

ERIN GRACE & GINA LIGON

NCITE

THE DESIGNATED COUNTER TERRORISM AND TARGETED VIOLENCE RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

NCITE conducts and shares research on the who, how, where, when, and why of terrorism and targeted violence that occurs inside the United States.

NCITE, or the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center has been the US Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) chosen academic partner for counter terrorism and targeted violence studies since 2020. NCITE conducts research and workforce development projects by leveraging interdisciplinary expertise across the social and technical sciences. NCITE has over 50 psychologists, sociologists, criminologists, political scientists, business and strategy professors, computer engineers and IT innovators focusing on the pressing case of violent extremism. These experts are drawn from 19 academic institutions in the US and UK, with a large number at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO). At NCITE HQ in UNO's Rod Rhoden Innovation Center, we have the largest number of dedicated PhD level extremist violence scholars of any academic terrorism centre in the US.

WHY DOES NCITE MATTER NOW?

Countering terrorism and targeted violence is always important, but especially so now. In its most recent Strategic Intelligence Assessment (May 2021), the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and DHS jointly said the greatest terrorism threat to the US is "posed by lone offenders, often radicalized online, who look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons".

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Extremist violence is an especially relevant threat area as we see an increase in ideological-based violence, reflective of the rise in anti-government and anti-authority beliefs, racially and ethnically motivated attacks, and general civic destabilisation. The latter has been exacerbated by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, deepening partisan divide, and an omnipresent online culture that elevates, accelerates, and mainstreams once-sidelined conspiracy theories and extreme beliefs. NCITE researchers are seeing a copycat effect in the way adherents of violent ideologies across the spectrum see, borrow, and use terrorism tactics and techniques from one another.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR FOCI OF NCITE?

NCITE is focused on four thematic areas, on which scientific advancements are generated through annual grants provided by the DHS Science and Technology Office via our centre:

1. The Nature of Counter Terrorism and Targeted Violence Operations

Here we explore the nature of counter terrorism from two perspectives: 1) understanding tactics, ideologies, and connections of terrorists, and 2) equipping DHS's counter terrorism professionals with the knowledge and tools they need to anticipate emerging, novel threats.

2. Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative

Our focus is on strengthening the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative: the formal tips reporting mechanism run by the federal government. Research looks both at the social barriers that prevent effective reporting and the technical innovations that make sorting complex information more efficient and precise.

3. Terrorism and Targeted Violence Prevention Program Evaluation

Work is focused on generating scientific evidence about the efficacy — and areas for improvement — for targeted violence and terrorism prevention programmes. Creative ways to evaluate the varied approaches to violence prevention is the main goal for this important and understudied area of research in terrorism studies.

4. Counter-Terrorism Workforce Development

We seek innovative workforce development research for the counter-terrorism community. The goal of this theme is to strengthen and professionalise the hardworking analysts, policymakers, and other members of the counter-terrorism workforce to ensure they are equipped with the latest training and technology to do their jobs and keep our communities safe.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

The best way to get involved is by signing up to our mailing list and attending our virtual and in-person events. We have several upcoming employment, scholarship, and fellowship opportunities to join us in Omaha! NCITE also run an annual call for funded projects and we welcome engagement with international academic and practitioner communities — check the website www.unomaha.edu/ncite for details. We look forward to welcoming these project teams to NCITE. Information on our previous funded teams can be found in our NCITE Year One Annual Report (see the Read More section).



WHAT IS NEXT FOR NCITE?

Our vision is to become the US's premier academic consortium for counter terrorism and targeted violence studies, now and beyond the 10-year duration of our DHS Center of Excellence designation. Picture NCITE as a place where an array of law enforcement, government agencies, non-profits, and corporate partners send their workers for professional development and where students across academic disciplines eagerly come for a unique opportunity to become part of the antidote to extremist violence. Picture Nebraska as a place leading the US from its centre, helping pull people in from the extremes to reduce violence, build resilience, and create a more stable future.

Professor Gina Ligon is the Director of the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education (NCITE) Center. She is also the Jack and Stephanie Koraleski Chair for Collaboration Science.

Erin Grace is the Strategic Communications Manager at the NCITE Center, and a former career journalist who believes in the power of storytelling.