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DVERT Domestic Violent Extremism Research and Translation
A Collaboration with Practitioners and the Community

Hybrid and Nonideological Cases in Clinical Settings

This series summarizes recent research with important implications for targeted violence and terrorism prevention practitioners. Some sections of these briefs were produced with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence, but all content was verified by research staff and authorized by the original authors. The discussion of implications reflects DVERT's analysis of how practitioners may apply the research findings.

Source article

Cécile Rousseau, Janique Johnson-Lafleur, Cindy Ngov, Christian Savard, and Samuel Veissière, "Hybrid Ideologies in Clinical Settings: Implications for Intervention of the Changing Landscape in Violent Extremism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 18, no. 3 (Sept. 2024): pp. 51–68, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27336023.

Key Findings and Implications

- Violent beliefs often do not fit neatly into traditional ideological categories; rather, a person may hold a hybrid ideology that blends elements from multiple sources.
- Individuals, especially young people, may also be nonideological, motivated by a mix of personal disillusionment, nihilism, or desire for agency, rather than structured ideology.
- Both hybrid ideologies and lack of ideology can make it challenging to accurately assess risk and ensure appropriate intervention, highlighting the need to focus on the intensity and evolution of violent beliefs rather than labels alone.

Why did the researchers conduct the study?

Though practitioners have reported seeing more people who mix elements from different violent ideologies or use violent symbols in ways that do not fit standard labels, such as far-right, far-left, or religious extremism, there is little empirical research on hybrid ideologies or nonideological actors. These cases can complicate risk assessments for those who hold a hybrid or no ideology, leading to missed opportunities to intervene and direct these individuals to existing prevention resources. This study sought to measure how often such cases appear, what these mixed beliefs (or lack of beliefs) look like, and how they shape risk and treatment.

Methodology

The researchers reviewed clinical files for 86 clients referred to a Montreal violent extremism prevention team between 2016 and 2021. They recorded the

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client ages and types of ideologies (far-right, far-left, religious, gender, nationalism, conspiratorial, and nonideological violence) and noted whether each person followed one, several, or no ideologies.

They also held a focus group with six team clinicians, who discussed their experiences with clients expressing hybrid or nonideological violent beliefs. The study drew the findings presented here from written files and clinicians' observations.

Findings

- **Hybrid or nonideological violent beliefs are "more the rule than the exception."** About 22 percent of individuals displayed more than one ideology, and 33 percent borrowed symbols from different ideologies without embracing a clear belief system.
- **Shifts in beliefs are often dynamic and situational.** Ideology may shift in response to personal crises or major life events as individuals seek to cope with feelings of alienation or reclaim agency; sometimes they adopt beliefs less out of deep conviction and more as a reaction to circumstances.
- **Ideology and violence patterns differ generationally.** Young people more often engage in nonideological or provocative violence, whereas older groups tend to embrace more structured or multiple ideologies.
- **These presentations complicate risk assessment and service access.** Clinicians noted that some practitioners downplay risk when they don't see a traditional ideological category being clearly embraced. Others overreact to shocking but poorly defined beliefs, showing the need for practitioners to focus on the intensity of a violent belief and changes in belief over time rather than labels alone.

How can practitioners working in early-stage intervention and threat assessment use these findings?

- Practitioners should expect to observe hybrid and nonideological belief patterns in extremism-related cases and should document multiple affiliations and changes over time, not just capture single labels.
- While conducting risk assessments, practitioners need to focus on how intensely beliefs are held, how they change, and how violent symbols are used, rather than assuming that nonideological or "nonradical" beliefs are low risk.
- Because hybrid and nonideological cases often present multiple risks, agencies may need to coordinate across other violence prevention fields (e.g., violent extremism, school violence) to avoid leaving high-risk clients without appropriate services.
- The authors suggest that the field reconsider its reliance on traditional ideological categories to ensure that people whose hybrid or nonideological beliefs still support serious violence are not overlooked.

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