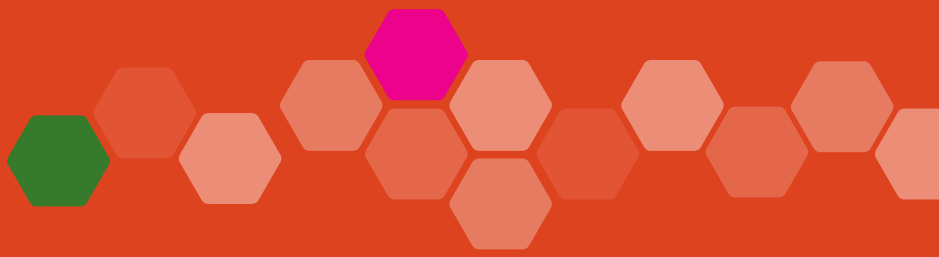
Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Understanding extremism in Scotland: Public perceptions and experiences



PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES

social research

This report was prepared for the Scottish Government by Diffley Partnership and the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV), the University of St Andrews. The research was conducted by the following members of staff:

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Background

The Scottish Government commissioned the Diffley Partnership and the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews to conduct research to explore public understandings and experiences of extremism in Scotland. This was carried out between February and December 2022.

The research is part of a wider programme of work to improve understanding of extremism in Scotland. Complementary research has been commissioned and conducted by the Scottish Government to explore the understandings and experiences of stakeholders and public sector practitioners:

- Understanding extremism in Scotland: Stakeholder perceptions and views (Scottish Government, 2023a)
- Understanding extremism in Scotland: Public sector practitioner perceptions and experiences (Scottish Government, 2023b)

Methodology

The researchers firstly conducted a Rapid Evidence Review to inform the primary research design. This desk-based exercise confirmed that while the academic literature on extremism is extensive, primary research with the public in Scotland is lacking. The review paid particular attention to methods and questions which have been used in other studies to gain views from the public on this topic, to inform the development of the data collection tools.

The primary research adopted a mixed-methods approach to collect both a wide range of views and in-depth insights from members of the Scottish public. Firstly, a survey was administered online and by telephone in May 2022. There were 2,071 responses to the survey from residents of Scotland aged 16 and over, 1,568 of which were received online and 503 of which were via telephone.

The survey was followed by qualitative research which took place between 24 June and 13 July 2022. This consisted of five online focus groups with between four and seven participants in each, and eight follow-up interviews with a subgroup of focus group participants. The total number of participants in the qualitative research was 26, and the sample was designed to cover various demographic characteristics.

This report is predominantly based on analysis of the data collected through the primary research, with additional context added, where relevant and available, from secondary sources.

There were several limitations to this research, including that the sample of qualitative participants was small, and did not represent the full range of demographic groups that reside in Scotland. Further methodological detail can be found in section 2 of the report.

Key findings

Public understandings of extremism

Public understandings of extremism were subjective, nuanced and context dependent. Nearly three quarters (74%) of survey respondents were at least 'fairly confident' that they understood what the term meant. However, in-depth discussion suggested that members of the public are not necessarily either confident or fixed in their understandings of the term.

For example, participants' opinions about whether and how specific views and actions constitute extremism were highly subject to context, such as the time or place the view or action occurred, and their own opinion on the cause concerned.

Causing harm to others was widely held as an important threshold that defined the point for when an action was 'crossing the line' into extremism. Over half (53%) of survey respondents considered 'causing physical harm to a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons' to always represent extremism. In the qualitative research, causing harm to another person was seen as the point at which an act could be considered extremist. However, while some had a specific interpretation of harm as involving physical violence, others considered wider forms of harm to constitute extremism, such as inciting or encouraging violence, and disruption more broadly.

Significant overlap, but subtle differences, were seen between the terms 'extremism' and the terms 'terrorism', 'sectarianism' and 'hate crime'.

Public views on existing definitions of extremism

The research team presented different definitions of extremism to interview participants. Of those shown to participants, there was some preference for the definition adopted in Australia (Australian Government, 2022), partly because it makes explicit reference to violence.

Challenges were raised with the UK Government's definition of extremism (Home Office, 2011), which largely related to the use of the term 'British values'. It was felt that if values were to be mentioned, more neutral language should be used, with no reference to a specific country or culture. Participants who raised this issue seemed to be concerned with ensuring that any official definition of extremism used in Scotland would be widely applicable and, potentially, widely accepted.

Some participants struggled with the accessibility of the definitions presented and indicated a preference for a clear definition, expressed in plain English.

Splitting extremism into categories, including 'religiously-motivated', 'politically-motivated', and 'ideologically-' or 'identity-motivated', did not lead to more clarity or consensus in what was understood as extremism. Participants struggled to think of examples to 'fit' into each motivation, and 'ideology-' or 'identity-motivated' was seen to encapsulate all motivations.

Public experiences of extremism

A third (33%) of the public had experienced or observed extremism, either online or in person, in Scotland during the past five years.

Some groups within the population, including younger people and those from BAME communities, were more likely to say they had experienced or observed extremism than others. BAME communities were also more likely to say they had experienced or observed discrimination, violence or hate crime.

Public views on the threat of extremism

Extremism was perceived to be less of a problem in Scotland than in the rest of the UK or worldwide. Less than one in ten survey respondents (9%) stated that extremism was a big problem in Scotland, compared with 24% for the rest of the UK and 49% worldwide. This was reflected in the qualitative discussions, where participants generally saw the threat from extremism in Scotland to be low, and lower than in England.

When asked whether they considered extremism to be a problem in their local area, less than half (46%) considered extremism as a problem, and only 5% as a big problem. Survey respondents in Glasgow (58%) were more likely to identify extremism as a problem in their local area than any other parliamentary region. BAME respondents were also more likely to perceive extremism as a problem in their local area than white respondents (57% compared with 45%).

In the qualitative research, participants often made an association between population size and the threat of extremism. England's larger population was commonly cited as contributing to an increased threat of extremism when compared with Scotland, whilst more densely populated areas of Scotland were seen as experiencing higher threat than less-populated areas.

When asked how they felt the threat of extremism had changed over time, close to half (46%) believed the threat of extremism had risen over the last five years in Scotland, while 9% felt that it had decreased. In the qualitative research, those who felt that the threat had increased tended to focus on extremist attitudes, such as the growth of social media and its role in spreading extremist sentiment. Meanwhile, those who felt that the threat had decreased tended to focus on extremist behaviours, and terrorism in particular, over a longer time period. This was particularly true of older participants, who mentioned the decline in threat relating to the peace process in Northern Ireland within their lifetimes.

When asked about the next five years, almost half (45%) of survey respondents felt that the threat from extremism will rise, around a third (31%) that it will stay the same, and less than one in ten (9%) that it will decrease. Qualitative participants felt that threat levels would be affected by the extent of divisions in society and how extreme different sides of religious, political or ideological arguments became.

In terms of the forms of extremism that the public felt pose the biggest threat in Scotland, participants displayed particular concern about intra-Christian

sectarianism, which was viewed as intertwined with extremism. This was regarded as most prevalent in the Central Belt.

Participants did not spontaneously refer to right-wing extremism or Islamist extremism within text responses to the survey or in the focus groups and interviews, and felt unable to comment on the extent to which different forms of extremism might exist in Scotland when presented with a list of groups.

Public opinions on tackling extremism

Survey responses to a question asking about views on the efforts of different organisations attempting to tackle extremism in Scotland were mixed for those who expressed an opinion. For each organisation, roughly half had a positive opinion and roughly half a negative opinion. High proportions of respondents answered 'don't know', indicating that many had limited awareness of what was being done by the different organisations.

Indeed, participants in the qualitative research were reluctant to say whether they thought particular organisations were doing enough or not doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland given their knowledge of their work was limited.

Awareness of Prevent, a strand of the UK Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy CONTEST (Home Office, 2018), was very low within the small sample of qualitative participants. Nevertheless, participants expressed general support for Prevent in theory, and a desire for more awareness of how it works in practice.

Intervention by existing social contacts was identified as an important preliminary step in the counter-extremism process, and participants felt this should take place before triggering any formal referral process. That is, whilst they would be willing to refer an individual to Prevent if they felt this was needed, they discussed how friends, families or others might first attempt to engage with and help individuals themselves prior to deciding to refer them to Prevent.

Participants considered both intended positive and unintended negative outcomes that may arise from counter-extremism measures, for example the risk that population groups might be unfairly targeted.

Key considerations

Public understandings of extremism

Bodies tackling extremism in Scotland should be aware that while levels of confidence in understanding of extremism appeared high initially, qualitative discussions revealed that participants' understandings were wide-ranging, and highly malleable. Therefore, in any public messaging regarding the threat of extremism, forms extremism can take, or counter-extremism work more broadly, it may be beneficial to explain what is meant by the term 'extremism', by providing a definition.

This would also be helpful for future work to ascertain public attitudes towards and experiences of extremism, as this research has shown that when asked about their views and experiences, the public naturally think of concepts they associate with extremism such as terrorism, racism or radicalisation. Providing a clear definition may therefore support a more robust estimate of the extent of experiences of extremism in Scotland.

Several considerations from this research are relevant for any future work to develop a definition of extremism:

- A definition of extremism should be accompanied with definitions of terms associated with extremism, including terrorism and hate crime, so that distinctions between the concepts are clear.
- A definition of extremism would likely be more accepted by the public if it references causing harm, including, but not restricted, to violence.
- Splitting extremism into different forms of motivation could be useful in encouraging the public to consider the different forms of extremism that exist.
- Highlighting ideological or identity motivations within a definition was seen to incorporate systems of ideas or ideals including political and religious.
- Referencing values attributed to any political or geographical area should be avoided.
- A definition of extremism should be as clear as possible, expressed in plain English.

Public experiences of extremism

While a significant minority of respondents reported having observed or experienced extremism in the last five years, in the qualitative discussions a broad range of examples of extremism were shared, which were notable for the diversity of beliefs and actions that participants considered to be extremist, and for the different criteria that respondents used to determine that these incidents were examples of extremism. As noted above, in order to gain a more robust estimate of the extent of public experiences of extremism in future research, it would be helpful to provide a clear definition of what is meant by extremism to participants.

In the qualitative discussions, an association was drawn between population size and the threat of extremism. For example, England's larger population was commonly cited as contributing to an increased threat of extremism when compared with Scotland, whilst more populated areas of Scotland were seen as experiencing higher threat than less-populated areas.

This may indicate that participants naturally assume that less populated areas and countries have relatively low threat levels. While no published research was found to evidence a correlation between population size and level of threat from extremism, the Scottish Government may wish to carry out further research to explore whether levels of threat vary in this way.

Public opinions on tackling extremism

The Scottish Government, and other public bodies attempting to tackle extremism in Scotland, may wish to consider whether to present more to the public on how they are working to counter extremism and terrorism, given low awareness of this among participants.

The research indicates that the public would be supportive of work to counter online extremism, such as to minimise sharing of extremist views online. However, they may have limited understanding of the threat of online extremism or the counter measures for online extremism at present.

Further research

The research has indicated a range of differences in the understandings, views and experiences of different demographic groups, which this report has not commented on except when secondary sources of evidence were available that could help to explain these results. Further research may wish to explore these differences in greater detail. In particular, the findings suggest that research which explores the views of people living in different areas of Scotland, and the views of young people, may be particularly valuable.

Given that public views and experiences are subject to change, and that examples and topics brought up by participants are likely to be influenced by any topical coverage, it may be beneficial to explore how perceptions and views change in future. The research instruments designed for this project could be utilised to do so; for example, repetition of the survey could allow for analysis of trends over time.

Finally, this research focused on exploring public perceptions of the threat posed by extremism in Scotland. It demonstrated that the public have mixed views on the level of threat and were largely uncertain about the extent and reach of particular extremist groups or ideologies. Further research which seeks to develop understanding of the level of threat, drawing on different data, would be beneficial for informing Scottish Government efforts to counter extremism in Scotland.

1. Introduction

The Scottish Government commissioned the Diffley Partnership and the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews to conduct research to explore public understandings and experiences of extremism in Scotland. This was carried out between February and December 2022, with fieldwork carried out between 9 May and 5 July 2022. This research is part of a wider programme of work to improve understanding of extremism in Scotland. Complementary research has been commissioned and conducted by the Scottish Government to explore the understandings and experiences of stakeholders and public sector practitioners:

- Understanding extremism in Scotland: Stakeholder perceptions and views (Scottish Government, 2023a)
- Understanding extremism in Scotland: Public sector practitioner perceptions and experiences (Scottish Government, 2023b)

This section provides an overview of the background to this research programme and outlines the aim and research questions of this research exploring public understandings and experiences of extremism.

1.1 Background to the research

Prevent policy

Prevent is a strand of the UK Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy CONTEST. The purpose of Prevent is to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' (Home Office, 2018). While counter-terrorism (and therefore Prevent) is a reserved matter and the responsibility of the UK Government, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015) places a duty on sectors that are devolved from Westminster to the Scottish Government (including health and social care, prisons, the police, education and local authorities) to pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. This is known as the Prevent duty.

The Prevent duty guidance for Scotland (Home Office, 2021a) outlines how specified authorities are expected to comply with this duty. There is sector-specific guidance for further education institutions (Home Office, 2021b) and higher education institutions (Home Office, 2021c).

The Scottish Government supports the specified sectors to fulfil their obligations under the Prevent duty, and ensures that mechanisms are in place for safeguarding and supporting individuals who may be susceptible to being drawn into terrorism as outlined in the Prevent Multi-Agency Panel (PMAP) Duty Guidance (Home Office, 2021d).

Key definitions

The UK Government currently adopts the following definition of extremism:

> 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas'. (Home Office, 2011: 107)

This definition was introduced in the 2011 Prevent strategy (Home Office, 2011), and is used as a working definition rather than a legal definition. This definition was used in the UK Government's Counter-Extremism Strategy (Home Office, 2015), which set out the UK Government's approach to countering 'both violent and non-violent extremism'. However, counter-extremism is a devolved matter and the Counter-Extremism Strategy and the UK Government's definition of extremism were not adopted in Scotland.

At present, therefore, the Scottish Government does not have an official definition of extremism. A review of evidence carried out by the Scottish Government (2023c) explored how extremism is defined in existing literature and highlighted the challenges with defining the concept. For example:

- Various factors, such as the prevailing political culture, value systems and personal characteristics and experiences, influence how the term is understood, meaning it is an inherently relative and ambiguous term (Sotlar, 2004).
- Extremism is often conceptualised as a continuum of beliefs and behaviours, which makes it difficult to capture in a definition (Wilkinson and van Rij, 2019).
- Defining extremism too broadly can risk impeding rights to free speech and protest, while defining it too narrowly can lead to potentially extremist behaviours being overlooked (Redgrave et al., 2020).

These challenges have meant that while a range of definitions of extremism have been proposed, there is a general lack of consensus on how it should be defined.

Understanding extremism in Scotland

The evidence review carried out by the Scottish Government (2023c) also identified gaps relating to the extent and nature of extremism in Scotland, which impede understanding of whether current approaches are appropriate and impactful in preventing the spread of extremist ideologies and reducing terrorism in Scotland. In particular, the review showed that while tentative conclusions can be drawn from data relating to terrorist activity, Prevent referrals and public attitudes, there is a lack of research evidence on the prevalence and nature of extremism in Scotland specifically.

The Scottish Government is therefore developing a programme of research which aims to support understanding of extremism and Prevent delivery in Scotland. In

the first instance, this research has sought to explore understandings, perceptions, and experiences of extremism from the perspective of the Scottish public, stakeholders[1] and public sector practitioners,[2] in three distinct but related projects.

The aim of this research is to develop understanding of how these groups define and understand extremism; their views on the extent to which extremism is a problem in Scotland and the types of extremism they consider to be more and less prevalent; as well as on how well they perceive current approaches to countering extremism in Scotland to be working.

This report focuses on the findings from the research exploring public understandings and experiences of extremism in Scotland.

1.2 Research aim and questions

The aim of this research was to explore understandings and experiences of extremism from the perspective of the Scottish public, hereafter referred to as 'the public'.

The study included thirteen research questions, which have been organised under five overarching themes.

Public understandings of extremism:

1. How does the public in Scotland define and understand extremism?
2. What are the public's views on the boundaries of extremism? For example, when does an act or behaviour cross the threshold into extremism?
3. How likely does the public think it is that extremism will translate into actual violence?
4. Do members of the public with different demographic characteristics diverge in how they perceive extremism?

Public views on existing definitions of extremism:

5. How far does the public's understanding of extremism in Scotland align with definitions and categorisations adopted in other contexts?

[1] The research with stakeholders was carried out with predominantly senior-level representatives of organisations that have direct involvement in Prevent in Scotland, or significant interest in Prevent or extremism in Scotland more generally.

[2] The research with public sector practitioners was carried out with frontline professionals working in sectors which have a statutory obligation to fulfil the Prevent duty (local authorities, health and social care, education, prisons, and the police).

Public experiences of extremism:

6. To what extent have the public observed or experienced extremism in Scotland?

7. How do the public perceive extremism in Scotland to manifest as views, behaviours, and actions, particularly in the communities they live in?

Public views on the threat of extremism:

8. To what extent do the public perceive extremism to be a threat or problem in Scotland?

9. Have public perceptions of extremism as a threat or problem in Scotland changed over time?

10. Do the public think extremism is increasing, decreasing or is stable in Scotland?

11. What are the public's views on the types of extremism that are of most concern or growing concern currently, and why?

12. What are views on the key drivers of these concerns?

Public opinions on tackling extremism:

13. What are the levels of awareness of, and attitudes towards, how organisations are tackling extremism in Scotland?

1.3 Report structure

The next section details the methodology used to address the research aim and questions. This is followed by presentation of the findings, and a conclusion chapter which sets out key considerations from this research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

As noted in the introduction, an evidence review carried out by the Scottish Government (2023c) identified a lack of existing research on extremism in Scotland. At the outset of this project a further Rapid Evidence Review was carried out, the focus of which was on methods and questions which have been used to explore views from the public on extremism in studies elsewhere. While the purpose of this Rapid Evidence Review was to inform the design of the research instruments for this work, it also confirmed that significant evidence gaps exist in relation to what is known about extremism in Scotland. In particular, no research was identified which had previously explored the public's views on, or experiences of, extremism in Scotland.

To address the research aim and questions, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, incorporating quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative research involved a large-scale survey, while the qualitative research involved focus groups and interviews. The quantitative research was undertaken first, so that the qualitative research could be used to explore any findings of interest or contradictory results in greater detail. The research design was subject to an in-depth ethical review process involving the research team and an ethics committee within the University of St Andrews.

This report details the findings from the primary research, with additional context added, where relevant and available, from secondary sources identified by the Rapid Evidence Review and further searches for relevant literature.

This section of the report details each stage of the research in turn, before concluding with a discussion of the limitations of the approach adopted.

2.2 Rapid Evidence Review

The main purpose of the Rapid Evidence Review was to ascertain how the public have been asked about their views on extremism in other studies, to inform the data collection tools for the primary research. The review also explored what is already known about public views on extremism in Scotland, building on the evidence review carried out by the Scottish Government (2023c).

As a rapid review of evidence, this stage was not as exhaustive as a systematic review or a literature review but was included to gain an overview of existing evidence on the topic and inform the design of the primary research.

To conduct the review, the research team utilised the subject expertise of the Handa CSTPV, including their knowledge of existing research on this topic. This research was reviewed, including reviewing the bibliographies of identified studies for further evidence. Additional searches of journal publications were also carried out using the key terms 'public', 'extremism' and 'data'.

The review covered five main areas. Firstly, building on a review of definitions of extremism used in other countries carried out by the Scottish Government (2023d), terminology adopted by governments elsewhere was explored. Variation in definitions was noted, for example the references to violence within the definitions adopted in Australia and New Zealand (Australian Government, 2022; Counter-Terrorism Coordination Committee, 2019). These definitions informed the development of the qualitative data collection tools, as participants were asked for their views on them during the interviews.

The review then explored categorisations of different types of extremism developed by academics. A notable study identified was that carried out by Michalski (2019) who examined 8,000 terrorist attacks that took place in the UK and the US between 1970 and 2017 and classified them according to their underlying motivation. The categories developed by Michalski (2019) informed the development of questions relating to the public's views on the threat posed by different types of extremism.

Thirdly, the review explored key findings of recent, relevant research which had been conducted in Scotland. The review confirmed that while the academic literature published in English language on extremism is extensive, primary research on this topic in Scotland is lacking. The few studies that have been conducted in Scotland (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013; Brooke, 2018; Morris & Meloy, 2020) provide relevant insights, but none were identified which have specifically sought to explore public perceptions and experiences of extremism. Further, these studies are largely based on small samples, meaning their findings cannot be easily generalised to Scotland as a whole.

Fourthly, the review explored previous variables from large-scale surveys which have been carried out with members of the public in Great Britain only, or in England and Wales only. Some of these surveys explicitly asked questions about extremism, or related concepts such as terrorism. This allowed the research team to draw on variables which had been previously tested and administered successfully when devising the survey questionnaire for this work.

Lastly, the review explored key sources relating to the UK and Scottish policy context regarding extremism and terrorism. These sources were valuable for the context sections of this report (for example see Redgrave et al., 2020; Wilkinson and van Rij, 2019).

In total the review drew evidence from 20 academic articles, six datasets and their survey questions, and six non-academic publications. The Rapid Evidence Review was used as a working document throughout the project and was updated and referred to during the primary research instrument design and qualitative and quantitative analysis.

2.3 Primary research preparation and ethics

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, this project was designed with consideration to many ethical sensitivities including:

- Protecting against potential harm to participants, such as minimising distress caused by discussion of extremism.
- Enabling participants to speak freely without risk of reprisals or upsetting others.
- Ensuring there were as few barriers as possible to participation.
- Incorporating a diverse range of perspectives.
- Avoiding placing an unnecessary burden on participants.
- Protecting the identity of participants and ensuring that their views were not attributed to them.
- Mitigating against potential harm to wider groups, for example if the research were to result in stereotyping or associations with any communities with extremism.
- Protecting against potential harm to the researchers.
- Ensuring a safeguarding process was in place.

The ethics process consisted of:

- An initial ethics assessment conducted by the Scottish Government prior to commissioning the research.
- Discussion of ethical issues at the inception of the research in relation to the proposed methods and approach.
- An extensive ethics review conducted by the University of St Andrews ethics committee.
- Preparation of ethics-related materials for participants, including an information sheet, sources of support, consent forms and privacy notices.

The participant materials were designed to inform participants of the purposes of the research, data procedures and data handling, and gain their informed and ongoing consent. Participants were assured before, during and after their involvement that they could opt out at any time.

Given a focus of this research was on exploring public perceptions and experiences of extremism, the possibility that a participant might disclose a Prevent concern relating to someone known to them was considered. A safeguarding process was developed with Police Scotland and put in place for all researchers to follow. In practice, the need to implement this did not arise during this research.

2.4 Quantitative research

The main aim of the quantitative research was to allow for inferences to be drawn about the views, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of people across Scotland,

including between those with different demographic characteristics. As has been noted, the Rapid Evidence Review identified a lack of robust data from a large sample of the Scottish population relating to this topic. While some Great Britain-wide polling surveys have included respondents from Scotland (for example YouGov, 2020), the small sample size for Scotland in such surveys precludes analysis by variables such as attitudes and demographic characteristics. This research therefore sought to capture the views of a large, representative sample of the Scottish population which would allow for subgroup analysis to be conducted.

Administration

A large-scale survey was issued by Survation between 9 and 25 May 2022. As noted above, an ethical consideration for this research was to ensure potential barriers to participation were reduced as far as possible, including digital inclusion. With this in mind, the survey was administered both online through Survation's Scotland panel, and also by telephone using Survation's expert, trained interviewers.

Sample

The survey aimed to collect 1,500 online responses and 500 telephone responses. The online sample was constructed by randomly selecting members of Survation's online panel with a valid postcode from Scotland. Membership of this panel is on a voluntary basis and respondents are not paid to complete surveys. Panel members come from a range of demographic backgrounds and geographic areas, including those living in more remote and rural areas. The telephone sample was constructed by randomly selecting members of Survation's telephone panel. Telephone interviewing has the potential to reach participants who may not take part in online research, such as people who are not confident in using online platforms (Fricker, 2016) or do not have internet access.

Respondents were given no prior knowledge of the contents of the survey before completion, to reduce the risk that people with stronger or polarising views on the research topic would be disproportionately motivated to respond.

There were 2,071 responses to the survey from residents of Scotland aged 16 and over, including 1,568 online responses and 503 telephone responses (see Appendix B for full sample details). Both samples were asked identical questionnaires and as such, the data were combined in one dataset.

The margin of error for the data, based on a nationally representative survey of the adult population of Scotland, is 2% at the 99% confidence level.[3]

[3] The margin of error refers to the range of values above and below the actual survey result that we can be sure the views of the public will lie between. For example, if 50% of the sample surveyed strongly agree with a statement, a 2% margin of error means that we can be sure that between 48% to 52% of the general population strongly agree with the same statement.

Variables

The survey included 12 questions, the majority of which were closed questions with answer categories provided. Two open text questions were also included so respondents could describe their own experiences in more detail, where applicable.

A further five questions gathered information on demographic characteristics, including the religion, ethnicity, and political affiliation of survey respondents. See Appendix A for all questions.

Survation provided additional demographic information about respondents. These were panel variables, not gathered as part of the survey, but collected and updated as standard by Survation. These included respondents' sex, age, Scottish Parliamentary Region,[4] household income and education level.

Education level is comprised of four groups based on attainment: one to four Standard Grades (any grade) or equivalent; five or more Standard Grades (grade A to C) or equivalent including intermediate apprenticeships; two or more Advanced Highers or equivalent; and Higher Education qualifications, including college or university qualifications. The findings section of this report includes short-hand descriptors of these four groups.

Age was broken down into the following bands: 16-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+. Additionally, responses were broken down into the following Scottish Parliamentary Regions: Highlands and Islands, Mid Scotland and Fife, North East Scotland, Lothian, South Scotland, Glasgow, West Scotland, and Central Scotland. Finally, responses were broken down into the following annual household income categories: up to £19,999, £20,000-£39,999, and over £40,000.

Analysis

On completion of the survey, data were weighted to the profile of all adults in Scotland aged 16+. Data were weighted by age, sex, Scottish Parliamentary Region and 2021 voting at the Scottish Parliament election. Targets for the weighted data were derived from Office for National Statistics Data and the results of the 2021 Scottish Parliament Election.

Descriptive statistics were conducted for the closed questions in the survey. These included frequencies of responses to the different answer options. In the case of multiple response questions, the sum of frequencies will not add to 100%. In the case of single response questions, the sum of frequencies will largely add to 100%, allowing for rounding.

In some cases, results for composite values are included. For example, 'any agreement' combining 'strongly agree' and 'agree' and 'any disagreement' for 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree'. These are clearly flagged as composites in the report, and all answer options can be consulted in Appendix A. Composites were also created based upon demographic questions to aid analysis. In particular, to identify respondents identifying as belonging to a religion a composite variable was

[4] Scottish Parliament Regions boundary map

created combining: Buddhist, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Other Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, Sikh, and Another religion or body. A composite BAME variable was also created by combining: African, Scottish African or British African, Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian, Caribbean or Black, and Mixed or multiple ethnic groups.

Cross tabulation was used to explore the relationship between two variables. Significance testing (a two-sample z-test) was performed on each cross tabulation to determine the likelihood of the differences observed between subgroups happening by chance.

Results are only reported as statistically significant for confidence intervals over 95%, where the test conducted is valid and the sub-samples of both groups are sufficient (due to the large number of responses gathered all of the subgroups of each classification question have a sample size which is greater than 30, meaning all were large enough to report on). It should be noted that even when statistical tests show there is a significant difference between groups, the level of difference can be small. Therefore, this report couples the frequency results for subgroups with any reporting of significance.

As noted above two open text questions were included in the survey. The results to these questions are displayed as word clouds. Word clouds are visual representations of textual data that are otherwise difficult to analyse. The word clouds were created with the aid of R software using the most common words within the open text responses. The bigger and bolder the word appears, the more often it is mentioned within the open text responses.

2.5 Qualitative research

The qualitative research aimed to explore public understandings, perceptions, and experiences of extremism in Scotland in greater depth, and was conducted in two stages. Firstly, five focus groups were carried out, to maximise participation numbers and enable discussion between participants, including exchanging and building of views. The focus groups took place between 24 June and 2 July 2022. Eight in-depth, one-to-one interviews were then carried out with a selection of people who had taken part in the focus groups, to allow a smaller number of participants to explain their views and experiences in more detail. The interviews took place between 11 and 13 July 2022.

The focus groups and interviews were conducted online using the online platform Zoom. Online research, adopted more commonly during the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face research was not possible, brings some advantages. For example, the use of an online platform can make it easier for people from different parts of Scotland to participate, as well as people with disabilities and long-term health conditions who may have difficulty travelling to a physical location.

At the same time, where online approaches are used, it is important to be mindful of barriers to participation that might arise as a result of digital exclusion or data poverty. As such, when contacting interested participants the research team

checked whether anyone selected needed help to access devices, data or Wi-Fi to participate. Although this was not the case, the team were requested, and did provide additional support for participants less familiar and confident with the platform in advance.

Following their participation, qualitative research participants were provided with an incentive payment of £30 per hour to compensate them for their time.

Recruitment

The telephone survey included a question to gauge interest in taking part in follow-up research. Those interested were asked to provide their contact details. This gained expressions of interest largely from people aged over 55 years.

This approach was supplemented by additional recruitment undertaken by a professional recruitment agency Taylor McKenzie. Taylor McKenzie was provided with a pre-screening questionnaire based upon the survey, which enabled the research team to ensure they held data about the characteristics of participants and their views in relation to extremism in advance of the qualitative research.

Participant characteristics

As explained, the qualitative phase of the research consisted of five focus groups and eight follow-up interviews with a subgroup of focus group participants. There were between four and seven participants in each focus group, making the total number of participants in the qualitative research 26.

Quotas were set for the focus groups in order to ensure diversity in the demographic characteristics of participants. These included minimum numbers of females, younger people, people identifying as religious and participants who were not from white ethnic groups. In addition, minimum quotas were set for location with regards to rural areas and for low SIMD postcodes (Scottish Government, 2020; Scottish Government, 2022). The demographic breakdown of the 26 participants is shown in Appendix C.

Appendix C also indicates those participants who took part in both focus groups and then follow-up interviews. Interview selection was based on interest to take part, gathered following each focus group from individual participants, and their availability to take part during the interview period. Moreover, participants were approached on the basis that they had collectively expressed a range of viewpoints and perspectives during the survey or recruitment survey, and the focus groups. Lastly, albeit with a small sample of eight people, efforts were made to include participants of different sexes, ages, religions and ethnicities, and from different areas of Scotland.

Discussion guides

The focus group and interview discussion guides were informed by a range of sources (see Appendix D for summaries of the discussion guides). Firstly, the Rapid Evidence Review provided key topics to potentially explore with the public. The evidence reviews carried out by the Scottish Government (2023c; 2023d) on

definitions of extremism and the extent and nature of extremism in Scotland were also used to determine key topics of interest. Discussion guides from the stakeholder and public sector practitioner strands of the research programme (Scottish Government 2023a; 2023b) were also considered to enable comparison of findings across the three projects. Initial analysis of the survey also produced results to be explored in more depth through qualitative methods.

Question order bias was considered in the drafting of discussion guides, which is where participants are primed by the words and ideas presented earlier. This was minimised by asking general unaided questions before more specific questioning and prompts. The language within the discussion guides was also chosen to mitigate acquiescence bias, where a participant demonstrates a tendency to agree with what is presented by a moderator – for example, reassurance that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. The questions raised and scenarios shared were designed to prompt further reflection and discussion than could be possible in response to the survey.

In both the focus groups and interviews, the researchers focused on phrasing questions to show it was possible for participants to answer in a way that might not be considered socially desirable, with participants reassured that their views were welcome. Social desirability bias is where participants answer questions in a way that they think would be viewed favourably by others, such as the interviewer, other participants in the focus groups or the research commissioner (also known as sponsor bias).

The phrasing of questions was not the only mitigation against response bias. Participants were assured about the handling of their data, including that their anonymity would be protected and that they would not be identified in reporting. This assurance was given in the information leaflets and privacy notices provided to participants, as well as verbally by the researchers.

All of the researchers were experienced and trained in conducting qualitative research on challenging topics. All qualitative research activities included a researcher from the Handa CSTPV who had specialist experience and expertise in conducting primary research on the topic of extremism and the related topic of terrorism.

Focus groups

The focus groups lasted 90 minutes. They took place on a range of days and times in order to encourage participation from people with different commitments and routines.

The focus group discussions were jointly facilitated by researchers from the Diffley Partnership and the Handa CSTPV, with a member of the Diffley Partnership asking the main questions and a member of the Handa CSTPV asking follow-up questions.

It was crucial for the research team to enable participants to speak freely without risk of reprisal in order to give them the opportunity to share their honest perceptions. At the same time, it was important to facilitate the focus group in a way

that precluded one participant upsetting another through their choice of words or their views. In practice there was discussion and debate, but no apparent or reported stress or upset. The researchers followed up with participants individually to ensure they were not negatively impacted by their participation, and to offer support if necessary.

Results from the survey influenced the split of focus groups. Higher proportions of females than males responded ‘don’t know’ to many survey questions. Therefore, a decision was taken to include a female-only focus group, allowing participants in this focus group time to reflect upon uncertainty and express their views. Furthermore, analysis of the survey indicated differences in responses between age groups. Therefore, the decision was taken to also include focus groups split by age.

The five focus groups therefore consisted of:

1. Over 55 years, mixed sex
2. Under 55 years, mixed sex
3. Mixed age groups, mixed sex
4. Mixed age groups, female only
5. Mixed age groups, mixed sex

Interviews

As noted above, subsequent to the focus groups eight interviews were conducted with participants who had already taken part in a focus group. As with the focus groups, these took place over Zoom at times to suit the participants. Each interview lasted around an hour.

The interviews provided an opportunity to follow up with individuals with a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. An interview setting can be more comfortable for individuals than a group setting, depending on individual preferences. The researchers conducting the interviews were mindful of the need to allow participants time to consider and express their views, whilst ensuring they did not feel pressured or burdened by their participation.

Analysis

Following the completion of qualitative fieldwork, transcripts were compiled, studied in-depth and thematically analysed to identify patterns in the data. From this analysis process a series of themes emerged, and a systematic multi-stage coding process was undertaken to code particular qualitative contributions in relation to the research topics. This process allowed the researchers to identify key insights, to draw out important nuances within the qualitative material, and to relate findings to the research questions set out at the start of the research.

To ensure the identity of participants was protected during the analysis stage, personal details such as full names, addresses, and contact details were only held by the Diffley Partnership. Across the research team the first names and key demographic details of participants were known and referred to within analysis.

2.6 Limitations and methodological notes

This research has several limitations. Biases are present in all forms of research, and the research team sought to minimise these in relation to this project as far as possible as described above. In addition to those outlined above, it should also be noted that when asked for views about past events, responses are subject to recall bias. This means that people sometimes forget certain things or do not remember past events accurately. The retelling of past events can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as a research participant's state of mind or more recent events that change attitudes or memories in hindsight.

In relation to the qualitative research specifically, it is important to note that the purpose of qualitative research is not to achieve a sample that is representative of the wider population in a statistical sense, which was the aim of the survey (Silverman, 2021). Rather, the aim of the qualitative research was to capture the views and experiences of a small sample of the public in detail. To elicit as broad a range of views as possible, quotas were set to ensure diversity in the characteristics of participants (including minimum numbers of females, people identifying as religious and people from BAME groups). However, because of the small sample size, quotas could not be set to ensure representation of the full range of demographic groups that reside in Scotland (see Appendix C for the demographic characteristics of the qualitative participants). For example, although there was a quota for people identifying as religious, the final sample only contained participants identifying as belonging to Christian denominations and not identifying with any religion. Further research may wish to explore the views and experiences of particular demographic groups in more detail than has been possible in this research.

A further point of note relates to the fact that no definition of extremism has been adopted in this research. Knight and Keatley (2020) highlight that in the absence of an agreed definition of extremism, studies often rely on different definitions and understandings, meaning they cannot be readily and robustly compared. In this research, no definition of extremism was presented to participants; rather, the study sought to explore how participants themselves understand and define this concept, before exploring their perceptions of the threat and experiences of extremism. This means that the comparability of this research to other studies, which rely on particular definitions of extremism, is limited.

3. Public understandings of extremism

3.1 Introduction

This section covers findings relating to the first research theme, public understandings of extremism. The specific research questions explored in this section include:

- How does the public in Scotland define and understand extremism?
- What are the public's views on the boundaries of extremism? For example, when does an act or behaviour cross the threshold into extremism?
- Do members of the public with different demographic characteristics diverge in how they perceive extremism?

The findings are based on the results of the survey and the qualitative research, which provided an opportunity for participants to articulate their understandings in greater depth. For example, scenarios were presented to focus group participants to encourage them to consider their perceptions of extremism in more detail.

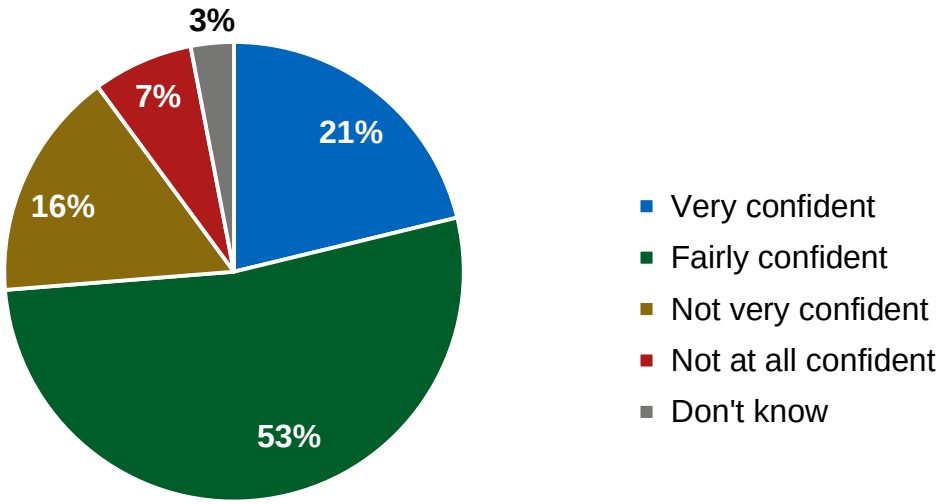
The section begins by exploring how confident the public feel in their understanding of extremism. Subsequent sections explore various dimensions of the public's understanding, such as their views on what constitutes extremist views and actions.

3.2 Confidence in understanding of extremism

Survey results

The survey opened with a question to elicit levels of confidence in understanding of the term 'extremism'. Nearly three quarters (74%) of survey respondents were at least 'fairly confident' that they understood what the term meant (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Public confidence in understanding of the term 'extremism'



Q2. How confident, if at all, are you that you know what is meant by the term 'extremism'?

Base: All respondents, n=2071.

Male respondents (81%) were more likely to be confident in their understanding than females (67%).

Meanwhile, a third of those in the youngest age group (31% of those aged 16-34) were not confident in their understanding, which was a significantly higher proportion than all other age groups (22% of those aged 35-44, 20% of those aged 45-54, 18% of those aged 55-64, and 18% of those aged over 65 years).

In contrast, respondents with Higher Education qualifications (84%) were more likely to be confident than respondents with lower levels of education (60% of those with one to four Standard Grades, 71% of those with five or more Standard Grades and 69% of those with two or more Advanced Highers).

Finally, respondents from South Scotland parliamentary region (81%) were more likely to be confident than respondents from Glasgow (69%) and North East Scotland (71%).

Qualitative findings

The qualitative research was designed to explore the nuances in the public's understandings of extremism. Within the focus groups and interviews participants often used conditional tenses such as 'I would say' before sharing their understanding. The framing of responses in this way suggested a degree of uncertainty, openness to changing their understanding and respect for other opinions.

Participants often discussed the subjectivity of the term extremism. The more this was discussed, the more participants also came to a realisation that they did not necessarily understand fully what the term meant. One participant explained towards the end of their focus group:

> 'I am confident I am not clear about exactly what extremism means.' (16; FG)[5]

3.3 Public perceptions of extremism as views and actions

Qualitative findings

The qualitative research sought to ascertain whether participants understood extremism as views (e.g., opinions held and shared), actions (e.g., behaviours undertaken including, but not limited to, violence), or both views and actions.

Below a range of perspectives are presented, including how extremism may take the form of views, views which are imposed on others, and actions. There is also discussion of how participants defined extremism in relation to societal norms.

[5] 'I' indicates 'Interview' and 'FG' indicates 'Focus Group'. See Appendix C for more information on the 26 qualitative participants.

Extremism as views

Some participants understood extremism as holding uncompromising and intractable views. This is reflected in academic literature, with Ford (2017: 145) explaining a tendency to ascribe extremism 'not to the views themselves, but to the way in which they are held, namely, in an absolutist sense'.

Furthermore, participants described extremism as attempting to impose these views on other people, for example:

> **'**[Extremism is] to have strong beliefs and to believe in a certain thing and try and put that upon other people.' (24; I)

> **'**For me I think extremism comes down to more of a forced opinion… It's pushed down somebody's throat… It's when its being forced upon others, that's when it would be extremism for me.' (11; FG)

Participants also explained that they understood extremism as the refusal on the part of an individual or community to hear other points of view:

> **'**Disregarding all the other viewpoints, not considering it, not thinking anyone who should have any say on it, not considering any arguments against it, that to my mind would fall into extremism.' (22; FG)

These understandings of extremism emphasise interpersonal interactions. For many, views at least had to be shared with, or imposed upon others, for them to consider this to be extremism.

Extremism was also understood as a process in which a set of beliefs or views 'develop' and come to shape what an individual or group hopes to achieve, or how they would act:

> 'When I think of extremism, I tend to think more of somebody who has a developed set of beliefs and something they are trying to achieve.' (25; FG)

Many participants saw the adoption of extremist views as an early stage in a process that could later manifest itself as behaviours, although participants did not go into detail of the possible causes of development from views to actions.

Finally, participants also expressed the notion of extremism as views and opinions that can be harmful:

> **'**When I think of using the word extremism, for me it means extreme views yes, but those that are potentially harmful to others.' (1; I)

This idea highlights a common theme that emerged in the qualitative research centred around the notion of 'harm' and the various forms that this takes.

Extremism as actions

Whereas several participants saw extremism as encompassing the process of developing beliefs before acting upon them, others felt that an individual (or group) does not cross the threshold into extremism until they act upon these views.

Some participants reflected on behaviours or actions quite broadly:

> **‘**When I’m talking about my understanding of extremism, I feel like I associate [it] with the actions more than I do the views.’ (8; FG)

For some participants their understanding of extremism was specifically predicated on violent actions, for example:

> **‘**I think we tip into extremism where law breaking and violence become, especially violence, become part of the mix to achieve some sort of objective.’ (4; FG)

These participants framed their understanding of extremism around the notion of violence: whether that be violent behaviour or the incitement or encouragement of violence towards another. This represents the narrowest understanding of extremism encountered in this research. However, while most agreed that extremism can (and often does) take the form of violence, many saw it as broader than just violence. This is an important distinction and will be discussed further in the next section.

Although some participants conceptualised extremism exclusively in relation to views or behaviours, many saw extremism as both views and behaviours, and suggested a variety of different combinations of these as examples.

> ‘I think there are extremist views and I think there are extremist actions. So, I think they could both be described as extremist. Extremism maybe you have taken those views to the next level where they are controversial at least, harmful at worst. […] I suppose the short answer is yes. I think you can have extremist views that you don’t act on but nonetheless they are extremist views. And certainly if you act upon them…’ (1; I)

Extremism in relation to norms

Participants also described extremism as views or behaviours outwith societal or democratic norms. This relates to a broad tendency described by Ford (2017: 145) that situates ‘extremist views on the horizons of legitimate political attitudes’. A range of perspectives from participants in this study highlighted this broad tendency:

> **‘**At a basic level [extremism] means any extreme view, anything outwith the norm, anything at the edges.’ (1; FG)

> **‘**I’d probably understand [extremism]… as views and actions that are typically seen as extreme in comparison to the social norm or the moral norm.’ (20; FG)

Central to this approach is the notion that established societal and democratic norms exist with regards to acceptable behaviour within a given society, and that extremism represents the deliberate contravention of these norms. Berger (2018: 2) identified this as a common approach in scholarly examinations of extremism: 'often, scholars define extremism relative to the "centre" or "norms" of any given society'.

The notion of extremism as defined in relation to societal norms is echoed in the extent to which many participants considered the term as highly contextual and subjective. When reflecting on the idea that extremism can take the form of views held, participants had concerns about the policing of thought:

> **'**To me someone can hold an opinion, they can write something, they can say something, there's no crime there. It's really in an action. So, [the] definition for me is, is there an action there? If there's no action, then it's not really a hate crime and it's not really extremism. It's really thought crime. [...] yeah it comes down to the act, absolutely.' (12; FG)

3.4 Public understanding of extremism as relating to violence

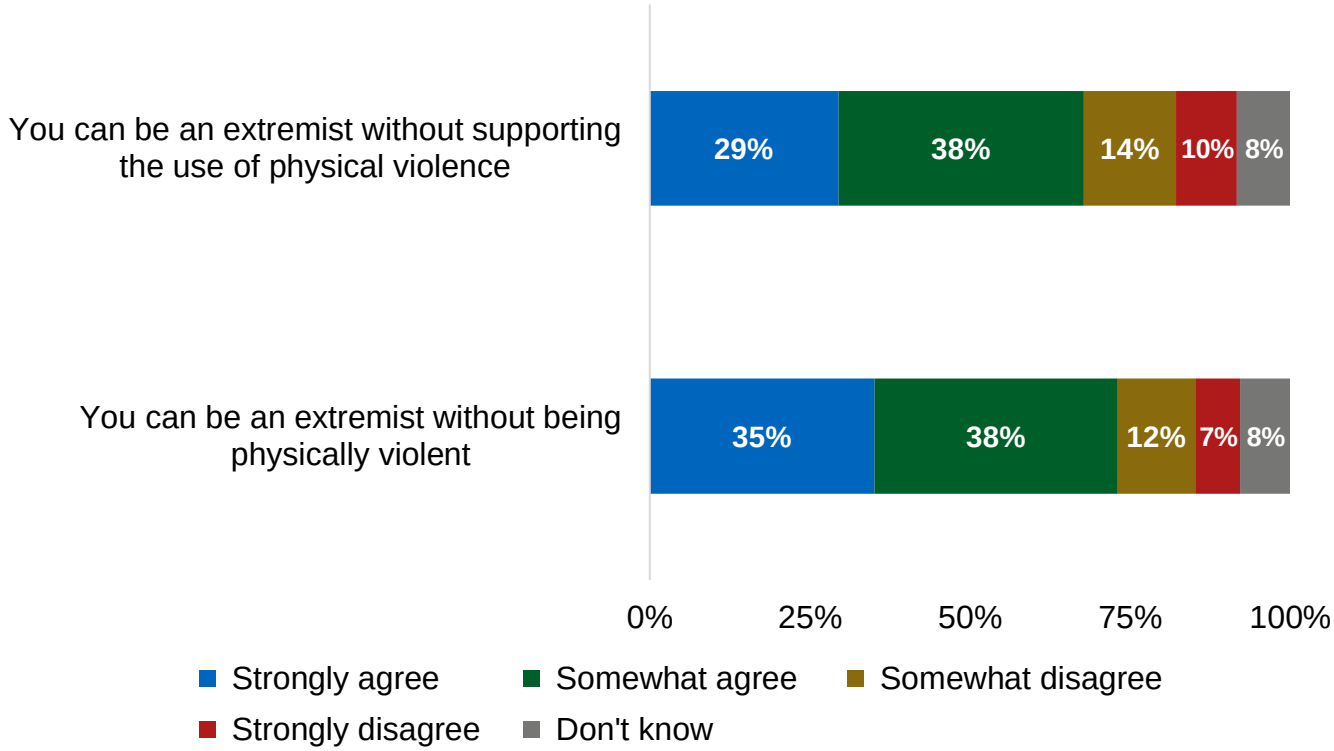
Survey results

Approximately two thirds (67%) of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'you can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence' and almost three quarters (73%) agreed with the statement that 'you can be an extremist without being physically violent' (see Figure 3.2).

The vast majority (85%) of people who strongly agreed with the statement 'you can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence' also strongly agreed that 'you can be an extremist without being physically violent'.

Meanwhile, over half (52%) of those who strongly disagreed with the statement 'you can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence' also strongly disagreed with the statement 'you can be an extremist without being physically violent'. These findings suggest that most respondents feel that extremism does not necessarily involve violence.

Figure 3.2. Perceptions of extremism as relating to violence



Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All respondents, n=2071.

Male respondents were more likely to agree that someone can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence (71%) than female respondents (65%).

Likewise, respondents with Higher Education qualifications were also more likely to agree that you can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence than respondents with lower levels of education (75% compared with 57% of those with one to four Standard Grades, 70% of those with five or more Standard Grades, and 64% of those with two or more Advanced Highers). This group were also more likely to agree that you can be an extremist without using physical violence than respondents with lower education levels (81% compared with 64% of those with one to five Standard Grades, 73% of those with five or more Standard Grades, and 71% of those with two or more Advanced Highers).

Meanwhile, those aged 16-34 (21%) were more likely to disagree that you can be an extremist without being physically violent than those aged 35-44 (14%) and 45-54 (14%), while respondents aged over 65 years (24%) were more likely to disagree with the statement than those aged 35-44 (14%) and 45-54 (14%).

Respondents from South Scotland parliamentary region (27%) were also more likely to disagree that you can be extremist without being physically violent than respondents from the Highlands and Islands (15%), Mid Scotland and Fife (16%), North East Scotland (17%), and Glasgow (13%).

Qualitative findings

Extremism, violence, and terrorism

During the qualitative research, a number of participants stated that, in their view, extremism does not always involve violence, echoing the survey findings and mirroring the views of scholars such as Berger (2018: 28). For example, when participants were asked about the differences between their understandings of the terms terrorism and extremism, many felt that terrorism by definition always involves violence, but that extremism does not:

> **'**For me terrorism is just extremism with the violence tacked on.' (9; FG)

> **'**I'd distinguish them as the terrorism is more an act of violence and the extremism is the reasons why.' (17; FG)

In these examples, participants made reference to extremism as a potential precursor stage in an individual's, or group's, path toward committing an act of terrorism. This demonstrates that participants consider there to be a connection between the terms extremism and terrorism, with terrorism conceptualised as a violent expression of extremism. This is explored further in section 3.6.

Extremist behaviours

Although a number of participants felt that extremism does not always involve violence, encouraging or inciting violence was a behaviour that some participants considered to constitute extremism:

> 'If people are encouraging violence against other people, that's kind of almost the definition of extremist behaviour.' (4; FG)

However, others did not agree. When asked if 'encouraging a violent act would constitute extremism', some participants argued that it could be in certain contexts, but without further information it would be wrong to consider this to always represent extremism:

> 'I'm not a pacifist. If there is an invading army, I will take it upon myself to be violent towards them. I don't need a leaflet to encourage me to do so. I don't think it would be extreme for a sovereign nation to do that.' (12; FG)

For some participants, therefore, the advocacy of violence regardless of the motivation or context is extremist. Other participants would not consider encouraging or inciting violence as extremist *per se* and would require further information to determine whether they would consider this extremism. This is further evidence of the breadth of understandings of extremism shared by qualitative participants, and highlights the subjective and contextual nature of these understandings.

To further explore participants' views on extremist behaviour, a series of examples of different types of behaviour and actions were shared by the researchers in the

focus groups (see Appendix D for a summary of the focus group discussion guide). Participants were asked to reflect on whether or not they felt each example constituted extremism. The examples chosen were deliberately contentious to encourage debate and, where possible, explore how similar events could be interpreted in different ways by participants. The examples were not chosen because they are interpreted as extremist by the researchers or the Scottish Government, but because they represent examples that have received significant media attention or social debate.

One example presented was holding a sit-down protest on a busy street at rush hour. Participants expressed a wide range of perspectives in response to this example. Some participants reflected on their personal experiences:

> **'**I watched something yesterday, you probably saw it yourself, there was the case where they blocked the ambulances. There was one yesterday where a guy who was going to see a parole officer, and if he was late he was going back to jail. And the guy was in tears, and you really felt for him, but they would not move. And that to me is very extreme, that someone could go to jail because you have blocked the motorway or someone that is waiting on an operation is blocked in an ambulance, I cannae get my head around how somebody would do that.' (9; FG)

In this instance, the participant's response to the example was shaped by their concern that road blockages could directly impact on the work of the emergency services, or disproportionately impact an individual's life. It was because of these factors that the participant understood this example as extremist. For other participants, in all cases this type of behaviour was understood as extremism:

> 'I feel like in terms of blocking the road, that has to be extremism.' (23; FG)

Both of the participants quoted here therefore considered disruption of this kind as a behaviour that could be extremist under certain circumstances. However, there was variation in the level of detail required for participants to determine whether they would consider this to constitute extremism. One participant felt that the act of blocking a road was extremist regardless of motivations and impact, whilst another was only prepared to label this behaviour as extremism because of the specific consequences it had. They highlighted it would only be extremist if it caused harm to people, for example an ambulance being blocked from getting to a hospital. This once again highlights how context matters to members of the public in forming their understandings of extremism.

However, other participants rejected the notion that disruption or inconvenience was extremist:

> 'It's not an extreme thing to block the road. Obviously, it disrupts a lot of people in their work and their day but I don't think it's an extremist view for me.' (13; FG)

3.5 Public views on the thresholds for extremist activity

Survey results

Similar to the focus groups, survey respondents were presented with seven types of activity and asked whether they considered any of them to represent extremism (see Figure 3.3). The answer options contained two opposite conclusions, never and always. Other answer options were provided which could indicate a more conditional association, including: often, sometimes and rarely. Respondents could select don't know, and under 10% did in all cases.

Attending a non-violent protest for political, religious or ideological reasons was seen as 'never' representing extremism by 14% of respondents. This compares with 8% regarding this as 'always' extremism. This was the only instance where never was a more prevalent answer than always. For the six remaining statements more respondents selected that the activities always represented extremism than that they never represented extremism.

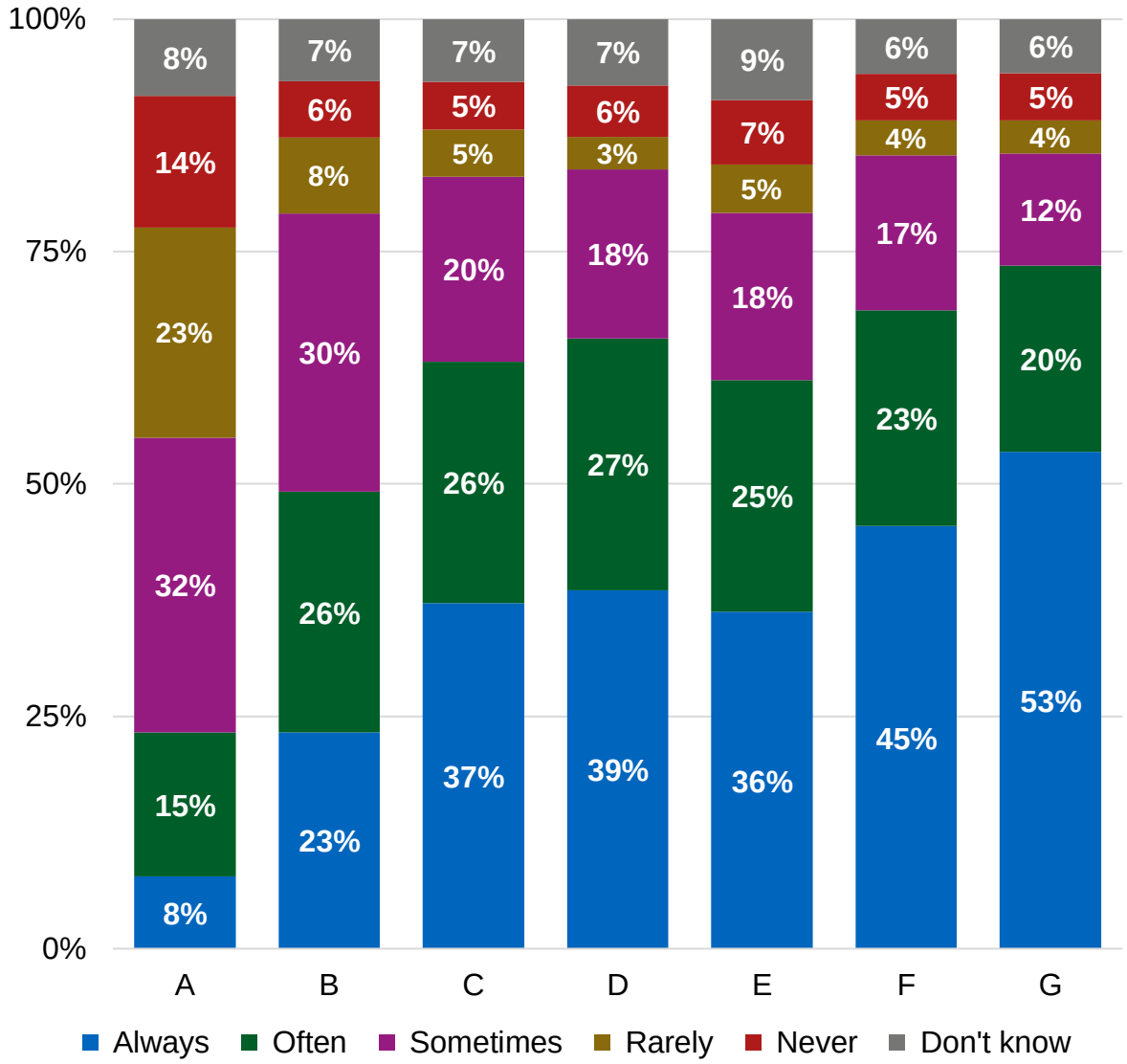
Over half (53%) of respondents considered 'causing physical harm to a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons' to always represent extremism, the highest proportion across all of the statements.

Notable differences in responses by age and gender are discussed below.

People over 65 years were more likely than other age groups to say that they 'never' regarded the following activities as extremism (albeit those with this view were still in a minority, even in this older age group):

- Collecting money for a group known to use violence for political, religious, or ideological reasons (15% compared with 6% of those aged 16-34, 2% of those aged 35-44, 5% of those aged 45-54, and 4% of those aged 55-64).
- Attending a non-violent protest for political, religious or ideological reasons (22% compared with 13% of those aged 16-34, 9% of those aged 35-44, and 10% of those aged 45-54 years).
- Making derogatory remarks about someone for political, religious, or ideological reasons (13% compared with 4% of those aged 16-34; 2% of those aged 35-44; 4% of those aged 45-54, and 4% of those aged 55-64 years).
- Sharing material (online or in person) promoting a group known to use violence for political, religious, or ideological reasons (13% compared with 5% of those aged 16-34, 2% of those aged 35-44, 3% of those aged 45-54, and 3% of those aged 55-64).
- Causing criminal damage for political, religious, or ideological reasons (11% compared with 5% of those aged 16-34, 3% of those aged 35-44, 2% of those aged 45-54, and 3% of those aged 55-64).
- Assaulting someone for political, religious or ideological reasons (11% compared with 5% of those aged 16-34, 2% of those aged 35-44, 2% of those aged 45-54, and 2% of those aged 55-64).

Figure 3.3. Perception of the extent to which various actions represent extremism



Q5. Do you consider any of the following to represent extremism?

- **A. Attending a non-violent protest for political, religious or ideological reasons**
- **B. Making derogatory remarks about someone for political, religious or ideological reasons**
- **C. Causing criminal damage for political, religious or ideological reasons**
- **D. Sharing material (online or in person) promoting a group known to use violence for political, religious or ideological reasons**
- **E. Collecting money for a group known to use violence for political, religious or ideological reasons**
- **F. Assaulting someone for political, religious or ideological reasons**
- **G. Causing physical harm to a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons**

Base: All respondents, n=2071.

This could indicate the oldest age group (over 65 years) had a higher threshold for considering actions as extremist than younger groups.

Analysis by gender showed that males were more likely to regard these actions as 'never' or 'always' extremism than females. That is, they were more likely to select an exclusionary option at either end of the opinion scale than females, who were more likely to select conditional options. For example, 40% of male respondents considered collecting money for a group known to use violence for political, religious or ideological reasons to always represent extremism, compared with 33% of female respondents. Additionally, 8% of male respondents believed that making derogatory remarks about someone for political, religious, or ideological reasons never represented extremism, compared with 5% of female respondents.

Females had significantly higher instances of 'don't know' responses to the statements than males. This could indicate a desire for more context and detail in order to determine whether an action constitutes extremism.

Qualitative findings

Participants also discussed their views on the threshold at which behaviours or views can be considered extremism in the qualitative research. Participants often offered thoughts on this topic spontaneously but were also asked directly to reflect on the matter.

A number of different thresholds were highlighted but they tended to coalesce around harmful interpersonal interaction. That is, causing harm to others was widely held as 'crossing the line' into extremism:

> **'**Hurting someone else, when you're harming other people that's where the line is drawn for me anyway.' (10; I)

> **'**I think [it] only tips into extremism where they actually take action and do something to you that actually causes harm.' (4; FG)

Some participants had a broad interpretation of harm, suggesting that behaviours that impact on another's human rights reached the threshold to be considered extremism:

> **'**I would say anything that's having a purposefully negative effect on somebody [is extremist].' (18; I)

Another perspective was that any attempt to impose one's point of views on another would represent extremism:

> 'It certainly crosses the line if you impose your views on others.' (1; I)

For other participants there was a more specific interpretation of harm as involving violence. These participants viewed the act of moving from non-violent to violent behaviour as representing 'crossing the line' into extremism:

> ‘I would say they are being able to demonstrate your right to protest but I think if it then descends into destruction and violence at that point, it could then be construed as extremism.’ (19; FG)

There was therefore a clear pattern that harming another person is seen as a threshold at which an act can be considered extremism.

Participants also discussed the importance of context in determining whether an act crosses a threshold into extremism. A number of participants highlighted at various stages how context heavily shapes their understanding of the concept:

> ‘I don’t know [if] you could draw that line, it 100% depends on the situation.’ (8; FG)

Participants raised the importance of time and place in their determination of an act as extremism. In relation to geography, participants highlighted variance among legal systems internationally as one factor that contributes to there being different thresholds for extremism. Some saw extremism as varying between different countries with unique legal systems:

> ‘It becomes very tricky and then different governments come into the picture, so that means different laws in different countries, […] so what is by law in one country might be okay in one country and not be okay in the other.’ (22; I)

A number of participants also highlighted the importance of physical location, for example:

> ‘Now some of their points you might be able to understand, say if it was people arguing against war or against the arms trade, it could be lying on the border of extremism if they’re protesting people’s funerals, cause it’s not an appropriate situation for it, whereas they could be making the same points and arguments in a different environment, maybe outside a place of business or outside a government building and that might be less extremist I suppose.’ (8; I)

In relation to time, some discussed how behaviour that may have been seen as extremism historically would not be considered as such today:

> ‘Twenty years ago, I would say yes, that would be extremist, now, no.’ (20; FG)

Participants therefore saw extremism as understood in relation to the norms of a particular political state and a particular time period, further emphasising the extent to which many understood extremism as inherently bound to societal limits of acceptable behaviour through norms and existing legal and democratic frameworks.

Participants also highlighted that determining whether an act was extremist was only possible when they fully understood the motivations of an individual or group. For example, when asked whether travelling overseas to fight for a religious cause would constitute extremism one participant reflected:

> **‘**People actually did go from the UK to help the Yazidis repel attacks by ISIS. Defending a non-aggressive group. That seems to me to be heroic and not extremist.’ (4; FG)

Some participants felt unable to label particular views and actions in positive or negative terms without understanding context. The term extremism itself, was seen by some as a wholly negative term. One participant reflected:

> ‘[Extremism] is viewed in a very negative light. The word has a very negative connotation, because you have extremism and then on maybe the opposite end which has more of a positive light to it you have activism.’ (5; FG)

One interesting notion that came from this, and other contributions, was regarding extremism as a form of ‘negative activism’. As discussed previously, many participants framed their understanding of extremism in relation to societal norms, and this particular approach would place the term activism as views or behaviours that do not transgress these norms in support of a particular cause of ideology. In contrast, negative activism is when these norms are transgressed in support of a particular cause or ideology.

There was also discussion of how individual opinion shapes understandings of extremism, and how supporters of a particular ideology might not conceive of this as extremist due to their support of that cause.

Indeed, on occasion, when presented with examples of behaviour and asked to reflect on whether they could be considered extremism, participants highlighted that their own opinion would heavily shape their answer, illustrating that some participants would not label a view or behaviour extremism if the cause was something they agreed with, for instance taking part in protests for climate action. A key finding, therefore, is that participants acknowledge that their understanding of extremism may not correspond with how others see the term.

Finally, participants also naturally raised the difficulties with drawing the line between extremism and activism, and highlighted the importance of maintaining freedoms of speech and protest, whilst protecting people from harm:

> **‘**Certainly, sit down protests in the middle of George Square would be perfectly… that’s a legitimate action that isn’t extremism, even if these people have what I would call extreme right-wing views. If they are having a sit-down protest and doing nobody any harm, although I think they might have extremist views I don’t view that as extremist action.’ (1; I)

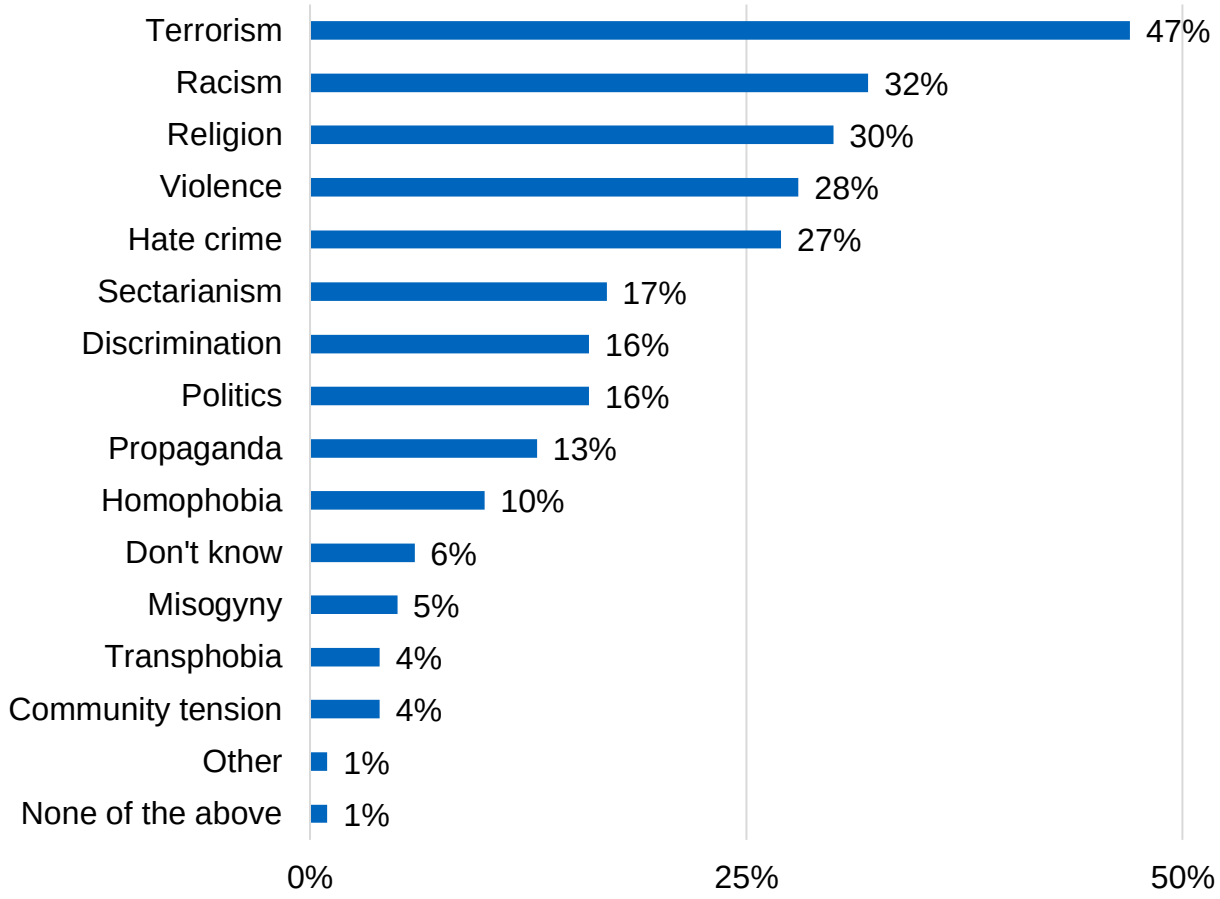
3.6 Word associations with extremism

Survey results

Survey respondents were presented with a list of words and asked to select which they would most strongly associate with extremism, up to a maximum of three words. The most prevalent association was with the term terrorism, with almost half

(47%) selecting this option (see Figure 3.4). Around 30% of respondents associated extremism with the words racism (32%), religion (30%), violence (28%) and hate crime (27%).

Figure 3.4. Degree of association of various words with the term 'extremism'



Q3. Which of the following words do you most strongly associate with extremism? Please select up to three options.

Base: All respondents, n=2071.

Those aged over 65 were the only age group with higher instances of associating racism with extremism (47%), than associating terrorism with extremism (39%). Only 8% of those aged 16-34 listed sectarianism as associated with extremism, compared with 26% of those aged 55-64.

The most common association among BAME respondents was racism (31%).

Males (21%) were more likely to associate sectarianism with extremism than females (12%). Males were also more likely to associate politics with extremism (18%) than females (15%). Meanwhile, females were more likely to associate homophobia with extremism (12%) than males (7%).

Respondents who did not identify with a religion (54%) were more likely than those who did to associate terrorism with extremism (42%). Respondents who did not

identify with a religion (30%) were more likely to associate violence with extremism than people who identified with a religion (26%).

Qualitative findings

Focus group participants were asked to consider the links between extremism and three related concepts: terrorism, sectarianism and hate crime. This section provides more detail on participants' views on the relationship between extremism and terrorism and hate crime (particularly that relating to racism) specifically. Views on the relationship between extremism and sectarianism are explored in later sections (see sections 5.2 and 5.4).

Terrorism

Research has shown that extremism is often conflated with terrorism, as well as radicalisation (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011; Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2019). As with the survey results on associations, qualitative participants perceived the most pronounced overlap to be between extremism and terrorism, with many participants drawing a strong connection between the two concepts:

> **'**I think extremism and terrorism are interlinked. You can't have one without the other, or it seems to be that way.' (2; FG)

For some, terrorism was a 'subset' of extremism. For others it was a 'branch'. Some participants visualised the relationship between extremism and terrorism in terms of a ladder, where one (usually extremism) can lead to the other (terrorism). Yet, it is important to highlight that progression from one to the other was not seen as inevitable:

> **'**It's that all terrorism is the extreme end of extremism […] all extremists aren't terrorists, but terrorists are extremists.' (6; FG)

> **'**I would probably go along [with] the view that all terrorists are extremists but not all extremists are terrorists.' (15; FG)

A significant number of participants therefore saw a clear relationship between extremism and terrorism, regardless of the exact nature of the relationship. For these participants, extremism was viewed as broader than terrorism.

Hate crime

Whilst many participants found terrorism and extremism to be strongly related, the term 'hate crime' was seen as similar but somewhat more distinct:

> **'**I think hate crime is more of a targeted thing, whereas extremism is quite a blanket attitude.' (19; FG)

Many participants felt that hate crime was specifically aimed at certain groups or communities within society, whereas extremism was less discriminate in target or focus. Hate crime was seen as related to extremism, with similar analogies as were

used to explain the relationship between extremism and terrorism. Some participants saw hate crime as the root of extremism, and others continued the analogy by suggesting that extremism and hate crime are branches of the same tree.

Taken together, the qualitative findings suggest that participants saw significant overlap, but subtle differences, between extremism, terrorism and hate crime.

Notably, at times participants naturally lapsed into using other terms when referring to extremism, in particular when making reference to terrorism or radicalisation, demonstrating that they viewed these concepts as closely linked.

3.7 Conclusion

How does the public in Scotland define and understand extremism?

Confidence

The majority (74%) of survey respondents were at least 'fairly confident' that they understood what is meant by the term extremism. Males were more confident than females, and those with Higher Education qualifications were more confident than those without. Almost a third (31%) of those aged 16-34 were not confident, significantly more than all older age groups.

Participants in the focus groups and interviews had more opportunity to discuss their understanding of the term extremism, which highlighted nuanced interpretations of the concept, and the subjectivity of the term. The qualitative discussions revealed that a diverse range of understandings of extremism exist within Scotland, and indicate that members of the public are not necessarily either confident or fixed in their understandings.

Context

Indeed, in the qualitative discussions participants explained that their opinions on whether and how views and actions constitute extremism were highly dependent on the context.

For example, when presented with examples of behaviour and asked to reflect on whether they could be considered extremism, participants highlighted that their own opinion on the cause would heavily shape their answer. Participants openly explained that they would be less likely to label a view or behaviour extremism if the cause was something they agreed with, such as taking part in disruptive protests for climate action. Participants also acknowledged that their understanding of extremism may not correspond with how others see the term.

Further, extremism was often understood as acting outwith societal norms or existing legal and democratic frameworks, but participants were conscious of the difficulties with using a threshold of outwith societal norms for extremism. They explained that in their view societal norms change over time and differ between places, such that behaviour that may have been seen as extremism historically

would not be considered as such today. They felt that using such a threshold could therefore risk impinging on freedom of speech or rights to protest.

Linked to other concepts

The most prevalent association with extremism was with the term terrorism, with almost half of survey respondents (47%) selecting this option. Around 30% of respondents associated extremism with racism (32%), religion (30%), violence (28%) and hate crime (27%).

Focus group participants were asked to consider three terms in particular: terrorism, sectarianism and hate crime. Participants saw significant overlap, but subtle differences, between these three terms and their understanding of extremism.

For example, terrorism was often viewed as the severest form of extremism, with extremism seen as a precursor stage towards a path of committing an act of terrorism. Meanwhile, hate crime was viewed as being specifically aimed at certain groups or communities in society, whereas extremism was less discriminate in target or focus.

Notably, at times participants naturally lapsed into using other terms when referring to extremism, in particular referring to terrorism or radicalisation, demonstrating that they view these concepts as closely linked.

What are the public's views on the boundaries of extremism? For example, when does an act or behaviour cross the threshold into extremism?

Views and actions

Extremism was not solely seen as either views or actions, and many participants suggested it could be both.

However, actions, including violence and other forms of harm, were considered to more clearly represent extremism, while opinion was more divided as to whether views alone that did not translate into harm or violence can be considered as extremism.

Thresholds

A number of different thresholds for when an act or behaviour crosses the threshold into extremism were highlighted by qualitative participants. These tended to coalesce around harmful interpersonal interaction. That is, causing harm to others was widely held as 'crossing the line' into extremism. For example, over half (53%) of survey respondents considered 'causing physical harm to a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons' to always represent extremism.

However, views were mixed as to whether this harm had to be intentional. While some felt that it did, others felt that even unintentional harm impacting on another's human rights reached the threshold to be considered extremism.

Meanwhile, others framed any attempt to impose views on another as the minimum criterion for an act to be considered extremist.

How likely does the public think it is that extremism will translate into actual violence?

There was agreement that extremism was broader than just physical violence across both the quantitative and qualitative research. For example, the majority (75%) of survey respondents agreed that 'you can be an extremist without being physically violent'. In the qualitative research, other forms of harm beyond physical violence were considered extremism, such as inciting or encouraging violence, and disruption more broadly.

Participants could not give a sense of what proportion of extremist views translated into violent action.

Do members of the public with different demographic characteristics diverge in how they perceive extremism?

The oldest age group (those aged over 65) were less likely than younger people to categorise given actions as extremist, meaning they appear to have a higher threshold for considering an action as extremist than younger age groups.

Males were more likely to regard a list of actions provided as 'never' or 'always' extremism than females. Moreover, females had significantly higher instances of 'don't know' responses to the examples than males. This could indicate a desire for context and detail in order to make a determination of whether an action constitutes extremism by females, and more polarized views among males.

Males were more likely to associate sectarianism and politics with extremism than females, while females were more likely to associate homophobia with extremism than males.

For BAME respondents, the most common association with extremism was racism (31%).

4. Public views on existing definitions of extremism

4.1 Introduction

This section includes findings relating to public views on existing definitions of extremism. The specific research questions explored include:

- How does the public in Scotland define and understand extremism?
- How far does the public's understanding of extremism in Scotland align with definitions and categorisations adopted in other contexts?

Participants' views on existing definitions of extremism were explored during the qualitative research, specifically the interviews. During the interviews, participants were shown three definitions. The first was the UK Government's definition of extremism (Home Office, 2011), the second was based on the Australian Government's (2022) definition of violent extremism, and the third was based on the Swedish Government's (2015) definition of violent extremism:

1. 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (UK Government definition).

2. 'a willingness to use unlawful violence, or support the use of violence by others, to promote a political, ideological or religious goal' (Australian Government definition).

3. 'engagement with ideologies that accept and legitimise violence as a means of realising extreme ideological opinions and ideas' (Swedish Government definition).

These definitions were identified as part of a review carried out by the Scottish Government (2023d) which explored how extremism is defined in other countries and contexts. Notably the term 'engagement with' is not included in the original definition of extremism outlined by the Swedish Government but was included in the definition presented to participants so that its structure aligned with the Australian and UK definitions.

The interviews also explored participants' views on an approach to defining extremism recently adopted in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, where broad categories of types of extremism are the focus, rather than specific ideologies. Views on the use of three categories were explored: 'religiously-motivated extremism', 'politically-motivated extremism', and 'ideologically-' or 'identity-motivated extremism'. Participants were prompted to consider whether they felt these categories were comprehensive, if they could provide examples of types of extremism which fit within each category, and if they thought the categories were helpful or unhelpful in understanding and defining extremism.

4.2 Public alignment with existing definitions

Qualitative findings

In the interviews, participants were shown the three definitions in a randomised order. They were asked to reflect on whether the definitions aligned with their personal understanding of extremism; whether they would change anything about the definitions; which definition they felt was closest and furthest from their own understanding; and whether they thought each definition could apply to Scotland.

Most participants thought that all definitions could apply to Scotland. There was a preference for the definition adopted in Australia, with most feeling that this was closest to their own understanding. The reasons presented for this, as well as other key themes that emerged in the discussions about existing definitions of extremism, are covered below.

4.3 Public views on what to include and exclude in formal definitions

Qualitative findings

The inclusion of the 'fundamental British values' element of the UK Government's definition of extremism was critically examined by scholars and media commentators following its introduction (see for example Richardson, 2015; Lander, 2016; Vincent, 2019).

Without prompting, interview participants questioned the inclusion of the term 'fundamental British values' in the UK Government definition, but for different reasons. Participants queried whether these values were specific to the UK or were more widely held, and felt that specifically making reference to 'British' values limited the international relevance of the definition. One participant noted:

> **'**I do not like it just focusing on British values. That makes it really very specific, just to focus on the UK, which I don't agree with.' (22; I)

It was felt that if values were to be mentioned, more neutral language should be used, with no mention of a specific country or culture. This illustrates that the participants who raised these concerns had a preference for a definition of extremism that would be widely applicable and, potentially, widely accepted. Reflecting this, one participant claimed:

> **'**If you took out British and put in societal values, you could probably take that to any country in the world… I think if that word [British] was taken out of there, or it was societal, or another word… more neutral, then I don't think anyone could disagree with that.' (9; I)

Although one participant suggested that the phrase 'Scottish values' could be used instead of the phrase 'British values', others took issue with this:

> ‘Even if it said Scottish values my first thought would be that they’re more universal rather than [that]… it seems like it’s meant to be patriotic or make me feel a certain way and that’s not really what I’m looking for.’ (8; I)

This suggests that participants were not critical of the inclusion of ‘British values’ on the basis of party political or constitutional preferences, but instead because it potentially limited the applicability of the term.

Some participants also felt that the ‘British values’ referred to in the definition, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs, had been eroded in recent years. For instance, one participant shared:

> ‘I think a lot of people think that there isn’t much democracy or individual liberty, so I don’t think there is much left of that in this country.’ (18; I)

Comments such as these reflected participants’ views about the state of British politics. Some contrasted the notion of ‘British values’ and behaviours or decisions taken by then members of the UK Government. For example, participants referenced the ‘partygate’ scandal that was reported in the media during the fieldwork period.

In summary, for the whole group of participants three main reasons emerged for taking issue with the inclusion of the term ‘British values’ in the UK Government definition. Firstly, that the values described were not solely ‘British’. Secondly, because the use of the term ‘British’ narrowed the applicability of this definition of extremism. Thirdly, because of their negative assessment of members of the UK Government, which they viewed as having diminished these ‘values’. On this basis, there appeared to be preference for a definition of extremism that does not include explicit reference to a particular country.

The definition that most participants preferred was the Australian Government’s definition of violent extremism. Many participants chose this definition because of the explicit reference to violence. This illustrates that whilst (as discussed in section 3.3) there were a mix of understandings on whether extremism is view-based or action-based, there was a preference for definitions that explicitly refer to violent behaviours. At least one participant, however, took the opposite view, suggesting that this inclusion narrowed the term too much.

When considering that a number of participants understood extremism as constituting a broader range of harms than just physical violence, it is possible that a definition that makes reference to a broader range of harms could be even more widely accepted.

A final point made on the definitions was with regard to language. Whilst participants were less supportive of the UK Government’s definition of extremism than those of the Australian and Swedish Governments, it was noted that all three definitions could be presented in more simple language:

> ‘Maybe I’m disrespectful but to the working man you’ve got to make it look and feel a lot easier to read and understand.’ (2; I)

This suggests that it is important to ensure that definitions of extremism are accessible and can be widely understood.

4.4 Public views on categorising types of extremism

As noted above, interviewees were presented with the categories ‘religiously-motivated extremism’, ‘politically-motivated extremism’, and ‘ideologically-’ or ‘identity-motivated extremism’. They were asked to consider whether they found the categories helpful and comprehensive, and if they could think of examples of extremism that could be categorised as such.

On first reaction, participants found the categories to be a helpful way of thinking about what the term ‘extremism’ can cover.

For participants closely associating intra-Christian sectarianism with extremism, they felt that seeing the three categories helped them to think beyond ‘religiously-motivated extremism’ and to also consider extremism related to political and other identity or ideological motivations.

However, one participant disagreed with using the categorisations on the basis that they focus on the motivation rather than the act itself:

> ‘I think you’re trying to section people into groups when you should just call it what it is. If you are trying to, say, blow up a plane or [commit] a targeted act on such and such, it should not really be this political party, or this cultural group is the cause.’ (18; I)

Participants found the categories sufficiently broad to cover a range of extremist groups. When challenged to consider groups that would fall outside the categories, some participants said that they felt that some forms of environmental protest, that they considered to be extreme, may not be covered by these categories.

Overlap across the categories was also noted by participants, with some struggling to distinguish ‘ideologically-’ or ‘identity-motivated extremism’ from the other categories. Indeed, one participant felt that ‘ideologically-motivated’ could be a catch all term for religiously- and politically-motivated.

> ‘The word ideological I like the most, because even if you didn’t use the term religion or political, ideological could cover that potentially. Because having a particular political idea, which is ideology, or a particular religious idea, which is ideology, you have the capacity to cover all that in together.’ (22; I)

Although participants expressed broadly positive views on the categorisation approach in theory, they found this harder in practice. Several interviewees mentioned the Capitol riot in Washington DC, USA in January 2021 as a clear example of politically-motivated extremism. However, anti-abortion vigils outside clinics were also discussed by several participants. Those who felt that this

constituted a form of extremism had mixed views on how this should be categorised, with some considering this to be an example of religiously-motivated extremism, and others categorising this as politically-motivated extremism.

As such, the categorisations seemed to spark thought and discussion, but did not necessarily lead to more clarity or consensus about what was understood as extremism.

4.5 Conclusion

How far does the public's understanding of extremism in Scotland align with definitions and categorisations adopted in other contexts?

Of the three definitions discussed in the interviews, the Australian definition was most popular within this small sample, partly because it makes explicit reference to violence. Challenges were raised with the UK Government's definition of extremism, which largely related to the use of the term 'British values'. It was felt that if values were to be mentioned, more neutral language should be used, with no mention of a specific country or culture. Participants who raised this issue seemed to be concerned with ensuring definitions of extremism would be widely applicable and, potentially, widely accepted.

Some interview participants struggled with the accessibility of the definitions of extremism presented, suggesting that it is important to ensure definitions are accessible, clear and expressed in plain English.

Splitting extremism into 'religiously-motivated', 'politically-motivated', and 'ideologically-' or 'identity-motivated' encouraged more thought and discussion on what would constitute extremism. However, utilising the three categories did not lead to more clarity or more consensus in what was understood as extremism. Participants struggled to think of examples to 'fit' into each category, and the 'ideologically-' or 'identity-motivated' category was seen by several to encapsulate all motivations.

5. Public experiences of extremism

5.1 Introduction

This section includes findings relating to public experiences of extremism. The specific research questions explored include:

- To what extent have the public observed or experienced extremism in Scotland?
- How do the public perceive extremism in Scotland to manifest as views, behaviours, and actions, particularly in the communities they live in?

In the survey, respondents were asked whether they had observed (including having experienced) extremism in the last five years, and if so what they had observed. They were also asked whether they had observed related phenomena including terrorism, hate crime and violence.

Experiences of extremism were then explored in more detail during the qualitative research. Questions on experiences were included in the interviews rather than the focus groups due to potential sensitivities involved in describing these experiences around others. However, some experiences of extremism were also discussed unprompted in the focus groups. In all cases, participants were provided with information and resources before and after their participation to mitigate any potential distress that might result from discussing or hearing about such experiences. Throughout the interviews participants were reassured that they did not have to answer questions or elaborate on any points should they not feel comfortable with this.

This section begins by looking at the survey findings in relation to the prevalence of experiences of extremism at the general population level, before looking at differences in experiences by population groups. The last section focuses on examples of experiences given by qualitative research participants.

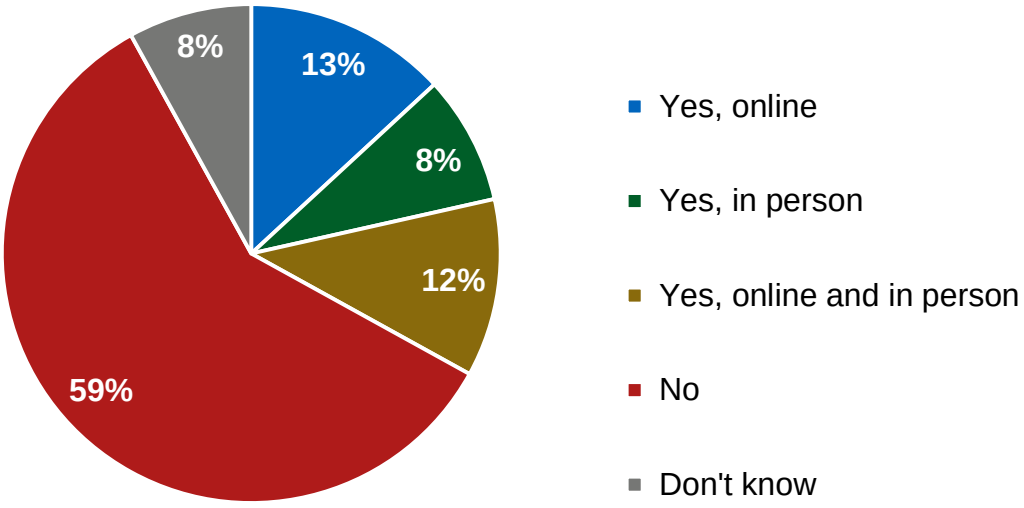
As noted in the earlier chapter on public understandings of extremism, interpretations of the term ‘extremism’ varied among those who took part in this research and did not always align with the definitions used by governments or academics. This should be borne in mind when considering the findings in this section. In other words, individuals may have a similar experience, but one person may regard this as an example of extremism, and another not.

5.2 The prevalence of experiences of extremism

Survey results

The survey asked respondents if they had observed extremism in Scotland in the last five years, including experiencing it themselves (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Observations of extremism in Scotland online and in person in the last five years



Q10. Have you observed extremism in Scotland in the past 5 years? This can include experiencing extremism yourself.

Base: All respondents, n=2071.

A third (33%) of respondents indicated they had observed or experienced extremism online or in person in Scotland in the past five years. This included 13% who had experienced or observed extremism online, 12% who had experienced or observed extremism online and in person, and 8% who had experienced or observed extremism in person. Based on the variety of different interpretations of extremism identified earlier in this report, this figure likely includes those who had observed or experienced views or attitudes that they consider to be extremist, as well as those who had observed or experienced acts or behaviours that they would define as such. Around six in ten (59%) respondents had not experienced or observed extremism.

Levels of confidence in knowing what is meant by the term extremism had no significant effect on whether people said they had observed extremism in the last five years in Scotland, meaning that people who were more confident in knowing what is meant by the term were not more or less likely to report observing extremism.

Respondents who said that they had observed or experienced extremism in the past five years were then asked to describe what happened. The results again highlighted respondents' wide-ranging and diverse interpretations of the term 'extremism', as at times examples were cited that would not be captured by many conventional understandings of the term. The broad range of examples given suggest that the ways in which the public understand and define extremism are more varied than formal definitions and categorisations.

The ten words used most frequently by respondents to this open question are displayed in Figure 5.2. The most common words used included ‘racism’, ‘extremism’, ‘religious’, ‘sectarianism’, ‘terrorism’ and ‘political’.

Figure 5.2. Experiences of extremism in the past five years

Q8. What have you observed?

Base: Those with experiences of extremism, n=653

5.3 Differences in experience of extremism by population groups

Survey results

Notable differences emerged in experiences of extremism by demographic group. Firstly, people in younger age groups were more likely to report having observed extremism in Scotland in the past five years than older respondents, and the oldest age group were least likely to have observed extremism. Among those aged 16-34, 45% said that they had observed or experienced extremism in the past five years, which fell to 34% of those aged 35-64, and 18% of those aged 65 or older. This trend was consistent for both online and offline extremism, meaning that it cannot be explained by respondents being more likely to observe or experience extremism online.

Respondents from the Glasgow parliamentary region were most likely to report having observed or experienced extremism in the past five years (39%), followed by those in Lothian and Central Scotland (36%). In contrast, respondents in the North East (25%) were the least likely to say they had observed or experienced extremism.

Half of BAME respondents (49%) reported having observed extremism in the past five years, compared with one third (32%) of non-BAME respondents. Within the follow up question asking for more detail, BAME respondents discussed having experienced discrimination and racism. Furthermore, parliamentary region

variations might offer some explanation as to why BAME respondents were significantly more likely than non-BAME respondents to say they had observed or experienced extremism in the past five years, given over half of BAME respondents lived in Glasgow, Lothian or Central Scotland (i.e., the areas in which respondents were most likely to report being exposed to extremism).

Males (36%) were more likely to say they had observed extremism in Scotland in the past five years than females (30%).

Those whose household income was between £20,000-£39,999 (35%) and over £40,000 (41%) were more likely to say they had observed extremism in Scotland in the past five years than respondents whose annual household income was less than £20,000 (29%).

Finally, respondents with five or more Standard Grades (35%) were more likely to have observed extremism in Scotland in the past five years than respondents with one to four Standard Grades (25%).

5.4 Examples of experiences related to extremism in Scotland

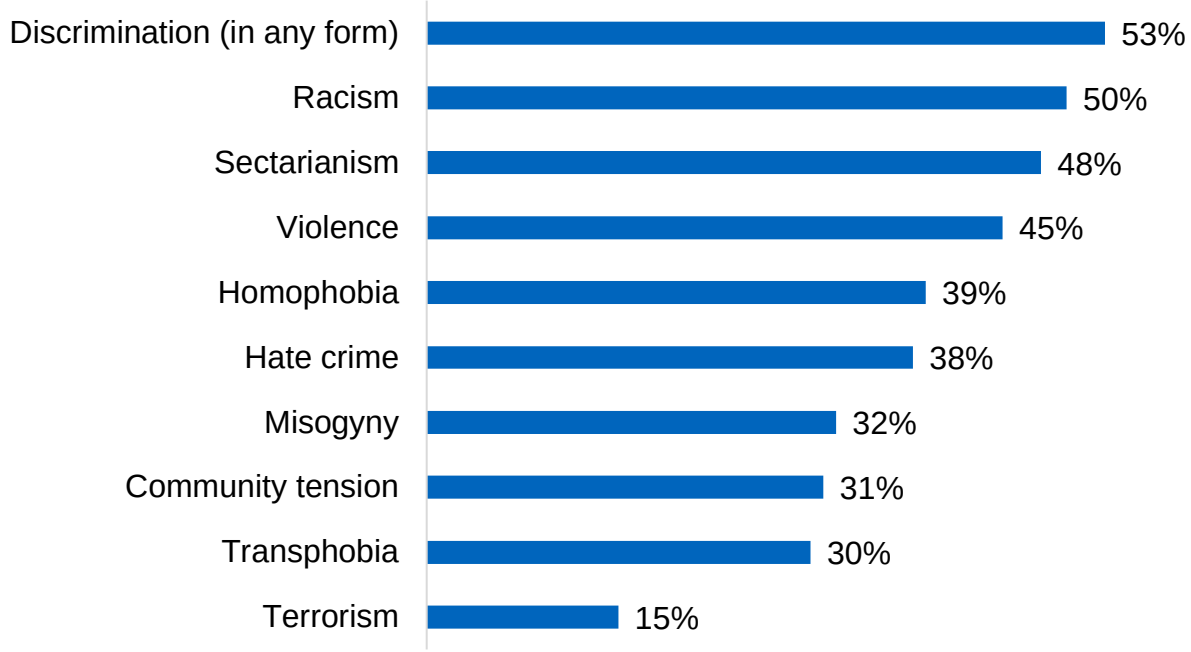
Survey results

Respondents were asked if they had observed a range of phenomena related to extremism in Scotland in the past five years (see Figure 5.3). These included: terrorism, hate crime, violence, racism, discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, sectarianism, and community tension.

This question was asked after the question on whether they had observed extremism in Scotland in the last five years to mitigate confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret a new piece of information as confirmation of something you already think (in this case a different question order could have primed respondents to state that they have observed extremism).

Over half of participants had observed discrimination (53%) and exactly half had observed racism (50%), which were the most common options selected. Terrorism was observed by the lowest number of respondents (15%). This finding is explored in more detail in the section on terrorism below.

Figure 5.3. Proportion who had observed or experienced phenomena relating to extremism in the past five years



Q12. Have you observed any of these in Scotland in the past 5 years, either online or in person? This can include experiencing these yourself.

Base: All respondents, n=2071.

Qualitative findings

The focus group discussions and interviews provided an opportunity to explore participants' accounts of observing or experiencing views, behaviours or actions that they would define as extremism in greater detail. As is the nature of qualitative research, participants were able to offer their views in their own words, which did not necessarily align with the opinions of the research team or the Scottish Government.

As noted above, questions on experiences were included in the interviews rather than the focus groups due to potential sensitivities involved in describing these experiences around others, but during the focus groups, several participants shared examples of their own experiences of extremism unprompted. The focus group facilitators were alert to the possibility that the participants sharing these experiences might become distressed by recounting them, and that other participants might be affected by hearing about others' experiences. However, no concerns of this type emerged during the fieldwork. Similarly, whilst the research team would have intervened in the event that discussions around these experiences risked offending other participants, this was not necessary.

The interviews explicitly asked participants if they had experienced extremism personally. To avoid causing any unnecessary distress, the researchers asked participants if they were happy to discuss their experiences before proceeding, and none of the participants raised any concerns about recounting these.

Sectarianism

At the interview stage, participants mentioned sectarianism when discussing their own experiences with extremism. On elaboration they were referring to intra-Christian sectarianism (for further research on intra-Christian sectarianism in Scotland see Scottish Government, 2015). Sectarianism and extremism were perceived as intertwined by some participants even though there remains some debate about the overlap between these two issues in academic literature (Baker, 2017). Some participants discussed specific experiences that had impacted them personally, but family conflicts linked to sectarianism were also highlighted. One participant discussed an acquaintance of theirs being subjected to a football-related sectarian attack – an act that this participant understood as being driven by an 'extreme' view:

> 'I know my friend's partner was literally walking home and he had a Celtic top on, and someone pulled up in the car and he got battered for having a Celtic top on. So that's an extreme view and that's just somebody who thinks that anyone that wears that colour shouldn't be allowed to think like that.' (24; I)

Violence and abuse

A number of participants discussed specific incidents involving violence and abuse. These incidents related to witnessing or experiencing acts of racial abuse, discrimination motivated by a religious belief, and an example of a homophobic assault. Their consideration of racial and homophobic abuse as a form of extremism rather than hate crime indicates a broad understanding of extremism.

Whilst personal experiences of violence and abuse were rare, the fact that several experiences cited reflected incidents affecting friends or family members illustrated how individuals might be vicariously affected by other people's experiences, even when they are not directly impacted (Paterson, Brown & Waters, 2019).

Other examples

A broad range of other examples of 'extremism' were shared by focus group and interview participants. The examples given were notable for the diversity of beliefs and actions that participants considered to be extremist, and for the different criteria that participants used to determine that these incidents were examples of extremism.

In some instances, examples related solely to individuals sharing beliefs that they considered to be extremist, with one participant discussing having had contact with individuals who appeared to believe conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 vaccine, for example. In other cases, participants considered individuals to be extreme based on both their beliefs, and their actions. This included one participant who discussed a family member being subjected to anti-abortion protests on a regular basis whilst working in a hospital, and another who discussed a friend having cut them out of their lives based on them holding a different political viewpoint.

The potential presence of extremist content online was discussed in several interviews and focus groups, but only one participant discussed being directly exposed to this content personally:

> 'I do see the occasional thing on TikTok. But it's usually just people screen sharing a video and saying, "what's this guy doing?" and it's removed by this point. And it's not frequent. And I don't think it's even Scotland, but from elsewhere in the world.' (18; I)

There was a general perception from participants that extremist content is likely to be online, but they had not come into contact with it themselves, and were unsure of the form and the scale of such content. Some participants in the focus groups and interviews speculated that most people were unlikely to stumble across extremist content online without searching for it. That observation is somewhat challenged by research which has suggested that a significant proportion of young people may be exposed to such content unwittingly (for example see Cottee & Cunliffe, 2020).

5.5 Experiencing and observing terrorism in Scotland

Survey results

Scotland's recent history of terrorist activity appears limited when compared with the rest of the UK. Information on terrorist events is available from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which details all discoverable terrorist attacks which have taken place worldwide between 1970-2020. The GTD has a broad definition of terrorism, covering 'the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation'.[6]

According to the most recent data available, there were 13 terrorist incidents in Scotland in the decade 2010-2020, accounting for 1.3% of the incidents recorded in the UK as a whole over the same period (figures correct as of 02/10/2022). Since 2020, a small number of terrorist incidents in Scotland have been reported in the media. For example, a 24-year-old man threatened to set fire to an Islamic centre in Glenrothes and was convicted of terrorism and other offences (see Police Scotland). However, terrorist activity in the country appears to remain comparatively low.

It was therefore notable that 15% of survey respondents reported having observed terrorism in Scotland in the past five years (see Figure 5.3). Although this represents a minority of survey respondents, this figure stood out given the limited terrorist activity in the country.

[6] In practice this means in order to consider an incident for inclusion in the GTD, all three of the following attributes must be present: (1) the incident must be intentional, i.e. the result of a conscious calculation on the part of a perpetrator; (2) the incident must entail some level of violence or immediate threat of violence; including property violence as well as violence against people; (3) the perpetrators of the incidents must be subnational actors (meaning the database does not include acts of state terrorism).

There are four potential explanations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting this finding. The first is that this notable minority had in fact observed what they would define as terrorism in Scotland, but that this was based on a much broader understanding of the term than traditionally understood. Such an interpretation would be feasible given that academics and governments continue to disagree on how to define 'terrorism' (Schmid, 2012), although it is not possible to conclusively determine how respondents understood the term based on the data available.

The second is that terrorism in Scotland is underreported, and that a significant minority of the population had observed terrorist activity. However, given the seemingly low incidence of terrorism in Scotland even when a relatively broad definition of terrorism is adopted, as is the case in the GTD, it seems unlikely that this would be the case.

The third is that significant proportions of the population might have observed terrorist content online, particularly given that younger respondents aged 16-34 – who would be expected to be most likely to regularly use social media – were over twice as likely to report having experienced or observed terrorism (27%) than respondents aged 35 or older (11%). However, given that only one participant in the qualitative research reported having been personally exposed to extremist content online, online experiences alone are unlikely to account for this finding.

Lastly, misinterpretation of the question could have led to experiences or observations of terrorism being overreported. In particular, even though Scotland was specified in the question, the terrorism observed could have related to events outside Scotland, or outside of the UK. For example, given that a number of high-profile terrorist incidents have occurred elsewhere in the UK in recent years – such as the 2017 London Bridge attack; the 2019 Fishmonger's Hall attack; and the 2021 murder of David Amess MP – it is possible that participants were referencing terrorist activity that occurred in other parts of the UK which they learned of through offline or online media channels consumed in Scotland. Additionally, it is possible that participants could have misunderstood the specified timescale, and be considering events in Scotland that took place longer than five years ago. It is also possible that respondents had a broad interpretation of what was meant by 'observing' and could have included seeing media reports or news about terrorism worldwide.

Qualitative findings

None of the participants in the interviews and focus groups had observed or experienced terrorism in Scotland in the past five years. In the few instances where specific examples of terrorist activity were discussed, participants tended to focus on examples from outside of Scotland, including attacks in London and Manchester, and the activities of individuals linked to the Islamic State. When participants mentioned the attempted attack on Glasgow airport in 2007, they then reflected that this had not taken place within the last five years.

However, topics relating to terrorism and the related issue of radicalisation were discussed by some participants. A small number of participants cited examples of

radicalisation that had occurred in Scotland, thereby pointing to a broader awareness of the potential risk of people in Scotland becoming involved in terrorism. For example, a participant referenced the aforementioned case of the planned attack on an Islamic centre in Glenrothes, whilst others referenced young people from Scotland travelling to Syria in support of the Islamic State. One of these participants, a retired teacher, discussed a specific example of teenage girls who had travelled to Syria:

> 'So, within the last five years, those girls that left… I am told by my colleagues normal students one minute or appearing to have normal behaviour, normal views as far as they could tell. Going to that extreme course of action. That's the one that springs to mind, I am sure there are lots of others.' (1; I)

The observation that 'I am sure there are lots of others' reflected a broader recognition amongst many of the participants that they would be unlikely to know the true extent of radicalisation in Scotland. However, the fact that radicalisation was mentioned so infrequently in the focus groups and interviews would suggest that concerns of this type were low.

5.6 Conclusion

To what extent have the public observed or experienced extremism in Scotland?

A third (33%) of survey respondents considered themselves to have experienced or observed extremism in Scotland in the past five years. However, this finding should be read in the context of the broader finding that members of the public have different understandings of the term 'extremism'. The majority (59%) had not experienced or observed extremism in Scotland, either online or in person, during this time period.

In the survey, 15% of respondents reported having observed or experienced terrorism in Scotland in the past five years, despite figures for terrorist incidents suggesting a relative lack of terrorist activity in the country over this period when compared with the rest of the UK. In contrast with the survey findings, no participants in the qualitative research reported having observed or experienced terrorism in Scotland in the past five years. Indeed, some participants started to talk about examples of terrorism, before clarifying that these did not take place either in Scotland or in the past five years.

How do the public perceive extremism in Scotland to manifest as views, behaviours, and actions, particularly in the communities they live in?

Around half of respondents reported having experienced or observed discrimination (53%), racism (50%) sectarianism (48%), violence (45%), or hate crime (38%) in Scotland. Although some may have regarded these other forms of harm as equating to extremism, the fact that these figures were higher than the equivalent figure for extremism (33%) shows that a proportion of people do not necessarily identify these forms of harm as extremism. The qualitative research highlighted that

context was important for people to consider different examples as constituting extremism or not constituting extremism.

Some groups within the population, including younger people and those from BAME communities, were more likely to say they had experienced or observed extremism than others. BAME communities also had higher instances of experiencing or observing discrimination, violence or hate crime.

6. Public views on the threat of extremism

6.1 Introduction

This section relates to public views on the threat of extremism. The specific research questions explored include:

- To what extent do the public perceive extremism to be a threat or problem in Scotland?
- Have public perceptions of extremism as a threat or problem in Scotland changed over time?
- Do the public think extremism is increasing, decreasing or is stable in Scotland?
- What are the public's views on the types of extremism that are of most concern or growing concern currently, and why?
- What are views on the key drivers of these concerns?

Participants were asked for their views on the level of threat at different geographic scales, including across Scotland as well as in their local area, the rest of the UK and worldwide. In addition, participants were asked for their views on whether they feel the level of threat has changed in the last five years, and whether they feel it will change in the next five years. Variation in the perceived degree of threat across different groups within the population was also explored. The focus groups and interviews then provided an opportunity to explore views on the threat of extremism in Scotland in greater detail.

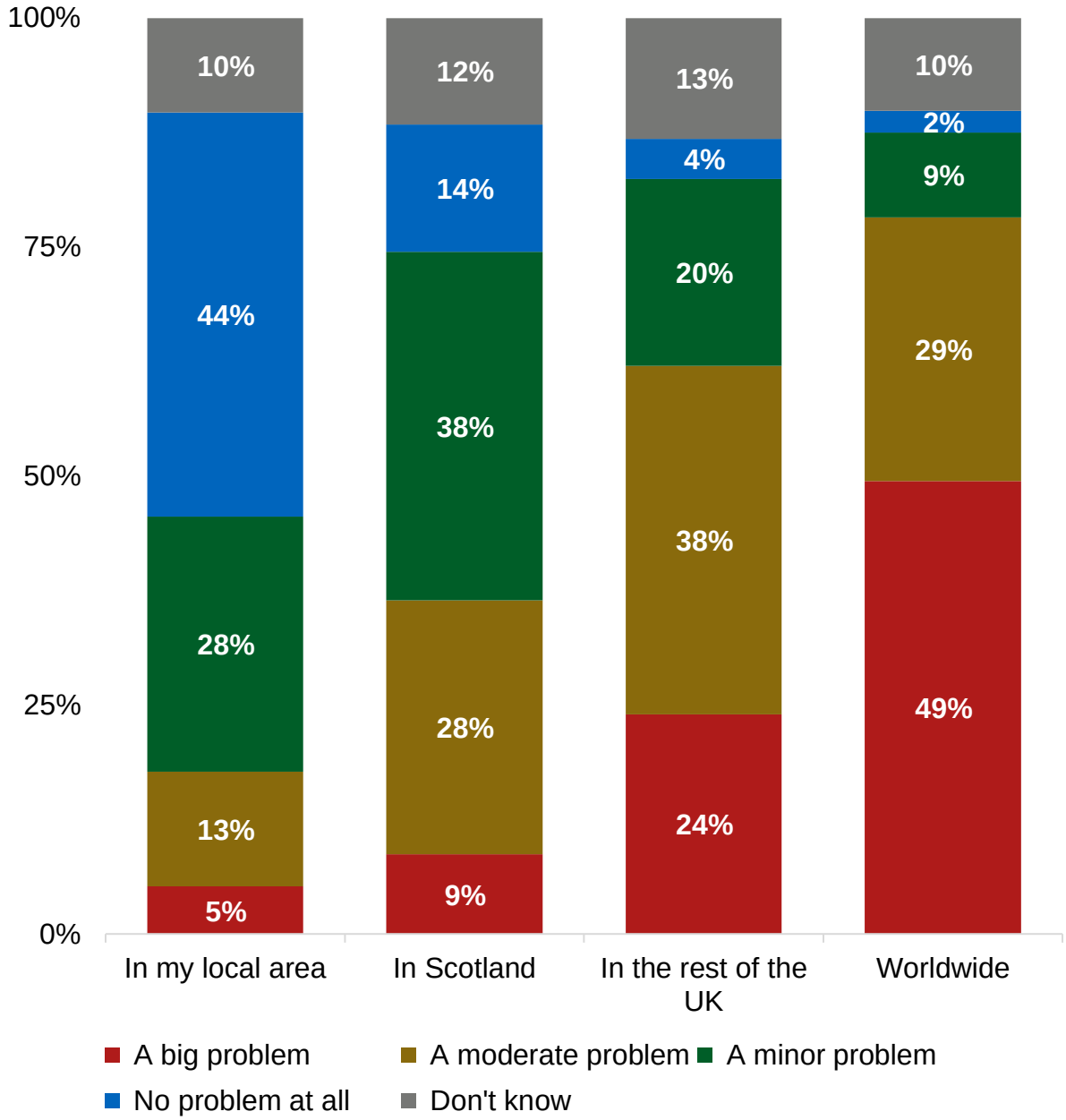
It is important to note that the level of threat perceived by members of the public will relate to their own understanding of the term 'extremism' (see section 3). As has been demonstrated, interpretations of this term varied among those who took part in this research and did not always align with the definitions used by governments or academics. Moreover, asking about threat levels will be subject to recency bias. That is, if members of the public had recently observed or experienced what they would consider as extremism, they may be more likely to report the threat as heightened.

6.2 Perceptions of the local, national, and international threat of extremism

Survey results

The survey asked respondents how much of a problem they considered extremism to be in Scotland and their local area, as well as in the rest of the UK and worldwide. Respondents were given a choice of options ranging from 'no problem at all' through to 'a big problem' and were also able to say if they didn't know (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. Perceptions of the level of threat at different geographic scales



Q1. How much of a problem do you consider extremism to be in the following places?

Base: All respondents, n=2071.

Proportions of respondents selecting ‘no problem at all’ increased as the geographical proximity drew closer, and the geographical size diminished. Whilst only 2% considered extremism to be no problem at all worldwide, and 4% no problem at all in the rest of the UK, 14% considered extremism to be no problem at all in Scotland, rising to 44% for ‘in my local area’.

Three quarters (74%) of survey respondents considered extremism to be a problem in Scotland (either minor, moderate or big). This was lower than the 87% regarding it as a problem worldwide and the 82% regarding it as a problem in the rest of the UK. Less than half (46%) of respondents considered extremism as a problem in their local area.

Looking at perceptions of the severity of the problem across geographies, almost half of respondents saw extremism as a big problem worldwide (49%). Around a quarter (24%) saw extremism as a big problem in the rest of the UK, and around one in ten (9%) saw extremism as a big problem in Scotland.

Further analysis explored respondents' perceptions of the threat in their local area in more detail. This showed that people in Glasgow (58%) were more likely to identify extremism as a problem in their local area than any other parliamentary regions (36% of those in the Highlands and Islands, 41% of those in North East Scotland, 43% of those in Mid Scotland and Fife, 43% of those in South Scotland, 45% of those in Lothian, 46% of those in West Scotland, and 48% of those in Central Scotland).

People in the Highlands and Islands had a different perception of extremism in their local area than in other parliamentary regions, with 55% of people in this region selecting extremism as no problem at all, compared with 45% of those in Lothian, 29% of those in Glasgow, 43% of those in West Scotland and 40% of those in Central Scotland.

Females (49%) were more likely to believe extremism is a problem in their local area than males (42%), while younger people aged 16-34 (59%) were more likely to believe extremism is a problem in their local area than any other age group (51% of those aged 35-44, 38% of those aged 45-54, 43% of those aged 55-64, and 32% of those aged 65 and over).

BAME respondents (57%) were also more likely to perceive extremism as a problem in their local area than white respondents (45%).

There were no significant differences between those considering extremism to be a problem and no problem at all in their local area for religion.

Further analysis also explored respondents' perceptions of the threat in Scotland in more detail. The only significant difference was by income, with people earning between £20,000 to £39,999 (77%) and £40,000 or more (79%) more likely to identify extremism as a problem in Scotland than those who earn under £20,000 (71%).

After being asked about their perceptions of the level of threat, respondents were presented with an open question which asked them to consider what type of extremism they think poses the biggest threat in Scotland. The word cloud displayed in Figure 6.2 shows the top 10 most common words used by respondents. These included 'racism', 'hate', 'comments', 'media', and 'violence'. This highlights a broad understanding of the term, as discussed in earlier sections.

In addition, despite only a quarter (25%) of respondents having experience of online extremism (see Figure 5.1), the word 'online' was one of the 10 most frequently mentioned, indicating that respondents feel that extremism which takes place online represents a significant issue in Scotland.

Figure 6.2. Text responses to type of extremism posing biggest threat

Q11. What type of extremism do you think poses the biggest threat in Scotland?

Base: All, n=2,071

Qualitative findings

The focus groups asked participants to reflect further on whether they considered extremism to be a problem in Scotland, and the extent to which this problem might vary across different regions. In addition, whilst the interviews did not specifically ask about perceptions of the threat, interviewees often discussed this spontaneously.

The findings from the qualitative research supported the survey results. Participants generally saw the threat from extremism – and from violent forms of extremism and from terrorism in particular – to be low in Scotland, and lower than in England. It should be noted that whilst participants were not specifically asked about England, they naturally drew comparisons between England and Scotland when prompted about the rest of the UK, and none drew comparisons between Scotland and Wales or Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Participants made a link between population size and the threat posed by extremism. Scotland's smaller population was cited by several participants as a potential reason for their perception of lower levels of threat in Scotland than in England:

> 'I wonder if there is any correlation with the population count. So, extremists in my mind are a minority group. They are the extreme leaners in their ideology, and I think there are less of them than the general populace. So, if there are more people there's going to be more extremists. So, if you look at a bigger country with a bigger population you are going to have more extremists. To an extent. I think there's more factors than just that, but I think that is a factor.' (6; FG)

However, no published research was found to evidence a correlation between population size and level of threat from extremism in the Rapid Evidence Review.

Social, cultural and political differences between England and Scotland were also alluded to when discussing the comparative threat level in both countries – albeit whilst still referencing the differences in population count:

> 'I think in Scotland [the threat is] nowhere near as what it is in England. If you go south of the border there is a lot more of that [extremism] present and a lot more of it available. We are not as bad in Scotland, Scotland are a lot more forgiving and a lot more accepting than in a lot of other places I have ever visited, even in the UK. We are a lot more broader minded and open to ideas and different perspectives in comparison to other areas. We do have those undertones there, but it's not socially acceptable and people shut it down quite quickly in Scotland. I don't know what it is, if it's a greater population south of the border and they've got more people that will listen, I don't know what it is, but there is a clear distinction of that in the UK.' (11; FG)

This point is reflected in the work of Bonino (2016), who suggests that the specific social, political and cultural landscape of Scotland might account for the comparative lack of Islamist[7] extremism in the country when compared with other countries.

Focus group participants were also asked whether they felt that the threat of extremism varied across different parts of Scotland. Again, whilst the interviews did not specifically ask about this, participants often discussed the topic spontaneously.

A consistent theme across both the focus groups and interviews was that the threat from extremism varied across different regions of Scotland. Again, a link was made by participants between population size and threat, with a number of participants suggesting that the threat of extremism was likely to be more prevalent in regions with higher population counts. For example, one participant living in Aberdeenshire stated that:

> 'I definitely think there's a difference where you have bigger populations like Edinburgh and Glasgow. We seem to be protected up here.' (2; FG)

Participants also commented upon there being different levels of threat of extremism in different parts of Scotland due to their association of extremism with intra-Christian sectarianism. Participants spontaneously referenced this form of sectarianism when asked about regional variations in extremism, noting that the threat posed by this was higher in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. In many instances, this observation was made by participants living outside of these regions:

[7] The term 'Islamist extremism' is UK Government terminology (Home Office, 2018) that is also adopted in Scotland.

> ‘I think one of the things about sectarianism is there’s obviously a prevalent problem in Glasgow. I don’t want to point out Glasgow, but it is Glasgow.’ (2; FG)

However, this perception was also held by participants living in the Central Belt, although these participants tended to take a more nuanced view of the issue:

> ‘I would love to say I’m not aware of any extremism in Scotland but certainly here in Glasgow, that issue [sectarianism] is not as problematic, I don’t think, as it was when I was growing up, but I think it’s still very much there.’ (1; FG)

These perceptions are supported by the survey findings discussed in the section covering differences in experience of extremism by population groups (see section 5.3) which highlighted how respondents in Glasgow and the West of Scotland were among the most likely to have observed or experienced extremism.

However, despite these findings wider evidence has suggested that sectarianism is not a purely regional issue. In particular, qualitative research from Goodall et al. (2015) has challenged the assumption of intra-Christian sectarianism being a ‘west coast problem’, with the authors instead using a ‘cobweb’ metaphor to conceptualise how sectarianism is experienced across and within different regions of Scotland. As these authors explained:

> ‘We found [sectarianism] throughout Scotland, but it is not all-present in any part, whether the West, the Central Belt or anywhere else. Instead, it runs strongly down generations and across masculine culture particularly, but it is experienced quite differently by different people, depending on their social relationships. This matters more than any simple geographical location.’

6.3 Public perceptions of the prevalence of different forms of extremism

Qualitative findings

The focus groups and interviews also provided an opportunity to explore participants’ perception of the threat posed by different forms of extremism. Participants in the focus groups were specifically asked about this, while in the interviews, participants spontaneously discussed specific forms of extremism that they felt were particularly prevalent.

Across the focus groups and interviews, intra-Christian sectarianism was by far the most commonly discussed issue, with many participants raising this topic without being prompted, often in relation to football-related sectarian abuse. Notably, these discussions tended to focus on broader sectarian attitudes and behaviours that participants did not always specifically call ‘extremism’. However, whilst participants recognised that the relationship between sectarianism and extremism was complex, and that they would only define sectarian attitudes and beliefs as extremism in certain circumstances, the fact that sectarianism was often discussed unprompted when asked about extremism was perhaps indicative of participants making a subconscious association between the concepts.

It is important to put these comments into perspective, as there was no indication that participants were concerned about sectarianism leading to large-scale violence or terrorism. However, there was broader concern about how sectarianism might contribute to more specific forms of harm such as hate speech and hate crimes. Furthermore, that sectarianism might contribute to a divided society, which some participants considered to be a serious issue in Scotland currently.

Spontaneous mentions of other forms of extremism were rare. For example, participants did not spontaneously refer to right-wing extremism or Islamist extremism within text responses to the survey or in the focus groups and interviews.

To further explore this topic, focus group participants were prompted with a list of groups. This list was drawn from the work of Michalski (2019), who examined 8,000 terrorist attacks that took place in the UK and the US between 1970 and 2017 and classified them according to their underlying motivation. The groups he identified included:

- Anarchists or anti-government agitators
- Animal rights or environmentalists
- Anti-abortionists
- Leftists or Marxist groups
- Nationalists or separatists
- Racists or hate groups
- Radical Islamist extremists
- Right-wing extremists, religious or otherwise
- Promoters of sectarian violence

This list reflects the ideologies and motivations which underpinned the terror incidents examined by Michalski (2019), but it is important to note that not all groups or individuals who adhere to these ideologies or who hold these beliefs are necessarily extremist in nature. Michalski's (2019) list was used to prompt discussion among participants and is not indicative of the official views of the Scottish Government, or the view of the researchers.

The list was adapted for the purposes of this research, with the addition of 'incels'[8] and small changes to the language used.

When presented with this list, participants commonly reflected that a range of different forms of extremism were likely to be present in Scotland, but that they could not comment on the level of threat posed by individual forms of extremism

[8] The incel community is comprised of individuals who feel rejected by women – and arguably society more generally – and turn to the Internet to voice their anger, and often, desire for revenge (Regehr, 2022).

based on publicly available information. For example, when presented with the list one participant stated that:

'[A]ny one of them could be here in different sizes.' (26; FG)

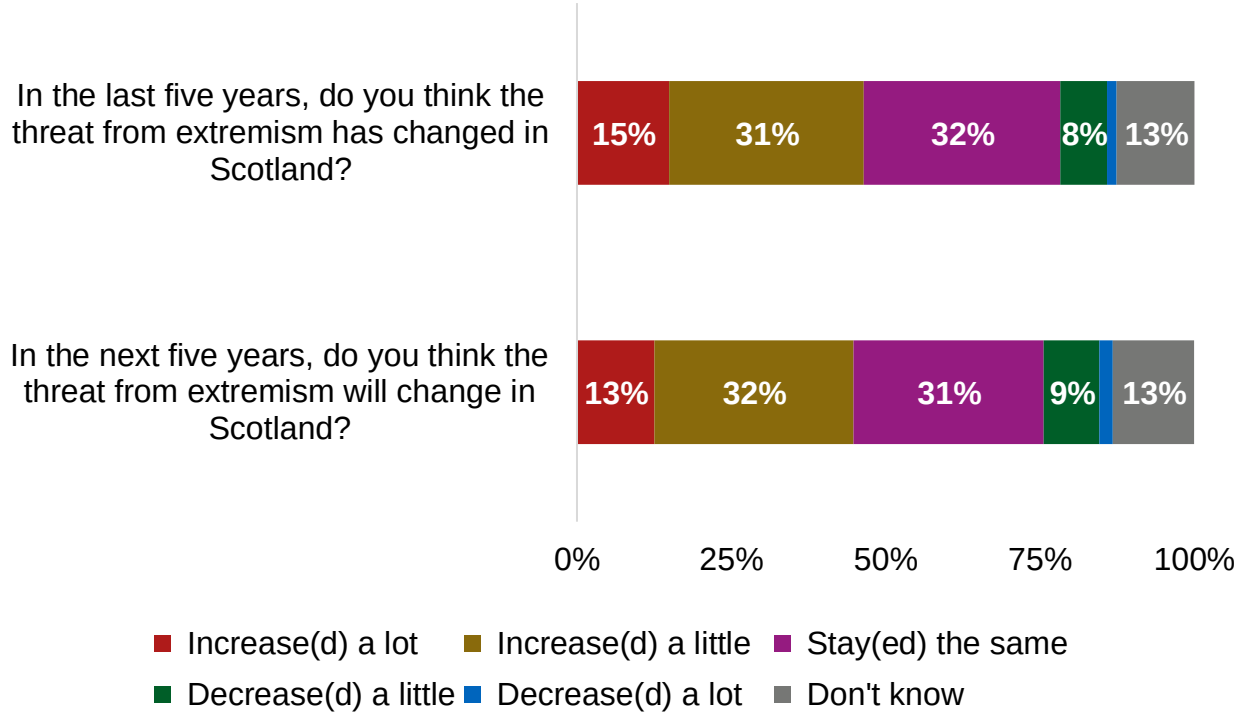
6.4 Public perceptions of variations over time

Survey results

Survey respondents were asked whether they felt that that the threat of extremism had increased, stayed the same or decreased over the last five years, and whether they felt that the threat would increase, stay the same, or decrease over the next five years (see Figure 6.3).

Close to half respondents felt that extremism has increased in the last five years (46%) and will increase in the next five years (45%).

Figure 6.3. Perceptions of the threat from extremism in the last and next five years



Q6. In the last five years, do you think the threat from extremism has changed in Scotland

Q8. In the next five years, do you think the threat from extremism will change in Scotland?

Base: All respondents, n=2071

Over half (59%) of the respondents who believed the threat from extremism in Scotland will increase a lot in the next five years also believed that the threat has increased a lot over the last five years.

Subgroup analysis explored variations in respondents' views on the threat from extremism over the last five years. Female respondents (53%) were more likely to think there had been an increase in the threat of extremism in Scotland in the last

five years than male respondents (40%). Respondents aged over 65 years (57%) were also more likely to think extremism had increased than younger age groups (43% of those aged 16-34, 47% of those aged 35-44, 36% of those aged 45-54, and 48% of those aged 55-64).

Those living in the Mid Scotland and Fife (10%), Lothian (13%), West Scotland (10%), and Central Scotland (11%) parliamentary regions were more likely to think the threat level had decreased than respondents from North East Scotland (5%).

White respondents (47%) were more likely to think the threat had increased than BAME respondents (36%), while respondents who identified as belonging to a religion (49%) were more likely to think the threat had increased than respondents who did not identify as belonging to a religion (44%).

Subgroup analysis also explored variations in respondents' views on the threat from extremism in the next five years. Male respondents (33%) were more likely to select that in the next five years the threat from extremism in Scotland will stay the same than female respondents (29%).

Respondents aged over 65 years (19%) were more likely to think the threat level will decrease than those aged 16-34 (12%), those aged 35-44 (5%), those aged 45-54 (9%), and those aged 55-64 (6%). Respondents aged over 65 years (51%) were also more likely to think the threat will increase than those aged 16-34 (43%), aged 35-44 (41%), and aged 45-54 (41%). Therefore, there were stronger opinions from the older age group compared with the younger age groups.

Respondents living in the Highlands and Islands (13%), Mid Scotland and Fife (12%), Lothian (13%), South Scotland (15%), and Central Scotland (12%) parliamentary regions were all more likely to think the threat will decrease than respondents from Glasgow (7%).

Those with a household income between £20,000-£39,999 (48%) were more likely to think the threat will increase than those with a household income below £20,000 (40%).

Finally, respondents who identified as belonging to a religion (48%) were more likely to think the threat will increase in Scotland than those who did not identify as belonging to a religion (42%).

Qualitative findings

Participants in the focus groups were divided on whether the threat of extremism in Scotland had changed over the past five years, with several potential explanations for these differing opinions emerging from the discussions. These competing perspectives again pointed to differences in how participants conceptualised extremism. Those who felt that extremism had increased tended to focus on extremist attitudes, whilst those who felt that extremism had decreased tended to focus on extremist behaviours, and terrorism in particular.

Participants who felt that extremism had increased often attributed this change to the growth of social media, and its role in spreading extremist sentiment:

> ‘The reason that I would say it would have intensified more recently is with the growth of the internet and social media because these groups may have always existed but it’s a lot easier for them to reach a wider audience and it’s a lot easier for someone to find a group like that.’ (6; FG)

However, one participant felt that the threat from extremism in Scotland remained limited, even though the internet had enabled it to grow:

> ‘I think it is easier to communicate it online so it’s easier to find those fringe groups and flourish and then propaganda and the snowball effect. It is a growing concern but still relatively quite small.’ (15; FG)

Some participants also held a view that society was becoming more divided, for example:

> ‘I don’t have any facts to back it up, but it’s just a feeling that people are getting more angry with each other, getting more divided. It seems that we are heading that way, to more... [pause] that I think would lead to more extremism.’ (15; FG)

In contrast, participants who felt that the threat of extremism had declined tended to take a longer-term perspective when thinking about the current threat. This was particularly true of older participants who believed that the threat from extremism – and from terrorism in particular – in Scotland had decreased over a longer time period. They specifically mentioned the decline in threat relating to the peace process in Northern Ireland within their lifetimes. For example:

> ‘I would have said there’s less extremism now than there was maybe twenty, thirty years ago. Regularly when my wife and family shopped in Edinburgh there would be a bomb scare when they were kids. Not happening now. So less extremist activity.’ (1; FG)

Participants in the focus groups and interviews were also asked whether they felt that the COVID-19 pandemic was likely to have had any impact on levels of extremism in the shorter term. Participants were divided on this point. Again, this division tended to reflect differences in how participants conceptualised extremism. Those who felt that extremism had increased tended to focus on the potential for extremist sentiment to have grown during the pandemic:

> ‘I got the feeling during lockdown that extremist attitudes were leaking more into the open. I’ve not really thought about why that might be, but it seemed to bring out the best and worst in people didn’t it?’ (4; FG)

> ‘I think it could possibly have an impact because you will get the odd person that maybe wouldn’t have ventured out to some of these dark corners of the internet if they weren’t trapped in their house with nothing better to do, but I don’t [think]

that would be enough people for that to have that great of an impact. I haven't personally seen an impact.' (8; I)

In contrast, participants who felt that the threat may have decreased over this period noted how the pandemic had reduced the opportunities for extremist action.

'I think during the pandemic everybody was locked in anyway so there wasn't much of anything happening.' (21; FG)

'You've got to remember that communities were in fact brought together and strengthened as communities, at least around here, during the pandemic. A lot of people helping others totally voluntarily and it was appreciated. I don't think there was very much opportunity for very much extremist activity.' (3; FG)

The issue of extreme positions in relation to the debate around Scottish independence was brought up spontaneously in some of the focus groups and interviews. Participants discussed extremism in connection to divides on the question of the constitutional future of Scotland without making reference to any specific position on independence. The underlying concern was that divisions caused by opposing views would potentially become more extreme. As one participant reflected:

'So yeah, I think if we have another [referendum], I'm not saying we shouldn't have another one, but if we have another one, there is danger that extremist views and actions could start to surface.' (4; FG)

However, it is important to note that there was no suggestion that participants were concerned about large-scale acts of violence, and that research has highlighted how Scottish nationalism has, aside from a handful of nuisance attacks and hoax threats being attributed to militant nationalist groups, been overwhelmingly non-violent (Brooke, 2018).

Further, while it is important to recognise that many participants were concerned about views regarding Scottish independence as having the potential to become more intense and extreme, it is also important to contextualise the concerns raised, noting particularly that in June 2022, during the research fieldwork period, the then First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon announced plans for a proposed second referendum on Scottish independence. The topic of independence may therefore have been at the forefront of many participants' minds during their participation in this research.

More broadly, it is important to contextualise concerns about a future increase in levels of extremism by restating that the current threat of extremism in Scotland was generally perceived to be low. As a result, concerns about a future increase did not point to a concern that extremism would become widespread:

'I think different forms could manifest in different communities. But I do agree that for the most part I don't think extremism is a particularly large problem in

Scotland or UK-wide. I just think it has the potential to become a problem.' (15; FG)

6.5 Conclusion

To what extent do the public perceive extremism to be a threat or problem in Scotland?

Three quarters (74%) of survey respondents considered extremism to be a problem in Scotland (either minor, moderate or big), though fewer than one in ten (9%) considered it to be a big problem. Higher proportions regarded extremism as a problem in the rest of the UK (82%) and worldwide (87%).

This was reflected in the qualitative discussions. Focus group and interview participants generally saw the threat from extremism in Scotland to be low, and lower than in England.

Respondents' concerns about extremism in their local area were also relatively low compared with wider geographical areas. Less than half (46%) of survey respondents considered extremism as a problem, and only 5% as a big problem in their local area. BAME respondents (57%) were more likely to perceive extremism as a problem in their local area than white respondents (45%), while people in Glasgow were more likely to identify extremism as a problem in their local area (58%) than those in other parliamentary regions.

Have public perceptions of extremism as a threat or problem in Scotland changed over time?

Close to half of the survey respondents (46%) believed that the threat of extremism had risen over the last five years in Scotland, while around one in ten (9%) felt that it had decreased.

In the qualitative research, those who felt that the threat had increased tended to focus on extremist attitudes, such as the growth of social media and its role in spreading extremist sentiment. Meanwhile, those who felt that the threat had decreased tended to focus on extremist behaviours, and terrorism in particular. This was particularly true of older participants who believed that the threat from terrorism had decreased over a longer time period. For example, they mentioned the decline in threat relating to the peace process in Northern Ireland within their lifetimes.

Do the public think extremism is increasing, decreasing or is stable in Scotland?

Survey respondents were divided over how the extremist threat might change over time. Around a third felt the threat from extremism would stay the same (31%), under half (45%) that the threat will rise, and around one in ten (11%) thought that that the threat would decrease in the next five years. Qualitative participants felt that threat levels would be affected by the extent of divisions in society and how extreme different sides of religious, political or ideological arguments became.

What are the public's views on the types of extremism that are of most concern or growing concern currently, and why?

In the survey, an open question asking about what form of extremism posed the biggest threat in Scotland generated a range of responses. The most commonly-mentioned terms were 'hate', 'racism' and 'online', indicating a broad understanding of extremism, as demonstrated in previous sections.

In the qualitative research, participants displayed concern about intra-Christian sectarianism, which was regarded as most prevalent in the Central Belt. There was also discussion of racism as a problem in Scotland, again suggesting a broad interpretation of the term extremism.

Notably, participants did not spontaneously refer to right-wing extremism or Islamist extremism within text responses to the survey or in the focus groups and interviews and felt unable to comment on the extent to which different forms of extremism might exist in Scotland when presented with a list of groups.

What are views on the key drivers of these concerns?

Participants in the focus groups and interviews often made an association between population size and the threat of extremism. England's larger population was commonly cited as contributing to an increased threat of extremism when compared with Scotland, whilst more populated areas of Scotland were seen as experiencing higher threat than less populated areas.

7. Public opinions on efforts to tackle extremism in Scotland

7.1 Introduction

This section presents findings relating to the public's awareness and perceptions of organisations working to tackle extremism in Scotland. The specific research question explored was:

- What are the levels of awareness of, and attitudes towards, how organisations are tackling extremism in Scotland?

In the survey, respondents were asked for their views on whether enough is being done to tackle extremism in Scotland by a range of organisations. This was also covered in the interviews, to allow participants to explain their answers in more detail. In addition, the interviews also asked participants about their awareness and perceptions of Prevent in Scotland. The Prevent duty was officially introduced in July 2015 as part of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015), and applies in Scotland with specific guidance (Home Office, 2021a). The duty places a statutory obligation on a range of sectors (including health, prisons, the police, education, and local authorities) to pay 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.

The introduction of the Prevent duty led to a rapid increase in studies exploring its impact in England – particularly in the context of the education sector (see for example Jerome, Elwick & Kazim, 2019). Yet, a key evidence gap relates to views on, and the impact of, the Prevent duty in Scotland, with only a handful of studies specifically examining Prevent in Scotland. For example, a research project from Birmingham City University included Scottish institutions when interviewing university staff about the impact of the Prevent duty (Spiller, Awan & Whiting, 2018), and when examining university Prevent policies (Whiting et al., 2021), while in another study examined the assumptions underpinning the UK government's Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) training sessions having attended one such session in Edinburgh (Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher, 2016). Another notable study focused on Scotland is Morris and Meloy's (2020) analysis of the case records of 23 individuals who were the subject of Prevent referrals in Fife. Research is also currently being carried out to examine the delivery of the Prevent duty in the Highlands and Islands (Brooke, forthcoming).

However, whilst existing studies provide some (limited) evidence of institutional compliance with the Prevent duty, it is not yet possible to draw robust conclusions about the impact and perceptions of Prevent in Scotland from this work.

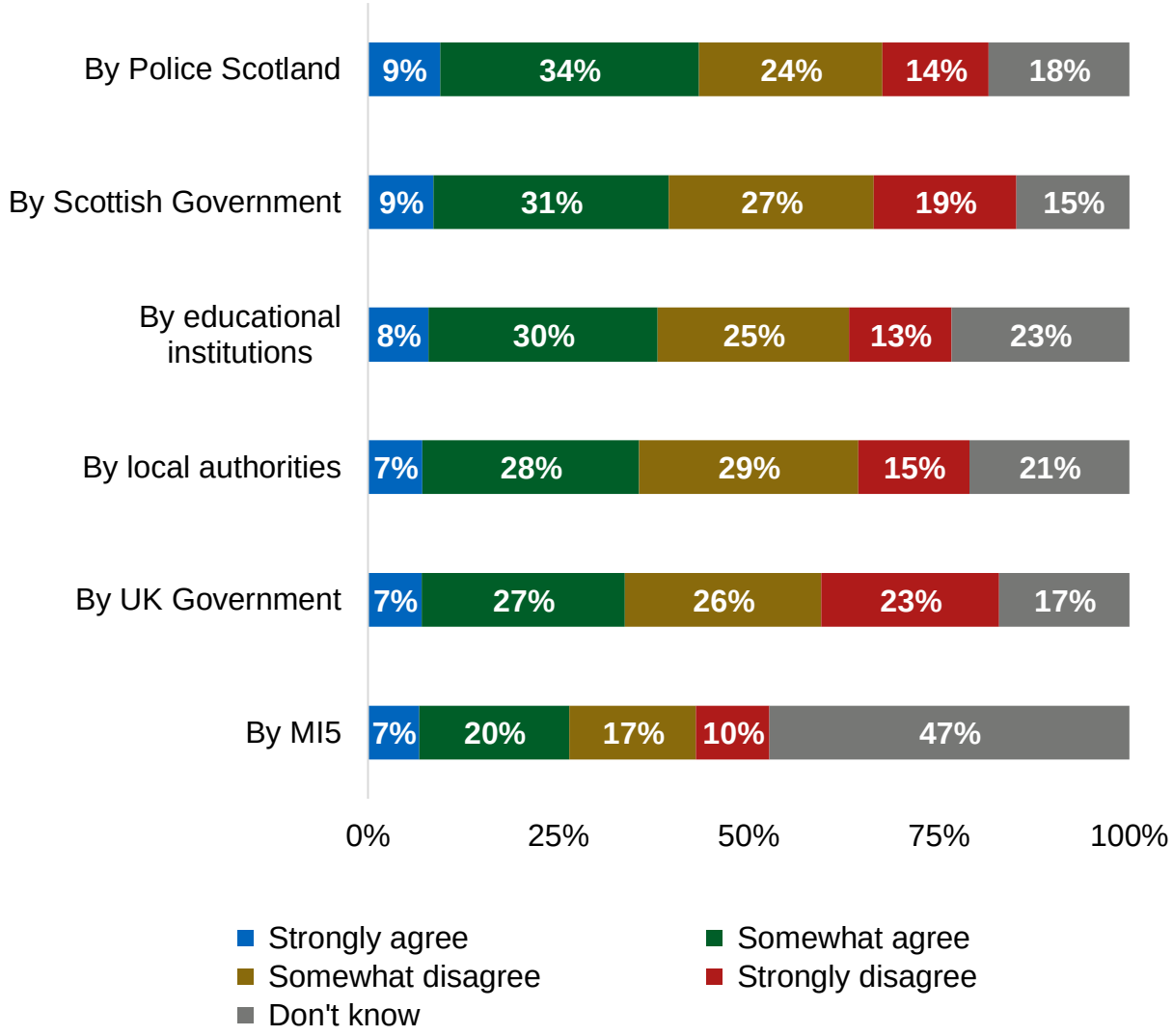
The interviews therefore included high-level questioning to explore the public's awareness of, and views on the Prevent duty in Scotland, as well as their views on what warrants a referral to Prevent.

7.2 Public views of organisations tackling extremism

Survey results

The survey asked respondents their views on whether enough is being done to tackle extremism in Scotland by a range of organisations, including local authorities, educational institutions, Scottish Government, UK Government, Police Scotland and MI5.

Figure 7.1. Perceptions of action taken by various organisations to tackle extremism in Scotland



Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that enough is being done to tackle extremism in Scotland?

Base: All respondents, n=2071

As shown in Figure 7.1, responses of 'don't know' were high. In particular, almost half of respondents selected this answer option for MI5 (47%), while almost a quarter (23%) selected this for educational institutions. Less than a fifth selected 'don't know' for Police Scotland (18%) and the Scottish Government (15%). As will

be discussed further in the next section, qualitative participants often pointed out that they were giving their impressions of how well organisations in Scotland are tackling extremism with very limited knowledge of what organisations are doing in this regard.

For those with an opinion, roughly half were positive and roughly half were negative towards each organisation.

Out of the organisations listed, Police Scotland gained the highest proportion of positive responses. Over two fifths (43%) agreed that Police Scotland were doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland.

Further analysis explored views on whether enough is being done by the Scottish Government to tackle extremism in more detail. Males appeared slightly more favourable towards the efforts of the Scottish Government than females, with 42% of males agreeing that the Scottish Government are doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland compared with 37% of females.

BAME respondents were also more favourable towards the Scottish Government than white respondents, with 49% of BAME respondents agreeing the Scottish Government are doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland compared with 39% of white respondents.

Meanwhile, the oldest age group was less favourable towards the Scottish Government than younger groups, with respondents aged over 65 years more likely to disagree that enough is being done to tackle extremism by the Scottish Government in Scotland compared with all other age groups (52% compared with 44% of those aged 16-34, 44% of those aged 35-44, 41% of those aged 45-54, and 46% of those aged 55-64).

Looking at differences between groups for the statement regarding local authorities, males (39%) were more likely to think enough is being done to tackle extremism by local authorities than females (33%).

Those aged over 65 years (42%) were also more likely to agree local authorities are doing enough to tackle extremism than those aged 35-64 (33% of 35-44 year olds, 30% of 45-54 year olds and 33% of 55-64 year olds).

Respondents living in the South Scotland parliamentary region (42%) were more likely than both respondents living in the Highlands and Islands (29%) and Glasgow (32%) to agree that enough is being done to tackle extremism by local authorities in Scotland.

Qualitative findings

In the qualitative research, participants expressed that the public may be unaware of what is being done to tackle extremism by different organisations.

> ‘You dunna really read or hear about how they’re [UK Government] tackling [extremism], but I am sure behind the scenes there will be intelligence resources

keeping an eye on a number of individuals or groups… Well again, what you hear and what you see, they [Police Scotland] seem to be reacting [as] if there was extremism. But you don't know what is happening behind the scenes.' (2; I)

Another participant discussed how their attitude towards whether organisations were doing enough to tackle extremism related to their awareness of extremism in general, including terrorist attacks:

'I don't see any [terrorist attacks], so I would say they are doing well.' (18; I)

The lack of public awareness of counter-extremism efforts undertaken by different organisations made it difficult for them to objectively reflect on what was being done and how effectively they were being undertaken. This finding suggests that a more effective strategy of communicating to the public what is being done by various agencies would allow for a greater public understanding of existing counter-extremism efforts.

7.3 Public awareness of Prevent

Qualitative findings

At the end of each interview a series of questions were asked to gauge awareness of, and views on, Prevent in Scotland. Interview participants were largely unaware of Prevent, with none able to describe it. Therefore, all were presented with a summary of Prevent and asked for their initial reactions. A common response was that this made sense in principle:

'That seems like a perfectly sensible idea, see something, say something, I think that is absolutely a good idea.' (8; I)

Therefore, even though awareness was low, impressions were largely favourable when the purpose of Prevent was explained.

After largely expressing positive reactions, participants considered why they, or others, had not heard of Prevent in Scotland. For example:

'This Prevent, I've certainly never heard of that before. That's an issue I'm sure there's not a lot of people in Scotland that would know about Prevent. And I view that as an issue full stop.' (2; I)

For those not employed in a role with Prevent duty responsibilities, knowledge of the Prevent duty would not necessarily be expected. However, the lack of awareness among participants further illustrates the limited popular understanding of existing counter-extremism measures.

7.4 Public views on Prevent

Qualitative findings

After being provided with an explanation of the Prevent duty, interview participants were prompted to consider the types of behaviours they felt people would have to

display to warrant a potential Prevent referral. Many participants were unsure how they would identify this, or what their threshold would be. One explained:

> ‘I don’t know how you would notice things like that. […] thinking if it was someone I knew like hiding their laptop or their phone, not wanting people to see what they’re doing. Becoming very into themselves like radicalised. If someone’s grooming them and making them think differently you would think you would see a change in their personality as well.’ (24; I)

Other participants were particularly conscious of people being reported because of misplaced concerns, or adverse attitudes to people with protected characteristics:

> ‘How many people would be reported purely because of how they look or their accent? And that’s where I think the drawback of that sort of system would come but then I don’t know how else you would avoid that in this situation.’ (8; I)

This point relates to the work of scholars such as Bonino (2015a) who carried out interviews with Muslims living in Edinburgh, and found that most participants ‘had either themselves experienced or had relatives and/or friends who were subjected to perceived undue targeting or harsh treatment when leaving from or arriving at a Scottish airport’. Concerns about, and experiences of, anti-Muslim sentiment were widespread in Bonino’s research, though there was some evidence to suggest that participants perceived Scotland, and particularly Edinburgh, as being more tolerant than England (Bonino, 2015a).

Interview participants presented a range of potential options that they would consider if they were concerned about the behaviour of someone they knew. Some participants spoke about conducting a personal intervention, although this was often in the context of knowing the person well. One participant articulated:

> ‘If it was someone that was close to me, I would think that I could help them. I would try understand. If I thought they were a danger I would possibly, but then that would be extreme because what is going to happen to that person? What have they done? But if I thought I couldn’t help them then I would yeah.’ (24; I)

A key point here is that this (and other) participants saw informal intervention by friends and family as a preliminary step in the counter-extremism process in some circumstances. That is, whilst they would be willing to refer an individual to Prevent if they felt it was needed, they discussed how friends or family members might first attempt to engage with and help individuals themselves prior to deciding to refer them to Prevent. Similar findings have been reported in research in England. For example, Thomas et al. (2017) found that community members concerned about the potential radicalisation of somebody close to them were likely to go through a ‘staged’ process. This consisted of first trying to intervene themselves or through other friends, family or members of their communities, before reporting their concerns to the authorities.

Others wanted more information about what a Prevent referral would accomplish before they would consider undertaking one. Some participants were therefore

cautious about making a referral without knowing more about what this process would involve and what the implications might be for the individual being referred. Both these concerns were raised in the research by Thomas et al. (2017) discussed above. For example:

> 'Yeah, I think it would be difficult, it would depend on the situation. It would be different if you had suspicions about a neighbour, like I say, but if it was maybe a close relative or a close friend it would definitely depend on what the situation was like. Because I can't remember the wording, but it says, "refer to them" or something like that, but is it going to feel like I'm reporting someone or grassing them, that might not be the best way forward.' (8; I)

Another participant explained that before reporting anyone:

> 'I'd need more information to understand what meets the criteria, to see what meets it.' (10; I)

Both comments speak to a concern about what form the referral process could take and whether it was in that person's best interests. Wider research has shown that social and cultural concerns about policing may also act as a restraint on approaching official counter-extremism channels (Awan & Guru, 2017; Cherney & Murphy, 2017).

Participants also talked through scenarios where they would make a referral to Prevent, make a referral after trying something else, or not make a referral. Their hypothetical intention depended on a number of considerations, including: how – and how well – they knew the person involved; and the extent to which they felt there was a possibility that the individual's extremist views might develop into extremist actions. Participants also discussed a desire to familiarise themselves with the criteria and process for making a Prevent referral before doing so.

Finally, participants were asked how they would find out more about the Prevent duty or the referral process. Participants offered a variety of answers, including that they would search for information online, contact the police or local authority, or speak to a superior if it occurred in a professional setting. Participants' instinct was not to seek information on official websites, but rather via a search engine, which may not necessarily prioritise official guidance. This would suggest that more can be done to raise public awareness of legitimate sources of information on Prevent, even for those who do not hold Prevent duty responsibilities.

7.5 Conclusion

What are the levels of awareness of, and attitudes towards, how organisations are tackling extremism in Scotland?

Participants were conscious of their lack of awareness of the work being done by a range of organisations to tackle extremism in Scotland. As a result, participants were reticent to say whether they thought organisations were doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland. This was reflected in the survey results, where responses of 'don't know' were high.

Awareness of Prevent was very low within the small sample of qualitative participants. All the same, they expressed general support for Prevent in theory, and a desire for more awareness of how it worked in practice. This included, for example, information on the criteria used to assess radicalisation risk, and the different referral mechanisms.

Participants considered intervention by family members or friends as a potential preliminary step in the counter-extremism process. That is, whilst they would be willing to refer an individual to Prevent if they felt this was needed, they discussed how friends or families might first attempt to engage with and help individuals themselves prior to deciding to refer them to Prevent.

When asked about potentially making a referral themselves, participants said that any potential referral would depend on how well they knew the person and how large a threat they perceived that person to pose, including whether they were likely to act on their views in a way that would cause harm.

They also reflected upon how conscious and unconscious bias within society could lead to individuals being misidentified as showing signs of radicalisation, and in turn wrongly referred to Prevent. Participants therefore showed an awareness of how mechanisms to counter extremism might produce negative and unintended consequences.

8. Key findings and considerations

This section summarises the key findings from across the research, and is organised by the research themes: public understandings of extremism; views on existing definitions of extremism; experiences of extremism; views on the threat of extremism; and opinions on tackling extremism. Key demographic differences and suggestions for further research are also presented.

8.1 Public understandings of extremism

Key findings

Public understandings of extremism were subjective, nuanced and context-dependent.

In the survey, nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents were at least 'fairly confident' that they understood what the term extremism meant. However, in-depth discussion during the qualitative research suggested that members of the public are not necessarily either confident or fixed in their understandings of the term.

For example, participants' opinions on whether and how views and actions constitute extremism were highly subject to context. Participants usually desired more information about the views and actions, such as the time and place they occurred, their underlying motivation and their impact, in order to determine whether they were extremist.

Causing harm to others was widely held as an important threshold for when an action could be considered as 'crossing the line' into extremism. Over half (53%) of survey respondents considered 'causing physical harm to a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons' to always represent extremism. The qualitative research found some had a specific interpretation of harm as involving physical violence, while others considered wider forms of harm to constitute extremism, such as inciting or encouraging violence, and unplanned protests if these caused harm to members or the public through disruption and delay.

Participants saw significant overlap, but subtle differences, between the terms 'extremism' and the terms 'terrorism', 'sectarianism' and 'hate crime'.

Considerations

Bodies tackling extremism in Scotland should be aware that while levels of confidence in understanding of extremism appeared high initially, qualitative discussions revealed that participants' understandings of extremism were wide-ranging, and highly malleable. Therefore, in any public messaging regarding the threat of extremism, forms extremism can take, or counter-extremism work more broadly, it may be beneficial to explain what is meant by the term 'extremism', by providing a definition.

While the Scottish Government does not currently have an official definition of extremism, a notable finding from this research was that among many participants,

causing harm to others, physical or otherwise, was viewed as a clear threshold for extremist behaviour. This suggests that a definition that references causing harm – including, but not restricted to violence – may be understood and accepted by the public. The Scottish Government may wish to take this into consideration if developing a definition in future.

The Scottish Government may also wish to present any future definition of extremism alongside definitions of associated terms, including terrorism and hate crime, so that distinctions between these concepts are clear.

A further notable finding was that levels of confidence in understanding of extremism differed between demographic groups. For example, young people were less confident than older people in their understanding. Therefore, messaging about extremism should be tailored to groups with different levels of confidence in their understanding. Groups with lower levels of confidence may welcome entry-level messaging to increase their knowledge on extremism. Groups with higher levels of confidence may need more expansive messaging to counter any potentially misplaced confidence.

Finally, while on the one hand participants were supportive of mitigation of the harm caused by extremism, on the other hand, they were conscious of the balance that policymaking must achieve so as not to stifle debate and democratic protest. The public are therefore likely to understand the challenges bodies attempting to tackle extremism face in determining whether an action or view constitutes extremism or could pose harm to the public.

Furthermore, they were mindful of UK or Scottish Government policies resulting in unintended negative impacts on groups within the population, an aspect which can be mitigated though Equality Impact Assessments.[9]

8.2 Public views on existing definitions of extremism

Key findings

Of the definitions shown to participants, there was some preference for the definition adopted in Australia (Australian Government, 2022), partly because it makes explicit reference to violence.

Challenges were raised with the UK Government's (2011) definition of extremism, which largely related to the use of the term 'British values'. It was felt that if values were to be mentioned, more neutral language should be used, with no mention of a specific country or culture. Participants who raised this issue seemed to be concerned with ensuring any official definition of extremism used in Scotland would be widely applicable and, potentially, widely accepted.

[9] The Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Impact Assessments

Some members of the public struggled with the accessibility of the definitions of extremism presented and indicated a desire for a clear definition expressed in plain English.

Splitting extremism into categories, including 'religiously-motivated', 'politically-motivated', and 'ideologically-' or 'identity-motivated' did not generate more clarity or consensus in what was understood as extremism. Participants struggled to think of examples to 'fit' into each motivation, and 'ideologically-' or 'identity-motivated' extremism was seen by several to encapsulate all motivations.

Considerations

It appears that the public may prefer a definition of extremism which makes explicit reference to violence, such as the Australian definition. Referencing values which are attributed to any political or geographical area should be avoided. Any definition of extremism should be as clear as possible, and expressed in plain English.

While splitting extremism into different forms of motivation (e.g., religiously-motivated, politically-motivated and ideologically-motivated) could be useful in enabling the public to differentiate between different forms of extremism, the qualitative research highlighted the difficulties with creating exclusionary categories, and indicated that delineating these could be challenging. Ideology was understood as a system of beliefs, including political or religious beliefs. Therefore, if it is deemed important for a definition to include a reference to motivations, the term 'ideologically-motivated' may be sufficient.

8.3 Public experiences of extremism

Key findings

A third (33%) of survey respondents considered themselves to have experienced or observed extremism in Scotland in the past five years. Higher proportions had experienced discrimination (53%) and racism (50%) in this period.

The qualitative research suggested that participants were including a wide range of experiences when reporting experiences of extremism, including of intra-Christian sectarianism, violence and abuse, and observing extremist views being shared.

Despite the lack of terrorist activity in Scotland in the last five years, 15% reported having observed or witnessed terrorism in Scotland over this period. Possible explanations for this are that participants interpreted this question broadly, and included events that had taken place outside of Scotland or longer than five years ago in their answers.

Indeed, when qualitative participants discussed examples of terrorism they had observed, in all cases they clarified either that these did not take place in Scotland or in the past five years, indicating that the survey respondents may also have included wider events in their observations.

Some groups within the population, including younger people and those from BAME communities, were more likely to say they had experienced or observed

extremism than others. BAME communities also had higher instances of experiencing or observing discrimination, violence or hate crime.

Considerations

While a significant minority of respondents reported having observed extremism in the last five years, in the qualitative discussions a broad range of examples of extremism were shared, which were notable for the diversity of beliefs and actions that participants considered to be extremist, and for the different criteria that respondents used to determine that these incidents were examples of extremism.

In order to gain a more robust estimate of the extent of public experiences of extremism in future research, it would be helpful to provide a clear definition of what is meant by extremism to participants. Otherwise, members of the public naturally think of concepts they associate with the word ‘extremism’ such as racism.

8.4 Public views on the threat of extremism

Key findings

Less than one in ten survey respondents stated that extremism was a big problem in Scotland (9%). Higher proportions of respondents felt that extremism was a big problem in the rest of the UK (24%) and worldwide (49%).

As the geographical area under consideration expanded, people regarded the threat from extremism as higher. While nearly three quarters (74%) of survey respondents considered extremism to be a problem in Scotland (either minor, moderate or big), less than half (46%) considered extremism to be a problem in their local area, including only 5% who felt it was a big problem.

Survey respondents in Glasgow (58%) were more likely to identify extremism as a problem in their local area than any other parliamentary regions. BAME respondents were also more likely to perceive extremism as a problem in their local area than white respondents (57% compared with 45%).

In qualitative discussions, participants often made an association between population size and the threat from extremism. England’s larger population was commonly cited as contributing to an increased threat of extremism when compared with Scotland, whilst more populated areas of Scotland were seen as experiencing higher threat than less populated areas.

Close to half of respondents (46%) believed the threat of extremism had risen over the last five years in Scotland, while 9% felt that it had decreased, and around a third (32%) were unsure. In the qualitative research, those who felt that the threat had increased tended to focus on extremist attitudes, such as the growth of social media and its role in spreading extremist sentiment. Meanwhile, those who felt that the threat had decreased tended to focus on extremist behaviours, and terrorism in particular, over a longer time period. This was particularly the case for older participants, who mentioned the decline in threat relating to the peace process in Northern Ireland within their lifetimes.

Almost half (45%) of survey respondents thought that the threat from extremism would increase in the next five years, while around a third (31%) felt it would stay the same and less than one in ten (9%) felt it would decrease. Qualitative participants felt that threat levels would be affected by the extent of divisions in society and how extreme different sides of religious, political or ideological arguments became.

In terms of which forms of extremism participants felt pose the biggest threat in Scotland, participants displayed concern about intra-Christian sectarianism, which was viewed as closely linked to extremism, and regarded as most prevalent in the Central Belt. Participants did not spontaneously refer to right-wing extremism or Islamist extremism within text responses to the survey or in the focus groups and interviews, and felt unable to comment on the extent to which different forms of extremism might exist in Scotland when presented with a list of groups.

Considerations

In the qualitative discussions, an association was drawn between population size and the threat of extremism. This may indicate that participants naturally assume that less populated areas and countries have relatively low threat levels. While no published research was found to evidence a correlation between population size and level of threat from extremism, the Scottish Government may wish to carry out further research to explore whether levels of threat vary in this way.

Survey respondents associated the term ‘online’ with extremism. Qualitative participants did not tend to share their views on online extremism without prompting because although they were aware that extremism might be fostered through online communications, they did not have any direct experience of this. The exception was some discussion of social media content expressing views they considered to be extremism or showing actions they considered to be extremism. The research indicates that the public would be supportive of work to minimise sharing of extremist views online, and of counter-extremism work focusing on online activity. However, they may have limited understanding of the threat of online extremism or the counter-measures in place to tackle online extremism at present.

8.5 Public opinions on tackling extremism

Key findings

Survey responses to a question asking about the efforts of different organisations attempting to tackle extremism in Scotland were mixed, with approximately equal proportions of respondents expressing a positive or a negative opinion. High proportions of respondents answered ‘don’t know’, indicating that many respondents had limited awareness of what was being done by the different organisations.

In the qualitative discussions, participants were reluctant to say whether they thought particular organisations were doing enough or not doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland given their knowledge of their work was limited.

Awareness of Prevent was very low within the small sample of qualitative participants. Nevertheless, they expressed general support for Prevent in theory, and a desire for more awareness of how Prevent works in practice.

Intervention by existing social contacts was viewed as an important preliminary step in the counter-extremism process, and something that participants felt might be important prior to any formal referral taking place. That is, whilst they would be willing to refer an individual to Prevent if they felt this was needed, they discussed how friends or families might first attempt to engage with and help individuals themselves prior to deciding to refer them to Prevent.

Participants considered both intended positive and unintended negative outcomes that might arise from counter-extremism measures, for example the risk that population groups might be unfairly targeted.

Considerations

The Scottish Government and other public bodies attempting to tackle extremism in Scotland may wish to consider whether to present more to the public on how they are working to counter extremism and terrorism, given low awareness of this among participants.

8.6 Key demographic differences

A summary of the key statistical results from the survey combined with observations from the qualitative research is provided in Appendix E. Some key differences not already covered in this section are summarised below:

Gender

- Males were more confident in their understanding of the term ‘extremism’ than females.
- Females displayed higher levels of uncertainty in their answers to the survey questions, and in qualitative discussions, desired more context to assess whether they thought particular behaviours or views could be considered extremist.
- Males were more likely to associate sectarianism and politics with extremism than females, while females were more likely to associate homophobia with extremism than males.
- Females were more likely to think extremism was a problem in their local area, and that levels of extremism in Scotland had increased in the last five years, than males.
- Males appeared more favourable towards the efforts of the Scottish Government to tackle extremism than females.

Age

- The youngest age group (aged 16-34) were more likely not to feel confident in their understanding of the term ‘extremism’ than other age groups.

- Respondents aged over 65 were less likely than younger people to categorise given actions as extremist, meaning they appear to have a higher threshold for considering an action as extremist than younger age groups.
- Respondents aged over 65 were more likely to think there had been an increase in extremism in Scotland in the last five years than younger age groups, but they were also more likely to think extremism will decrease in the next five years than younger age groups.
- Respondents aged over 65 were less favourable towards the efforts of the Scottish Government to tackle extremism than younger groups.

Location

- People in Glasgow parliamentary region were more likely to identify extremism as a problem in their local area than any other parliamentary region.
- In qualitative discussions, participants felt that more populated, urban areas were more threatened by extremism than more remote, less populous areas.
- Participants displayed concern about intra-Christian sectarianism, and saw this as more prevalent in the Central Belt than other parts of Scotland.

Ethnicity

- BAME respondents were more likely to associate extremism with racism than white respondents.
- BAME respondents were more likely to perceive extremism as a problem in their local area than white respondents.
- BAME respondents were more favourable towards the Scottish Government's efforts to tackle extremism than white respondents.
- White respondents were more likely to think the threat of extremism in Scotland had increased in the last five years than BAME respondents.

Religion

- Respondents who identified as belonging to a religion were more likely to think the threat from extremism had increased in the last five years in Scotland than respondents who did not identify as belonging to a religion.
- Respondents who identified as belonging to a religion were more likely to think the threat of extremism will increase in Scotland in the next five years than those who did not identify as belonging to a religion.

8.7 Further research

This mixed-method research study involved over 2,000 residents of Scotland, helping to address a significant evidence gap regarding public perceptions and experiences of extremism. There were differences in the understandings, views and experiences of different demographic groups. This report has not commented on reasons for these differences, except when secondary sources of evidence were available towards explaining results. It was also not appropriate to draw strong conclusions from the relatively small number of 26 qualitative research participants.

Given the differences in opinion across demographic groups highlighted in this report, research with sufficient sub-samples of participants could explore what leads to differences in opinion across groups in more detail. In particular, research with young people, exploring how attitudes to extremism are formed, could be of particular value in this area. Young people may also be more exposed to the coverage of extremism views or actions on social media than older age groups. In this study the youngest age group was 16-34. However, research with school-aged children could bring in different experiences and would help future-proof policy making. Research with people living in different areas of Scotland would also be valuable, given the differences found between parliamentary regions in the analysis of survey results.

Given that public views and experiences are subject to change, and that examples and topics brought up by participants are likely to be influenced by any topical coverage, it may be beneficial to explore how perceptions and views change in future. The research instruments designed for this project could be utilised to do so; for example, repetition of the survey could allow for analysis of trends over time. It may also be worthwhile to develop longitudinal research on this topic, for example, to track public views on the threat of extremism, and the extent to which the public have experienced extremism or related phenomena such as sectarianism or hate crime.

Finally, this research focused on exploring public perceptions of the threat posed by extremism in Scotland. It demonstrated that the public have mixed views on the level of threat and were largely uncertain about the extent and reach of particular extremist groups or ideologies. Further research which seeks to develop understanding of the level of threat, drawing on different data, would be beneficial for informing Scottish Government efforts to counter extremism in Scotland.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. How much of a problem do you consider extremism to be?
   - In my local area
   - In Scotland
   - In the rest of the UK
   - Worldwide

SCALE: A big problem, a moderate problem, A minor problem, no problem at all, DK

2. How confident are you, if at all, that you know what is meant by the term 'extremism'?
SCALE: Very confident, fairly confident, not very confident, not at all confident, don't know

3. Which of the following words do you most strongly associate with extremism? Please select up to three options.
[phone- pause for unprompted responses and note]
[randomised order except last two options]
   - Terrorism,
   - Hate crime,
   - Violence,
   - Racism,
   - Propaganda,
   - Discrimination,
   - Homophobia,
   - Transphobia,
   - Misogyny,
   - Sectarianism,
   - Community tension,
   - Religion,
   - Politics,
   - None of the above,
   - Other (please specify)
   - Don't know

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
   - You can be an extremist without being physically violent
   - You can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence

SCALE: Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, DK

5. Do you consider any of the following to represent extremism?
[randomised]

- Attending a non-violent protest for political, religious or ideological reasons
- Making derogatory remarks about someone for political, religious or ideological reasons
- Causing criminal damage for political, religious or ideological reasons
- Sharing material promoting a group known to use violence for political, religious or ideological reasons
- Collecting money for a group known to use violence for political, religious or ideological reasons
- Assaulting someone for political, religious or ideological reasons
- Causing physical harm to a large number of people for political, religious or ideological reasons

SCALE: Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely. Never, DK

6. In the last five years, do you think the threat from extremism has changed in Scotland?

- Increased a lot,
- Increased a little,
- Stayed the same,
- Decreased a little,
- Decreased a lot,
- Don't know

7. Have you observed extremism in Scotland in the past 5 years? This can include experiencing extremism yourself.

- Yes, online
- Yes, in person
- Yes, online and in person
- No
- Don't know

8. Could you describe what happened?
[ask only if answer to 5 is first 3 options]
[note]

9. Have you observed any of these in Scotland in the past 5 years, either online or in person? This can include experiencing these yourself.
[randomised order]

- Terrorism,

- Hate crime,
- Violence,
- Racism,
- Community tension,
- Discrimination,
- Homophobia,
- Transphobia,
- Misogyny,
- Sectarianism,

Yes, No

10. What type of extremism do you think poses the biggest threat in Scotland? [note]

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that enough is being done to tackle extremism in Scotland?

- By local authorities
- By educational institutions
- By Scottish Government
- By UK Government
- By Police Scotland
- By MI5

SCALE: Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, DK

12. In the next five years, do you think the threat from extremism will change in Scotland?

- Increase a lot
- Increase a little
- Stay the same
- Decrease a little
- Decrease a lot
- DK

13. What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

- None
- Buddhist
- Church of Scotland
- Roman Catholic
- Other Christian

- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Pagan
- Sikh
- Another religion or body, please specify

[note of prefer not to say/ refusal]

14. What is your ethnic group? Choose **one** section which **best describes** your ethnic group or background

- African, Scottish African or British African
- Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian
- Caribbean or Black
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- White
- Other ethnic group, please specify

[note of prefer not to say/ refusal]

15. In the Scottish Parliament Election of 2021, 64% of people voted, while 36% of people did not vote. Thinking back to the Holyrood Election in May 2021, can you remember whether or not you voted in that specific election?

- I voted in the 2021 Holyrood elections
- I did not vote in the 2021 Holyrood elections
- Don't know

16. In Scottish Parliament elections you are given two votes. Your first vote is for a single person to represent your constituency in the Scottish Parliament.
Which party did you vote for with your Constituency vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament Elections?

- Scottish National Party (SNP)
- Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party
- Scottish Liberal Democrats
- Scottish Labour Party
- Another Party
- Can't remember
- Refused

Appendix B: Survey Sample

Sex (Weighted total: 2071)	N	%
Female	1075	51.9
Male	996	48.1

Age* (Weighted Total: 2071)	N	%
16-34	612	29.6
35-44	305	14.7
45-54	364	17.6
55-64	325	15.7
over 65 years	465	22.5

*some only gave age range

Scottish Parliamentary Region (Weighted Total: 2072)	N	%
Highlands and Islands	154	7.4
Mid Scotland and Fife	255	12.3
North East Scotland	289	14.0
Lothian	340	16.4
South Scotland	192	9.3
Glasgow	240	11.6
West Scotland	293	14.1
Central Scotland	309	14.9

Income (Weighted total: 1864)	N	%
Up to £19,999	658	35.3
£20,000 - £39,999	710	38.1
Over £40,000	496	26.6

Education Level (Weighted Total: 2050)	N	%
One to four Standard Grades (any grade) or equivalent	478	23.3
Five or more Standard Grades (grade A* to C) or equivalent including intermediate apprenticeships	603	29.4
Two or more Advanced Highers or equivalent	206	10.0
Higher Education, including college or university qualifications	763	37.2

Religion (Weighted Total: 2071)	N	%
None	866	41.8
Buddhist	21	1.0
Church of Scotland	476	23.0
Roman Catholic	233	11.3
Other Christian	188	9.1
Hindu	9	0.4
Jewish	9	0.4
Muslim	35	1.7
Pagan	21	1.0
Sikh	7	0.3
Other	60	2.9
Prefer not to say/Refusal	146	7.0
NET: Religious	1059	51.1

Ethnic Group (Weighted Total: 2071)	N	%
African, Scottish African or British African	24	1.2
Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	45	2.2
Caribbean or Black	14	0.7
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	38	1.8
White	1903	91.9

Other	15	0.7
Prefer not to say	33	1.6
NET: BAME	136	6.6

2021 Scottish Parliament Elections Constituency Vote (Weighted Total: 1526)	N	%
SNP	655	42.9
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party	301	19.7
Scottish Labour Party	297	19.5
Scottish Liberal Democrats	95	6.2
Scottish Green Party	3	0.2
Alba	0	0.0
Another party	23	1.5
Can't remember	44	2.9
Refused	109	7.1
Other: Vote for any party other than the SNP	718	34.7

Appendix C: Qualitative participant details

Table C.1: Qualitative research participants in relation to minimum quotas

Characteristic	Focus Group participants (n=26)	Interview participants (n=8)
Female	12	4
30 years and under	10	3
Rural Areas	11	2
Low SIMD	7	2
Ethnicity Non-White	5	2
Religious	12	3

Table C.2: Characteristics of qualitative research participants

Code	Sex	Age	Religion	Ethnicity	Location	Interview
1	F	55-64	Church of Scotland	White	Glasgow	Yes
2	M	65-74	Church of Scotland	White	Aberdeenshire	Yes
3	M	65-74	Church of Scotland	White	Scottish Borders	
4	M	65-74	Humanist	White	Argyll and Bute	
5	F	21	None	White	Edinburgh	
6	M	20	Roman Catholic	White	Bridge of Weir	
7	F	21	Roman Catholic	White	Glasgow	
8	M	26	None	White	Kilbarchan	Yes
9	M	55	None	Mixed Ethnic Group	Glasgow	Yes
10	F	41	None	White	Greenock	Yes

11	M	40	None	Asian, Scottish Asian, or British Asian	Glasgow	
12	M	46	Other Christian	Other	Glasgow	
13	F	31	None	White	Kilmarnock	
14	F	29	None	White	Johnstone	
15	M	29	None	White	Kilmarnock	
16	M	75+	None	White	Stirling	
17	F	30	Church of Scotland	White	Ayr	
18	F	29	None	White	Glasgow	Yes
19	F	27	Roman Catholic	White	Glasgow	
20	F	35-44	Other Christian	White	Highlands	
21	F	65-74	None	White	Highlands	
22	M	38	None	Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	Edinburgh	Yes
23	M	19	Other Christian	Scottish African	Glasgow	
24	F	24	Roman Catholic	White	Glasgow	Yes
25	M	65-74	None	White	Highlands	
26	M	65-74	None	White	Glasgow	

Appendix D: Summary of Discussion Guides

Focus Group

Section	Topics Covered
Set up	• Introduction explaining length of the focus group, that it is anonymous and confidential, and asking permission to record the session • Opportunity for participants to ask any questions • Participant introductions
Understanding the term extremism	• Confidence in understanding of the term extremism • Participants' own definitions of extremism • Where participants get their information about extremism
Distinctions between extremism and related terms	• Distinction between extremism and terrorism, hate crime, and sectarianism • Distinction between conducting, encouraging, and condoning violent or hateful acts
Thresholds of extremism	• Participants' judgements on whether various examples constitute extremist acts
Extent and types of extremism in Scotland	• Extent to which participants feel extremism is a problem in Scotland currently • Variability of extremism across parts of Scotland • Types of extremism prevalent in Scotland • Perceptions of increased or decreased threat from extremism in Scotland in last five years • Predictions of increased or decreased threat from extremism in Scotland in the next five years
Conclusions and wrap up	• Participants thanked for their time • Opportunity to ask any questions and discuss any other topics • Signposting to resources if discussion was distressing • Additional information about incentive payments and subsequent parts of the research

Interview

Section	Topics covered
Set up	• Introduction explaining length of the interview, that it is anonymous and confidential, asking permission to record the session, and reassuring participants they do not need to answer any questions they don't want to • Opportunity for participants to ask any questions
Understanding the term extremism	• Participant's own definition of extremism • If views and actions can be extremist • Examples of extremist views and actions • Causes of extremist views and actions • Changes in intensity of these causes
Experiencing/ Observing/ Witnessing Extremism	• Participant observations of extremism in Scotland in last 5 years • If terrorism is mentioned, follow up questions on this topic
Definitions of extremism	• Presentation and evaluation of the UK, Australian, Swedish definitions of extremism • Presentation and evaluation of categorisation approach to extremism
Knowledge and views on tackling extremism, including Prevent	• General impressions of how well various organisations tackle extremism • Awareness of Prevent and whether interviewees would use it • If unaware of Prevent, interviewees were presented with a definition and asked whether they would use it
Conclusions and wrap-up	• Interviewee thanked for their time • Offered opportunity to ask any questions and discuss any other topics

Appendix E: Demographic results

Characteristics	Statistical results	Qualitative observations
Gender	Male respondents (81%) were more likely to be confident in their understanding of the term 'extremism' than females (67%). Male respondents (71%) were more likely to agree you can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence than female respondents (65%). For seven statements within the question – *Do you consider any of the following to represent extremism?* – analysis of gender showed that males were more likely to regard these actions as 'never' or 'always' extremism than females. That is, they were more likely to select an exclusionary option at either end of the opinion scale than females, who were more likely to select conditional options. Females also had significantly higher instances of 'don't know' responses to the statements than males. Males (21%) were more likely to associate sectarianism with extremism than females (12%). Males were also more likely to associate politics with extremism (18%) than females (15%). Meanwhile, females were more likely to associate homophobia with extremism (12%) than males (7%).	Within the focus groups and interviews females displayed more desire for context and detail. Females were more forthcoming to say when they did not know about a topic or that they felt unable to form an opinion. All participants, but more so female participants, desired context to make an assessment of whether they thought behaviours or views constituted extremism. Females appeared more open to hearing about how public bodies were tackling extremism before forming an opinion on their efforts.

	Females (49%) were more likely to believe extremism is a problem in their local area than males (42%). Female respondents (53%) were more likely to think there had been an increase in the threat of extremism in Scotland in the last five years than male respondents (40%). Male respondents (33%) were more likely to select that in the next five years the threat from extremism in Scotland will stay the same than female respondents (29%). Males appeared more favourable towards the efforts of the Scottish Government to tackle extremism than females, with 42% of males agreeing that the Scottish Government are doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland compared with 37% of females. Males (39%) were more likely to think enough is being done to tackle extremism by local authorities than females (33%).	
Age group	A third of those in the youngest age group (31% of those aged 16-34) were not confident in their understanding of the term 'extremism', which was a significantly higher proportion than all other age groups (22% of those aged 35-44, 20% of those aged 45-54, 18% of those aged 55-64, and 18% of those aged over 65 years).	Participants over 40 years often gave examples of the threat of terrorism from Northern Irish paramilitary groups.

	Those aged 16-34 (21%) were more likely to disagree that 'you can be an extremist without being physically violent' than 35-44 (14%) and 45-54 year olds (14%). Respondents aged over 65 years (24%) were more likely to disagree with this statement than 35-44 (14%) and 45-54 year olds (14%). Those aged over 65 were the only age group with higher instances of associating racism with extremism (47%), than associating terrorism with extremism (39%). Only 8% of those aged 16-34 listed sectarianism as associated with extremism, compared with 26% of those aged 55-64. Younger people aged 16-34 (59%), were more likely to believe extremism is a problem in their local area than any other age group (51% of those aged 35-44, 38% of those aged 45-54, 43% of those aged 55-64, and 32% of those aged 65 and over). Respondents aged over 65 (57%) were more likely to think there had been an increase in the threat of extremism in Scotland in the last five years than younger age groups (43% of those aged 16-34, 47% of those aged 35-44, 36% of those aged 45-54, and 48% of those aged 55-64. Respondents aged over 65 (19%) were more likely to think the threat level will decrease in	

	the next five years than those aged 16-34 (12%), those aged 35-44 (5%), those aged 45-54 (9%), and those aged 55-64 (6%). Respondents aged over 65 years (51%) were also more likely to think the threat will increase than those aged 16-34 (43%), 35-44 (41%), and 45-54 (41%). Therefore, there were stronger opinions from the older age group compared with the younger age groups. The oldest age group was less favourable towards the efforts of the Scottish Government to tackle extremism than younger groups, with respondents aged over 65 years more likely to disagree that enough is being done to tackle extremism by the Scottish Government in Scotland compared with all other age groups (52% compared with 44% of those aged 16-34, 44% of those aged 35-44, 41% of those aged 45-54, and 46% of those aged 55-64). The oldest age group, over 65 years (42%) were more likely to agree local authorities are doing enough to tackle extremism than those aged 35-64 (33% of those aged 35-44, 30% of those aged 45-54, and 33% of those aged 55-64).	
Location	Respondents from South Scotland (81%) parliamentary region were more likely to be confident in their understanding of the term ‘extremism’ than respondents from Glasgow	Participants perceived that more populated, urban areas were more threatened by extremism than more remote areas.

	(69%) and North East Scotland (71%). Respondents from South Scotland (27%) parliamentary region were more likely to disagree that you can be extremist without being physically violent than respondents from the Highlands and Islands (15%), respondents from Mid Scotland and Fife (16%), respondents from North East Scotland (17%), and respondents from Glasgow (13%). People in Glasgow (58%) parliamentary region were more likely to identify extremism as a problem in their local area than any other parliamentary regions (36% of those in the Highlands and Islands, 41% of those in North East Scotland, 43% of those in Mid Scotland and Fife, 43% of those in South Scotland, 45% of those in Lothian, 46% of those in West Scotland, and 48% of those in Central Scotland). People in the Highlands and Islands parliamentary region had a different perception of extremism in their local area, with 55% of people in this parliamentary region selecting extremism as no problem at all than in other parliamentary regions (45% of those in Lothian, 29% of those in Glasgow, 43% of those in West Scotland and 40% of those in Central Scotland).	Participants displayed concern about intra-Christian sectarianism, and saw this as more prevalent in the Central Belt than other parts of Scotland.

	Those living in Mid Scotland and Fife (10%), Lothian (13%), West Scotland (10%), and Central Scotland (11%) parliamentary regions were more likely to think the threat of extremism in Scotland had decreased in the last five years than respondents from North East Scotland (5%). Respondents living in the Highlands and Islands (13%), Mid Scotland and Fife (12%), Lothian (13%), South Scotland (15%), and Central Scotland (12%) parliamentary regions were all more likely to think the threat will decrease in the next five years than respondents from Glasgow (7%). Respondents living in the South Scotland parliamentary region (42%) were more likely than both Highlands and Islands (29%) and Glasgow (32%) to agree that enough is being done to tackle extremism by local authorities in Scotland.	
Education levels	Respondents with Higher Education (84%) qualifications were more likely to be confident in their understanding of the term 'extremism' than respondents with lower levels of education (60% of those with one to four Standard Grades, 71% of those with five or more Standard Grades, and 69% of those with two or more Advanced Highers). Respondents with Higher Education qualifications (75%) were more likely to agree that	

	you can be an extremist without supporting the use of physical violence than respondents with lower levels of education (57% of those with one to four Standard Grades, 70% of those with five or more Standard Grades, and 64% of those with two or more Advanced Highers). Respondents with Higher Education qualifications (81%) were more likely to agree that you can be an extremist without using physical violence than respondents with lower education levels (64% of those with one to four Standard Grades, 73% of those with five or more Standard Grades, and 71% or those with two or more Advanced Highers).	
Ethnicity	The most common association among BAME respondents was racism (31%). BAME respondents (57%) were more likely to perceive extremism as a problem in their local area than white respondents (45%). White respondents (47%) were more likely to think the threat of extremism in Scotland had increased in the last five years than BAME respondents (36%). BAME respondents were more favourable towards the Scottish Government's efforts to tackle extremism than white respondents, with 49% of BAME respondents agreeing	

	the Scottish Government are doing enough to tackle extremism in Scotland compared with 39% of white respondents.	
Religion	Respondents who did not identify with a religion (54%) were more likely than those who did to associate terrorism with extremism (42%). Respondents who did not identify with a religion (30%) were more likely to associate violence with extremism than people who identified with a religion (26%). Respondents who identified as belonging to a religion (49%) were more likely to think the threat from extremism had increased in the last five years than respondents who did not identify as belonging to a religion (44%). Respondents who identified as belonging to a religion (48%) were more likely to think the threat of extremism will increase in Scotland in the next five years than those who did not identify as belonging to a religion (42%).	
Income	People earning between £20,000 to £39,999 (77%) and £40,000 or more (79%) were more likely to identify extremism as a problem in Scotland than those who earn under £20,000 (71%). Those with a household income between £20,000-	

	£39,999 (48%) were more likely to think the threat of extremism in Scotland will increase in the next five years than those with a household income below £20,000 (40%).	

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The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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