

Institution: Liverpool Hope University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA4: Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience		
Title of case study: Developing the Understanding of Terrorism and Political Violence Amongst Policy Makers and Practitioners		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Neil Ferguson	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Psychology	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1996- ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 to July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Political conflict, terrorism and the war on terror pose a significant challenge for governments and NGOs across the world. The impact is based on research into the psychological processes associated with engaging in, and disengaging from, politically motivated violence and terrorism. This impact has had substantial national and international reach (e.g. Academic Advisor to the UK Home Office) and has directly influenced policy makers, the military, policing and the security services. The impact is also reflected in benefits to non-governmental organization (NGO) groups, and been made accessible for wider audiences in order to raise awareness of and educate people on issues surrounding terrorism and political violence and its reduction.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Countering violent extremism and dealing with the impact of political violence is highly contested and policy is often contradictory, fraught with risk and devised in governmental silos with limited input from external voices. Additionally, the field of research in this area suffers from serious methodological issues, such as the lack of primary data that has a negative impact both on the creation of quality and reliable insights and on evidence-based theory development. Ferguson has led research activity into the psychology of terrorism and political violence since 1996. Supported by academic staff and a series of postgraduate research students, he has built a well-established reputation in this area in both academic and policy circles.</p> <p>The research is underpinned by first-hand primary accounts of violent extremism and terrorism from perpetrators of politically motivated violence rather than being based on secondary sources, databases or hypothetical modelling. The research is also distinctive as it explores the full extremist lifecycle from initial encounters with armed groups to desistance from violence (see R1, R2, R4 & R5). Its distinctive contributions can be described under three headings.</p> <p>Becoming Involved in Extremist Violence and Terrorism</p> <p>Ferguson's research (for example, outputs R2 & R6) shows how everyday civilians are drawn towards extremism, begin to engage with extremist groups and enter violent and armed extremist groups. In doing this, the research charts various antecedent 'push' and 'pull' factors at interpersonal, intergroup and societal levels, which contribute to the dynamic interplay between individual decision-making and social context that lead to these 'choices'. The research challenges</p>		

common conceptions of 'radicalisation', downplaying the importance of ideological forces in motivating engagement in violence, and instead demonstrates how bonds of kinship and/or friendship and feelings of injustice and fear have a greater role to play.

Sustaining Violent Extremism in the Face of Adversity

More recently, Ferguson has explored the previously under-researched second or middle phase in the terrorist lifecycle (R1) that focuses on how the extremist sustains their violent extremism in the challenging environment of being pursued by police, security forces and oppositional groups. This research builds on a series of earlier studies (R5) exploring the impact that this extremist lifestyle has on the militant and their families. This research demonstrates the importance of identity and small group pressures in bonding and psychologically protecting members of armed extremist groups as they develop militarily and ideologically in a hostile environment where they face daily threats of death or incarceration and the negative consequences of their violent actions.

Desisting from Political Violence and Terrorism

The third strand of research (R3, R5) focuses on disengagement from violent behaviour, ideological deradicalization and reintegration in society. In particular, the research explores how former extremists can make the transition away from employing violence towards peaceful means of civic or political engagement.

Together, this body of research offers insights for policy makers on how to efficiently discourage involvement with violent groups and encourage violent actors to disengage and details barriers to desistance that can hamper reintegration and problematize deradicalization endeavours.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [R1] Ferguson, N., & McAuley, J. W. (2020). Staying Engaged in Terrorism: Narrative Accounts of Sustaining Participation in Violent Extremism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11:1338. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01338
- [R2] Ferguson, N., & McAuley, J. W. (2019). Radicalization or Reaction? Understanding Engagement in Violent Extremism in Northern Ireland. *Political Psychology*. doi.org/10.1111/pops.12618
- [R3] Ferguson, N., McDaid, S., & McAuley, J. W. (2018). Social movements, structural violence and conflict transformation: The case of Northern Irish loyalist paramilitaries. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 24, 1, 19–26. doi.org/10.1037/pac0000274
- [R4] Ferguson, N., Burgess, M., & Hollywood, I. (2015). Leaving violence behind: Disengaging from politically motivated violence in Northern Ireland. *Political Psychology*, 36, 2, 199–214.
- [R5] Ferguson, N., Burgess, M., & Hollywood, I. (2010). Who are the Victims? Victimhood Experiences in Post Agreement Northern Ireland. *Political Psychology*, 31, 6, 857–886. doi.org/10.1111/pops.12103
- [R6] Ferguson, N., & Burgess, M., & Hollywood, I. (2008). Crossing the Rubicon: Deciding to Become a Paramilitary in Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 2, 1, 130–137. doi.org/10.4119/ijcv-2779

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transformation: Lessons learned from former combatants in Northern Ireland (£7,735) in 2017 to Neil Ferguson. This programme of research has also been also been funded through PhD bursaries from charitable trusts for students working under Prof Ferguson's supervision, namely, £10,000 from the **W. F Southall Trust** awarded in 2007, £40,000 from the **Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust** awarded in 2006 and £6,000 from the **Lantern Project** awarded in 2013. In addition, the **British Academy** provided Prof Ferguson with overseas travel grants worth £500 and £200 to support dissemination of this research in 2006 and 2007.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

A range of groups both within the UK and globally, who are focused on reducing engagement in terrorism and political violence, have reported impact as a result of the underpinning research. The impact results from a wide range of activities including giving briefings, producing guides and reports grounded on the underpinning research, advising on and evaluating UK deradicalization practices, co-creating educational resources and disseminating research through the media. The impact will be detailed in six sections below.

UK Government [text removed for publication]

Ferguson has worked with three UK Government ministries/departments and has provided briefings and consultancy to a number of Government departments. Ferguson [text removed for publication] has (since 2018) been part of an independent academic advisory committee providing expert insight on desistance, disengagement and deradicalization, and acts as a critical friend to the Home Office (OSCT) for their Disengagement and Desistance Programme for violent extremists. He was also involved in a number of Home Office sponsored conferences from 2017 aimed at sharing knowledge about disengagement and desistance from terrorism (summary of conferences available in S1). This work has been viewed by the Head of Research and Analysis for the Home Office OSCT as "very impactful" and "provided us with actionable advice for the near future" (see S1). Additionally, Ferguson has provided research briefings to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development (see S2) on issues around the reintegration of former combatants in Syria and elsewhere which were "excellent...particularly thought-provoking" and had "especial relevance" (Violent Extremism and Terrorism (VET) Hub Policy Manager, see S2).

Ferguson has also provided briefings to Police Service of Northern Ireland, [text removed for publication] and the Northern Ireland Office (2017, 2019) on issues around Northern Irish related terrorism and how to aid the transitioning away from armed groups in Northern Ireland and has produced guides on Northern Irish Related Terrorism

International Governments, Intelligence Agencies and Military

In April 2018 Ferguson hosted a meeting of academics and staff from US Africa Command (AFRICOM), in addition to staff from the Home Office OSCT, for a three-day workshop (see S4). The workshop explored linking research and policy in relation to the work of US Africa Command and OSCT. The Chief of Operations, US AFRICOM, stated (see S4) that the workshop "helped provide context to our [US AFRICOM] analysis of violent extremist organizations (VEO's). The workshop also reinforced, in my mind, the need to tie into academic research to allow us to maximize the potential impact of our policy recommendations".

Ferguson has continued to support the US government. In 2019 he presented his research to the US military (CENTCOM, EURCOM & AFRICOM), US Intelligence services (DIA) and to the Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment Group at the Pentagon. The Director, Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment Group, at the Pentagon described the briefing [S4] as follows: "It is through exceptional scholarship and insights like yours that we develop the contextual understandings that

lead to better decisions and strategies to cope with what is certain to be a generational challenge...your framings and guideposts may help us dampen the most detrimental outcomes and minimize harm through more thoughtful actions." One outcome was that Ferguson's research was used in two reports (S4) for the United States Department of Defense, Pentagon Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment Group, dealing with the reintegration of violent extremists back into their local communities and on strategies to break cycles of radicalization in young Syrians.

Ferguson's research has also informed the Dutch and Australian Governments' thinking about policy on challenging violence and creating mechanisms and strategies to reduce violence and radicalisation [S5]. The Head of Youth Policy at the Dutch Ministry for Health, Welfare and Sport [see S5] said that Ferguson's research provided "important food for thought for all policy makers attending". In 2020 Ferguson was consulted by the Australian High Commission and his research was used by the Australian Federal Police Counter Terrorism Behavioural Science team [S7].

Non-Governmental Organizations, Counter Terrorism Practitioners and Expert Groups

Ferguson's research has been incorporated into the production of a number of consultative reports [see S9] for the British Council and the international charity Peace Direct [S8]. A noteworthy example of the impact of this is his work with the British Council in Pakistan [S8] on promoting violence reduction amongst Pakistani policy makers.

Citizen Education and Media

Ferguson's work has attracted international media attention [See S6 for examples]. Ferguson worked with the BBC (2014) to co-create a web-based learning resource based on his research to educate people about the radicalisation process using the Troubles in Northern Ireland as an example of how civilians can get drawn into armed groups and which integrated BBC archival video content to illustrate the processes involved [see S9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] Home Office (OSCT) Impact Engagement Evidence, includes:

- I. Summary of Home Office (OSCT) Conference Outcomes 2017 & 2018
- II. Deradicalization & Desistance Programme (DPP) Academic Advisory Committee Roles etc.
- III. [text removed for publication]
- IV. Testimonial from Head of OSCT Research & Analysis at the Home Office.

[S2] Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for International Development (DfID) Impact Engagement Evidence, includes:

- I. Testimonial & Communications with Violent Extremism & Terrorism Policy Manager
- II. DfID Countering Violent Extremism Workshop Agenda
- III. FCO communication and discussion of activity.

[S3] UK [text removed for publication] Evidence, includes:

- I. A copy of Guides [text removed for publication] on Northern Irish Related Terrorism (NIRT)
- II. [text removed for publication]

[S4] US Military and Intelligence Agencies Engagement Evidence, includes

- I. Communication/ Testimonial on significance of the 2018 Liverpool Workshop hosted by Prof. Ferguson from Lt Col and Chief of Operations, UN AFRICOM
- II. Communication & testimonial on significance of the 2019 Joint SMA Pentagon panel from Director of SMA, Joint Staff Pentagon, Washington, DC.

III. Copies of both US Dept of Defense reports citing Prof. Ferguson's research.

[S5] Dutch Government impact evidence includes:

- I. Testimonial from Dutch politician and former member of the Dutch House of Representatives.
- II. Programme for the Expert Meeting hosted by the Dutch Ministry for Health Welfare & Sport in 2016

[S6] Examples of Media Coverage

- I. Article in the Irish News based on [R3] - <https://www.irishnews.com/news/2017/08/09/news/former-loyalist-paramilitaries-show-no-need-for-expensive-deradicalisation-programmes--1105498/>
- II. Radio of Islam – Producer's Testimonial with links to radio interview.

[S7] Evidence of Engagement with Australian High Commission and Australian Federal Police

- I. Communications with Australian High Commission
- II. Communications with Australian Federal Police

[S8] Impact and Engagement evidence from NGO and Practitioner Groups

- I. British Council Pakistan. (2014). Next Generation: Insecure Lives, Untold Stories. (128 pages). Hard copy available on request. Ferguson's research is cited in the report.
- II. Communication/testimonial from British Council on 2014 activities.
- III. Listed contributor to a British Council report, published by BC Pakistan as part of the Next Generation Research Series, see <http://blog.britishcouncil.org/2014/05/08/how-violence-affects-young-pakistanis-next-generation-report/> and <http://www.britishcouncil.pk/programmes/society/next-generation/> for more details and programme for final Global Conference event.
- IV. Expert participant for "Peacebuilding and Violent Extremism: Key insights and lessons from a global consultation" convened by Peace Direct. Report available from <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/full-report-peacebuilding-violent-extremism/> Indications of Ferguson's contributions are on pages 20 and 38.

[S9] BBC Northern Ireland, iWonder Educational web resource - What turns a civilian into a paramilitary? (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zghnn39>), 2014