

Panel Summary: Combating Online Radicalization and Extremism

Moderator: Nuala O'Connor, Center for Democracy & Technology

Panelists: Lara Ballard, US Department of State; Mia Bloom, Georgia State University; Jonathan Russell, Quilliam Foundation; Erin Saltman, Institute for Strategic Dialogue

Overview: A look at the growing concern of radicalization and extremism online

This timely panel examined the ever-increasing concerns that are being raised about the use of the Internet by terrorists for propaganda and recruitment. The responses of non-profits, industry and governments were examined, alongside potential legislation and protection efforts.

Nuala O'Connor, the panel moderator, outlined the use of the Internet by radical Islam, far-right extremists and white supremacists as well as the recent news stories.

Erin Saltman detailed the work of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. They work with unwanted but not illegal online content; importantly she reinforced the idea that censorship and filtering don't work. At ISD they are trying to create networks of credible voices, including women, children, former extremists to counter online statements.

The idea of using marketing techniques, previously reserved for big companies like Coca-Cola, to target those at risk with alternative messaging was highlighted as an important measure. Scaling up only those projects that have proven success is vital.

Mia Bloom reinforced the fact that online radicalization is multi-layered and non-linear, but many of the methods used in the grooming of children for sexual predation are applied in the radicalization process.

Lara Ballard talked about the US Department of State's approach to countering violent extremism, part of which involved intelligence reform and oversight changing in various countries.

Jonathan Russell talked about the work of the Quilliam Foundation and how they promote counter-extremism best practice through adherence to human rights. The online space is a manifestation of the radicalization process, it is both a threat and an opportunity.

Importantly all panelists agreed that children do not go online and become radicalized without their knowledge and volition. It is a conscious decision to look for the material and to engage with the ideas, the Internet may speed up the process but there have not been instances of auto-radicalization online. Consequently there is still hope, education and counter-extremism messages can be tailored and can still be effective. Government, religious institutions, non-profits, schools and industry must come together to ensure that the best messages are being distributed from the most credible source.