However, his age did not prevent his significant participation in the group, deemed by the prosecution as "one of the most active members" and "future leadership material".⁹⁰ His trial heard that he had "driven himself into poverty" by travelling to meetings and funding 1,500 stickers calling for a "final solution".⁹¹ His original 18-month custodial sentence was halved to nine months on appeal, because he had initially received an adult term despite offending as a youth.⁹² This is the first extreme-right conviction of a minor in the dataset, in line with the evolving landscape of the ecosystem which increasingly moves away from group structures. It is a rare example of the regular participation of a minor in offline extreme-right activities.

Among extreme right-wing offenders, group-related offences remain a challenge. Given the nebulous 'post-organisational' network of far-right actors,⁹³ such an offence is rarely relevant. Governmental proscription mechanisms are opaque in their application – banning Feuerkrieg and Sonnenkrieg Division, but at the time of writing, not the Order of the Nine Angles or The British Hand,⁹⁴ the latter in spite of the association of a thwarted attack plotter (case 26). As such, actions of similar severity are seemingly inconsistent in their counter-approaches. While the proscription policy remains useful in many ways, it may struggle to keep pace with a rapidly adapting threat landscape, with young people continually attempting to establish their own networks. So too will it encounter hurdles in its definition of group membership, where the traditionally imagined terrorist group with leaders, members, fees and meetings rarely exists.

Luca Benincasa, an adult at the time of offending and therefore not included in this dataset, is the only individual to have been convicted of membership of a 'third generation' extreme-right group.⁹⁵ Benincasa admitted belonging to Feuerkrieg Division in 2022, after

90 "Teen Neo-Nazi Jailed over National Action Membership Has Prison Sentence Halved," *Birmingham Mail*, accessed 22 August 2022, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/black-country/teen-neo-nazi-jailed-over-19325907>.

91 Jess Glass PA and Rachel Lee, "Notts Teen Jailed over Neo-Nazi Terror Group Has Sentence Halved," *Nottingham Post*, 20 November 2020, <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/nottingham-news/nottingham-teenager-jailed-over-neo-4721050>.

92 The Royal Courts of Justice, *Regina v Connor Scothern*, No. T20180636 (The Court of Appeal Criminal Division, 20 November 2020); "National Action: Connor Scothern's Jail Term Halved on Appeal," *BBC News*, 20 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-55009000>.

93 Joe Mulhall, "A Post-Organisational Far Right?," in *2018 State of Hate: Far Right Terrorism on the Rise*, ed. HOPE not Hate, 2018, 10–12.

94 "Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations," Home Office, accessed 22 August 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>.

95 "Neo-Nazi Luca Benincasa Locked up for Terror and Child Sex Crimes," *BBC News*, 25 January 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64404704>.

it was proscribed. However, given the loose network structure of the 'group', it remains unclear how the bar for 'membership' is set and proved.

The only minor to be convicted of inviting support for a banned organisation is a Newcastle teenager, who invited support for National Action (case 21).⁹⁶ In the more traditionally organised Islamist landscape however, no children have been convicted either of membership of, or inviting support for a proscribed terrorist organisation, despite foiled travel plans and coordination with group members. Two Islamist-related offenders also reportedly wrote notes declaring allegiance to IS,⁹⁷ one of whom was arrested with a note in his backpack declaring "I am a soldier of the Islamic State and I have attacked Cardiff today because your Government keep (*sic*) on bombing targets in Syria and Iraq" (case 5). However, neither was tried for group membership.⁹⁸

Once more, the opacity of both the proscription process and the legal definition of membership inhibits analysis. The limited number of group-related offences complements the high level of innovation and independence of young terrorist offenders, who are not always engaged in traditional group structures. In the case of extreme-right offenders, this follows the 'leaderless resistance' model motivated by Louis Beam and James Mason's *Siege*. Among Islamists, those who have succeeded in travelling to join IS are in legal limbo. If, over the coming years, the British government makes a decision on the repatriation issue, we may see the number of group-related charges for minors increase.

Collection and Dissemination of Propaganda

Among young terrorist offenders, the most common offences relate to the collection and dissemination of terrorist propaganda and instructional material. Three offences relevant to young people relate to a) the collection of information likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism, b) the collection or creation of a record of information and c) the possession of a document or record containing such information. 26 young people were convicted of collecting information, 17 of whom were related to the extreme right. For many young extreme-right offenders, this was their only conviction, resulting in non-custodial sentences. However, for the dissemination of a terrorist publication, for which 19 children were convicted, the cross-ideological spread is more equal. For many extreme-right offenders, where this was often not accompanied by other offences, this resulted in non-custodial sentences.

Young people downloaded materials and digitally distributed them to their friends and family, as well as posting them to unknown online communities. Active on mainstream platforms, more secure alternative messaging apps, and forums that are inherently extremist in nature, young terrorism offenders used the technology available to them to share and receive ideological knowledge and technical

⁹⁶ Rose and C, "'We Are Generation Terror!'" 3.

⁹⁷ "ISIS-Obsessed Sixth Form Student Who Planned Terror Attack Is Jailed for Six Years," *Daily Mail*, accessed 22 August 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7192987/ISIS-obsessed-sixth-form-student-planned-terror-attack-jailed-six-years.html>.

⁹⁸ "Lloyd Gunton Locked up for Bieber Terror Plot," *BBC News*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-43257323>.

expertise. Both the extreme right and Islamists were active on mainstream platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. However these were proportionately more popular among Islamists, probably due to the earlier dates of their offences correlating to a historically less sophisticated approach to content moderation. A number of offenders used platforms and browsers that had higher encryption levels, anonymity and less severe content moderation policies, such as Telegram. The extreme right made further use of alternative social media and communications platforms Gab, Wire, Viber, gaming server Discord and the Tor browser. On such platforms, extreme-right ecosystems are readily accessible. Indeed, some young individuals intended, and in some cases managed to establish their own Telegram channels.⁹⁹ For this reason, only a few individuals were reportedly active on Fascist Forge and Ironmarch, where fringe violent extremist communities flourished.

Literature collected and distributed by children is not dissimilar to that of their older counterparts. Often with the specific intent of radicalising others, Islamist-related cases referred to the distribution of Islamic State material, including execution videos, *Rumiyah* magazine and *anasheed*, as well as al-Qaeda's magazine *Inspire*. As is common among older extreme-right and accelerationist communities, the same or broadly similar Islamist material was found in the possession of young extreme-right offenders. Extreme-right 'collection of information' sentences referenced the possession of videos of attacks in Utøya and Christchurch, among others, and literature included the *White Resistance Manual*, *Mein Kampf*, *Siege*, and materials from groups including Atomwaffen Division and National Action.

In addition to ideologically motivated propaganda, manuals such as "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom" and "Just Terror Tactics" from IS magazine *Rumiyah* were found in the possession of Islamist children, while on the extreme right, instructional materials included bomb recipes, detonator manufacture, fighting skills and 3D weapons creation, many of which related to homemade weapon creation. For example, one boy (case 19) was found in the possession of 90 documents on firearms, military tactics and explosives, accruing significant knowledge which he later disseminated to others.¹⁰⁰ The electronic devices of an Islamist offender (case 10) were found to have more than 349,000 files, including a highly substantial propaganda cache which would have taken significant time and effort to build.¹⁰¹

Due to the bottom-up nature of extreme-right activism, it was more common for extreme-right children to create their own propaganda, including literature and images. Young people created images for Sonnenkrieg Division¹⁰² of a high graphic quality and with highly racist content, often employing the popular aesthetic 'fashwave' which layers "earlyinternet themes, like vector art, pixel painting, bright neon and tropical landscapes".¹⁰³ So too did the 16-year-old from

99 Vernalls, "Boy, 17, Sentenced to Detention."

100 Dearden, "Teenage Neo-Nazi."

101 "Teenager Sudesh Amman Jailed for Online Terror Videos," *BBC News*, 17 December 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-46592539>.

102 Daniel De Simone, "Harry Vaughan: Neo-Nazi Teenager Sentenced," *BBC News*, 2 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-54782394>; Lizzie Dearden, "Teenage Neo-Nazis Jailed for Inciting Terror Attacks on Prince Harry and Other Targets," *The Independent*, 18 June 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/neo-nazi-trial-terror-prince-harry-michal-szewczuk-oskar-dunn-koczorowski-a8963396.html>.

103 Lisa Bogerts et al., "Fashwave: The Alt-Right's Aestheticization of Politics and Violence," in *Dada Data: Contemporary Art Practice in the Era of Post-Truth Politics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 230–45; Jack Smith, "This Is Fashwave, the Suicidal Retro-Futurist Art of the Alt-Right," *Mic*, 12 January 2018, <https://www.mic.com/articles/187379/this-is-fashwave-the-suicidal-retro-futurist-art-of-the-alt-right>.

Newcastle (case 21), who created highly antisemitic Blutkrieg Division propaganda,¹⁰⁴ and the 16-year-old from Merseyside (case 32), who was convicted of “making his own content”.¹⁰⁵ At 15, a boy from Kent (case 24), associated with The British Hand, made videos of Nazis shooting victims in concentrations camps, set against fashwave or heavy rap music with the lyrics “all Jews should die, race mixing is a sin”.¹⁰⁶

Young extreme-right adherents, due to the decentralisation of their online ecosystems, also created their own manifestos, demonstrating the depth of their ideological innovation and independence. One boy (case 15) wrote an attack-planning document, with the intention of use by others, entitled “Storm 88: A manual for practical sensible guerrilla warfare against the [k**k] system in Durham city area, sieg hiel”,¹⁰⁷ while a teenager from Wiltshire (case 27) wrote “the big plan”, detailing targets and bomb-making instructions.¹⁰⁸ Such instances may follow a trend among extreme-right terrorists of all ages for releasing manifestos alongside their attack, designed to inspire others and build notoriety among violent extremist ecosystems.

From the breadth of literature collected, created and disseminated by young offenders, as well as their manner of doing so, it is apparent that young people are equally, if not more capable of committing the same severity of offence as older extremists. Videos, images and literature are shared on encrypted platforms with little content moderation, and are therefore increasingly available to those at risk of radicalisation or searching for attack-planning methodologies. Beyond this, children pose an additional threat in the technical and ideological innovation that they demonstrate through the creation of specific propagandistic images and manifestos which, with professional graphic design capabilities and high shock value, incite against new targets and increase shareability. Indeed, as HOPE not Hate researcher Patrik Hermansson expressed, “the fact that those suited to bring in young people to the far right are young people themselves has not been lost on the far right”.¹⁰⁹ Despite this, questions must be raised on a case by case basis about the agency of the individual, their understanding of their actions and their intentions, as well as the usefulness, both with regard to outcomes and resourcing, of pursuing securitised and judicial responses to minor offences.

Non-TACT Offences

Beyond terrorism offences, ten minors were convicted of adjacent offences, including hate crimes, explosive offences and sexual crimes. In the dataset, these are indicated in brackets. To date, no minor has been convicted of committing an act of terrorism, a fact that may change if young people are repatriated from Syria.

104 Rose and C, “We Are Generation Terror!”.

105 “‘Terror Threat’ Boy Spared Custody over Synagogue Bomb Twitter Post,” *BBC News*, 27 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-61247774>; Rose and C, “We Are Generation Terror!”.

106 Lizzie Dearden, “Neo-Nazi Teenager Who Threatened to Attack Migrants in Dover Admits Terror Offences,” *The Independent*, 28 June 2021.

107 Lizzie Dearden, “One of UK’s Youngest Terror Plotters Named after Losing Anonymity Battle,” *The Independent*, 11 January 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/neo-nazi-terror-plot-durham-jack-reed-b1785650.html>.

108 Daniel Wood, “Wiltshire Teen Who Made Plans to Attack Mosque and Kill 10,000 People Convicted of Terrorism,” *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, 10 January 2022, <https://www.wiltsglosstandard.co.uk/news/19835748.wiltshire-teen-made-plans-attack-mosque-kill-10-000-people-convicted-terrorism/>.

109 Patrik Hermansson, “Hitler Youths: The Rise of Teenage Far-Right Terrorists,” *Hope not Hate*, September 2020, 8, https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/HnH_Hitler-Youths-report_2020-09-v2.pdf.

A 15-year-old boy (case 13) was convicted of making an explosive device, alongside the possession of a document likely to be useful to a person committing an act of terrorism, but was acquitted of the more serious offence of making an explosive substance with intent.¹¹⁰ As such, his bomb-making attempts do not fall under terrorism legislation. Similarly, another boy was convicted of making explosives in 2017 but acquitted of the preparation of terrorist acts, and so did not serve as a terrorism offender,¹¹¹ despite his stated extreme-right motivations. He was, however, convicted for later downloading terrorist manuals at the age of 19, and is thereby excluded from the dataset.¹¹² Explosives offences sit outside terrorism legislation, often despite apparent extremist connections or activism.

Four minors were additionally convicted of sexual crimes. The link between the extreme right and sexual crimes could be motivated by the same social and sub-cultural circumstances that lead to radicalisation, or could constitute evidence of a fringe sub-ideology. For example, a 15-year-old boy was convicted of five counts of sexually touching a girl under the age of 13, fulfilling his stated wish to commit sexual violence (case 15).¹¹³ The court heard that he had described himself as a “natural sadist” with an interest in “occult neo-Nazism”.¹¹⁴ Similarly, a 16-year-old, convicted of two counts of making and possessing indecent images of children, was also found to harbour a hybrid of left-hand path and neo-Nazi accelerationist ideology (case 18).¹¹⁵ Such cases could be evidence of a growing trend of the promotion of occultism-linked sexual violence among young neo-Nazi organisations.¹¹⁶ When sexual offences overlap with extremist ideologies, the judicial system should consider their designation as terrorism-related offences, particularly in the context of growing violent misogynist networks such as the incelosphere.

A third terrorism-related offence relates to hate crimes, including stirring up religious or racial hatred (case 21),¹¹⁷ and racially or homophobically aggravated criminal damage (case 41).¹¹⁸ It remains unclear where the threshold between stirring racial hatred and terrorism offences is placed, where the majority of extreme-right terrorist propaganda promotes extreme racism. Hate speech legislation is rarely prosecuted, despite the likelihood of the majority of speech of individuals included in the dataset qualifying. Where motivations and harms are often the same, the barrier between hate crimes and terrorism should be considered fluid, and taken equally as seriously by both the legal system and rehabilitative efforts.

110 Dearden, “Kieran Cleary.”

111 “Neo-Nazi Pipe Bomb Teenager given Rehabilitation Order,” *BBC News*, 13 February 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-38962931>.

112 “Four Years for Nazi Teen Who Downloaded Terror Handbook,” *BBC News*, 19 July 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-44885343>.

113 Dearden, “One of UK’s Youngest Terror Plotters Named after Losing Anonymity Battle.”

114 De Simone, “Terror Plot.”

115 Dearden, “Neo-Nazi Teenager Spared Jail for Encouraging Terror Attacks.”

116 Ariel Koch, “How Satanism Has Transformed Neo-Nazi Violence – Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right,” CARR (blog), accessed 24 August 2022, <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2021/11/24/how-satanism-has-transformed-neo-nazi-violence/>.

117 Fatima Aziz, “Preston Man Encouraged Terrorism against Jews and Muslims,” *BBC News*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-61043995>; Lizzie Dearden, “Neo-Nazi Boy, 16, in Court Accused of Encouraging Terror Attacks,” *The Independent*, 6 April 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/neo-nazi-boy-terror-attacks-racial-religion-newcastle-national-action-a9450716.html>; “‘Terror Threat’ Boy Spared Custody over Synagogue Bomb Twitter Post.”

118 “Teenager Arrested in Connection with Right-Wing Terrorism Offences,” *Express & Star*, 20 April 2023.

Pleas and Sentences

Pleas

While not universal, there was a higher proportion of not-guilty pleas entered by young Islamist defendants, despite some explicitly retaining a level of ideological conviction throughout the judicial process, such as in cases 9 and 10. Defendants received credit for disassociation from previously held beliefs. By the time they reached trial, it was not uncommon for extreme-right defendants to allege distance from their past actions, presenting themselves as reformed and regretful in order to secure reduced sentences.¹¹⁹ Some offenders entered guilty pleas for the less severe charges, such as collection of information, and not guilty for acts such as preparation of terrorist acts.¹²⁰

In mitigation of their actions, it was common to rely on social influences that they “wanted to look cool”,¹²¹ were “just trying to fit in”,¹²² or were to “receive validation”¹²³ or “outdo one another”.¹²⁴ This was more common among the extreme right. For example, when police arrested a then-16-year-old boy (case 15), they discovered a note that read: “Killing is probably easier than your paranoid mind thinks. You’re just not used to it. Most were caught because they got sloppy.”¹²⁵ Giving evidence, he later claimed to have few friends and no intention of carrying out any attacks, insisting that he adopted a fake persona for “shock value”.¹²⁶ In attributing their actions to competitive online ecosystems, defences rested on the argument that young people neither intended nor understood the impact of their actions, and that their offences were a by-product of peer pressure.

A number of defence barristers also noted the isolation that young people experienced, which led them to become involved in such subcultures, including relying on the COVID-19 pandemic as mitigation.¹²⁷ Additionally, some individuals detailed difficult family circumstances or adverse childhood experiences as a reason for terror offending, including a “neglected mother”,¹²⁸ loss of a parent¹²⁹ or “a simply dreadful childhood”.¹³⁰ However, the role

119 “Teenage Neo-Nazi from Cornwall Is UK’s Youngest Terror Offender,” *BBC News*, 1 February 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cornwall-55891140>.

120 “R. v Matthew Cronjager – Sentencing Remarks,” 19 October 2021, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/R.-v.-Matthew-Cronjager-Sentencing-Remarks.pdf>.

121 “Youngest British Terrorist Sentenced for Neo-Nazi Manuals Stash,” The Crown Prosecution Service, accessed 24 August 2022, <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/youngest-british-terrorist-sentenced-neo-nazi-manuals-stash>.

122 “Schoolboys from Derbyshire and Kent Admit Terrorism Offences.”

123 Dearden, “Teenage Neo-Nazi.”

124 Eleanor Barlow and Charlotte Hadfield, “Boy, 16, Threatens to Bomb Synagogue after Playing Fortnite,” *Liverpool Echo*, 28 April 2022, <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/boy-16-threatens-bomb-synagogue-23806796>.

125 Simpson and Wace, “Neo-Nazi Teenager Jack Reed Plotted to Attack His Mother’s Office.”

126 James Tozer and Alex Ward, “The Quantity Surveyor’s Son Who Plotted a Nazi Atrocity at 16: Middle Class Teenager Who Became Britain’s Youngest Terror Convict Is Finally Named after Losing Bid to Maintain His Anonymity as He Turns 18,” *Daily Mail*, 11 January 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9136051/The-quantity-surveyors-son-plotted-Nazi-atrocity-16.html>.

127 “Preston Teenage Neo-Nazi Thomas Leech Jailed for Two Years for Encouraging Far-Right Terrorism,” *ITV News*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2022-04-08/teenage-neo-nazi-jailed-for-encouraging-far-right-terrorism>; Martin Naylor and Jason Evans, “Family of Schoolboy Who Created Far-Right Terrorist Group Move to Swansea,” *Wales Online*, 4 August 2021, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/extremist-racist-schoolboy-terror-swansea-21218988>; Alex Boyd, “Dangerous’ Redhill Teenager Haider Ahmed Jailed for Terror Offences Including Planning Attack with ‘Massive’ Knife,” *Surrey Live*, 28 June 2019, <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/redhill-terrorist-isis-jailed-ahmed-16503054>; “Widnes Teenager Detained on Terrorism Charges,” *BBC News*, 1 June 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-61666454>.

128 Dominic Casciani, “Teenager Safaa Boular Jailed for Life over IS Terror Plot,” *BBC News*, 3 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45062647>.

129 “Widnes Teenager Detained on Terrorism Charges.”

130 “Teenage Neo-Nazi from Cornwall Is UK’s Youngest Terror Offender.”

that these factors might play in radicalisation pathways is rarely detailed. While this plea was often credited, it is worth noting that socioeconomic circumstances or education level should not be understood as a universal radicalising factor among young people.¹³¹

A universal factor among pleas was, of course, youth. In many cases this was interpreted by judges as evidence of being “impressionable”¹³² or in an “adolescent fantasy”.¹³³ However, in others, youth almost appeared to work against the interests of the defendant, whose behaviour was described as even more disturbing or surprising on account of their age.¹³⁴

The factors of peer pressure, disassociation from previous beliefs, isolation, adverse childhood experiences and youth were counted as mitigating factors in pleas. However, more research must be done to fully understand the role these factors play in offending pathways, and the extent to which this influences agency both in social and legal interpretations.¹³⁵

Sentences

Sentence lengths for minors convicted of terrorism range from non-custodial or suspended sentences, including youth referral orders, to a life sentence with a minimum of eleven years (see Figure 6). Non-custodial sentences were the most common, given to twelve extreme-right, three Islamist offenders and one unknown. Typically given to those with fewer counts and less serious offences, such as the collection of information, these were often accompanied by some form of rehabilitative order and restriction of activities such as monitored use of the Internet. The most severe sentences were reserved for minors convicted of serious terrorism offences, including those convicted of plotting attacks on the British Museum (case 9),¹³⁶ a Justin Bieber concert in Cardiff (case 5)¹³⁷ and a male classmate of colour (case 26).¹³⁸ Both of the life sentences were handed down to Islamist offenders (cases 5 and 9). Only one of the four minors sentenced to over a decade was not convicted of attack planning – a Derbyshire boy (case 35) convicted of trying to make a 3D gun and whose substantial volume of terrorist material was linked to attacks in Buffalo and Colorado.¹³⁹

While the most common sentence for extreme-right offenders was non-custodial, for Islamist offenders it was a custodial term of 3.1–5 years, presenting a significant discrepancy. Four factors may

131 Dearden, “Neo-Nazi Teenager Spared Jail for Encouraging Terror Attacks.”

132 “Ifthikhar Ali Jailed over WhatsApp IS Propaganda,” *BBC News*, 26 January 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-42834996>.

133 Nicole Wootton-Cane, “Pair Convicted of Terror Offences Walk Free after ‘Powerful Mitigation’,” *Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 2022, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/pair-convicted-terror-offences-handed-25661339>.

134 *R. v Anon*, No. T20197374 (Manchester Crown Court, 7 January 2020).

135 The authors are currently exploring this issue in greater depth in another publication using the qualitative data collected from court transcripts and case reporting.

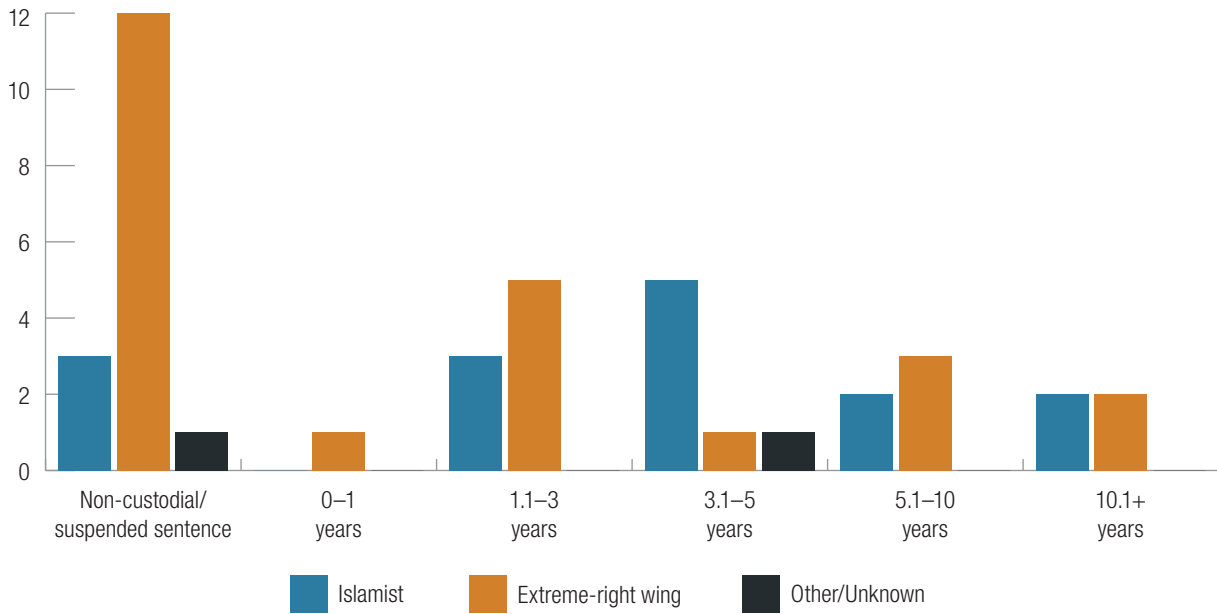
136 Lucia Binding, “Safaa Boular: UK’s Youngest Female Terror Plotter Handed Life Sentence,” *Sky News*, 3 August 2018, <https://news.sky.com/story/safaa-boular-jailed-youngest-woman-convicted-of-plotting-uk-terror-attack-handed-life-sentence-11459560>.

137 Steven Morris, “Teenager given Life Sentence for Planned Justin Bieber Gig Attack,” *The Guardian*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/02/teenager-lloyd-gunton-jailed-cardiff-pop-concert-terrorist-attack-plot>.

138 “Neo-Nazi Matthew Cronjager Jailed for Plotting Terrorist Acts,” *BBC News*, 19 October 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-58973060>.

139 Liam Barnes, “Daniel Harris: UK Teen Sentenced over Videos Linked to US Shootings,” *BBC News*, 27 January 2023.

Figure 6: Sentence Length of Minors Convicted under TACT



influence this data. First, in contrast to the lower average age of extreme-right offenders, those who have already reached the age of 18 at trial would not be eligible for a non-custodial sentence for a terrorism offence, nor would age be such a powerful mitigating factor in sentencing guidelines. A second factor relates to severity of offence, where more serious offences, which were more common among Islamist individuals, such as preparing an act of terrorism, require a longer minimum custodial term. Third, extreme-right defendants relied on stronger mitigating circumstances, with difficult social circumstances such as adverse childhood experiences. Finally, lower sentences may also be explained by a higher rate of guilty pleas among extreme-right defendants, who often expressed remorse and regret, compared to the retention of belief through the judicial process exhibited by Islamist defendants. However, a combination of these factors may not fully explain the trend of longer sentences among Islamist offenders, and the judicial system should consider whether similar crimes with different ideologies are being treated equally. Greater transparency, such as improved access to data, would aid the analysis of how sentence length is determined across ideologies.

4 Discussion

Much of the colour and detail comprising the dataset is strung by a common thread: that young people are not merely passive consumers of content created and shared by their older counterparts. If terrorist activity is increasingly transnational, grassroots and participatory, then the same must be true of young terrorist offenders. The tired stereotype of a troubled and undereducated young person unwittingly led astray by a shadowy online (adult) groomer hinders our ability to understand radicalisation processes and threat landscapes. Instead, the dataset points to new understandings of children's terrorism involvement: as innovators, as amplifiers and as capable perpetrators of violence.

Online Influence: Innovators and Amplifiers

Children have not merely joined pre-established networks and integrated into existing violent extremist spaces, but have themselves expanded and innovated terrorist activities. On the extreme right, at least four children have either attempted or managed to establish their own online networks. One of these cases clearly exemplifies the international connectivity and innovation of young terrorist offenders.

In 2020, having been in contact with the 13-year-old founder of Feuerkrieg Division in Estonia, a young teenager from Cornwall set up its UK affiliate branch (case 20). On his new Telegram channel, the teenager, 16, created and shared neo-Nazi propaganda, and recruited five other young people. One of these new recruits was a 17-year-old from Rugby (case 19), who aspired to set up his own network (Figure 7), providing weapons advice to a young person in Lithuania who went on to plant a bomb outside Western Union offices in Vilnius.

Similarly, a Derbyshire teenager (case 35) recently convicted of encouraging terrorism was found to have made a large number of videos that went on to influence attackers in Buffalo and Colorado.¹⁴⁰ A screenshot of one of his videos, uploaded to extremist video-sharing platform World Truth Social, featured on the front page of Payton Gendron's terrorist manifesto.

Young innovation and connectivity are not only evidenced on the extreme right. A minor (case 6), along with his older adult brother, was found to have links with two boys (cases 2 and 3), all of whom were arrested on the same date and convicted of preparing to travel to Syria. While some assistance may have been provided by older individuals in the facilitation of travel, it was the young people themselves who motivated each other in their online radicalisation and offline activities.

¹⁴⁰ Barnes, "Daniel Harris."

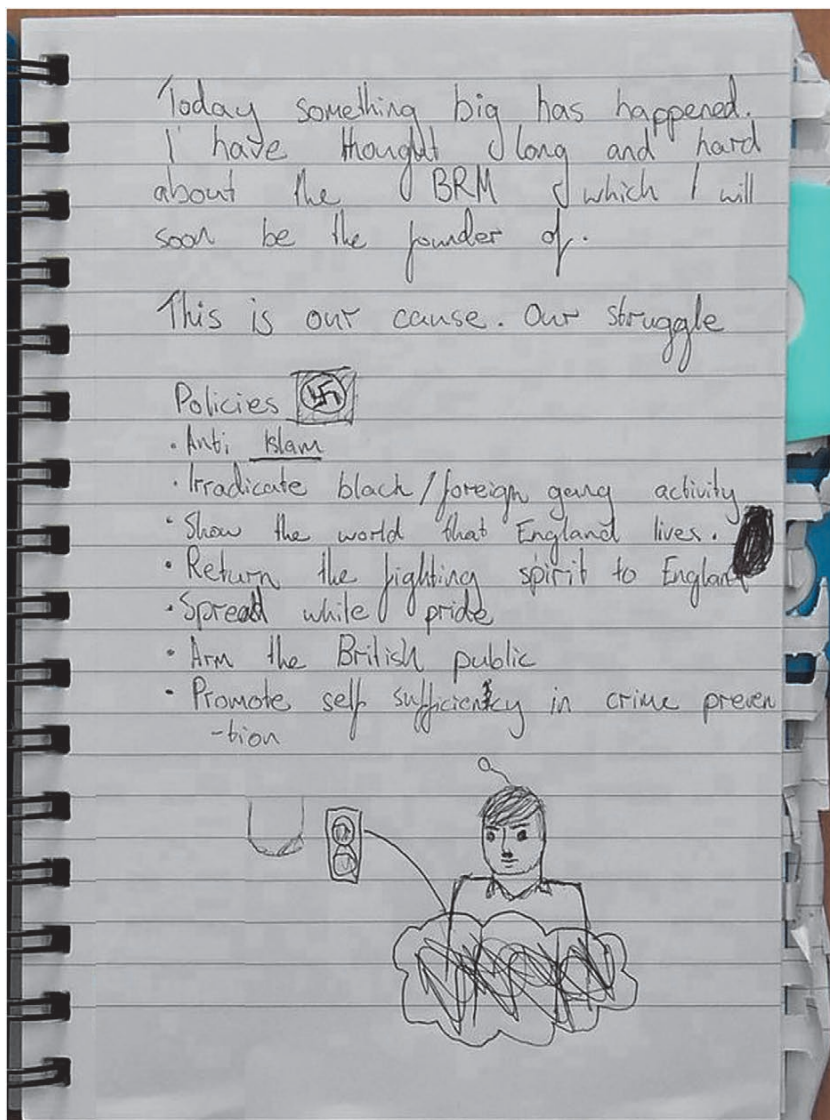


Figure 7: Handwritten Note Recovered from the Bedroom of Case 19. It states that he is “soon to be the founder” of a new network called “BRM”.

Source: Daniel De Simone, “Rugby teenager [X] jailed for terror offences,” *BBC News*, 6 November 2020

Interconnectivity can be evidenced both through online networks and the presence of co-defendants.

13 minors stood trial alongside co-defendants, of whom six were minors, four were family members, and three were older individuals involved in the same group or plot. For those who did not stand trial alongside co-defendants, this is not necessarily evidence of their autonomy, rather the circumstances of their arrest and trial. All minors in the dataset were highly networked into violent extremist ecosystems, whether in their families or online forums among peers and adults. Influence in these arenas is rarely one-directional; radicalised individuals both lead and follow.

Aforementioned manifesto and propaganda creation is further demonstrative of the abilities that young people increasingly possess to incite against new targets, conjure up their own attack plans and make their own contribution to the violent extremist ecosystem. Through simultaneous radicalisation, logistical assistance or propaganda creation, young people have contributed to the continued development of terrorist innovation. This occurs not just ideologically, such as in the generation of Siege Culture, but through contribution to the creation of online subcultures that motivate users towards violence, and the production of aesthetics and propaganda.

Beyond innovations, children also share existing propaganda, ideologies and knowledge, acting as amplifiers of current threats and contributing to the continual expansion of violent extremist ecosystems. The young people recruit upwards, sharing extremist ideas or materials with their older relatives or friends. Children are not merely a threat to vulnerable contemporaries, but have tried, and in some cases managed to engage with those older than them, reversing the downward-grooming stereotype. One boy (case 14) was 16 when he started trying to radicalise his older brother, sending him transcripts from al-Baghdadi speeches and volumes of *Rumiyah*, including instructional material and potential attack locations. Messaging his brother, he said that “it is better to live one day as a lion than 100 years as a sheep”.

Even when a child is involved in an older group, this does not preclude their heavy involvement. The young boy convicted for his role in National Action (case 17) was not merely a passive observer but a financial and activist contributor to the group and its overall harm. When children participate in unattributable online extremist ecosystems where others are unaware of their age or location, their postings carry equal weight to those of older users. Children have used such anonymity to radicalise upwards (older individuals), sideways (their peers) and downwards (younger children). Even where limited independence may reduce the potential harm of attack planning or financing, children’s ability is equal to that of others to amplify terrorist content through the low-cost actions of posting on anonymous online forums.

The threat, connectivity and longevity of these extremist networks – whether initiated or supported by children – rests on the ability of children to protect themselves from identification and prosecution. Some took significant steps to cover their tracks and demonstrated awareness of the criminal nature of their activities. One boy (case 19) took steps to erase extremist content from his device, with the judge commenting that “you left the British version of the FGD chat group and informed the founder that you were wiping your online presence while you got your own operations off the ground in real life”.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the prosecutor on case 14 indicated that the defendant was “technically and forensically aware”, and was using encryption techniques to hide conversations.¹⁴²

These findings into the ways in which children innovate and amplify terrorist content are seminal for threat assessments. Media reports, and often court proceedings, frame children as helpless and hapless

¹⁴¹ Dearden, “Teenage Neo-Nazi.”

¹⁴² James Rodger, “Brothers Safaan Ali and Mohammed Shehzad Who ‘adopted ISIS Ideology’ Jailed,” *Birmingham Mail*, 29 November 2019.

– stumbling upon threats unwittingly and not understanding the impact of their actions. While this may remain true, it does not reduce the impact that children are having on violent extremist ecosystems and their contribution to the prevailing terror threat. We must seek to understand these co-existing dualities; children can be unaware of their actions, and still pose a threat to democratic society.

Offline Threat and Capability

The support that children give to domestic and international terrorist networks signals a potential new threat vector. However, a critical distinction must be made between teenagers' online communications and offline activity. The transition from content consumption and/or creation to active participation in 'jihad' or the realisation of a 'race war' saw differing levels of viability and capacity for violent action. In some cases, their age betrayed them, with terroristic ambition giving way to logistical reality. In others, their status as minors was immaterial to the attempted fulfilment of their plans.

While in many cases the teenage offenders were able to eloquently articulate and justify their extremist worldviews online, their ability to fulfil their stated intentions was less clear-cut. For example, in case 19, while the presiding judge acknowledged that the boy's claims were "bravado and exaggeration" to increase his status in online chats and forums, he concluded in sentencing remarks that he had "no doubt that [he] did harbour an intention to commit an act of terror at some point in the future".¹⁴³ Despite this "intention", the boy was hampered by preparations that the court heard were "at a very early stage and largely inept".¹⁴⁴ Similar remarks were made concerning two Islamist co-defendants (cases 28 and 29) whose homemade propaganda video was deemed "pitiful", complemented by their "vanishingly unlikely" plans to travel to Syria.¹⁴⁵ Belittling the capability of the pair, Judge Richard Field even went as far to say "if these offences were not so serious, I would say laughable".¹⁴⁶

Bearing in mind that what all data points have in common is that they have been apprehended and convicted, the teenagers exhibited varying awareness of operational security protocols. Some took significant steps to cover their tracks and demonstrated awareness of the criminal nature of their activities. For example, a 17-year-old plotter (case 26) told an undercover officer of his desire to use a double-barrelled shotgun instead of a rifle so as to ensure "no tracking ballistics". Conversely, other offenders took very few steps, or only rudimentary ones, to obscure their activities. Multiple extreme-right teenagers were found to have swastika flags on their walls or etchings on their desks, making no attempt to obfuscate their beliefs from their families. One boy (case 13) was found to have stored explosive devices in "open sight" in his bedroom.¹⁴⁷

Two 15-year-old boys epitomise the dichotomy between online sophistication and real-world immaturity, which was key to disrupting their respective attack plots. The first (an extreme right-wing teenager from Haworth, case 40) stole his father's car to conduct

¹⁴³ Dearden, "Teenage Neo-Nazi."

¹⁴⁴ Vernalls, "Boy, 17, Sentenced to Detention."

¹⁴⁵ Wootton-Cane, "Pair Convicted of Terror Offences Walk Free."

¹⁴⁶ Wootton-Cane, "Pair Convicted of Terror Offences Walk Free."

¹⁴⁷ Dearden, "Kieran Cleary."

a reconnaissance outing for his planned attack; however, when he crashed into a fence, his underage driving without a licence led to his arrest.¹⁴⁸ The second boy (an Islamist from Sutton Coldfield, case 8) was arrested after two suspicious trips to Birmingham Airport. At first, he was turned away at check-in as he did not have a flight booked and had unconvincingly told the airline staff that he wanted to travel to Istanbul for three days as he had “seen it in a film”.¹⁴⁹ He returned later that day with multiple flight and accommodation reservations “in an attempt to elude authorities and cover his tracks”.¹⁵⁰ It is important here to note his own financial constraints, as he used his parents’ credit card to make the bookings. Upon arrest, a search of his personal devices also revealed WhatsApp messages with a friend telling him about using money to “bribe the border guards”.¹⁵¹ In passing sentence, the judge concluded that the boy had made “determined attempts to travel to Syria”.¹⁵² Though his plans were poorly executed, they were notably at the latter stages of development following research and online communications with facilitators – some of whom may have been adults. It is unclear whether the boy was already on the radar of law enforcement; however, his unexplained absence and unusual behaviour were key to intervention.

The Sutton Coldfield boy is not the only teenager to be apprehended on the day of intended travel. Two teen co-defendants (cases 2 and 3) were arrested before they could board their flight from London Gatwick to Istanbul in February 2017. Over a three-month period leading up to their intended travel, the boys’ plans and preparations intensified, including obtaining currency, visas and even knives.¹⁵³ Despite these arrangements, the boys were not entirely self-sufficient, but relied upon an IS facilitator to cross the Turkish border. While the pair demonstrated independent commitment and preparedness, their pragmatic reliance upon external assistance was key to detection by authorities.

Despite their status as minors, some teenagers demonstrated a thirst – and even pragmatic potential – to inflict major harm. Alongside the recent launch of the UK government’s CONTEST Strategy 3.0 in July 2023, it was announced that “intelligence agencies and law enforcement have prevented 39 terror attacks that were in their late stage of planning over the last six years, with the majority of them Islamist-motivated”.¹⁵⁴ While this statistic clearly focused on the ideological leanings of domestic plotters, it is equally important to include age (and gender) as significant factors in this threat picture. While the extreme right-wing teenage plotters outnumber Islamists in our dataset, it is interesting to note that two planned large-scale Islamist attacks (cases 5 and 9) could meet the threshold of ‘late stage’ disruption after months of research and reconnaissance.

Upon arrest, the female plotter (case 9) even passed the baton to her mother and older sister. From prison, she directed her adult relatives in the code of an Alice in Wonderland-themed ‘tea party’.¹⁵⁵ Under the veneer of the child-like and fantastical character,

148 “Right-Wing Haworth Teenager Idolised Convicted Terrorists.”

149 McCarthy, “Teenager Tried to Get to Syria.”

150 “Birmingham Teen Jailed for Terrorism Offences,” West Midlands Police, 6 July 2018, <https://www.west-midlands.police.uk/news/birmingham-teen-jailed-terrorism-offences>.

151 McCarthy, “Teenager Tried to Get to Syria.”

152 McCarthy, “Teenager Tried to Get to Syria.”

153 The Royal Courts of Justice, *Regina v Mohammed Ali*, paragraph 6.

154 Matt Dathan, “Islamic State and Al-Qaeda ‘Still Plotting Attacks in UK,’” *The Times*, 16 July 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/islamic-state-and-al-qaeda-still-plotting-attacks-in-uk-90v88ktqh>.

155 Dearden, “Britain’s Youngest Female Terror Plotter Jailed for Life.”

she was said to have “acted with open eyes” and “was old enough to make her own decisions”¹⁵⁶ regarding the attacks to which she was “deeply committed”.¹⁵⁷ Similarly in case 5, Judge Mark Wall stated that at the time of his arrest, the boy was “within hours of committing an act of atrocity on the streets of Cardiff”, having spent weeks conducting detailed research into possible target sites and security arrangements.¹⁵⁸ Consistent with these public venues, he reportedly “planned not just the killing of one person but rather mass murder [...] [and his] actions show[ed] a total disregard for human life”.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, the same language is used for another 16-year-old Islamist plotter (case 12), whose “callous disregard” for life made him “no different” from the [adult] killers at London Bridge and Westminster.¹⁶⁰ While several extreme right-wing plotters were reported to have drawn ‘inspiration’ from adult attackers such as Brenton Tarrant, it is notable that the Islamist boy was directly likened to his adult counterparts, with his youth disregarded in discussions of his ideological commitment and the resulting threat he posed.

All domestic terror plots in the dataset were developed to be conducted either independently – or even in command – of adults. In addition to the three Islamist cases discussed above, all extreme right-wing plots were self-directed attacks. The only exception or, rather, addition is the 16-year-old boy who also provided advice to the adult Vilnius bomber (case 19).¹⁶¹ These teenagers reiterate the need to challenge stereotypes of children engaged in political violence purely as ‘pawns’ in the games of ‘deceitful yet powerful’ adults.¹⁶² The tables appear to have turned somewhat. The granular detail of their indoctrination and recruitment is often unclear and omitted from public reporting, and further research is needed to determine the role of adults in these teenagers’ initial exposure to violent ideas. However, once integrated into these extremist networks, it is clear that some teenagers demonstrate capacity and independence in violent action.

Weapons Procurement

While ideological adherence and even target selection could be undertaken independently, obtaining weapons was not so straightforward and required external (adult) assistance. Twenty-five (15 extreme right, nine Islamists, and one Other) possessed or shared material relating to the development of improved explosive devices.¹⁶³

156 Casciani, “Teenager Safaa Boular Jailed for Life over IS Terror Plot.”

157 Dearden, “Britain’s Youngest Female Terror Plotter Jailed for Life.”

158 Dearden, “Autistic Teenager Who Planned Isis-Inspired Terror Attack in Cardiff Jailed for Life”; “Cardiff Terror Plot: How Teenager Planned to Attack City,” *BBC News*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-42607784>.

159 Cathy Owen and Matthew Cooper, “Teen Who Planned Islamic State-Inspired Terror Attack in Cardiff Named for First Time as He’s Jailed for Life,” *Wales Online*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/teen-who-planned-islamic-state-14360348>.

160 Alexander Robertson, “ISIS-Obsessed Sixth Form Student, 19, Who Watched Beheading Videos at His Parents’ Surrey Home before Buying a Hunting Knife for London Bridge-Style Terror Attack Is Jailed for Six Years,” *Mail Online*, 28 June 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7192987/ISIS-obsessed-sixth-form-student-planned-terror-attack-jailed-six-years.html>.

161 Gardham and Hamilton, “Paul Dunleavy”; Margiris Meilutis, “Lithuanian Neo-Nazi Receives 28-Month Sentence for Attempting Terror Attack,” *Lithuanian National Radio and Television*, 18 September 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1235208/lithuanian-neo-nazi-receives-28-month-sentence-for-attempting-terror-attack>.

162 Myriam Denov, “Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (Mis)Representations,” *Children & Society* 26, no. 4 (2012): 282, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00347.x>.

163 Lizzie Dearden, “White Supremacist Who Collected Bomb Manuals and Expressed Admiration for Hitler Spared Jail,” *The Independent*, 20 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/white-supremacist-george-fowle-bomb-manuals-hitler-camp-america-a9522831.html>; Daniel Wood, “Wiltshire Teen Who Made Plans to Attack Mosque”; “Darlington Boy, 14, Sentenced for Terrorism Offences,” *BBC News*, 20 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tees-61521771>; Harriet Robinson and PA Media, “Wiltshire A-Level Student Guilty of Terrorism Offences,” *BBC News*, 14 September 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-wiltshire-66811832>.

However, far fewer explicitly expressed a desire to deploy an explosive device themselves, and none managed to successfully develop a functioning device. While one boy (case 15) had identified a potential supplier on Fascist Forge for ammonium nitrate,¹⁶⁴ the closest to fulfil this ambition was case 13, a 15-year-old boy whose construction of a “shrapnel-filled device” “almost created a weapon with a 30m blast radius”.¹⁶⁵ If developed into a viable CO₂ bomb, he would have had the potential to wreak “maximum harm and death to civilians”.¹⁶⁶

The majority of the teenagers – across the ideological spectrum and irrespective of their offences – conducted research into firearms,¹⁶⁷ downloaded or developed gun-related attack tactics or manuals,¹⁶⁸ and even engaged in shooting lessons.¹⁶⁹ However, none of the teenagers successfully procured a conventional firearm, reflective of the wider British threat and gun control landscape, as well as youth-specific financial constraints. Indeed, to raise independent funds, one far-right teenager (case 26) suggested setting up a PayPal account to buy weapons, though these did not materialise.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, in his extensive weapons cache, one boy (case 19) obtained an airsoft handgun and a 0.22 calibre air rifle,¹⁷¹ both of which are illegal to purchase or own under the age of 18. In addition, he stated that he was “100% serious” about converting a blank-firing pistol. All nine counts of his possession of documents of use to a terrorist (s.58 TACT 2000) related to construction plans for homemade firearms and ammunition.¹⁷² This is just one example of a new teenage terrorism trend, albeit again with varied degrees of development. Another boy’s plans came to an early end when he was arrested for sharing information with a man on how to manufacture a homemade firearm (case 37).¹⁷³ It is unclear whether, and in what way, he would have proceeded to act on this information.

Cases 26 and 35 epitomise a new development in attack planning and capabilities among the extreme right: the use of 3D-printed firearms.¹⁷⁴ While the former “only” provided information on the manufacture of a FGC-9 and Cheetah,¹⁷⁵ the latter was found in possession of a 3D-printer, with which he had unsuccessfully attempted to make a carbine rifle out of plastic (Figure 8).¹⁷⁶ By the end of 2022, there were at least 14 publicly reported cases across Europe and Australia of extremists possessing 3D gun designs and/or attempting to manufacture and use them.¹⁷⁷ A recent investigation

164 De Simone, “Terror Plot.”

165 Dearden, “Kieran Cleary.”

166 Dearden, “Kieran Cleary.”

167 Dearden, “Neo-Nazi Teen Who Threatened to Attack Migrants in Dover.”

168 “Gloucestershire Boy Sentenced for Terrorism Offences,” Gloucestershire Police, 29 July 2021, <https://www.gloucestershire.police.uk/news/gloucestershire/news/gloucestershire-boy-sentenced-for-terrorism-offences/>; “‘Terror Threat’ Boy Spared Custody over Synagogue Bomb Twitter Post.”

169 Jasmine Ketibuah-Foley and PA Media, “Ex-Boarding School Pupil Who Posted Neo-Nazi Videos Avoids Jail,” *BBC News*, 31 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-65141206>.

170 “Neo-Nazi Matthew Cronjager Jailed for Plotting Terrorist Acts.”

171 *The Royal Courts of Justice, Regina v Paul Dunleavy*, No. T20197814 (The Court of Appeal Criminal Division, 21 January 2021).

172 *The Royal Courts of Justice, Regina v Paul Dunleavy*, No. T20197814.

173 “Man from Liverpool Jailed for 30 Months for Terrorism Offences,” Greater Manchester Police, 9 May 2023, <https://www.gmp.police.uk/news/greater-manchester/news/news/2023/may/man-from-liverpool-jailed-for-30-months-for-terrorism-offences/>.

174 Rajan Basra, “The Future Is Now: The Use of 3D-Printed Guns by Extremists and Terrorists,” *GNET*, 23 June 2022, <https://gnet-research.org/2022/06/23/the-future-is-now-the-use-of-3d-printed-guns-by-extremists-and-terrorists/>.

175 Judiciary of England and Wales, “R. v Matthew Cronjager Sentencing Remarks.”

176 “Derbyshire Teen Encouraged Others to Commit Terrorism and Tried to Make a Gun,” *Counter Terrorism Policing*, 2 December 2022, <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/derbyshire-teen-encouraged-others-to-commit-terrorism-and-tried-to-make-a-gun/>.

177 Rajan Basra (@rajanbasra), “Time for Some Updates: In Short, There Have Now Been at Least 14 Cases of Extremists (or Suspected Extremists) Possessing 3D Gun Designs and/or Attempting to Make/Use Them,” *Twitter*, 22 November 2022, <https://twitter.com/rajanbasra/status/1595063106153111555>.



Figure 8: 3D-printed Gun Parts Made by Case 35.
Source: David Mercer, “British teenager whose videos were linked to two mass murders in US is jailed,” *Sky News*, 27 January 2023

by *The Times* newspaper discovered that instructions for building a 3D-printed gun can be found “via a few clicks on Google”, and that one site had been viewed over 87,000 times.¹⁷⁸ The anonymity of online downloads certainly allows teenagers to circumvent age-based licensing restrictions for firearms in the UK. At least in the second case, the availability of these online guides and the machinery to facilitate their manufacture presents a significant and viable threat of independent, larger-scale and more lethal attacks by teenagers in future. In the face of difficulties with the procurement and construction of firearms and explosives, it is notable that some teenagers turned to more accessible weapons. The most common were various types of knife, which featured in cases 12, 40 and 19, whose weapons cache described above included four types of bladed weapon.¹⁷⁹ While significant funds are required to purchase a 3D-printer – or plane ticket – an individual planning a knife attack would only need to look in their kitchen drawer. With the low cost of attack planning, some teenagers improvised to meet their objectives. Irrespective of their availability, however, knives are no less lethal. Passing sentence in case 12, Judge Peter Lodder stated that the defendant’s 15-inch hunting knife was “a terrifyingly large, and vicious looking weapon of the utmost dangerousness”.¹⁸⁰

The scope and scale of teenage terrorism convictions demonstrates a new risk to both national and international security. While it must be noted that, in the last seven years studied, no child has successfully

¹⁷⁸ Tom Ball, “Instructions on How to Build Guns Found via Few Clicks on Google,” *The Times*, 17 December 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/instructions-on-how-to-build-guns-found-via-few-clicks-on-google-fw26ns9r5>.

¹⁷⁹ The Royal Courts of Justice, *Regina v Paul Dunleavy*.

¹⁸⁰ Dearden, “Teenage Isis Supporter.”

conducted an attack on UK soil, the threat of teenage offenders is increasing and must be taken seriously. Where independent attempts to travel to a conflict zone or procure conventional firearms are hampered by the chronological and developmental age of young offenders, new technology is emerging that capitalises on teenagers' ideological commitment and digital skills.

Future Prospects: Recidivism or Rehabilitation?

By the end of 2024, six currently incarcerated teenagers are expected to have completed their custodial sentences or be eligible for consideration for parole, leaving only eight of the 43 convicted still incarcerated.¹⁸¹ With the high proportion of non-custodial or youth referral orders issued, as well as suspended and already-served sentences, this is an important moment to ascertain the potential threat posed by young terrorism offenders.

The timeline of the teenagers' offending is important for determining whether their radicalisation or indoctrination derived from genuine – and potentially long-term – commitment, or immature, and likely temporary, fascination. Without access to full original case files, it is not possible to draw a granular picture of all individuals in the dataset. However, it is known that 13 of the teenagers had been referred at least once to Prevent, the UK Government's counter-extremism programme. The majority (9 or 69.2%) of these minors adhered to an extreme right-wing ideology; the remaining were three Islamist and one Other. This is reflective of the trend in Channel cases shifting away from Islamism, and remaining consistent with the broader ideological divide in the teenage convictions.¹⁸²

For many of the teenagers, referral was made years prior to their initial offence, with evidence at the present time that their engagement with the programme was unsuccessful. For example, after months with an assigned intervention worker, one extreme-right boy's behaviour "continued to be of serious concern" (case 13).¹⁸³ Moreover, enrolment in the programme did not appear to affect the behaviour of an Islamist boy (case 7), whose offending spanned the period 2016–17 and *therefore included the duration of his involvement with the de-radicalisation programme*.¹⁸⁴ During his Prevent engagement, he messaged a friend: "I just had a 2 hours conversation with a coconut mozlem which works with the government...He tried to "deradicalise" me. I lost count on the amount of statements of kufr [unbelief] that he made...They think we're gunna stop following the haqq [truth] out of fear of them or of ignorance (*sic*)."¹⁸⁵ Evidently, he did not.

For some teenagers, the process of arrest, prosecution and conviction was a reality check and realisation of the severity and consequences of engagement with terrorist material or networks. Several expressed sincere regret and intention never again to engage with such extreme

¹⁸¹ This does not account for two convicted individuals who await sentencing, or whose sentence has not been reported in open sources (cases 40 and 42).

¹⁸² "Individuals Referred to and Supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2021 to March 2022."

¹⁸³ Dearden, "Kieran Cleary."

¹⁸⁴ "Successful Prosecutions Since 2016," Crown Prosecution Service, emphasis added.

¹⁸⁵ "Successful Prosecutions Since 2016," Crown Prosecution Service.

ideas.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, two years after his offence, and now an adult, one man is said to have “gone so extremely the other way he is scared to even check the news” (case 28).¹⁸⁷ Conversely, for others, their criminality was not simply a passing phase. Of public record for four of the teenagers, their engagement in terrorism was not their first offence. Indeed, the criminal activities of three boys can be considered linked to their later extreme right-wing terrorism offending. For example, one boy (case 35) had previous convictions of “common assault, criminal damage, possession of indecent images of children and racially aggravated damage of a memorial in Manchester to George Floyd”.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, another boy (case 31) received a caution and “some intervention” for a previous “prank” claim of planning a school shooting.¹⁸⁹ A third boy (case 25) also received a caution for a bomb hoax, and has previous convictions for a hate crime, after threatening to blow up a mosque, and for attacking a police officer who went to his home.¹⁹⁰ These cases demonstrate escalated interest and engagement in political violence by teenagers, with other less serious crimes as precursors or important warning signs of more serious commitment to come.

For others, engagement in extremist networks did not desist upon arrest or even conviction for terrorism offences. Prior to his second arrest for possession of terrorist documents, one extreme-right boy (case 34) told a friend online: “I don’t think they realise, raiding our houses f***** radicalises us more.”¹⁹¹ In his case, the securitised law enforcement-led intervention crystallised his extremist and anti-establishment mindset. Two Islamist teenagers committed further offences while on bail. It was during this time in April 2017, with her passport confiscated, that a girl (case 9) shifted her attention from travel to Syria to plotting her domestic attack.¹⁹² Similarly undeterred by his own prevented travel to Turkey, the boy from Sutton Coldfield (case 8) set up a channel on Telegram, through which he posted terrorist publications and contact details for others who wished to travel to Syria. Clearly, the boy’s online activity was unconstrained by his bail conditions, which West Midlands Police had said were “strict”.¹⁹³ Both teenagers fit the ‘frustrated traveller’ profile, but innovated in differing ways to continue their activity within the constraints applied.

The most serious case of teenage terrorist re-engagement is that of case 10, in which a boy was convicted of six counts of possession and seven counts of dissemination of documents relating to Islamist extremism. In 2018, he was sentenced to three years and four months’ detention, half of which was to be served in custody

186 Katie Feehan, “Two Neo-Nazis, 16, Who Wanted to ‘bomb London Because It Isn’t English’ and Ran Extremist Right-Wing Group on Telegram after Going down a ‘Twisted Rabbit Hole’ in Lockdown Are Spared Jail,” *Mail Online*, 9 September 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9973749/Two-neo-Nazis-16-wanted-bomb-London-isnt-English-spared-jail.html>; Ketibuah-Foley and PA Media, “Ex-Boarding School Pupil Who Posted Neo-Nazi Videos Avoids Jail.”

187 Wootton-Cane, “Pair Convicted of Terror Offences Walk Free.”

188 Tom Ball and Duncan Gardham, “Teen Who Inspired Buffalo Shooting Killer Faces Extradition to the US,” *The Times*, 1 December 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/teen-who-inspired-buffalo-shooting-killer-faces-extradition-to-the-us-x0lxwd28v>.

189 “Preston Man Encouraged Terrorism against Jews and Muslims,” *BBC News*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-61043995>.

190 Feehan, “Two Neo-Nazis.”

191 Andrew Bardsley and Amy Walker, “Loner Bullied at School Went on to Become ‘literal Nazi’ Who Posted Vile Racist Hate Online and Downloaded Terrorist Documents,” *Manchester Evening News*, 1 June 2022, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/loner-bullied-school-went-become-24114548>.

192 Royal Courts of Justice, *Regina v Rizlaine Boular and Safaa Boular*, No. 2018/03490/A3 (The Court of Appeal Criminal Division, 16 April 2019).

193 Nick Horner, “Teen ‘Terrorist’ Remanded after Alleged Breach of Bail Conditions,” *Birmingham Mail*, 5 February 2018, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/teen-terrorist-sutton-coldfield-remanded-14249902>.

with the remainder on licence.¹⁹⁴ He declined to engage in prison deradicalisation programmes,¹⁹⁵ and there were signs of his continued extremist beliefs, including a handwritten pledge of allegiance and graffiti of the IS flag found in his cell.¹⁹⁶ Convicted at the age of 18, he served his sentence at HMP Belmarsh, where he mixed with (adult) high-profile terrorist prisoners including Hashem Abedi, the brother of the Manchester bomber, Ahmed Hassan, the failed Parsons Green bomber, and Abdulla Ahmed Ali, the leader of the Al Qaeda plot to blow up transatlantic airliners with explosives hidden in bottled liquids.¹⁹⁷ Records were kept of his consistent concerning behaviour. Upon his automatic release at the midpoint of his sentence, then aged 20, he was placed under full armed surveillance by Metropolitan Police Counter-Terrorism Command SO15 and MO3 Covert Policing Units. His licence conditions also required him to wear a GPS ankle tag, banned him from travelling to large parts of London, and imposed a strict curfew.¹⁹⁸ On 31 January 2020, he was observed purchasing aluminium foil, parcel tape and Irn Bru in plastic bottles. Two days later – ten days after his release – he launched an attack, stabbing two people before being shot dead by police in Streatham, south London. An inquest later found that HM Prison and Probation Service had “missed an opportunity which may have prevented the attack”, by failing to recall the man to prison after being notified of the purchases he used to construct a hoax explosive vest during the attack.¹⁹⁹

The law concerning automatic early release of convicted terrorism offenders has since changed,²⁰⁰ and the inquest into the above case (10) has provided some lessons on the need to adequately respond to the clear – and sometimes brazen – warning signs of youth extremism. While he is to date the only child offender who has gone on to perpetrate an attack upon release as an adult, his case highlights the potential risk posed by radicalised or indoctrinated children whose extremist beliefs are left insufficiently addressed.

Other teenage offenders have gone on to defy the conditions of their licence or requirements of their rehabilitation orders. A salient example is case 18. After receiving a suspended sentence for 14 extreme right-related terrorism offences (and two child sexual offences) in November 2020, the now-21-year-old man was sentenced to a 38-month prison term in August 2023, after pleading guilty to a counter-terror order breach, as well as making an indecent image of a child.²⁰¹ Material recovered from his personal devices showed his searches for the proscribed groups Sonnenkrieg Division and Atomwaffen Division, taken as evidence that he had “falsely asserted” that his “mindset had changed” since his initial offences.²⁰² Another ongoing case involves an Islamist boy (case 4), who faces charges of four breaches of a Part 4 Terrorist Notification Order, under Section 54

194 Judiciary of England and Wales, “R. v. Sudesh Faraz Amman Sentencing Remarks,” No. T20180087 (Central Criminal Court, 17 December 2018).

195 Vikram Dodd and Dan Sabbagh, “Streatham Attacker Was Released amid Fears He Felt Terrorism ‘Justified’,” *The Guardian*, 3 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/03/streatham-attacker-was-under-full-surveillance-from-day-of-release>.

196 Daniel Sandford, “Sudesh Amman: From Troubled Schoolboy to Terrorist,” *BBC News*, 20 August 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-58233560>.

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199 Lizzie Dearden, “Streatham Terror Attack Could Have Been Prevented, Inquest Finds,” *The Independent*, 20 August 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terror-streatham-attack-inquest-b1905912.html>.

200 “Emergency Terror Legislation Becomes Law,” *BBC News*, 26 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-51649643>.

201 Daniel De Simone, “Harry Blake: Paedophile Jailed on Terror and Indecent Image Charges,” *BBC News*, 3 August 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-66399561>.

202 De Simone, “Harry Blake.”

of the Counter Terrorism Act 2008. They relate to “failing, without reasonable excuse, to notify police of financial information, phone numbers and an email address”.²⁰³ Now aged 25, at the time of writing the man has been released on bail. While some teenagers have completely desisted and turned away from extremist activity, others demonstrate entrenched and undeterred ideological commitment, which requires continued support and consideration in national threat assessment.

²⁰³ Ruth Ovens, “Man Charged with Breaching Terrorist Notification Requirements,” *BuckinghamshireLive*, 29 September 2022, <https://www.buckinghamshirelive.com/news/buckinghamshire-news/high-wycombe-man-charged-breaching-7644496>.

5 Conclusions and Implications

This research has offered an initial scoping investigation into child terror offending in the UK and the outcomes of judicial processes. Through the construction of a unique dataset of 43 children convicted of terrorism offences since 2016, the research has added colour to the often opaque and highly sensationalised details of the children's engagement pathways and offending patterns.

The timeline of analysis corresponds with a post-organisational landscape which offers ready access to harmful content in anonymous online networks. In this context, extremist children have proven to be of significant concern in the evolving terrorism threat landscape. Teenagers across the ideological spectrum have engaged as online innovators and influencers, and violent offline activists. Independently of adults, they have succeeded in producing terrorist propaganda, influencing their peers and adults towards violence, and preparing acts of terrorism both domestically and abroad. The low barriers to committing acts of terrorism mean that a child-led attack is certainly viable, although it has not yet been perpetrated in England and Wales.

Children's ability to perpetrate or motivate violence does not necessarily correlate directly with increased agency and understanding of their actions. Countermeasures should address this nuance between intent, actions and accountability. This report does not attempt to tackle the complex legal, safeguarding and rehabilitative measures that comprise an intricate framework of responses to child-terrorist offending. Rather, its data and discussions raise questions for policymakers and practitioners in these fields on the appropriate use of punitive powers against minors.

Early data on children's re-engagement and recidivism suggests that a securitisation response or custodial knee-jerk reaction does little to resolve the long-term shift, as evidenced in this report, of the potential constituency for radicalisation to children. The stigma of the 'terrorist' label, potentially traumatic judicial proceedings,²⁰⁴ and the accompanying reporting and publicity of their offences as a minor will carry through their life, influencing their job prospects and perhaps exacerbating the grievances and frustrations that prompted their initial step towards engagement in extremist networks. Rehabilitative and reintegration efforts, the public details of which are scarce, must offer genuine pathways away from violence, despite what is seen as the exceptional or extraordinary

²⁰⁴ A doctor's report indicated that one boy (case 6) had a "nervous breakdown" during his trial, including "making these growling sounds, [and] frothing at the mouth". This delayed the sentencing hearing, which was eventually held with the defendant *in absentia*. The boy's family expressed concern for his mental welfare, which they linked to his remand in the high-security (adult) Belmarsh prison. See: Lisa Mitchell and Neil Murphy, "Jihadist Who Went Paintballing to Prepare for Martyrdom in Syria Was 'Too Scared to Attend Sentencing'," *The Mirror*, 18 May 2018, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/jihadist-who-went-paintballing-prepare-12554511>.

nature of terrorism. While severe offences and real threats to the public must be sufficiently addressed, systems must be careful not to prioritise short-term punishment over long-term behavioural change. For example, for the various minors whose offences were met with a non-custodial sentence, questions must be asked about whether bringing charges was good use of time and resources, and indeed why protracted and public judicial proceedings were necessary in order to secure a rehabilitative outcome.

Additional aims of this research and the simultaneous publication of the live dataset are the promotion of both transparency and areas for future research. Analysis of the influence of co-defendants, the backgrounds and root causes of child offenders, and their judicial outcomes are only some of the questions that would add greater value to the debate. Where data has not been attainable, or in some cases not even collected by policing or government, researchers must rely on arduous and incomplete data collection in order to produce analysis. Here, it is important to acknowledge the work of journalists in making these cases a matter of public record to be analysed. However, with the above cautions of stigma and re-embedding grievances in mind, but without sacrificing quantitative and qualitative analysis, the authors have fully anonymised the published dataset and would recommend that other public reporting follow this approach, thereby supporting greater data sharing.

The findings also highlight the need for comprehensive educational programmes that promote critical analysis skills and social cohesion, while also acknowledging teenagers' digital nativism. The children in this dataset have demonstrated high skill and sophistication in the employment of online tools and platforms to communicate their ideals. Digital literacy and safeguarding programming should build on these skills for positive activism, adopting a whole-of-society approach to tackling the toxic cocktail of intersecting hate, extremism and social issues. Commendable approaches such as HOPE not Hate's safeguarding guide²⁰⁵ should be integrated into classrooms and community intervention programmes.

So too do governments have a role to play in holding social media companies to account for the accessibility of radicalisation pipelines and the availability of illegal materials to young people. The lockdown legislation of the recent COVID-19 pandemic increased social isolation of youth and saw the expansion of online extremist content.²⁰⁶ While exposure to this content is not by itself a causal mechanism for mobilisation, its temporal correspondence with teenagers' natural processes of identity development render children particularly vulnerable to violent anti-system, grievance-based and conspiratorial ideals.²⁰⁷ A family member of a teenage boy jailed for six years called for government action, highlighting the safeguarding failure for her "brother [who] was

205 "Signs of Hate: A Safeguarding Guide to Online Hate," HOPE not Hate, <https://hopenothate.bigcartel.com/product/signs-of-hate-a-safeguarding-guide-to-online-hate>.

206 Garth Davies, Edith Wu, and Richard Frank, "A Witch's Brew of Grievances: The Potential Effects of COVID-19 on Radicalization to Violent Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 0, no. 0 (10 May 2021): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.1923188>.

207 Randy Borum and Terri D. Patterson, "Juvenile Radicalization into Violent Extremism: Investigative and Research Perspectives," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 58, no. 12 (1 December 2019): 1143, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2019.07.932>.

only 16, even less than that, when he began searching all of this and it shouldn't have been accessible to him in the first place".²⁰⁸

The burgeoning involvement of children in terrorist activity poses a heightened threat to national security *and* child welfare. With child terror offenders sensationalised, stigmatised and securitised, this research is one the first genuine efforts to detail and understand the scale and scope of their activity, and the potential threat they pose.

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CONTACT DETAILS

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact:

ICSR
King's College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
United Kingdom

T. +44 20 7848 2098

E. mail@icsr.info

Twitter: [@icsr_centre](https://twitter.com/icsr_centre)

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