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GORE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

AN EXPLORATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF GORE WEBSITES FOR HOSTING AND SHARING EXTREMIST AND TERRORIST CONTENT

Human Digital, Dr Ali Fisher and Arthur Bradley

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About the authors

This report was produced by researchers at **Human Digital**,*
a division within M+C Saatchi who develop data-led understanding and
recommendations to combat online harms, including violent extremism,
violence fixation, misinformation, and the exploitation of emergent
technologies, for example generative AI, cryptocurrency and Web3.
The team consists of analysts, data scientists and engineers working
collaboratively with subject specialists from across academic disciplines.
All Human Digital's data collection, processing and analysis is facilitated
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GORE-RELATED WEBSITES ENABLE the hosting and sharing of illegal videos, including those produced by proscribed terrorist entities. The websites are numerous, free to access, provide no user or child safety features, and have seen a growth in visitor numbers in recent years due to ongoing conflicts. Most gore-related websites offer download and social media share functionality, allowing for graphic content, including thousands showing terrorist violence, to be shared across social media.

Gore-related websites and the content they host have been largely avoided within academic study and practitioner responses, particularly in relation to counterterrorism and online harms such as violence fixation. This report provides a starting point for understanding the utility the websites provide to terrorist and violent extremist actors and the harms the content hosted on the websites present to children. The report is particularly pertinent in the UK context due to the recently passed Online Safety Act and growing public concern about the availability of graphic violent content in light of the Southport attacker's reported online behaviours.[1]

WHAT DOES OUR DATA SHOW?

Gore websites host thousands of videos created by terrorist organisations or lone attackers.	Searches for terrorist material on 24 gore-related websites found 12,000+ examples. Analysis suggests the largest proportion were produced by Islamic State, including both graphic and non-graphic violent propaganda. There were hundreds of examples of the Christchurch, Buffalo and Halle attack livestreams, accruing tens of thousands of combined views.
Violent misogynists are viewing thousands of videos showing violence against women on gore websites.	A popular incel forum has 2,000+ posts directing users to gore-related websites, some of which advertised purchasable folders of videos of women being murdered.

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1   Cooper (2025).

The websites are easy to find, access and navigate.	Search engines return millions of results for gore-related keywords. Analysis of access to 24 gore-related websites found no barriers to view content, aside from just four requesting users 'confirm' their age. On-website features include keyword-led search and curated topics, e.g. war and ISIS.
Content from gore websites is viewable across social media.	Visitors can share links to the websites or download and re-upload videos direct to social and messaging platforms. Content from gore-related websites is routinely shared in extreme right-wing spaces online, and observed across mainstream social media.
There is little to no prohibited content on most gore websites.	Analysis of the terms of service of 24 gore-related websites showed 12 had no public policy, 5 referenced 'illegal content', 6 referenced child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and none referenced terrorism.
Gore websites attract millions of monthly visits in the UK.	Analysis of web traffic to 24 gore-related websites shows an average of 1 million combined total visits per month from the UK, primarily from young men. The most visited gore-related websites largely feature content in English and receive up to 334,000 visits per month from the UK alone.
Web traffic growth since 2022 to gore-related websites has been driven by recent outbreaks of war and incidents of violence.	Events that involve outbreaks of real-world violence – such as the Russia–Ukraine war, 7 October Hamas attack and the Israeli invasion of Gaza – provide new content for and correlate with increased web traffic to gore-related websites. Many websites create specific topic filters dedicated to specific conflicts or incidents, helping to drive a year-on-year growth in web traffic to many observed websites.
Traffic arrives from direct visits and pornography websites.	Analysis of web traffic to 24 gore-related websites showed most visits are from searches for a specific URL, indicating most users are return visitors, arrive via a shared link, or are referred from pornography websites. Advertisements embedded within gore-related websites are dominated by pornography.

1. INTRODUCTION

DOZENS OF PURPOSE-MADE websites are providing unrestricted and unmoderated access to gruesome, violent video content, including terrorist material, violent misogyny, war footage and extreme pornography. Global and UK web traffic data to these websites shows increases correlating to real-world conflicts and war, most recently following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. The content hosted on these websites is not contained within a secluded online ecosystem but instead is shared and watched on the largest social media platforms, with some gore-related websites offering a social media share function.

There is limited data-led analysis into the scale and nature of the content hosted by these websites, though some studies have been carried out in attempts to understand their appeal.[2] Consequently, there is a lack of research in a range of areas related to online harms, including: the role of gore within terrorist group propaganda and online violent extremist communities, the use and functionality of the websites to terrorist groups, the accessibility of the sites to general populations – particularly from a child safety perspective – and the topics or events that influence content volume and viewing figures. Addressing this data gap is necessary and urgent, with recent incidents in the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) indicating that the availability of graphic gore content is of interest to violent perpetrators who may not fit within traditional ideological profiles.

2   While academic research on gore-related websites exists, most of this research has focused on shock websites, their relationship with pornography and the arousal of viewers through horror (Lonergan 2020; Alvarez 2017; Paasonen 2011; Tait 2008). Comparatively little research has focused on other aspects of gore and the relationship between gore-related websites and terrorism. One exception to this is the book *Watching Murder: ISIS, Death Videos and Radicalization*, which explores "Jihadi murder videos and the people who watch them on the internet" (Cottee 2022). In it, Cottee (2022) finds ISIS fans who, while hating the group, love watching their videos of decapitation and murder. While some research has focused on specific gore-related websites (Lonergan 2020; Alvarez 2017; Paasonen 2011; Tait 2008), data-led research on a broad range of gore-related websites is limited.

Prior research has examined the influence of violent media on adolescents and young people, including research which has shown a small but significant association between long-term outcomes and adolescents viewing violent imagery.[3] Other research has argued that youth who observe violence, either in person or via video, increase "their own risk of behaving violently with weapons later in life".[4] Other analysis has shown "higher rates of PTSD, depression, distress, aggression, and externalizing behavior disturbances are reported among those who witness violence".[5]

Through meta-analysis, researchers have sought to explore the "major psychological processes that account for the relationship between children's exposure to different kinds of violence in their world and the increase in the risk for violence and aggression that this exposure produces".[6] While it is clear that "exposure to violence is only one significant risk factor for violent behaviour among many", current theories have sought to explain "why exposure to media violence increases aggressive and violent behavior" and "suggest numerous factors that might exacerbate or mitigate the effect".[7] The conclusion remains that "violent behavior is almost never the result of a single cause".[8] Instead, "[v]iolent behavior is usually the consequence of the convergence of multiple, longer term predisposing factors that have made an individual more receptive to violence and of multiple precipitating factors that have stimulated the individual to violence in the short run".[9] Access to violent material via the Internet, social media and gore-related sites specifically has therefore become a policy concern as part of the effort to limit the threat of violent acts within society. In particular, the ease with

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3   Browne and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2005).

4   Huesmann et al. (2021).

5   Buka et al. (2001).

6   Bushman and Huesmann (2006).

7   Huesmann and Kirwil (2007). The theory that witnessing violence is the cause of aggression is challenged in Freedman (2002).

8   Huesmann and Kirwil (2007).

9   Huesmann and Kirwil (2007).

which violent and gore content can be accessed, along with the availability of terrorist material on such platforms, has become an issue highlighted by recent events.

In 2025, UK law enforcement released information about the Southport killer, Axel Rudakubana, stating that he had watched videos of murder and genocide in the lead up to his attack. In response, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer stated that UK terrorism laws would be reviewed, and technology companies would be pressured to remove online violent content inspiring acts of murder.[10] Home Secretary Yvette Cooper stated: "I have been deeply disturbed at the number of cases involving teenagers drawn into extremism, serious violence and terrorism, including Islamist extremist, far-right extremism, mixed and confused ideology and obsession with violence and gore."[11] In response to the Southport attack, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley has also stated that "those with a fixation on violence and gore are also consuming different bits of terrorist and extremist material".[12] While police claim that the Southport attack was not ideologically motivated, and therefore not an act of terrorism, Axel Rudakubana spent "hours researching genocide and watching graphic videos of murder".[13] He possessed numerous violent images on his tablet, including of dead bodies, victims of torture, beheadings and cartoons depicting rape and violence.[14] Despite these concerns, little information is publicly available describing gore-related websites and explaining their relationship with terrorist content.

Rudakubana represents one of several recent examples in which the perpetrators of mass violence appear to have accessed gore content prior to mounting their attack. Solomon Henderson, a student who opened fire at Antioch High School in Nashville,

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10   Booth et al. (2025).

11   Cooper (2025).

12   Available at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-01-21/
     debates/70A99479-E1AB-4D28-AC21-024A77A05D3E/details.

13   Halliday et al. (2025).

14   See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/czepl8406n8t?page=2.

Tennessee, in January 2025, added a link to a gore-related website[15] in his manifesto. The link was to his profile on the gore website, suggesting he was a user of the website and that he had two profiles, which he named in his manifesto. In December 2024, the teenage perpetrator of a school shooting in Madison, Wisconsin, left a similar digital footprint following their attack, including comments on several videos (including of suicide) on a popular gore website.[16]

These attacks occurred at a time of growing recognition, certainly in the UK and US, that young people and children are exposed to harmful, violent and potentially radicalising content and that such content goes beyond 'traditional' understanding of ideological extremism. In 2024, one in five people arrested as terrorist suspects in the UK were under 18,[17] and an Ofcom study on access to violent content reported that "all children who took part in the research came across violent content online" and described it as an "unavoidable" part of their online experience.[18]

In response, online regulatory frameworks – such as the EU's Digital Services Act, the UK's Online Safety Act and Australia's Online Safety Act – present an opportunity for governments to better protect children online and force social platforms and digital services to adopt effective intervention and prevention policies. For this analysis, researchers focused on 24 websites hosting gore and gore-related content with little to no age restrictions or moderation policies and observed content from these websites being shared across mainstream social media platforms. The names of the websites have not been included in this report to avoid directing more viewers to them.

This report contributes data and information relevant for law enforcement, policymakers, regulators and academia on the role of gore content within terrorist ideologies and the types of content gore-related websites offer viewers. It does this by addressing the

15   Website name anonymised.
16   Website name anonymised.
17   Swann (2024).
18   Ofcom (2024).

reach and accessibility of these websites, focusing specifically on the implications for child safety within the context of the UK's Online Safety Act. It then describes the volume and findability of terrorist content on the gore-related websites, explains the importance of gore itself to Salafi-Jihadi and extreme right-wing terrorist ideology, and presents observations on how violence towards women, war content and extreme pornography drive users to gore-related websites. The report concludes with considerations for future research, as well as suggestions for how various stakeholders can use the information in this report and build on it to better safeguard users (particularly children) against exposure to gore-related websites.

METHODOLOGY

The terms 'gore-related websites' or 'gore websites' used within this report refer to surface-web accessible websites:

- that serve the explicit purpose of facilitating the hosting and consumption of content displaying real-world violence and/or death, or

- on which a majority of the videos and other multimedia content shows death or extreme violence.

The 24 websites analysed in this report were selected using a combination of third-party web traffic and search engine data collection tools to identify the gore-related websites that were most often returned in search engine results for gore-related keywords, and/or had crossover web traffic, and/or had a minimum of 10,000 visits a month from the UK. Data was collected between March 2020 and March 2024.[19]

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19 The authors are happy to share this list with researchers or practitioners on request. Access will be granted on a case-by-case basis.

2. ACCESS AND MODERATION

ALL 24 GORE-RELATED websites were accessible via the surface web, required no user information to view content, presented violent and often illegal content directly on the homepage, and did not include a paywall. The presence of illegal material on all assessed websites suggests that there is, at best, insufficient moderation processes deployed by the websites' owners.

FINDINGS SUMMARY

Gore websites are easy to find, access and navigate via mainstream search engines.	Google search returns millions of results for gore-related keywords. Analysis of access to 24 gore-related websites found no barriers to view content and only 4 requesting users 'confirm' their age. On-website features include keyword-led search and curated topics, e.g. war and terrorism.
Content from gore websites is viewable across social media.	Visitors can share links to the websites or download and re-upload videos direct to social and messaging websites. Content from gore-related websites is routinely shared in extreme right-wing spaces online, and has been observed on mainstream social media.
There is little to no prohibited content on gore websites.	Analysis of the terms of service of 24 gore-related websites showed 12 had no public policy, 5 referenced 'illegal content', 6 referenced CSAM, and none referenced terrorism.

CONTENT MODERATION

Unsurprisingly, most of the 24 gore-related websites analysed presented inadequate policies for addressing illegal material and half failed to provide any publicly available terms of service. Of those that did, only six mentioned CSAM as banned content, with five referencing 'illegal content' more broadly. None of the websites mentioned terrorism.

The researchers saw little evidence of active content moderation on any of the 24 gore-related websites, identifying just two instances of a video having been removed for violating a website's policies. Solomon Henderson shared a link to his account on a gore-related website in his manifesto. The attack occurred on 22 January 2025, and by 24 January 2025 the link was no longer active. This suggests that, with public attention and law enforcement intervention, the website owners are reachable and will remove content.

Notably, two websites were found to have mirror websites, which could increase their resilience to any takedown action from hosting or DNS providers, or law enforcement. In addition, three websites used Framasoft's 'PeerTube' software to share videos on self-hosted, federated and decentralised platforms. These are deployed to disperse the storage and ownership of content away from a centralised company (such as on traditional Web 2.0 social media), improve user privacy/anonymity and enable a website owner to easily transfer the content and user base of a website to a new website should they need to contend with removal efforts.[20]

MONETISATION

Most proactive moderation efforts – whether via human review or automated identification tools – require time, money and inclination from the website owner. Based on observations of viewable pages on the 24 gore-related websites, running a platform dedicated to graphic violence presents limited monetisation options except for adverts. In turn, this limits the moderation options.

One of the ways these websites can monetise is through membership fees targeted at their more dedicated users. Four of the 24 websites offered membership access to non-public videos, though

20 Though outside the remit of this report, Human Digital has conducted in-depth analysis of Web3 and blockchain-enabled communication services and the potential these technologies pose for online harms due to features such as decentralised hosting, immutable content and the maintaining of user-base social graphs.

only one website appeared to charge for this service, and one required membership for using the search feature. Seven websites requested cryptocurrency donations and there were examples of websites selling downloadable video content not otherwise available to view. Another monetisation option is through on-website advertisement. However, as already mentioned in the report, pornography websites appear to be one of the few industries willing to advertise to visitors of gore websites.

3. REACH AND POPULARITY

OVERALL, MILLIONS OF monthly visits to gore-related websites originate from the UK, with the total numbers increasing over recent years. This growth appears to be largely due to real-world violent events increasing overall global web traffic to gore-related websites. Between March 2020 and March 2024, the two most popular gore-related websites increased their average UK monthly visits by 227% and 226%, respectively, seemingly driven by footage from the Israel–Hamas conflict.

FINDINGS SUMMARY

Attract millions of monthly UK visits.	Analysis of web traffic to 24 gore-related websites shows an average of 1 million combined total visits per month from the UK, primarily from men via mobile devices. The most visited gore-related websites feature content in English.

Of the 24 gore-related websites identified, 21 were video-sharing websites, 2 were forums and one was an index for other gore-related websites, highlighting the shareability of the gore content. Due to an expected lack of data access, the researchers were unable to identify clear measurements of total content volume on the websites, with the closest metric being page numbers per website. However, this varied in accuracy when manually checking the websites. To provide some indication, one of the most popular websites was estimated to be hosting 54,000 videos as of February 2024.

Most websites allowed visitors to share the hosted videos to other online locations, with 19 of the 24 providing a 'share' function and 15 providing a free-to-use download function. These features are integral to scaling up the distribution of gore content across social media, especially on messaging platforms that encourage the sending of embedded media content, for example Telegram and WhatsApp. As noted, there are no barriers to viewing content on these websites. Therefore, once a person has clicked on a link to one

of the websites – either knowingly or not – they will immediately be able to see gore content. From a child safety perspective, the harm this could cause is clear.

POPULARITY

Previous academic research has focused on gore-related websites that have been historically popular with online audiences.[21] However, since 2020, the two most visited gore-related websites globally and in the UK (based on SimilarWeb data) have not received any specific academic attention. From April 2023 to March 2024, those two sites accounted for a combined 58% of the total 1 million average UK monthly visits of the 24 websites, with 334,000 and 293,000 visits respectively. During the same period, the two sites also accounted for 45% of average Global monthly visits of the 24 websites, with 2 million and 1.9 million visits respectively.

Overall, the 24 websites saw an increase in UK monthly visits between March 2020 and March 2024, highlighting a growing interest from UK audiences since the pandemic. Despite this, the two most visited websites in the UK experienced significant drops in visits in 2024 and there was a small decrease in the combined total average across the 24 websites. The reason for these declining numbers is unclear from the collected data but does reflect how gore-related websites operate within a volatile and competitive industry for individual websites but within a resilient ecosystem from a user perspective. This is reflected in the global data where, from April 2023 to March 2024, the monthly average overall global visits for the 24 websites increased from 29.5 million to 37.9 million (28.5% increase).

Data provided by SimilarWeb also suggests that, globally and in the UK, visitors are dominated by men (82% of all visits), aged 25 to 34 years old (24% of all visits), who primarily use mobile devices

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21   See: Ibrahim (2020); Khayambashi (2019); Alvarez (2017); Barker (2014); Tait (2008).

to access the websites. However, it is not possible to collect definitive data on the age profiles of those visiting the website, particularly with regard to children.

HOW USERS ARRIVE AT GORE-RELATED WEBSITES

Web traffic to the 24 gore-related websites suggests that 49% of users visit the websites directly via "entering a URL into a browser, using saved bookmarks or clicking on a direct link".[22] This indicates that visitors have pre-existing knowledge of the websites, there is high potential for frequent visitors, and the importance of people sharing links is high. The data also suggests that 28% of users visit the websites organically via typing a platform name, specific video content or category into a search engine, and 16% of users are referred from affiliate websites, content partners and traffic from paid media.

On average, websites obtain just 1–5% of their traffic from social media platforms. However, there are examples of websites obtaining a much larger proportion of their visitors from these sources. For example, one website receives 14% of its web traffic from social media platforms, with 95% of that coming from Reddit. While the exact percentages fluctuate and have changed since the time of collection in January 2024, Reddit remains the most dominant social media source of traffic to all websites of interest, compared with all other platforms. It is important to consider that there are also core communities of gore enthusiasts who share information and advice detailing which websites are best for which content type as well as discussions of a platform's functionality, paywalls or censorship. Within these communities there are clear preferences for specific websites, hence a new user seeking advice as to where to find gore content of interest may be directed to specific gore-related websites by community recommendations.

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22 This is the SimilarWeb description of the metrics they use to measure direct web visits.

Observationally, and despite limited terms of service on the websites themselves, online gore enthusiast communities on some forums and message board websites also display community-led moderation and baseline rules of engagement. For example, researchers identified a gore enthusiast group on Reddit that requested users to not submit terrorist or illegal content such as CSAM. This may in part reflect a concern among the subreddit that the company would act against it if it consistently hosted illegal material – Reddit acted against a prominent gore subreddit for breaching its policies in 2019[23] – but it may also be a reflection of the varied actors that view and engage with gore-related websites.

23   Ibrahim (2020).

4. TERRORISM

FINDINGS SUMMARY

Gore websites host thousands of videos created by terrorist organisations or attackers.	Searches for terrorist material on 24 gore-related websites found 12,000+ examples. Analysis suggests most content was produced by Islamic State, including both graphic and non-graphic violent propaganda. There were hundreds of examples of the Christchurch, Buffalo and Halle attack livestreams, accruing tens of thousands of combined views.

SEARCHING FOR TERRORIST-RELATED keywords across 24 gore-related websites returned 23,000 videos. Of those, 12,400 were assessed – via subject-matter specialists with deep knowledge of terrorist group propaganda viewing the thumbnails and reading the video titles – as likely to cross the threshold of the UK Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidelines on terrorist material, as outlined in the UK Terrorist Act (2006). A sample of these videos was manually verified as likely to cross this threshold. Notably, finding this content was not a difficult task, with 19 of the websites offering terrorist content as a specifically curated topic category. Salafi-Jihadi was the most common ideology represented in the videos, resulting from the high volumes of graphic violent Islamic State material that has been produced and made available online.

Of the remaining returned videos deemed unlikely to cross the CPS guidelines, there was a range of content, including videos with terrorist-related keywords in the titles and descriptions, footage from the 7 October Hamas attack, and livestream and video reports from mass shootings such as in Columbine,[24] Jacksonville[25] and Isla Vista.[26]

24 Attack occurred on 20 April 1999 in Columbine, Colorado, United States.
25 Attack occurred on 26 August 2023 in Jacksonville, Florida, United States.
26 Attack occurred on 23 May 2014 in Isla Vista, California, United States.

OVERVIEW OF TERRORIST VIDEO VIEWING FIGURES

Videos showing graphic violence perpetrated by Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK, received an average of 10,000 to 50,000 views on the 24 gore-related websites with the highest web traffic volumes. On the same platforms, Islamic State videos received anywhere between 1,000 and 10,000 views. This difference in view numbers is likely a result of the Israel/Gaza conflict increasing visitor numbers to gore-related websites. Material from Hamas is also included in the 'war' video categorisation for many gore-related websites, whereas Islamic State videos were often categorised under 'terrorism'. In addition, and specifically related to the popularity of Hamas videos, the prevalence of drone footage, high-quality bodycam and mass surveillance content has contributed to the high frequency of battle content more broadly across the gore-related websites and mainstream social networking platforms.

Despite this, livestream footage from extreme right-wing terrorist (ERWT) attackers received the highest view counts of any observed terrorist video across the 24 gore-related websites. For example, one re-upload of the Christchurch livestream gained over 150,000 views on one platform prior to it being made inaccessible, while another received almost 240,000 views. These viewing figures could reflect the lower volume of ERWT-related content that is available to viewers when compared with Hamas, Israel, 'war' and Islamic State videos. For users interested in graphic ERWT content, there is a scarcity of content and a reliance on a smaller pool of videos. Additionally, it could reflect the resonance or importance of specific attacks such as Christchurch to ideological ERWT supporters.

These types of videos, often under the category of 'war', appear to get on average more views than general 'gore content'. For example, one site hosts a video containing footage from the Islamic State attack on Crocus City Hall, Moscow,[27] which gained over 650,000 views between March 2024 and May 2024. On the same site was an Islamic State video uploaded in 2016 that had gained more than

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27   Attack occurred on 22 March 2024 in Crocus City Hall, Moscow.

11 million views. Islamist terrorist group videos are often featured on gore-related websites and gain significant attention due to the visceral, bloody nature of the content.

SALAFI-JIHADI

Content produced by Salafi-Jihadi groups, specifically by Islamic State, appear more frequently in the 24 gore-related websites and contain more graphic footage than those produced by ERWT actors. Despite this, it is unlikely that Salafi-Jihadi groups or their core supporters are responsible for uploading, viewing and sharing most of the Salafi-Jihadi content on gore-related websites. This is due to graphic violence being an outcome of the application of theology as interpreted and espoused by Islamic State, rather than a goal in and of itself. To committed members of the Salafi-Jihadi movement, presenting actions purely as gore risks decontextualising the theological practices presented in videos and reduces documenting the application of what they consider the law of God to a form of entertainment for non-believers. Despite this, there are examples of Salafi-Jihadi groups using gore-related websites to host content, likely due to the potential for wider distribution and greater stability of content there. For example, in November 2024, a channel administered by al-Shabaab (HSM) on an Al-Qaeda-linked *Rocket. chat* server shared a link to an upload of an official video produced by the group on a gore website. Within two weeks the video had been removed on the gore site, however, seemingly by the platform itself.

Islamic State Content

One of the most well visited of the assessed gore-related websites has Islamic State (IS) propaganda videos published as recently as 2024, such as a video of the Crocus Hall attack with 650,000+ views, and as far back as from 2016. Some of the earliest published Islamic State videos on the websites have received more than 11 million views.

Some Western academics have been inclined to attribute Islamic State's brutal execution methods disseminated across their media foundations as a means of spreading fear among their opponents.[28] While there are elements of content that are intended to be viewed by and to intimidate what the Salafi-Jihadi group consider non-believers, non-believers and specifically Westerners are very rarely the primary target audience. The Salafi-Jihadi movement have emphasised for well over a decade that their focus is on galvanising core supporters (the mujahid vanguard) and mobilising a mass movement. In this context, a more important reason for Salafi-Jihadi groups disseminating very graphic content is the demonstration of the application of their understanding of theology, including 'hudud', or punishments under religious law. Furthermore, when Western commentary describes 'Islamic State beheading videos', the original content frequently refers to 'nahr' (ritual slaughter), in which case, the acts are presented with theological references and the context behind the punishment.

In one of the best-known and often-cited examples of violent content, which has also appeared on gore websites, is 'Healing of the Believers' Chests' released by al-Furqan. While the most discussed part of the video shows Jordanian Flight Lieutenant Moaz al-Kasasbeh being burned alive, the beginning of the video focuses on the damage caused by coalition airstrikes – particularly focusing on the charred corpses of children burned alive. Only 4.5% of this video features the actual burning of the pilot, while the majority of the video (95%) covers elements that include the context and the theological rationale of the group.

Within content such as this, the theological message and context is the point, and the graphic violence appears within that framework. This is the inverse of 'gore' content, where the shock, horror and violence is the point, often independently of the context in which the specific event occurred. Hence there are few or no parallels to be drawn from other violent ideologies, such as ERWT, which disseminate decontextualised gore content – including content produced by Salafi-Jihadi groups.

28   Khawaja and Khan (2016), Yarchi (2019).

Theological Framework

Undoubtedly, Salafi-Jihadi propaganda can contain brutal images. However, Salafi-Jihadi groups are acting – in their view – in the service of God and are not producing 'gore' as entertainment. Understanding the potential risks associated with content produced by Salafi-Jihadi groups is therefore twofold: first, the potential longer-term health impact on those, particularly young people, viewing violent 'gore' content; and second, the way gore websites can expose a larger audience to the intended message of Salafi-Jihadi groups. Understanding Salafi-Jihadi material only through the lens of 'gore', even when on gore websites, risks overlooking this exposure to a particular theological interpretation.

Many Salafi-Jihadi writers, including 'Abdallah 'Azzam, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, Yusuf al-Uyairi and Abd Al-Qader Bin 'Abd Al-'Aziz, all consider Jihad Fisabilillah a religious obligation that includes, training, combat and armed conflict as part of spreading their understanding of theological teaching. Therefore, documenting their pursuit of theology includes documenting the practice of justice in territory held by a group, the treatment of prisoners, alongside attacks, battlefield injury and death.

Thousands of pages of scholarly theological writing articulate the logic behind their behaviour. For example, the practice of beheading is the focus of significant theological discussion, including questioning specific details, such as whether the head, once severed from the body, can be transported. In 2014, Hussain bin Mahmood published a 7,000-word article – 'The Issue of Beheading' – on the Salafi-Jihadi (pro-IS) forum Shumoukh al-Islam.[29] This is one example of the well-documented rationale for when Salafi-Jihadi groups can apply hudud punishments, including when taking territory.

Public beheading with a knife or sword, often in a town square, is also practised in Saudi Arabia, adhering to comparable understanding of theology.[30] In some cases, Saudi authorities have "publicly pinned

29 Fisher and Prucha (2021).

30 See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/26/saudi-arabia-criticised-over-executions-for-drug-offences.

the executed body and severed head of a convicted Sunni extremist to a pole as a warning to others".[31] One Saudi executioner has been quoted as saying he is doing "God's work" and that he does not see his work as particularly gruesome.[32] The mindset of applying theology is how Islamic State also understands these acts, rather than revelling in gore and brutality.

As such, those viewing Salafi-Jihadi content on gore websites are exposed to both the potential harm caused by viewing extreme violence and the theologically driven missionary work of banned terrorist groups. Salafi-Jihadi groups have produced thousands of pages of text outlining the goals of groups in their physical and online activity: specifically, to raise awareness of Jihad within their interpretation of Islam and Salafi theology. In this interpretation, Jihad is understood as preparing for and engaging in combat, in addition to other forms of personal and theological struggle. Three examples of these texts help explain this interpretation further.

EXAMPLE 1

In documents produced by al-Qaeda, the group sets out their four general goals for Jihad.

Al-Qaeda four goals for Jihad
1   Promote Jihad awareness in the Islamic world.
2   Prepare and equip the cadres for the Islamic world through trainings and by participating in actual combat.
3   Support and sponsor the Jihad movement as much as possible.
4   Coordinate Jihad movements around the world in an effort to create a unified international Jihad movement.

31 See https://apnews.com/general-news-e653f1326ece453d9c2b4a 9a733042f7.

32 See https://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/24/when-it-comes-beheadings-isis-has-nothing-over-saudi-arabia-277385.html.

EXAMPLE 2

Abdullah Azzam noted in his Outlook for Jihad in 1988 – 'al-jihad between Kabul and Jerusalem' – that the path to the creation of an Islamic State that would not violate the laws of God is clearly only possible by fighting for it. In this context Azzam argues that "jihad must undergo four steps until we unite – jihad is constituted by four chapters", explained as the hijra (emigration), military preparations and training, ribat (residing under arms on the border) and qital (combat).[33]

EXAMPLE 3

For English-language readers, Anwar al-Awlaki spends significant time outlining the meaning of Jihad in his interpretation/translation of what is known by the short name as the *Book of Jihad* by ibn Nuhaas. He also discusses this in his translation of Yusuf al-Uyairi's *Constants on the Path of Jihad* (al-Uyairi is often referred to in Western commentary as bin Laden's 'bodyguard' and was subsequently leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula). In both texts there is a theological rationale for engaging in combat; by documenting combat operations, groups seek to spread their theological message. That someone subsequently posts it on a 'gore' website does not inevitably sever the connection with the theology.

Combat

Salafi-Jihadi groups video-record their military activity, including the killing of enemies, due to the importance of combat. As noted, this is part of documenting their application of theology. This nuance matters, as the following of the commandment to Jihad is not 'gore' but a religious duty. As 'Abdul-Qādir Ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz argued in *Fundamental Concepts Regarding Al-Jihād*, "The Muslim nation is a Mujahid nation." Another section of the book notes "the original objective of the Jihād is to make the religion dominant, not the martyrdom," a reference to the idea that actions in this world

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33   For a longer discussion of this point, see Prucha (no date).

are rewarded in the hereafter and Salafi-Jihadi should conduct themselves in a manner that would permit them to enter the highest levels of jannah (paradise). Salafi-Jihadi groups often support this view with quotes from the Quran, including: "Verily, Allāh has purchased of the believers their lives and their properties; for the price that theirs shall be the Paradise" (Sūrat At-Tawbah, 111). Documenting martyrdom is therefore, in a Salafi-Jihadi context, intended as an inspiration to others, as any act of violence that would lead to the video being posted on a 'gore' site is believed to raise the word of the religion.

Legal Framework

The Sharp Sword on Whoever Insults the Prophet by Ibn Taymiyya provides a legal framework based on jurisprudential findings on when it is obligatory to kill an insulter of the Prophet, regardless of whether he is a Muslim or a disbeliever. This uses the example of early Muslims under the command of Prophet Muhammad. Whoever insults the Prophet, according to Ibn Taymiyya, "must be killed, no matter if he is a Muslim or disbeliever and has no right to repent". The abridged version in English runs to 116 pages, compared with 600 pages of the original Arabic.

The book was used by Muhammed Bouyeri to justify killing Dutch filmmaker and Islam critic Theo van Gogh in November 2004 in Amsterdam. In June 2012, the book was referenced by Jund Allah media (Uzbekistan) in which a German jihadist called on supporters in Bonn to kill right-wing politicians. In the attack on Charlie Hebdo,[34] one of the attackers is heard saying, "we have avenged the Prophet" (li-intiqamna al-rasul), before shooting the wounded French police officer Ahmad Merabet in the head.

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34 Attack occurred on 7 January 2015 in Paris, France at the offices of a satirical weekly magazine named Charlie Hebdo, killing 12 people and injuring 11 others.

The application of hadd punishment (pl. hudud) is part of the application of theology in areas where Salafi-Jihadi groups hold territory. This includes the removal of hands for theft. Over the years, many detailed discussions have been produced by Salafi-Jihadi groups on the application of hudud punishments. For example, this was discussed in a 20-page document published by al-Wafa' in 2016.

For members of Islamic State and the Salafi-Jihadi ecosystem, footage serves no purpose when devoid of context or if just viewed as gore. Content containing punishments is used as a show of piety and commitment to Islamic theology. Analysis of photo reports released by Islamic State between 2020 and 2023 shows that only 1% of images relate to the concept of nahr (ritual slaughter). By contrast, 12.8% of content depicted bay'ah (oath of allegiance and obedience).

Gore as Entertainment

Ultimately, the prevalence of Salafi-Jihadi content on gore-related websites is likely due to the large volume of violent content produced by the movement over the last two decades, their inherent searchability, intrigue from Western audiences, and preference from gore enthusiasts. Even groups advocating ERWT ideology share videos of Salafi-Jihadi violence. This is reflected by examples of compilation videos of the violence demonstrated in Salafi-Jihadi propaganda. It is possible that some of these are made as part of documenting the application of theology or to infuriate or terrorise Western audiences, but it is more probable that they were made or posted on gore websites to simply emphasise the gore and are intended to be enjoyed as such.

While the sharing of violence is the likely reason for gore enthusiasts posting Salafi-Jihadi content, the posting of that content also creates exposure to the theological message of banned terrorist groups. However, it is unlikely to become a key tactic of core Salafi-Jihadi content distribution. As such, al-Shabaab using a gore website to host and distribute video content remains uncommon, and is unlikely to signal a shift in platform preferences by Salafi-Jihadi groups.

EXTREME RIGHT-WING

Across the 24 assessed gore-related websites were signs of a present and active cohort of users supporting extreme right-wing terrorist (ERWT) ideology. This was reflected by easy-to-find examples on each website of profile names containing key terms or dog whistles to the ideology, and user-created channels dedicated to compiling videos from ERWT attacks. In addition, there is ongoing evidence of videos from gore-related websites being downloaded and then shared as embedded media on messaging and social media channels that also post ERWT content, for example manifestos, related literature or attack footage. This cross-sharing of graphic violent content with ideological content also reflects the growing discourse in the UK related to the threat posed by people with mixed, unstable and unclear ideologies.

Storage and Archives

There was widespread evidence of accounts and channels on gore-related websites that referenced terminology linked to ERWT ideology, including user accounts named after the Buffalo[35] shooter's Twitch account handle. In addition, there were hundreds of examples of ERWT livestream attacks and proscribed terrorist propaganda viewable and downloadable across the websites. ERWT-aligned actors are likely to be drawn to gore websites because of the lack of moderation there compared with other platforms.

Based on the observed evidence, it is possible that some users are intentionally using gore-related websites to store terrorist content. However, given the high viewing numbers for the ERWT videos, the audiences watching them are unlikely to all be ideologically aligned with the uploader or video content. It is also likely that there are cases when ERWT-related content that contains gore and graphic violence is uploaded and shared by non-ideologically aligned users who are more interested in the graphic violence.

35   Attack occurred on 14 May, 2022 in Buffalo, New York at a Tops Friendly Markets supermarket, killing 10 people.

Gore on Telegram

This research identified thousands of videos shared on public Telegram channels that contained gore or graphic violence, or that had the visible watermark of a gore-related website. These videos were shared on 100 public channels that were also posting ERWT content and discussing ERWT-related issues, for example white supremacy and accelerationism. Within these channels, users were observed shitposting and goreposting,[36] embedding videos that would provoke a response from and shock other channel members. The findings highlighted the different reasons people supportive of ERWT ideology may also be interested in or actively share graphic violence (see table below).

Graphic violence shared on 100 public Telegram Channels	
Livestream attack footage	24 channels contained livestream footage from ideologically motivated mass murders, e.g. in Christchurch and Buffalo. These videos are often shared to signal support for a belief system and can be found across mainstream and fringe social media platforms.
Military content	Five channels were dedicated to sharing military content from the Russia–Ukraine war and Israel–Hamas conflict. The high volume and frequency of content from these conflict zones generates a stream of real death and gore content. It can also be shared to demonstrate and admire the impact of weapons deployment like the use of drones.
Racially motivated gore-sharing	Unsurprisingly, channels sharing ERWT ideological content also shared and celebrated videos showing violence towards black people and other ethnic minorities. Channels also shared graphic videos of violence perpetrated by ethnic minorities to promote racism and xenophobic views.
Gaming and gore content	Researchers identified examples of users sharing content from and links to customised video game maps and characters depicting gore and playable recreations of live stream attacks. Some games appear created specifically to generate 'gore' gaming content e.g. GoreBox, others provide modification functionality that can be exploited by users, e.g. Roblox.

36 Shitposting is the posting of "worthless or irrelevant online content intended to derail a conversation or to provoke others." See: qz.com/1173819/shitpost-is-the-2017-digital-word-of-the-year. Goreposting is the practice of sharing extremely graphic or violent content, often without context, to entertain, shock, or desensitise viewers.

On 31 January 2023, Justin Mohn uploaded a video to YouTube of him displaying the decapitated head of his father. The YouTube video featured several ERWT conspiracy theories and narratives.

In the days following the upload, researchers observed 88 posts containing 42 embedded photos and 19 embedded videos shared across the 100 public Telegram channels. The embedded videos were a combination of excerpts and full unedited footage from Mohn's original upload. Post descriptions included requests for users to share across social media once YouTube eventually removed the content from their platform, for example, "Justin Mohn – Manifesto Video taken down... download and disseminate." Eleven of the posts included explicit support for Mohn's actions and motivations, while an equal number included disdain for Mohn. Most posts (65) did not comment on whether the act was good or bad, with discussions leaning towards the incident being fabricated or a 'psy-op', for example, "This is VERY SUSPICIOUS timing as Congress is trying to push Senate Bill 3589 – the anti-Militia bill." The responses demonstrate that some of the ERWT community are willing to re-share, re-edit or re-purpose gruesome and gore footage for both distribution and archiving within the community. This reflects the normality of gore content within sections of the ERWT ecosystem and the regularity with which graphic violent content and deaths are shared by channel members.

Ideology of Websites

The researchers for this study did not identify any particular extremist ideological beliefs motivating the creators or administrators of the 24 gore-related websites. The websites self-describe themselves as providing shocking real-world content, motivated by their own and their users' desire to watch death and violence as well as potentially financial motivations through adverts. There was no indication of political or religious ideology within the outward-facing communication, despite many of the websites hosting dedicated terrorism categories for video content. This was potentially reflected

in web traffic data, which suggested that websites affiliated with extremist ideologies, for example KiwiFarms,[37] had negligible influence on directing traffic to the websites. As will be detailed later in this report, pornography plays a more significant role in directing web traffic to the gore websites than any other type of website.

Observational analysis of hundreds of user comments on terrorist-related videos across the 24 gore-related websites surfaced no URLs or mentions of extremist platforms. In addition, when looking at the links shared within extreme right-wing communities online, there was a low volume of URLs leading to the 24 gore-related websites. For this research, analysts studied links posted on 1,047 public messaging and public social media channels that also shared ERWT content. The results showed that URLs leading to 13 of the 24 websites were shared a total of 121 times between April 2021 and March 2024, with 17 of the 24 websites being mentioned a total of 269 times in message posts. However, it is important to note that observations of the embedded media in those 1,047 channels showed numerous examples of videos taken from gore-related websites being posted and shared.

The lack of ideological influence presented by the gore-related websites themselves is also reflected in the broad range of content that platforms host, ranging from illegal terrorist content and road traffic accidents to extreme pornography. The most popular UK gore-related website publicises its hosting of sexual assault videos via its currently dormant X account. For Islamist violent extremists and terrorists, pornography is considered haram and against Islamic law, which makes it unlikely that a group such as Islamic State would either create or promote the use of these gore-related websites.[38]

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37 See https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/09/03/kiwifarms-website-offline.

38 Aulia et al. (2023).

Novelty-seekers

Researchers at Human Digital have worked previously with Dr Chad Steel – a specialist in studying child sexual abuse offenders – to better understand the profiles of those consuming illegal content, including extreme pornography. Steel has described how a large number of consumers can be categorised as 'novelty-seekers', who include an array of both illegal and legal but 'deviant' material, such as gore. This work could provide a usable guide for exploring gore audiences and help understand the role that exposure to gore content may play in motivating a person to carry out a violent act.

In addition, there are pre-existing studies on the impact of persistent exposure to violent content that could contribute to understanding the role of gore in the ERWT ecosystem specifically. For example, a study into self-reported responses of people receiving unsolicited violent or sexually explicit content found that men "with high previous exposure [to violent content] rated violent content as more exciting than those with lower or no prior experience".[39] The study demonstrated that "contrary to what desensitisation theories would predict, prior exposure did not attenuate how disturbing explicit content (of either a sexual or a violent nature) was rated". Such research indicates that some users – such as novelty-seekers – rather than becoming desensitised to content, are actually "developing a taste for it".[40]

Nihilism

There exists a small but growing academic focus on the intersection of nihilism, violent extremism and gore content.[41] Some academics within counterterrorism and counter-extremism have explored the role of nihilism as a potential factor driving people to engage with graphic or otherwise violent content and extremist ideologies, or even to mobilise into violence. However, data-led evidence is still needed

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39   Nicklin et al. (2020).
40   Ibid.
41   Siegel (2022).

to measure the significance nihilism has in motivating real-world violence. Some attempts at approaching the study of this potential intersection have included an article from 2022 by Simon Purdue, who applies the term 'ideological nihilism' – defined as "the absolute embrace of apocalyptic thinking" and "online doomerism" – to what he describes as growing online subcultures which "actively promote the aesthetic of nihilism and violence".[42]

Despite limited data-led research to support a causal relationship between nihilism and violent radicalisation, there are recent cases of real-world violence in which both nihilism and gore content have featured in the digital footprint of violent extremist offenders. A shooting in Highland Park, Illinois, in July 2022 was carried out by a suspect whose digital history evidenced an immersion in nihilistic and gore-focused online communities.[43] Similarly, the perpetrator of a militant accelerationist-inspired attack in Eskisehir, Turkey, in August 2024 had engaged with graphic and violent videos on Vidlii, a shock website, including a murder video created by Ukrainian serial killers, the Dnepropetrovsk maniacs.[44] More recently, an online alias linked to the 15-year-old perpetrator of a school shooting in Madison, Wisconsin, in December 2024 had been an active user of a prominent gore website, including posting comments on several videos depicting suicide. Nihilism has also been shown by Marc-Andre Argentino to be a prominent feature of the ideologies of two militant accelerationist organisations, Maniac Murder Cult (M.K.Y.) and the 764 Network, both of which have encouraged members to film themselves committing acts of violence and to share the footage within extremist communities.[45]

42 Purdue (2022).

43 Vinicky (2022).

44 See https://www.unian.info/society/55483-three-19-year-old-youths-committed-19-murders-in-dnipropetrovsk-during-a-month.html; Bradley (2024).

45 Argentino et al. (2024a, 2024b).

Notably, the presence of nihilism and gore content in extremism is not new. For example, a threat assessment on school shooters, published in 2000 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, cites "themes of violence, hopelessness, despair, hatred, isolation, loneliness, nihilism [and] 'end-of-the-world' philosophy" as an example of leakage[46] by students who may be considering engaging in a school shooting or other violent act.[47] The report also cites a fascination with "violence-filled entertainment" and "death and destruction" as one of several potential indicators that a student may be considering engaging in violence: "on the internet, the student regularly searches for websites involving violence, weapons, and other disturbing subjects." References to nihilism and graphic content in the report are part of a much longer list of potential indicators that are unrelated to these two factors, however.[48]

Nihilism has also been identified by several researchers as being an intrinsic characteristic of the incel ideology, a form of extreme misogyny popularised by Elliot Rodger, who killed six people and injured 14 others in a mass shooting in California in 2014.[49] The incel interpretation of the 'blackpill' suggests that people's life circumstances – particularly in relation to their ability to engage in sexual contact with women – are contingent on biological traits, like face shape, and so are outside of their control. Some incels who subscribe to this philosophy can advocate for suicide or mass violence as a way of escaping their otherwise inescapable predicament, and so their worldview can tend toward nihilism.[50]

46   "Leakage occurs when a student intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that may signal an impending violent act" (O'Toole 2000).
47   O'Toole (2000).
48   O'Toole (2000).
49   RAN Practitioners (2021); BBC News (2018).
50   Roser et al. (2023).

Some researchers have even argued that the ideology and tactics of Western recruits to Islamic State (IS) from around 2014 were motivated in part by a form of nihilism. Oliver Roy[51] refers to what he calls a "generational nihilism" among the mostly young IS recruits during the group's peak, and to the significant proportion of those recruits who came from a background of violence and criminality.[52] He argues that the fascination with death by the group's members can not only be explained by its extreme Islamist metanarrative, but instead describes the group's recruitment in Europe as being characterised by an "Islamisation of radicals" rather than the radicalisation of Muslims.[53]

Several recent case studies have documented the presence of nihilism and gore content in individual radicalisation processes, but much of the recent research has been based on anecdotal evidence. There is currently limited data-led research to suggest that nihilism or the consumption of gore content should be considered primary indicators of mobilisation to violence. Given the prevalence of nihilistic, violence-obsessed online communities documented in this report and elsewhere, however, this may be worthy of serious consideration by the psychology field.

51 Roy (2017).
52 Basra et al. (2016).
53 Roy (2017, pp. 71–74).
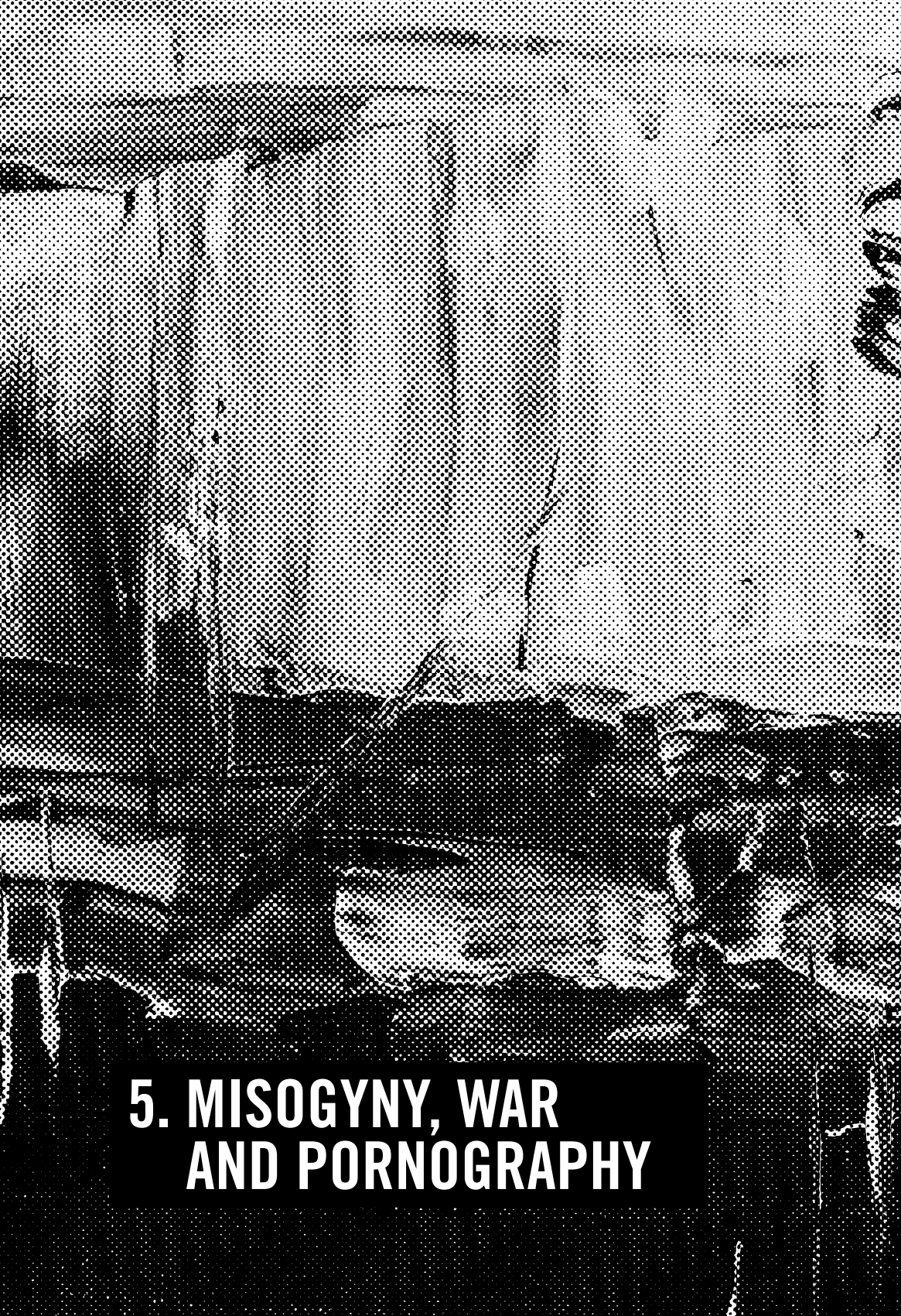
5. MISOGYNY, WAR AND PORNOGRAPHY

ALL OF THE researched 24 gore-related websites hosted material showing violence towards women, videos of real-world conflict and extreme pornography (necrophilia, bestiality, mutilation and sexual assault).[54] Researchers determined that, alongside terrorist material, these three content types contributed significantly to the volume of videos accessible on the websites and were potentially significant drivers of web traffic. As such, this report provides observations of how each content type appears on the websites and uses limited available data to explain how they might influence the volume of visitors.

VIOLENT MISOGYNY

Online violent misogyny content is easily accessible across social media, messaging, video-sharing platforms[55] and gore-related websites. Researchers at Human Digital have observed it being used by malicious actors to indoctrinate boys and young men, and target girls and women, often helped by social media recommendation algorithms. As a harm set, it includes a wide range of content types, from dedicated discussion boards to purchasable archives of graphic and violent videos. Videos showing violence towards women were evident across all of the 24 gore-related websites analysed for this research.

54 'Extreme pornography' definition within the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008; see https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05078.

55 Brace et al. (2024).

Findings Summary

Gore websites host thousands of videos showing violence towards women.	A popular incel forum had 2,000+ posts directing users to gore-related websites, some of which were found to advertise folders of videos showing graphic violence towards women, purchasable with cryptocurrency.
Violent misogyny is a common denominator across a multitude of harm sets.	Researchers at Human Digital observe violent misogyny content as a distinct focus across harmful ecosystems, including terrorism, violent extremism, gore, illegal pornography, school massacre ideation and incels.
Male supremacy represents the ideological side to violent misogyny and explains how it is used strategically to exploit young men.	Incels, manosphere influencers and extreme right-wing communities all promote male supremacy narratives as justification for subjugating women to discrimination or violence. These communities are populated primarily by young men.
It is easy to find violent misogyny-related pornography and graphic violence.	Google search returns millions of results for introductory violent misogyny-related pornography keywords, including those linked to 'barely legal' content. Assessment of 24 gore-related video platforms found violent misogyny was offered as a topic filter, and purchasable folders of videos showing graphic violence towards women were available. The websites receive millions of combined visits per month from the UK.
Pornography websites drive traffic to gore-related websites.	Web traffic data to gore-related websites suggests that visitors arrive from pornography websites, and advertisements on gore-related websites are limited primarily to pornography websites. Very few gore-related or pornography websites limit access or use any meaningful barriers to prevent children from accessing them.
Generative AI provides new options for violent misogyny content creation, including chatbots and deepfakes.	Easy-access and custom artificial intelligence (AI) models have been quickly exploited to create new options for people to explore violent misogyny behaviours, including female (often underage) AI chatbots encouraging users to roleplay sexual abuse or physical harm, and hundreds of AI-enabled image/video generators purpose-made for deepfake image abuse. These services require no age restrictions and are easily accessible and searchable. Generative AI image abuse content could be uploaded onto gore-related websites. Evidence already suggests that generative AI is being used to edit videos of graphic violence to bypass content moderation on mainstream social media platforms.

Context

There is a close relationship between misogyny, violent behaviour, and graphic or otherwise violent content online, including on gore-related sites. In 2024, the UK government committed to halving violence towards women and girls in the UK, including addressing the root causes of violence. According to government statistics,[56] almost 100 domestic abuse-related offences were recorded by the police every hour on average in 2023. Online violent content, which includes extreme misogyny, is ubiquitous online. A July 2024 study in Australia by Plan International and CNN's As Equals found that one in ten girls and women say they face online violence on a daily basis.[57] Violent content online was also highlighted as a real-world harm by a recent Ofcom[58] study, which showed how children first see violent online content while still at primary school, describing it as having a traumatising effect and being an inevitable part of being online.

Misogyny is identifiable within both violent and non-violent extremist ideologies, often embedded within narratives around traditional gender roles, anti-feminism or men's rights. In 2021, a study[59] commissioned by UK Counter Terrorism Policing revealed a "striking prevalence" of domestic abuse in the lives of those referred to Prevent as being vulnerable to radicalisation. Notably, terrorist attacks and other acts of mass violence very often target women and girls. In April 2024, for example, the perpetrator of a mass stabbing attack in a Sydney shopping centre predominantly targeted women. In July 2024 in the UK, Axel Rudakubana targeted a Taylor Swift dance class and killed three young girls. In September 2021, a man armed with an improvised explosive device attempted to detonate

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56   GOV.UK (2024).

57   See https://www.plan.org.au/media-centre/one-in-10-girls-and-young-women-say-they-face-online-violence-daily-new-study.

58   Ofcom (2024).

59   See https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/research-project-released-investigating-prevalence-of-domestic-abuse-related-incidences-within-prevent-referrals.

it in the maternity ward of Liverpool Women's Hospital. In May 2017, a suicide bombing at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester killed 22 people, 18 of them girls and women, and injured 139 others.

In 2025, violence towards women is promoted within online spaces where extreme right-wing and Islamist terrorist ideological content is also shared, including on gore-related sites. In addition, Human Digital research on a wide range of harm-related topics has shown how violent misogyny connects to many harmful ecosystems online, including some with considerable mainstream reach.

Human Digital's DeltaVision platform enables researchers to securely monitor violent extremist and harmful ecosystems online. Within DeltaVision's datasets, analysts routinely observe misogyny as a focus for discussion alongside violence towards women within videos and imagery. This has included the identification of communities built specifically around fantasising and discussing violence towards women and girls. Within these communities, people share links to gore-related sites or other video-sharing platforms, or share embedded media files that depict domestic abuse, violence and sometimes the murder of women.

In recent years, Human Digital have carried out scale-of-issue studies to ascertain the volume of material depicting specific, under-researched harm types across various online platforms. This has led to the identification of hundreds of AI chatbots created specifically to facilitate fantasies of sexual violence towards women, and dozens of private chatrooms dedicated to merging AI content-creation tools to create deepfake image abuse and CSAM. To date, the volume and reach of violent material online where women are the subject has not been adequately measured. This data is necessary to build proportionate responses and tackle the issue of violence towards women and girls in the long term. In addition, there is a lack of data on how the material shared and the language used by extreme, violent communities infiltrates into more mainstream online public spaces. This lack of data limits understanding of the ongoing exposure risks for girls and boys online, which in turn could undermine broader

efforts to reduce violence towards women and girls in the UK. The findings from this research provide an indication of the likely scale and access of this content available to people online.

Findings

Across the 24 gore-related websites, violent misogyny was a common video theme, topic of conversation within comment sections, and subject of interest within online extreme right-wing and incel communities that also shared links to the gore-related websites. One website promoted a "secret link" directing visitors to a page where users could make a $10 crypto donation to download "the largest compilation of photos + videos of beheaded women ever".

Due to the gore industry's proximity and overlap with pornography websites, objectification and abusive misogyny was commonplace within the comment sections of videos containing violence against women. Twenty-one (21) of the gore-related websites have been mentioned on a popular incel forum, with a total of 2,045 posts and URLs shared by users of the forum. The most popular gore-related website shared on this incel platform received 424 links and had been the focus of previous academic studies. Discussions on the platform suggested that the interest in gore and graphic violence was motivated in part by a hatred of both women and "normies". Below are examples of comments observed on the platform.

> *"I love to see women being murdered, tortured, quartered, killed by animals, in horrible accidents."*

> *"I like seeing bad things happen to normies who reject me in society."*

> *"For me it's a type of escapism. Whenever I feel pissed off about other people, I watch other people die to fill the void."*

> *"It reinforces my sense of nihilism... Makes me feel better about my own life."*

> *"After coming back from my shitty retail jobs, seeing someone being decapitated or disembowelled makes me feel happy."*

> *"We find comfort in fear – we have to know that the world is a bad place so that it justifies out social paranoia."*

The posts mentioned above were attained through keyword searching across all '*incels.is*' boards for the exact domains/URLs. The most mentioned websites largely mirror those with the most web traffic, with four of the top six URLs mentioned on *incels.is* also appearing in the top six most visited websites.

Regarding how pervasive the websites are, those with high mention numbers are indicative of widespread and consistent discussion. Researchers identified entire threads dedicated to discussing the 'best' gore websites, with users weighing up the pros and cons of certain websites:

> *"Yeh, [website A] is alright but not as good since you see mostly accidents and other stuff that aren't as exciting, and they get old real quick. Now [website B] was the shit and same with [website C] since they have a lot of videos of close up executions and gang wars. The [website D] is starting to paywall a lot of its videos tho."*

Researcher observations on incel chatrooms revealed discussions on how specific content types were more readily available on certain platforms, with some gore-related websites recommended by users because they contained content showing violence against women. Importantly from an accessibility perspective, multiple discussions were observed that cited free access and no paywall as the most important factor in choosing a gore-related website to regularly visit. This report includes a description of access and observed monetisation.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is being used to create deepfake[60] image abuse of women at scale, with purpose-made websites offering low-cost options for users to create this content. Researchers for this report did not find evidence of deepfake image abuse appearing on the gore-related websites specifically, although this could be a result of the focus of the research being primarily to identify terrorist content. However, it is pertinent to briefly address deepfakes within the context of violent misogyny online because GAI services will mean more similar content is produced.

60 Deepfake is a prescriptive umbrella term for content created by complex algorithmic computation with minimal, if any, human supervision that falsely represents reality. It can include one or more types of content, for example video, images, audio and text. The 'deep' does not specifically refer to GAI but is a reference to it being on the same spectrum of production effort as 'shallowfakes'. On this spectrum, more human supervision is needed in content production towards the shallow end and more automation is involved towards the deep end. Early shallowfakes were present in faceswap and later bodyswap applications that were used to create pornographic image abuse content, and which drove the development of deepfake technology. Deepfake technology could be used to create harmful content that could be uploaded to gore-related websites.

Findings on Deepfake Image Abuse

Hundreds of models exist that have been created specifically for deepfake image abuse.	Early nudify/faceswap apps were designed by image abuse creators, who have since built hundreds of easy-access AI models that generate deepfake image and video content at scale.
AI chatbots provide 'set-and-forget' model for ideological validation.	Chatbots can be accessed by many users repeatedly and simultaneously, offering sexual and non-sexual gratification, roleplaying of violent sexual behaviours towards women and girls and validation of extremist ideological viewpoints.
GAI is being used to bypass content moderation efforts.	Minion Gore uses the AI generator Runaway to edit real videos of murder and make them look like they are from the Minions films. This content is then uploaded to mainstream social media platforms, bypassing content moderation efforts.

There is some evidence of GAI being used to make gore more accessible and mainstream.[61] During mid-December 2024, Minion Gore became popular. Minion Gore uses the AI generator Runaway to edit real videos of murder and make them look like they are from the 'Minions' films. These videos are then uploaded to mainstream social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and X. Due to the edits, these videos are undetected by content moderation efforts. This example highlights how GAI can be used to bypass content moderation efforts on mainstream social media platforms.

Alongside deepfake images, there is evidence that AI chatbots are being used by violent misogynists. The character-based 'virtual girlfriend' chatbots provide a space for young men to exercise dangerous, degrading and violent misogynistic beliefs and conversations. This may start with validation of coercion or control,[62] but progresses into further abusive behaviours which remain unchecked by the AI chatbots. Some chatbots are designed specifically for violent misogyny. One service provides access to

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61 Maiberg (2025).
62 Taylor (2023).

a varied number of characters labelled on the website as 'NSFW',[63] including submissive and 'people-pleaser' characters. While it does not supply nude images to the user, it does roleplay sexual fantasies. One character, described as "your stepmother, the people pleasing type", does not object to having violence used against her, including strangling and hitting. It allows the user to kill the character without any content moderation being triggered. While being designed to fulfil romantic and sexual fantasies, the lack of pushback or moderation on these interactions supports the notion of reinforcing dangerous coercive and controlling behaviours, especially when evidenced to have been used by members of incel communities.

As with the gore-related websites, the researchers identified minimal age restrictions or access barriers to the AI chatbots, limited evidence of coherent moderation policies relating to extremism or terrorism, and numerous examples of services facilitating discussions and content generation depicting violent misogyny. Violent misogynistic content and discussions is a common theme within the wider ERWT ecosystem and is a thread across numerous harm sets, from religious extremist ecosystems to communities sharing and creating extreme pornography. This content may be hosted on gore-related websites.

WAR

War content is important for gore-related websites as both a source of content and driver of web traffic, with recent conflicts increasing the content being uploaded to the websites and total volume of website visits.

63   NSFW is a common online phrase meaning Not Safe For Work.

Findings Summary

Web traffic growth to gore websites since 2022 is likely to be driven by war and incidents of violence.	Events that involve outbreaks of real-world violence, such as the Russia–Ukraine war, 7 October attack and the Israeli invasion of Gaza, are key drivers of content and web traffic to gore-related websites. Many websites create specific topic filters dedicated to specific conflicts or incidents, helping to drive a year-on-year growth in web traffic to many observed websites.

Origins of Gore-related Websites

Some gore-related websites have their origins in war content, with one website launched in 2000 specifically created to host videos of mutilated corpses, burns victims and videos relating to terrorism and war.[64] Previous research by Cottee has also connected gore websites with terrorist and war content.[65] 'Jihadi snuff', videos of staged Jihadi executions, emerged from the second Chechen war (1999–2009) and were hosted on gore websites.

Growth of Gore-related website Usage

According to Similarweb data, between March 2020 and March 2024, the two most visited websites in the UK saw their web traffic increase by 227% and 226% respectively. The most significant spikes in visits coincided with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Hamas's attack on Israel in 2023, and Israel's subsequent ground invasion of Gaza. In October 2023, one website, created following the removal by Reddit of the popular gore subreddit,[66] received a 200% increase in monthly UK visits, seemingly driven entirely by graphic content from Israel and Gaza since 7 October 2023.

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64   Stryker (2014); Anderson (2012).

65   Cottee (2022).

66   Dahl (2018); Ibrahim (2020).

These conflicts all generated large volumes of real-world graphic violent content, with gore-related websites providing an easy-to-access space for uploading, storing and sharing bloody and gruesome videos taken from those conflicts. These videos, often placed under the category of 'war' by the uploaders or websites, appear to receive a higher average view count than non-war-related gore content. One particularly gruesome Hamas-related video had received over half a million views.

PORNOGRAPHY

Approximately 6% of total global traffic to the gore-related websites was directed from pornography websites, either through advertising or shared links. In turn, the observed advertisements on the gore-related websites appeared to be dominated by (often violent and extreme) pornography websites, indicating a shared ecosystem of related web traffic.

Findings Summary

Traffic arrives from direct visits and pornography websites.	Analysis of web traffic to 24 gore-related websites showed most global and UK visits are from searches for a specific URL, e.g. return visitors and link-sharing, or are referred from porn websites. Advertisements embedded within gore-related websites are dominated by porn websites.

Origins

Most of the research into gore to date has focused on shock websites in relation to pornography and the arousal of viewers through horror.[67] Studies have demonstrated the crossover with extreme pornography and gore content,[68] termed 'shock porn',

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67   Lonergan (2020); Alvarez (2017); Paasonen (2011); Tait (2008).
68   Lonergan (2020).

'gore porn', 'death porn' and 'war porn'.[69] This was reflected in the research for this report, which showed that extreme pornography content was available across many of the gore-related websites and that many visitors to gore-related websites had arrived from pornography websites.

Two-way Traffic

Twelve per cent of visitors to the gore-related websites are referred from non-gore-related websites. However, three of the top five of those are pornography websites. In total, pornography websites accounted for approximately 6% of total global website visits for the 24 gore-related websites. The relationship between gore and porn is also reflected in 18 of the 24 websites either hosting pornography or containing pornography banner or pop-up advertisements.

This is further demonstrated by looking at the user destinations when they leave the gore-related websites. Analysis of the out-link referrals from the top five most globally visited gore-related websites revealed a combination of pornography, adult 'humour' and shock websites. Of the top 20 out-linked websites, all primarily functioned as pornography websites promoting 'barely legal' material and depictions of extreme pornography, including 'fauxcest' and non-consensual sex. Compared with more mainstream adult video-sharing platforms, those out-linked from the dataset of gore-related websites displayed an increased focus on violent scenarios, including frequent references to 'force' and 'pain', frequented with thumbnails of actors enduring pain and suffering. The content of these websites suggested a relaxed approach to moderation and, similar to the gore-related websites, little to no access restrictions preventing users or children from viewing the content.

69   Jones (2010).

6. CONCLUSION

THIS REPORT HAS demonstrated how dozens of easy-to-find websites are acting as a secure viewing platform for people in the UK and globally to watch illegal and graphic violent video content. The websites appear to operate with little to no visible pressure from governments, regulatory bodies or law enforcement agencies that could prevent them from being used to host terrorist or other illegal content.

As online services, the websites provide no protections for children who visit them or click on their links, and actively include functions designed to better spread their graphic violent content across social media and messaging platforms. Their audience consists mostly of men and the websites demonstrate a proximity to extreme pornography that raises cross-harm concerns about the public online spaces accessible to young men and boys in the UK and globally.

For years, these websites have been and continue to be used to share terrorist propaganda, both violent and non-violent. This research identified hundreds of branded Salafi-Jihadi and extreme right-wing terrorist videos, identified using basic search terms and on-website recommendations, uploaded by users showing support for terrorism via profile names and account handles. There was also evidence of terrorist content hosted on the websites being downloaded and shared as embedded media – identifiable via watermarks – within extreme right-wing communities online.

Regardless of the motivation of the gore-related website owners, it is clear that through a lack of action they are providing an anonymous, unmoderated space for individuals to upload, view and download videos created by terrorists and violent extremists.

WHAT NEXT?

This report has presented data, insights and observations from an explorative piece of research. Systematic and sustained studies into both the websites themselves and the presence of graphic violent videos within violent extremist communities are still required to better understand the role (if any) of gore in motivating real-world violence or influencing violence fixation. This includes a need for

data-led, evidenced analysis of potential risk factors involved in the profiles of people who view gore-related content alongside supporting extremist ideologies. This is particularly important in counter-extremism studies, where academics and commentators rely on anecdotal evidence as an inadequate replacement for empirical evidence. Additionally, researchers at Human Digital routinely identify videos from gore-related websites being shared on and recommended by mainstream social media platforms. It will be necessary for more data to be collected on the volume, engagement and moderation efficacy of gore content on those sites.

Practically, the scope of the UK's Online Safety Act may not yet extend to gore-related websites specifically, and it is unlikely that much action will be taken on the websites in the near future. However, the websites' accessibility and growing popularity will undermine broader efforts to limit the amount of harmful content that children are exposed to online. It would be pertinent to direct focused attention towards these websites to better safeguard and protect children in the UK and globally from viewing the graphic violent, often illegal, videos. Gore-related websites may not be the reason the video content exists, but they are a critical junction in the flow of this content online.

At a minimum, the websites should require an account to view content and ideally include stringent age verification steps to help reduce harm to children. Online regulators globally should align on enforcing these measures. For counterterrorism and counter-extremism efforts, it would be useful to have more data-led evidence that can help explain both the active use of these websites by terrorist groups, networks and individuals, as well as the psychological influence that viewing this content has on vulnerable audiences in the context of radicalisation and violence. In light of recent revelations around the Southport attack perpetrator and Nashville shooter, there would appear to be value in understanding whether the viewing and consuming of gore and graphic violent content presents risk factors for certain individuals.

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