

IN THE SHADOWS OF THE INTERNET:

The Rise of Far-Right
Violence in Europe

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Foreword

Jan Havlíček

Given the development of events in the past decade, and recent triggering factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and migration, far-right violence has become an acute issue. It is expected to grow, as can already be witnessed in the United States and New Zealand. It would be irrational to think that Europe would remain immune to this trend.

Far-right extremists inspire each other in transnational online communities. Each new attack serves as a motivation to do the same or even more. Despite these networks being decentralized, international links are maintained, particularly between the U.S. and Europe. The most common ways these connections occur are via both open and closed online groups, as well as forums where far-right ideologies are propagated. The online space also serves as a platform for recruitment and mobilization. Asylum seekers and ethnic minorities are often the primary targets, but public figures, civic action groups, political parties, and politicians are also exposed to extremist assaults. Most recently, the group of potential targets has expanded to include virologists, healthcare workers, and authorities dealing with the COVID-19 crisis or encouraging vaccination.



Far-right terrorism is not a new phenomenon. However, there is limited information on its contemporary aspects, such as the role of the Internet, conspiracy theories, or violent gaming used for far-right radicalization. Before diving further into these topics, it is vital to answer these fundamental questions: **What is happening and why should we care?**

What is happening?

15 December 2021, Germany: Law enforcement officials launched a series of raids after far-right, anti-vaccination activists plotted violence and made death threats to state premier Michael Kretschmer. Crossbows and other “piercing weapons” were planned to be used. The group of some 100 individuals were communicating via the encrypted messaging app Telegram, where they discussed killing the state premier and other representatives. According to a BBC report, “at least a dozen threatening letters containing pieces of meat have also been sent to politicians, media outlets and public institutions” (“German raids on Covid extremists over Saxony leader death plot”, 2021). Germany has blamed Telegram for hosting COVID-19 conspiracy theorists and providing a safe haven for far-right extremists.

6 December 2021, Finland: Five young men were detained on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks. According to the Helsinki Times, “the investigation is the first into suspected terrorist offences by a far-right organization in Finland” (Teivainen, 2021). The men were in possession of “dynamite and fertilizers containing ammonium nitrate, a chemical compound that has been popular among terrorists for decades due to its availability and explosive properties” (Teivainen, 2021), as well as a significant number of firearms and ammunition, which were all seized by law enforcement officials during the raid. They subscribed to “accelerationism” – a dangerous ideology, theory, or tactic, which will be addressed in a separate chapter of this document. Its proponents believe that society must be burned down before anything new can be built on its ashes, and their aim is to “accelerate” this process by inciting and committing violence.

11 January 2021, United Kingdom: Britain's youngest convicted terrorist was unmasked after losing a bid to keep his anonymity secret. Jack Reed began searching for extremist material when he was 12. Setting up a Twitter profile named "Mosley was right" (referring to British 1930s fascist leader Oswald Mosley), searching online for terms such as lone-wolf attacks, explosives, knives, and firearms, Reed was found to be "a highly intelligent, widely read, quick-thinking and articulate young man" by the judge (Aoraha, 2021). His plan was to attack schools, pubs, and other places (Image 2), and to start a "race war". When he was arrested in 2019, law enforcement officials found in his pocket a note which read, "Killing is probably easier than your paranoid mind thinks ... You're just not used to it. Most were caught because they got sloppy" (Aoraha, 2021). Other disturbing documents were found in his home (Images 1 and 2 below).



Image 1: List of firearms Reed was planning to buy. Source: Aoraha, 2021.

I: AREAS TO ATTA- CK

There are several areas in Durham worth attacking, and here's why.

- * Post offices - cut off communication
- * Telephone wires - the same reason
- * Pubs - prevents degenerating, scares/angers Labour
- * Passport office - Responsible for immigration
- * Bus station - Large modes of transport for government workers
- * Schools - Serve as centres of indoctrination for the youth
- * Council buildings - weakens their grip over the city
- * Banks - ch... ..

Image 2: List of areas he planned to attack. Source: Aoraha, 2021.

Reed even drafted his own manifesto, named “A Manual For Practical And Sensible Guerrilla Warfare Against The Kike System In The Durham City Area, Sieg Heil,” where the term “kike” was a slur used to refer to a Jewish person. In this “manifesto”, Reed threatened local synagogues and wrote about “the inevitable race war” (Pilling, 2019).

These are only three selected examples of what is occurring within Europe currently. It is only a miniscule fragment of what has been increasingly occurring in the past few years. It is important to note that none of these mentioned cases resulted in an actual terrorist attack. However, one can imagine that it could very easily be a different story should law enforcement react too late. Moreover, this is already considered an act of terrorism, based on its definition, which anticipates the “use or threatened use of violence”. More planning is happening, and due to the fact that far-right individuals and groups often gather and plot in the shadowy parts of the Internet, what the public sees is just the tip of the iceberg.

Why should we care?

A substantial amount of research highlights the dominance of online platforms as places for communication preferred by far-right extremists. These platforms tie together extremist communities and allow them to develop and maintain transnational networks. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered diverse conspiracy theories (either new or reinvented) circulating on social media where foreigners and immigrants, among others, are blamed for spreading the disease. This novel circumstance has caused a rise in xenophobic, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and other generally racist attacks. Additionally, far-right extremist ideas are increasingly stimulated by video games. Online shooting games constitute an opportunity for far-right community member radicalization and recruitment. As illustrated in one of the above-mentioned examples, it is of little surprise that far-right extremists are often very young teenagers, which is, again, quite a new and worrying phenomenon.

Thriving conspiracy theories, increased gamification of violence, and an interconnected online world are not the only reasons why we should start paying more attention to this problem. Another crucial aspect of this threat is the involvement of security, law enforcement, military, or ex-military individuals in far-right movements, although the intensity varies from country to country.



Germany, the United Kingdom, and France seem to have the most significant challenges to deal with.

Radicalized individuals within both the national and local security forces have access to weapons, confidential information, training, and are typically protected and trusted by the state they are meant to serve. Ex-Royal Fusilier Danny Glass of the UK and Jürgen Conings of Belgium, discussed later in the document, are not the only examples of how dangerous this issue can become. Dealing with far-right extremism will be more challenging if the threat, even partially, comes from within.

Lastly, we should care more because the media tends to underreport and underestimate the issue of far-right violence, which became evident while attempting to collect data from Eastern Europe. Although there have previously been numerous incidents in the region, such as attacks against Roma people, detailed media coverage remains limited. It is evident that events inspired by politics and ideologies draw less publicity than religion-based violence, such as Islamic extremism. Reporting bias and journalists' preferences also play a role in investigating incidents (Ellis et al., 2016).

Jihadism persists

Far-right terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Regardless, it has not been and still is not a security priority owing to the expansion of Jihadi terrorism. Understandably, Islamic extremism became a top priority after the 9/11 attacks and several large-scale deadly attacks across Europe. However, as most of the human and financial resources went to countering Islamic extremism, the far-right threat grew stronger, largely unnoticed by law enforcement agencies, the media, and the public. As the chapter on Data & Trends explains, the threat is becoming truly imminent, and, in some respects, even more lethal than Islamic extremism.

This publication on no account seeks to downplay the other forms of terrorism in Europe. It is not downplaying religious extremism, far-left extremism, or ethno-nationalist extremism and terrorism. Recent terrorist attacks in Vienna, France, and the UK clearly showed that Islamic extremism is still relevant. However, what this study emphasizes is the need to ALSO focus on the far right and keep up with its contemporary aspects, especially when it comes to the online space.

Moreover, there are clearly identified similarities between far-right extremists and Jihadists. For example, the far-right's utility of violence, Internet usage, propaganda, recruitment techniques, fundraising methods, and transnational networks resemble those of the Jihadists. The similarities of terrorist affiliations can help identify their best practices, which may eventually enable our societies to counter them.

Terminology

Jan Havlíček

This research paper, with respect to its purpose of informing the general public, uses several key terms interchangeably. It needs to be noted, however, that in a strict academic environment these terms have nuanced differences.

The definition of **terrorism** has been source of a decades-long debate. There is no unified definition of what terrorism is, although there are several factors that can transform acts of violence into acts of terrorism. These factors can be observed in the following definition. This paper considers terrorism as the use of or threatened use of violence, directed against victims, selected for their representative or symbolic value, as a means of instilling anxiety in, transmitting one or more messages to, and thereby manipulating the perceptions and behaviour of wider targeted audiences. In other words, the crucial factor of terrorism is the intent of the perpetrators, who are politically motivated and seek to cause a psychological impact on the broader society. In short, it is an operational technique, a method, which can be used by states, groups, individuals, or so-called lone actors.



When it comes to **right-wing terrorism**, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) defines it as terrorist violence conducted by right-wing extremists. Variants of those include neo-Nazis, neo-fascists, and ultra-nationalists, all of whom seek to change the entire political, social, and economic system to a right-wing extremist model (The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2021, p. 80). One of the core concepts of far-right extremism is supremacism, typically white supremacism¹. Supremacists see themselves in a supreme position, which, they believe, gives them the right to dominate the rest of the population. Right-wing extremists do not form “a coherent or easily defined movement, but rather a shifting, complex and overlapping milieu of individuals, groups and movements (online and offline) espousing different but related ideologies, often linked by hatred and racism toward minorities, xenophobia, islamophobia [sic] or anti-Semitism” (Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2020). Indeed, right-wing terrorists and extremists attack any kind of diversity in society, not only religious and ethnic minorities, but also lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) communities.

The terms of **extreme right-wing violence** and **far-right violence** are used interchangeably in this publication. It is considered a unique form of political violence with fluid boundaries between hate crime and organized terrorism. The prevalence of right-wing extremism depends on whether it is defined in terms of an ideology or in terms of politically motivated violent behavior. Given the scope of this work, the emphasis is put primarily on the latter. Regarding the definition of far-right (or extreme-right), individuals or groups should be located at the extreme-right end of the left-right spectrum, with no entity located more to the right. They express values, issues and policies rejecting and de-legitimizing the democratic system, and typically have an ideological link with Nazi or fascist principles.

“ The far-right is inherently anti-democratic, and in some cases, legitimizes the use of violence to pursue its political aims.

The following chapter explains the recent trends in far-right violence, while assessing the sufficiency of available literature.

¹ Europol defines supremacism as “the idea that a certain group of people sharing a common element (nation, race, culture, etc.) is superior to all other people” (The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2021, p. 80).

Literature Review: Far-Right Data & Trends

Adél Kovács, Blanka Kovács

This section presents the trends in far-right violence in Europe, supported by graphs and charts based on reliable online databases and reports. Due to the fact that most of these reports and databases use different definitions of far-right violence and include different sets of countries in their assessments, it is difficult to provide a truly comprehensive analysis. For instance, Europol's annual Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), discussed below, is influenced by the EU countries' national definitions and selection criteria. It does not categorize the vast majority of the violent crimes motivated by far-right ideologies as terrorism (Koehler, 2016).



European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-STAT)

The data from the TE-SAT reports show the **number of people arrested** for right-wing terrorism in the EU countries, indicating a clear upward trend between 2015 and 2018. The data also shows that recent years have seen considerably more arrests than the early 2010s. The number of reported **far-right terrorist attacks** in the EU is relatively stable (Figure 1).

Number of people arrested for right-wing terrorism and the number of reported terrorist attacks in the EU

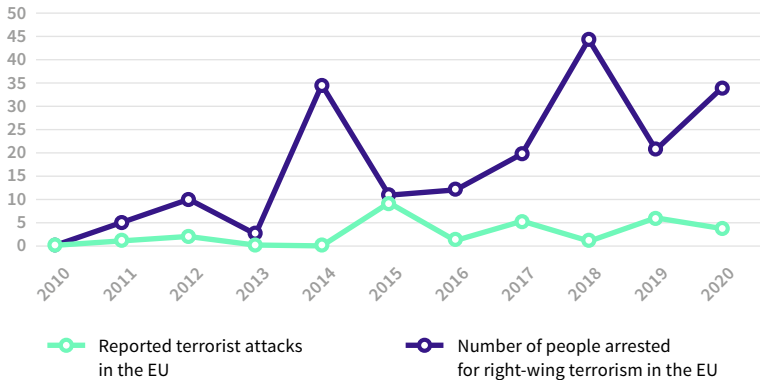


Figure 1: Number of people arrested for right-wing terrorism and the reported terrorist attacks in the EU. Source: Author's production based on the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend reports (TE-STAT) 2011 to 2021.

Global Terrorism Index (GTI)

The Global Terrorism Index examines global terrorism trends on an annual basis. The first GTI report was published in 2012 by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), where no far-right terrorist attacks were identified. Throughout continuous reporting, far-right terrorism was not noticeable. In the 2018 report, however, far-right terrorism is mentioned for the first time as a growing concern, with an increased number of deaths linked to far-right-motivated attacks (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2018). For the third consecutive year, there has been a significant increase in far-right terrorism globally, including cases in Western Europe (IEP, 2019). The report from 2020 raises special attention to far-right terrorism and describes it as a worrying trend.

“ Although the absolute numbers are still low, compared to other forms of terrorism, there has been a 709 percent increase in deaths and a 250 percent increase in attacks over five consecutive years globally (IEP, 2021). ”

The report recognizes the lethality of far-right attacks. It is more lethal than far-left terrorism but less lethal than Islamist terrorism. In addition, lone actor terrorism and those that had no affiliation with specific terrorist groups are highlighted (IEP, 2021).

The report also introduces the term “Positive Peace”². When Positive Peace declines, the risk of political instability and violence increases. The far right reflects the mood of dissatisfaction with politics and isolation, where violence is accepted as a political strategy (IEP, 2021). In recent years, far-right terrorism has mainly been unsystematic in the West. However, judging from the increase of violence carried out by semi-organized affiliations in the U.S., far-right extremists may unite, organizing this type of terrorism. Therefore, the report predicts that the ungoverned deterioration of Positive Peace in the West will lead to the intensification of organized political violence (IEP, 2021).

² Positive Peace is defined as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. (...) Higher levels of Positive Peace are statistically linked to greater income growth, better environmental outcomes, higher levels of wellbeing, better developmental outcomes and stronger resilience” (IEP, 2020, p. 54).

Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) Dataset

The Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset provides a systematic overview of its titular subject matter between 1990 and 2020. It focuses on the most severe right-wing terrorist events in Western Europe and intends to address the constraints of law enforcement statistics and terrorism datasets. According to the authors, those datasets lack “availability, representativity, measurement validity, comparability, and replicability” (Ravndal, Lygren, Jupskås & Bjørge, 2020, p. 7).

The number of **far-right fatal attacks** in Western Europe has declined (Figure 2). Nonetheless, the number of people killed by far-right violence is stable (Figures 3 and 4), indicating that on average more people die per attack.

Far-right fatal attacks in Western Europe 2010–2020

Number of events with fatal outcomes

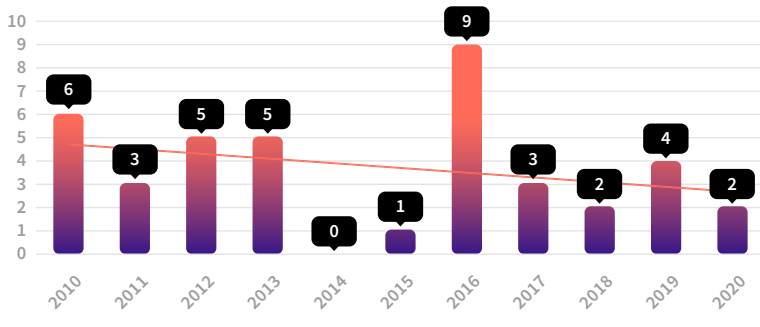


Figure 2: Far-right fatal attacks in Western Europe between 2010 and 2020. Source: Author’s production based on the limited version of the RTV dataset 2010-2020.

Number of people killed during the fatal attacks

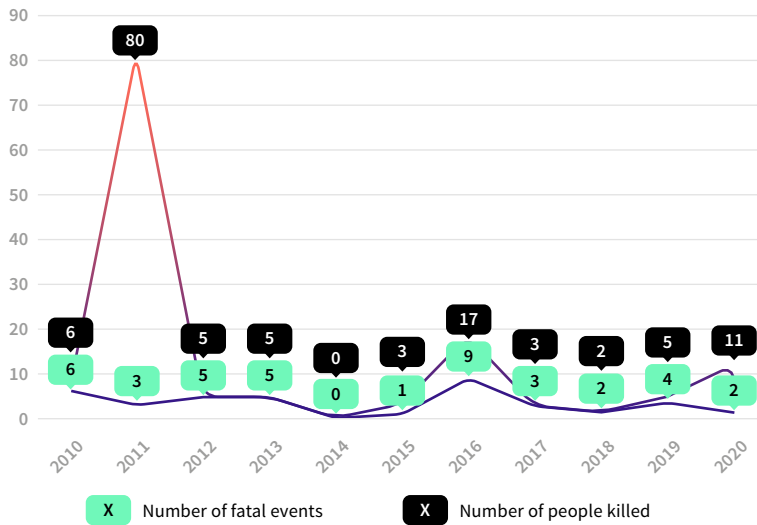


Figure 3: Far-right fatal attacks in Western Europe in comparison to number of people killed during these attacks between 2010 and 2020. Source: Author’s production based on the limited version of the RTV dataset 2010-2020.

Contrary to the previous trend, the **number of people wounded** by far-right violence in Western Europe shows a sharp rise after 2017 (Figure 4).

Number of people killed or wounded by far right violence in Western Europe 2010-2020

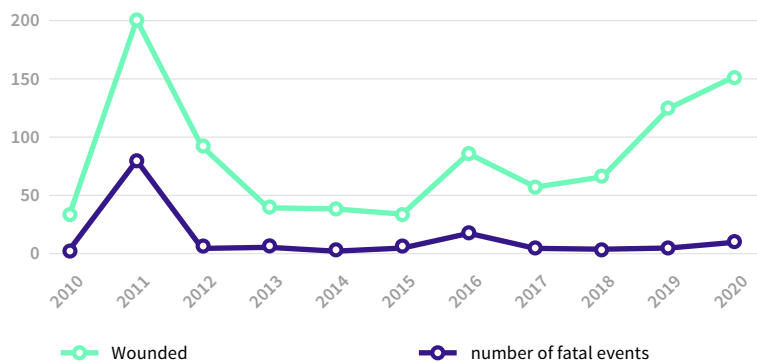


Figure 4: Number of wounded people in comparison to number of people killed during far-right attacks between 2010 and 2020. Source: Author’s production based on the limited version of the RTV dataset 2010-2020.

The number of all attacks committed by far-right perpetrators is even more alarming, including those where no one got hurt (Figure 5).

Number of far-right violence cases in Western Europe 2010–2020

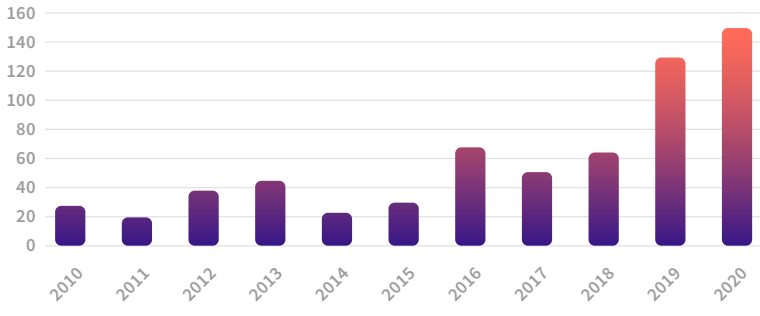


Figure 5: Number of all attacks committed by far-right perpetrators between 2010 and 2020. Source: Author’s production based on the limited version of the RTV dataset 2010-2020.

In 2019, causing mass casualties was a rare objective of right-wing extremists in Western Europe (Ravndal, Lygren, Jupskås & Bjørgo, 2020). Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Greece experienced the most far-right terrorist attacks in absolute terms.

“ Lone actors were responsible for all fatal far-right-motivated attacks in 2019, while organized groups and affiliated members carried out many severe but non-fatal violent attacks.

Ethnic and religious minorities remained the most frequently targeted groups (Ravndal, Lygren, Jupskås & Bjørgo, 2020, p. 3).

In 2020, Germany stood out in the number of violent far-right attacks. An upward trend could also be observed in Greece, the United Kingdom, and France (Figure 6) (Ravndal, Thorstensen, Jupskås & Macklin, 2021, p. 9).

Number of attacks by country 2010–2020

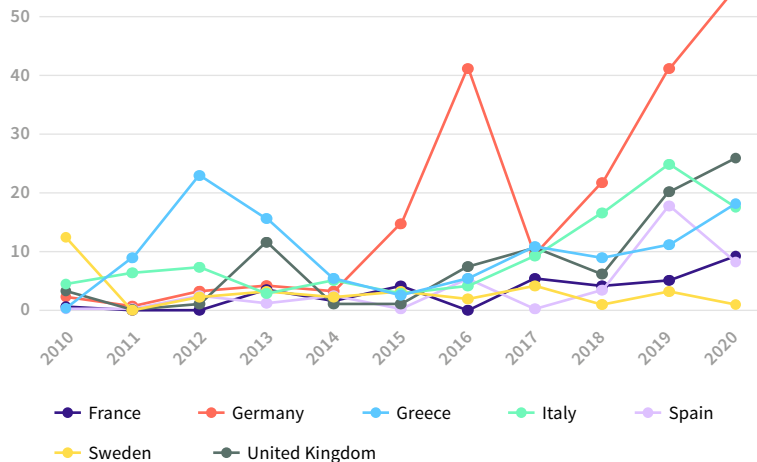


Figure 6: Number of attacks by country between 2010 and 2020. Source: Author's production based on the limited version of the RTV dataset 2010-2020.

The CSIS Transnational Threats Project

According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, Sweden, and Finland have been most affected by right-wing violence in Europe in the last ten years. Unlike the RTV dataset, CSIS' Transnational Threats Project includes most European countries. In Ireland, France, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Norway, the threat was medium-high. Less but still significant are the threats in Italy, Austria, Slovakia, Lithuania, Belgium, and the Netherlands (Figure 7) (Jones, Doxsee & Harrington, 2020).

Right-wing Attacks per Capita

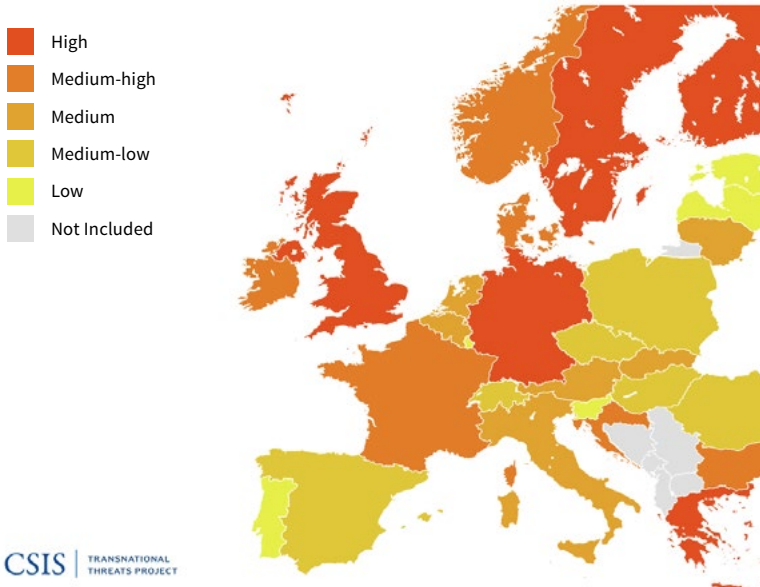


Figure 7: Far-right terrorism threat in Europe. Source: Jones, Doxsee & Harrington, 2020.

While the total number of people killed by Jihadists declined by 2020, the number of people killed by right-wing perpetrators had increased in Europe. Moreover, far-right extremists were predominantly responsible for all terrorism-related killings in 2020 (Figure 8).

Number of persons killed

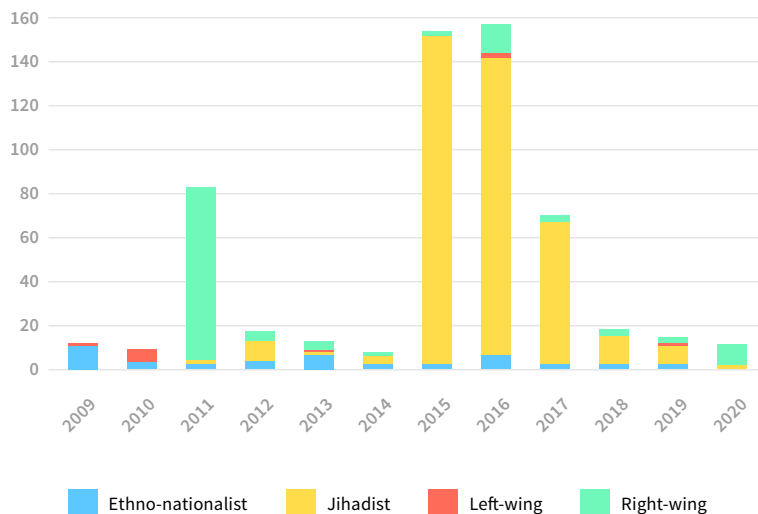


Figure 8: Comparison of all terrorism-related killings between 2009 and 2020. Source: Jones, Doxsee & Harrington, 2020.

Conclusions and Takeaways

The available literature and data on far-right violence in Europe have significant limitations.

There is a lack of Eastern European data. The major sources focus on the EU, global, or Western European trends.

Quantitative data is often restricted from the public.

Far-right extremism is underestimated by both the media and public, which gives it significantly lower coverage compared to other types of extremism, such as religious extremism.

The number of people arrested for right-wing terrorism indicates a clear upward trend.

The 2018 GTI report mentions far-right terrorism as a growing concern for the first time.

There has been a 709 percent increase in deaths and a 250 percent increase in attacks over five consecutive years globally.

The number of far-right fatal attacks in Western Europe has declined, but the number of people wounded by far-right violence has shown a sharp rise after 2017.

In 2019, ethnic and religious minorities remained the most frequent target groups.

In 2020, Germany stood out in the number of violent far-right attacks.

While the total number of people killed by jihadists declined by 2020, the number of people killed by right-wing perpetrators increased.

Far-right extremists were predominantly responsible for all terrorism-related killings in 2020.

Violence and Far-Right Political Parties

Alicia Gasset, Frederik Brekk

Understanding the causes contributing to the violent actions of extreme right-wing individuals and movements requires an analysis of the problem at its root. While physical violence aims to coerce individuals both physically and directly, symbolic violence, subtle and invisible, is expressed through language, political communication, and rhetoric. If an extreme ideology becomes the new normal to the population – i.e., “normalise”, the threat becomes more serious. In this sense, the spread and normalisation of far-right ideologies within European societies should be analysed in connection to the increase in right-wing acts of violence. As Leonid Bershidsky (2019) puts it, “Franco, Stalin, Mussolini, and the other monsters of the 20th century are much more dangerous when they are in people’s minds than when their bones lie in the most magnificent of crypts.”

This chapter explores the role of European far-right political parties in the rise of far-right violence.



Overview of far-right political parties in Europe

Far-right parties have been on the rise across Europe. They have achieved record results in the recent elections in many European countries. They hold seats in both the national and European parliaments, which gives them the opportunity to influence the political agenda. The figure and sub-sections below present several examples of far-right parties and their results in recent elections.

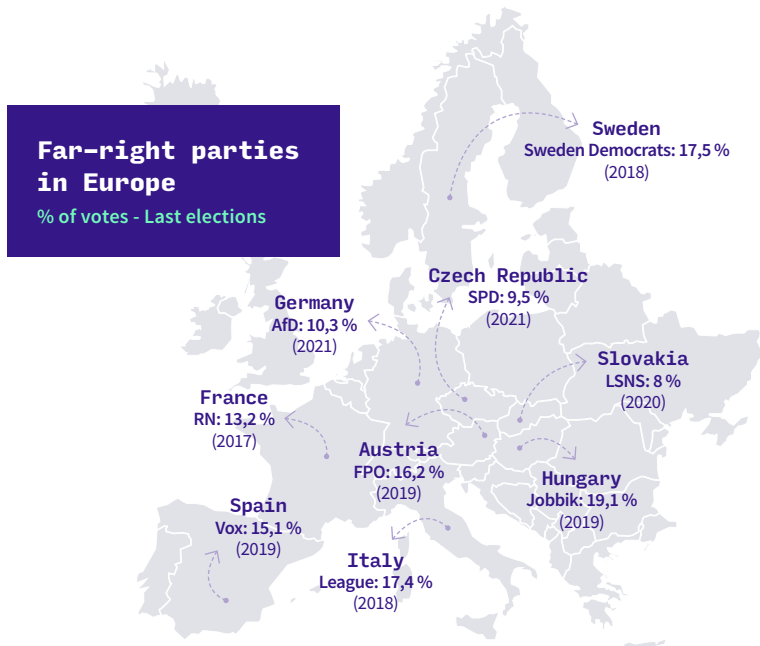


Figure 9: Far-right parties in Europe and their results in recent elections. Source: Author's production.

Germany

During the last federal elections in 2017, the German far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) obtained 12.6 % of the votes and became the third largest political force in the Parliament (“Bundestag election 2017”, 2017). This changed, however, following the 2021 Bundestag elections wherein AfD lost 2.3 percentage points dropping from 12.6 % to 10.3 % (“Bundestag election 2021 results”, 2021). The party’s progress is also visible in the latest European elections in 2019, during which the party obtained 11 % of the vote, an increase of approximately 4 percentage points compared to the 2014 elections (European Parliament, 2019a).



The electoral successes of AfD demonstrates how the extreme right in Germany has, for the first time since 1945, managed to establish a permanent political presence in the country (Vaillant, 2020).

While the far right had been taboo in Germany since the end of the Second World War and the Nazi regime’s fall, the last few years have underlined an unabashed attitude towards extremism. According to Jérôme Vaillant (2020), the increase in the AfD’s vote percentage is linked to the influx of refugees into Germany, which began in the summer of 2015, and predominantly occurs within East German territory, which serves to expose lingering frustrations between the unified East and West Germany.

France

In the 2007 legislative elections, Le Rassemblement National (RN) obtained 4.29 % of the votes cast (“Results of the legislative elections 2007”, 2007). In 2021, however, the far-right party has made progress on the political scene.

The results have doubled in the last elections: RN obtained 13.60 % of the votes in the 2012 legislative elections and 13.20 % in 2017 (“Results of the legislative elections 2017”, 2017). Additionally, in the 2019 European elections, the RN obtained 23.34 % of the votes (“Results of the European elections”, 2019) whereas 10 years earlier it obtained only 6.34 % of the vote (“European election results”, 2009). The migration crisis and the security context linked to Islamist terrorism are elements contributing to the fragmentation of the French landscape. The COVID-19 crisis and its uncertain consequences also create a favorable climate for RN’s rise.

Italy

Capitalizing on the refugee crisis and the growing discontent with Matteo Renzi’s centrist government, Lega Nord, in a coalition with Forza Italia, managed to win the majority in the Chamber of Deputies during the 2018 Elections (Stille, 2018). The party held around 20% of the seats within both the Chamber (“Conoscere la Camera: Gruppi Parlamentari”, 2021) and the Senate (“Dove siedono i Senatori”, 2021) in 2021. The anti-immigration policy puts Lega Nord at the center of media attention and contributes to its high popularity. This popularity was repeated in 2019 when the League won the European elections with 34.26 % of the vote (European Parliament, 2019b). Alexandre Stille (2018) pointed out that “Salvini’s rise to power has heightened concerns in Italy about the escalation of racist and xenophobic violence.” In 2018, numerous attacks against black people and Roma were recorded across Italy. For instance, in July 2018 in Turin, Italian athlete Daisy Osakue was a victim of a racist attack. A motorist threw an egg at her face, resulting in hospitalization and the risk of permanent damage to the cornea (Trouillard, 2018).

Greece

In 2012, 18 members of the Golden Dawn party were elected to the Greek parliament.



Golden Dawn is a neo-Nazi right-wing party founded in the mid-1980s by a Holocaust denier who openly admired Hitler.

Several party members wore swastikas or had tattoos of Nazi symbols (Vice Video, 2021). The party gained prominence following the 2008 financial crisis, when Greece lost 25 % of its GDP. With this context, in 2012, Golden Dawn amplified its anti-globalization and anti-EU discourse. The party uses the slogan “Clear the Filth”, where “Filth” is code for African and Asian immigrants (Vice Video, 2021). The group, however, has experienced decreasing popularity. Between 2015 and 2019, the group diminished from 6.99 % of the votes to 2.93 % (“National elections- July 2019 results”, 2019).

In October 2020, a court in Athens ruled that the Golden Dawn party was a criminal organization, thereby removing it from political sphere within the country (“Greek far-right party Golden Dawn ruled a criminal organization, supporter convicted of murder”, 2020). However, recent reporting suggests that in the absence of this political power, new organizations are rising up within Greece to take its former place. According to Bali (2021), the new organizations have capitalized on the fears surrounding COVID and the vaccines, as well as governmental restrictions within Greece to gain influence among the public spheres, with some groups aiming for a new political party. It would appear that despite Golden Dawn being gone, the influence of far-right extremists remains strong in Greece.

Austria

Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) is a far-right, xenophobic, anti-Islam, anti-immigration, and Eurosceptic party. Founded in 1956 by former Nazis such as Anton Reinthaller, who was a former Nazi official and SS officer, the party is now becoming increasingly popular. Like RN in France, FPÖ 'de-demonised' itself by removing former Nazi leaders and limiting the use of physical violence. The new enemies are the foreigner and the Muslim. FPÖ's rhetoric often targets external threats (L'Effet Papillon, 2021).

Norbert Hofer, leader of FPÖ from 2019 to 2021, reached the second round of the 2016 presidential election. However, the green candidate Alexander Van der Bellen was elected, even though the polls predicted Norbert Hofer's victory. In the 2017 Austrian parliamentary elections, FPÖ received 26 % of the vote ("Austria - National parliament voting intention", n.d.). In the 2019 parliamentary elections, FPO received 16.2 %, lower than in 2017. The decline is linked to the Ibiza affair in 2019, during which secretly produced pictures were released showing party leader Heinz-Christian Strache soliciting funds for the party from a Russian.

Despite this scandal, FPÖ is still the third largest of the five parties in the National Council, with 31 of the 183 seats ("Austria - National parliament voting intention", n.d).

Slovakia

Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (L'SNS) is a far-right neo-Nazi party launched in 2010 and its leader is Marian Kotleba. The leader admires the Nazi regime and the pro-Nazi dictator Jozef Tiso, who governed Slovakia between 1939 and 1945 (Chastand, 2020). It is an openly neo-fascist, ultra-nationalist, Eurosceptic, anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, and Islamophobic party ("Extreme Right Parties in Slovakia", 2021). Its emblems are directly inspired by fascist imagery. L'SNS managed to enter the national parliament in 2016 with 8 % of the vote, getting 14 out of 150 seats. It has maintained its score in the last parliamentary elections in February 2020, winning 17 seats (Chastand, 2020).

The Czech Republic

The Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (Svoboda a přímá demokracie or SPD) is an extreme right-wing party created in 2015 and led by Tomio Okamura. It obtained 10.6 % of the votes in 2017 and 9.5 % in the most recent 2021 elections (“Czech Republic – National parliament voting intention”, 2021). SPD surpassed big parties, such as the Czech Social Democratic Party (Česká strana sociálně demokratická or ČSSD) and the Communist Party (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy or KSČ). Tomio Okamura’s agenda is based on the fight against the alleged, although virtually non-existent, Islamization of the Czech Republic, the exit from the European Union, and an anti-immigration policy. In his campaign slogans, Okamura instrumentalizes the economic crisis of 2008 as well as the migration crisis. Minorities and especially migrants have become the target of his political discourse: “I am happy that our ideas and our programme which aim to introduce direct democracy, to stop the Islamisation of the Czech Republic and to stop all reception of migrants have received so much support,” claims Okamura (Deloy, 2017).

Norway

The Norwegian anti-Islam group SIAN – “Stop Islamization of Norway” (Norwegian: Stopp Islamiseringen av Norge) – was officially founded in 2008 and headed by Arne Tumor, but has roots dating back to 2000. Its predecessor, the Action Committee against prayer calling (Norwegian: Aksjonskomiteen mot bønnenrop), was established to protest a request to broadcast the Adhan (i.e., call to prayer) at a local mosque in Oslo. The organization has 127 members as of 2021, making it smaller in comparison to similar movements abroad. Their impact, however, is still noticeable in the public sphere and in the news. According to SIAN’s website, the organization is based on democracy, rule of law, and the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and its purpose is to ‘combat’ Islamic ideology and practice. The organization’s logo depicts a white wolf howling on a grey background. The use of wolves is seen in other ultra-nationalist organizations, including Turkey’s Islamic and neo-fascist organization, the Grey Wolves. The current leader of SIAN is Lars Thorsen who has published various documents on the SIAN website, including the one discussed below.

When considering far-right violence in Norway, it is impossible to ignore the preeminent example – Anders Breivik and his 22 July 2011 attacks. Breivik has received support from a range of sources, including some from within Norway. Internationally, the situation is similar – British far-right extremists have described Breivik as a ‘role model’, with some even forming a petition to free him. Following Breivik’s attack and imprisonment, then-leader Tumyr claimed that Breivik’s knowledge and understanding of Islam is impressive, but the actions he took were wrong. In contrast, Tumyr claims that SIAN desires enlightenment and dialogue on the subject of Islam – not violence. Ironically, however, the organization has repeatedly held events which are aimed at provoking Norwegian Muslims. The most prominent is Qur’an burnings, one of which occurred in Kristiansand. A document published on SIAN’s website describes these events and uses language such as: ‘As the Qur’an got its deserved testing through fire, the barbarians [(Muslims)] poured towards us, to practice the well-known Islamic problem-solving method – Muslim violence’, referring to Muslim onlookers as ‘The Unintegrables’, and calling the Qur’an a ‘murder-manual’ (“Pop goes the Weasel”, 2019).

“ Such inflammatory language, combined with provocations such as Qur'an burnings, elicits anger from the Muslim community in Norway, with some going so far as to react violently.

SIAN often attempts to provoke violent reactions from the Norwegian Muslim communities in order to confirm their bias – to themselves and to onlookers – that Muslims are inherently violent.

Additionally, increasing European influence has become a political and strategic objective of far-right parties, as this reinforces their legitimacy. Several of the continent’s most prominent far-right parties are trying to build a new alliance at the European level. During April 2019, in Italy, the interior minister and leader of the Northern League brought together the leaders of other European far-right parties: The Alternative for Germany (AfD), the True Finns in Finland, and the Danish People’s Party (DFP). These alliances are reflected in European institutions such as the European Parliament with the parliamentary group, “Identity and Democracy”. With its 72 members, it is the fifth largest group in the European Parliament (Identity and Democracy, n.d.).

Ideological basis

Cas Mudde (1996) identifies 58 different ideological characteristics associated with extreme right-wing parties (p. 6). Most importantly, the party's ideology must be radical and/or extremist and promote nationalism. Nationalism encourages dedication to the nation over the need for identity. It is driven by a fear of "the others" and by a feeling of superiority.

Far-right parties can also be fascist. Fascism combines extremism, populism, and nationalism. It calls for a national renaissance of the liberal democratic order, which is seen as decadent, corrupt and against the common man. The national renaissance aims to produce "a new kind of political system, a new elite, a new kind of human being" (Griffin, 2010).

Furthermore, populism has become a tool often used by far-right parties. It is based on three components: the pure people, the corrupt elite, and the general will. François Bonet (2012) explains that the "people-nation" is at the heart of the most widespread variant of European populism today: "national-populism". This concept is generally rooted in the far right. Its primary aim is to preserve national identity, which is undermined first by immigration and, more generally, by multiculturalism and globalization. "The rejection of the European project is perhaps the common denominator of all populists in the [European] Union" (Bonet, 2012).

Rhetoric and propaganda

Discourse analysis is a key approach in understanding a political party's communication strategy and its impact on the population. The speeches of far-right political parties include "heightened emotionality, dramatization and the use of colloquial language on the part of populist actors to appeal to the people, adopt anti-establishment positions and increase media value" (Ekström, Patrona & Thornborrow, 2018). This rhetoric accentuates the return to the nation and the anti-minority narrative.



Image 3: Czech far-right party poster: “No to Arabic villages in Teplicko [Czech region]”. Source: Reportéři ČT, 2018.

Targeting a minority is a common strategy for finding a “source” of society’s woes. For instance, the far-right Freedom and Democracy Party (SPD), led by Tomio Okamura in the Czech Republic, instrumentalized the economic crisis of 2008 and the migration crisis, which peaked in 2015. Minorities, especially Muslim migrants, have become the target of Okamura’s political agenda. As in the Czech Republic, the Spanish far-right party Vox uses propaganda posters to denounce migrants as being privileged in comparison to Spanish citizens. The Spanish newspaper *El País* compared this type of communication to Nazi propaganda on the eve of the Second World War, which stigmatized the Jewish community (Blanco, 2021).



Image 4: Spanish far-right party poster: “An underaged immigrant, 4700 euros per month, your grandmother, 426 euros per month”. Source: Blanco, 2021.

Secondly, the demographic threat is also used as an argument. Propaganda aims to stigmatize a part of the population, typically Muslim migrants, in the context of Islamist terrorism. In Germany, for instance, the AfD party tweeted, “Learning from Europe’s history... so that Europe will not become Eurabia”³ (AfD Berlin, 2019).

3 The term “Eurabia” and related conspiracy theory is further explained in the “Far-Right Conspiracy Theories” chapter.

Case study: Le Rassemblement National

Marine Le Pen's far-right party, Le Rassemblement National (RN), reached the second round of the 2017 presidential election in France, and was a formidable threat in the 2022 presidential elections.⁴ Historically, RN, formerly known as Le Front National (FN), was founded in 1972, and until 1983 represented less than 1 % of the electorate.

RN's rejection of physical violence is tied to the process of "de-demonization" – a term given by the media to the strategy utilized since 2011 by the party's head, Marine Le Pen (Dézé, 2015).

“ Marine Le Pen wanted to conceal the radical nature and prevent damage to the party's image by dismissing the internal elements most prone to racist abuses and extremist statements (Bristielle, Guerra & Robert, 2021).

For instance, RN wants to separate from radical members: after RN won the elections in the southern French town of Brignoles in 2013, the far-right candidate in the municipal elections, Joris Hanser, tweeted: "In Brignoles this morning, Die Ausweise was to be collected at the sub-prefecture" (Provost, 2013). Die Ausweise means "identity card" in German. This ironic tweet compares RN victory to the restoration of the Nazi occupation. Joris Hanser was removed from the 2013 municipal election after this tweet ("Le FN se sépare à nouveau d'un candidat", 2013).

⁴ Front pages of *Le Figaro* in May 2021: "Presidential 2022: Macron-Le Pen duel settles in" and *Le Point* in June 2021: "Presidential 2022: Marine Le Pen leads in first round, according to a survey".

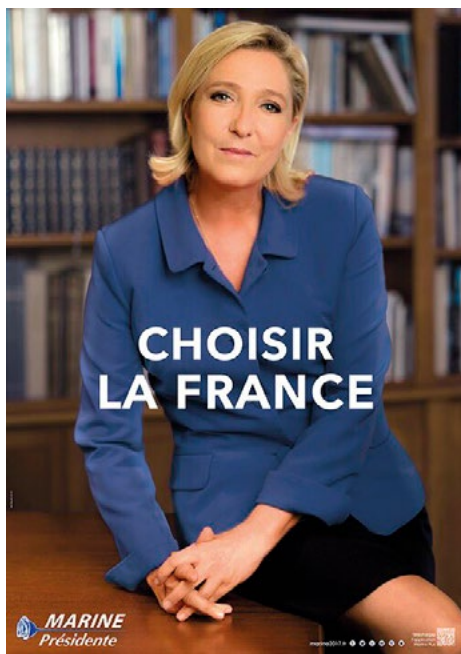


Image 5: RN poster for the 2017 presidential campaign: “Choose France”. Source: Le Breton, 2017.

RN has extended the ‘de-demonization’ process to its discourse and media actions. By controlling its discourse, limiting the use of radical discourse, and operating within the democratic framework, RN claims to be “obliged to place its action and discourse within the framework of the laws” (François, 2016). One of the most demonstrative examples of this change is linked to the party’s communication campaign. For the 2017 presidential elections, Marine Le Pen appeared as a modern, young, active woman (Le Breton, 2017). Through this picture, she “de-demonizes” the radical and violent image of RN under her father Jean Marie Le Pen. She also targets a new demographic: women.

Moreover, the success of far-right movements, especially in France, is based on their will to move away from an openly anti-Semitic orientation. The aim is to get rid of any negative image and attract a wider, and more diverse, electorate. The strategy is accompanied by a focus on Islam, which allows extreme right-wing parties to attract voters concerned about radical Islamism (Hafez, 2014). Farid Hafez (2014) explains how far-right parties, not only in France, target the “imagined Islamic threat” in order to tap into broader concerns about the slow disappearance of old national identities in the face of multiculturalism and globalization.

Finally, the “normalization” of far-right parties could have dramatic consequences, as the RN case shows. The gap between the supporters of traditional French right-wing parties and those of RN has largely diminished (Bristielle, Guerra & Robert, 2021). There is a worrying trend in their stance regarding the reinstatement of the death penalty, which, until recently, clearly separated traditional French right-wing parties and RN electorates. Today, 71 % of right-wing voters and 85 % of RN supporters favor reinstating the punishment (Bristielle, Guerra & Robert, 2021). This example shows how the de-demonization of RN could have an impact on collective thinking. By reducing violence, RN is becoming more credible and influential. Social issues such as the death penalty, which have divided the country for a long time, are now supported by RN voters, as well as those of other political parties. The French far-right has managed to internalize its rhetoric in the collective mind. Moreover, the softening of the discourse on European issues and the “de-radicalization” of its rhetoric on identity issues may improve RN’s public perception and attract even more voters (Bristielle et al., 2021).

When hate speech becomes dangerous speech

Even with an effective communication strategy, far-right parties are shaped by ideologies aiming at exclusion and division. Their “normalization” helps make pre-existing extremist rhetoric and thinking more commonplace. It is a gradual and insidious process, which is where the danger lies. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a clear link between far-right parties and acts of terrorism. The parties do not claim responsibility for the attacks, nor officially support the perpetrators. In Germany, the wave of far-right-motivated terror, including the Halle and Hanau attacks, have shocked the public. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) denied any responsibility, claiming that it does not explicitly call for acts of violence (Marcks & Pawelz, 2020). However, denying complicity does not mean having zero responsibility. When hate speech becomes “dangerous speech”, parties are responsible.

Dangerous speech⁵ does not only advocate for physical violence, but also promotes fear and hatred.

“ When fear is involved, and a section of the population is defined as a threat to the cultural identity of the majority, it becomes more socially acceptable to use violence against this minority.

Whether in Christchurch or El Paso, Halle or Hanau, the perpetrators all shared the idea that their community was threatened by migration. The feeling of being threatened builds a self-defense scenario that allows, or even requires, violent action (Marcks & Pawelz, 2020).

Although far-right political parties do not openly support terrorist attacks, they do participate through their nature and rhetoric, thus making seem violence more acceptable. In Germany, right-wing terrorism is not considered a threat because terrorists are classified as unbalanced (“Fusillades de Hanau”, 2020). However, Professor Valérie Dubslaff (2020) underlines the need to explore the link between terrorist acts, the normalization of hate speech against ethnic and religious minorities, and the structural racism that exists in Germany as well as other European countries (“Fusillades de Hanau”, 2020).

5 The concept of dangerous speech was developed by an American speech specialist Susan Benesch as part of the Dangerous Speech Project. Dangerous speech is defined as “any form of expression (e.g., speech, text, or images) that can increase the risk that its audience will condone or commit violence against members of another group” (Benesch, Buerger, Glavinic, Manion & Bateyko, 2021, p. 5).

Conclusions and Takeaways

Far-right parties have achieved record results in the recent elections of many European countries.

They hold seats in both national and European parliaments, which gives them the opportunity to influence the political agenda.

Despite their rise in appearances, their overall direct political influence appears to be diminishing slightly based upon the most recent election data.

The diminishing power, however, is not universal, nor is it dramatic.

The rise of far-right parties in Europe is accelerating due to both external and internal drivers.

The external process reflects the context of crises occurring in Europe and the whole world.

Such crises include international terrorism, the economic crisis in 2008, the migration crisis in 2015, and the COVID-19 health crisis since 2020.

The emergence of a group in one country may elicit support from a group in a neighboring country thus proliferating their influence.

Symbolism and rhetoric tend to be universal yet are received and interpreted differently from country to country.

Far-right extremists, as witnessed in the past and present, can easily become the head of states through democratic means.

The Transatlantic Nexus: Far-right Extremism and Domestic Terrorism in the U.S.

Daniel Scaduto

To discuss far-right extremism, or any violent domestic extremism in the U.S., evokes the definition of domestic terrorism. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines domestic terrorism as “violent criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”⁶ This terminology purposely separates domestic terrorism from terms such as hate crimes, protests, riots, and civil unrest. The terminology of domestic terrorism under the USA PATRIOT Act, Section 802, includes acts of intimidation and coercion, as well as the threat of violence (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). Laws applying to domestic terrorism grant federal and state authorities more powers to investigate individuals and groups suspected of domestic terrorism activities within American territorial jurisdiction.



⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation – Domestic Terrorism Definition: <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>

Most far-right groups meet the parameters outlined by the definition of domestic terrorism. As such, these groups and individuals maintain no sanctioned affiliation with mainstream political parties or any government institutions, despite efforts to co-op party platforms, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The term will be broadly applied when discussing far-right groups or individuals which have been identified, either by the federal government or by reputable advocacy organizations, as domestic terrorism groups or individuals.

The Renewed Threat of Far-Right Terrorism

The modern era of far-right extremism emerged in the 1990s. During this time, organized far-right groups predominately focused attacks on facilities providing abortions, justifying violence by contending abortions infringed on religious moralities (Jones, Doxsee & Harrington, 2020). These incidents often involved violent attacks on Planned Parenthood locations – federally-funded clinics that offer family planning and women’s health services, including abortions. However, the emergence of violent lone-wolf individuals, who executed attacks without any formal group affiliation, began to proliferate with greater frequency in the mid-1990s (Freilich et. al., 2018).

“ These individuals often share similar characteristics; most were single white men, many were military veterans, and nearly all held anti-government or white supremacist views (Freilich et. al., 2018).

Unlike earlier eras of extremist domestic-born violence in the U.S., modern extremism has become more decentralized. Rather than joining one group or falling in-line behind a specific leader, modern far-right extremists adhere to ideologies, viewpoints, or conspiracy theories. While some observers contend decentralization weakens the capacity of far-right groups to effectively carry out acts of violence, one can argue that decentralization has empowered extremist individuals to act on their own volition. As a result, lone wolves have become bolder in carrying out violence in the name of loosely affiliated ideas.

This shift in exercising violence is punctuated by early far-right attacks such as the Oklahoma City bombing. Such attacks pose a significant challenge for law enforcement in identifying extremist individuals and thwarting far-right plots and attacks.

The Oklahoma City bombing remains one of the most successfully executed far-right domestic terror plots in American history. On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh and co-conspirator Terry Nichols, anti-government extremists and avowed white supremacists, detonated explosives hidden in a truck under the Alfred P. Murrah Building in downtown Oklahoma City. The blast killed 168 people and injured hundreds of others. McVeigh, who had parked the truck and detonated the bomb, was arrested wearing a shirt with the Latin phrase *sic sempra tyrannis* (Thus always to tyrants) – a phrase claimed to have been shouted by John Wilkes Booth after he assassinated President Lincoln in 1865.



Image 6: The Oklahoma City bombing. Source: Daemmrch, 1995.

The Oklahoma City bombing garnered the largest death toll of any domestic terrorist attack in the U.S. During his trial, McVeigh justified his crimes by claiming the U.S. federal government was impeding Americans' Second Amendment rights, which protects the right of private gun ownership. As a former member of the U.S. Army, McVeigh considered himself a patriot in defending the country against a tyrannical federal government. Trials convicted both bombers in 1997. McVeigh received the death penalty and was executed by lethal injection in 2001; Nichols is currently serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. Since executing the bombing, similar-minded far-right groups have lauded McVeigh as a model figure against government overreach.

In the years leading up to 2000, the far-left briefly supplanted the far-right in carrying out most domestic terrorist attacks, usually against properties associated with animal farming or construction projects in vulnerable ecosystems. These attacks mainly used explosives to disrupt operations or damage property in an effort to instigate stronger animal and environmental protection legislation.

Despite a brief reprieve in domestic terrorism following the attacks of 9/11, far-right extremism has slowly experienced a resurgence over the last two decades.

As explored in previous sections of this publication, far-right extremism has grown substantially due in part to the Internet and access to social media platforms.

“ This technology enables disparate individuals to share and normalize far-right ideas and participate in a community of like-minded individuals.

Before the introduction of the Internet, experts contend that many extremist individuals remained isolated from their contemporaries. While they held onto far-right ideas, the lack of an easily accessible far-right community left them in a vacuum. Unable to converse or gain inspiration with other far-right adherents, most extremists kept to themselves and rarely carried out violent acts.

Compounding this enhanced connectivity, social and cultural trends in the U.S. have played a contributing factor towards increasing the fear and anxiety that can be found at the root of many far-right groups and individuals. For example, increasing flows of non-white immigrants, demographic shifts toward a majority non-white society, and the mounting prevalence of ethnic and social justice movements have stirred the anxieties of far-right individuals who feel threatened by cultural change.

As a result, since the 1990s, the U.S. has witnessed a rapid surge in far-right violence. The majority of terrorist attacks in the U.S. since 1994 have been carried out by far-right groups. Of the 893 terrorist attacks (including foreign terror attacks) identified by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, between 1994 and 2020 far-right groups and individuals were responsible for 57 percent, as compared to far-left (25 percent), and religious affiliates (15 percent) (Jones, Doxsee & Harrington, June 2020). Evidence further shows that the prevalence of these attacks escalated dramatically following

the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, the first Black American president (Felbab-Brown, 2021).

White Supremacy and Anti-government Far-Right Violence

The resurgence of far-right violence over the past thirty years can be classified broadly under two umbrellas – anti-government/militia groups and white supremacists. While these two categories certainly cross-over and generate several divergent far-right adherents, the majority of perpetrated far-right violence can be attributed to these classifications.

While individuals on both extremes of the American political spectrum have adopted anti-government ideologies, individuals on the far-right have executed anti-government actions to a much greater extent in recent years. Anti-government extremists in the U.S. maintain a variety of motivations for pursuing violence. Some individuals and groups believe state and federal governments are corrupt and pose a threat to liberties safeguarded by the U.S. Constitution, such as the Second Amendment right. Anti-government militia groups, such as the Three Percenters, conceptualize themselves as defenders of American freedom against encroachment from tyrannical government leaders (Anti-Defamation League, 2021). Still others contend that the U.S. federal government has been corrupted by non-Europeans, Jews, Blacks and members of minority religious and ethnic groups.

White supremacist groups and their sentiments have an enduring history in the U.S. From the colonial era through the mid-nineteenth century, a large portion of American wealth was derived from the labor of African slaves working on agricultural plantations in the South. In the early years of the country, the U.S. Constitution determined one slave accounted for 3/5 of a person, giving slave states greater populations for the purpose of accruing electoral votes. Following the American Civil War and the emancipation of Black slaves, white supremacist groups emerged in the post-bellum South and quickly accrued national followers. Groups such as the Ku Klux Klan targeted their acts of violence and intimidation against freed Blacks in order to prevent them from engaging in civic society or participating in democratic elections.

Throughout the history of white supremacist groups, adaptations have been made to be more inclusive of which groups they target in efforts to recruit individuals on a larger scale. Originally, these groups primarily targeted

violence and hatred towards Black Americans. But soon their ideologies changed to target other groups, including religious minorities and immigrants (including non-white Europeans). Through the 1980s and 90s many white supremacists began adopting neo-Nazi ideologies and adopting beliefs in ethno-nationalism, professing the belief of white European superiority. As explained in previous sections, several far-right white supremacist groups have adopted accelerationism and have also advocated for race wars in order to cleanse the country, and the West more broadly, of non-white peoples.

Today, both categories of far-right extremists have expanded dramatically.

“ According to the Intelligence Project conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center, 566 extreme anti-government groups (many holding white supremacist or ethno-nationalist sentiments) existed in the U.S. in 2020 (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020).

The following list is an example of the most prominent groups:

QAnon – a conspiracy theory-driven group founded on the core belief that Satan-worshipping elites run a child sex ring and control politics and media. Once considered fringe, QAnon adherents succeeded in spreading wild conspiracy theories and widely contributed to the belief that the 2020 presidential election was rigged to the detriment of President Donald Trump.

Proud Boys – a self-described white chauvinist and misogynist group that subscribes to ethno-nationalism. The group also supports anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric, and represents one of the more formally organized far-right groups in the U.S. with well-established networks formed on Internet platforms.

Rise Above Movement (RAM) – established on the premise of racist ideologies, the group champions white identity, aligning itself with identitarian movements in Europe. RAM, which champions masculinity and physical fitness, rose to prominence as disruptors at otherwise non-violent protests and rallies.



Image 7: Members of the Proud Boys participate in a march, led by their leader, center, Enrique Tarrío. Mr. Tarrío is currently serving a prison sentence for burning a Black Lives Matter banner from a Church and carrying two high-capacity magazines. Source: McKay, 2021.

Boogaloo Boys – a decentralized group of individuals who adhere to accelerationism and hold both anti-government and white supremacist views. Individuals associated with the Boogaloo movement foresee an impending civil war. Boogaloo associates first only rallied around online meme culture, but became more visible during a Second Amendment rally in Richmond, Virginia in 2020.

The above list scratches the surface of white supremacist and anti-government groups in the U.S., but their recent proliferation and visibility outside the bounds of Internet chatrooms causes reason for concern among both the American public and law enforcement. Furthermore, the increasing willingness of individuals affiliated with these movements to engage with the press or openly attend rallies in order to express far-right ideas underscores the extent to which far-right movements have gained footholds in American socio-political and cultural discourse.

Perhaps the most recent internationally visible event which shined a spotlight on the mounting far-right violence in the U.S. can be drawn from the events that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017.

White supremacist groups alongside anti-government and militia groups participated heavily in the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville. According to organizers, the rally aimed to unite a broad range of white supremacist groups and to prevent the proposed removal of a statue depicting Confederate General Robert E. Lee.⁷ Across the American South, propositions to remove Confederate monuments and memorials, as well as depictions of the Confederate flag, sparked outrage among white supremacist groups and individuals. This collective sentiment enabled disparate far-right groups to coalesce around a common cause and incite violence, which ultimately culminated in the events of Charlottesville.

Media reports from the rally depicted hundreds of armed men wearing tactical gear, claiming their purpose was to protect the right of citizens to protest. Counter-protesters, many of whom were peaceful, also rallied in an effort to confront the white supremacist groups. Throughout the rally, violence stood at the cusp of exploding as far-right groups, militia, counter protesters, and law enforcement officials clashed. Despite efforts to subdue mounting tensions in Charlottesville, the rally had already become a tinderbox. By nightfall on August 11, Americans around the country watched as white men wielding lit tiki torches chanted racially driven rally cries, including “Jews will not replace us.”



Image 8: Protestors and counter protesters in Charlottesville Virginia acting in regard to the removal of the Robert E. Lee Statue. Source: Somodevilla, 2017.

⁷ Robert E. Lee served as a Confederate general during the American Civil War and was appointed the overall commander of the Confederate States of America. Far-right groups have consistently co-opted Lee's image as a symbol of white supremacy and ethno-nationalism. The Lee statue in Charlottesville was removed in 2021.

On August 12, conflicts continued as protestors from opposite sides assaulted one another and dispersed chemical deterrents. In response, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe declared a state of emergency and mobilized the Virginia State Police, who declared the rally to be an unlawful assembly. Reports of brawls, property damage, and verbal assaults abounded as the rally continued until law enforcement officials managed to disperse most of the crowds.

“ Later that afternoon, James Alex Fields, a young man from Ohio who had previously expressed sympathy for Nazi Germany, drove his car into a group of counter protesters, injuring dozens and murdering 32-year-old Heather Heyer.

The events in Charlottesville received widespread condemnation from political leaders in both the Democratic and Republican parties. President Donald Trump’s muted responses, and failure to immediately condemn the violence, garnered near universal criticism. Many political and cultural leaders in the U.S. accused President Trump of reaping the political benefits of voter support from far-right individuals.



Image 9: Protestors and counter protesters in Charlottesville Virginia acting in regard to the removal of the Robert E. Lee Statue. Source: Somodevilla, 2017.



Image 10: Protestors and counter protesters in Charlottesville Virginia acting in regard to the removal of the Robert E. Lee Statue. Source: Somodevilla, 2017.

According to some reports, members of white supremacist groups from Europe were present in Charlottesville. The three main organizers of the rally, Richard Spencer (neo-Nazi, white supremacist), David Duke (a former leader of the KKK), and Matthew Heimbach (neo-Nazi, white nationalist) – “have all been involved with European white nationalist individuals or organizations” (Golinkin, 2017). Spencer had previously worked with far-right groups in Sweden in an effort to establish a far-right media outlet (Feder and Mannheimer, 2017). In 2016, Heimbach had toured Europe extensively to meet with far-right groups including Golden Dawn in Greece, and the Czech Workers Party in the Czech Republic (Golinkin, 2017). Additionally, some investigators contend that Russian trolls may have played a role in spurring the event over social media channels. The tumultuous clash in Charlottesville renewed a national focus on far-right extremism, as federal law enforcement cracked down on organizations across several U.S. states (Lister, 2020).

Another prominent incident of far-right violence occurred in October 2018, when Robert Bowers, a self-professed white supremacist, killed eleven Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Bowers actively expressed his hatred of non-white and non-Christian peoples on social media platforms such as Gab. In the weeks preceding the mass shooting at Tree of Life, Bowers had criticized the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society for helping bring immigrants from Latin America to the US. He also criticized President Trump for associating himself with Jews. The attack was the deadliest carried out against Jews in U.S. history.

Both events drew attention from peoples and governments all around the world. The events not only garnered shock from the international community, but also embodied worries that similar events could take place at home, particularly in European countries. In an interview with German media, Chancellor Angela Merkel commented on the rally in Virginia stating, “It is racist, far-right violence and clear, forceful action must be taken against it, regardless of where in the world it happens” (Stack, 2017). She further cautioned that Germany must be vigilant to condemn far-right extremism at home “before we point our fingers at others” (Stack, 2017). Merkel further condemned the Tree of Life shooting and was echoed by other European leaders on social media including Emmanuel Macron, Andrzej Duda, and others.

Transnational Interactions

Law enforcement in the U.S., at local, state and federal levels, has tended to look at far-right violence through the lens of domestic-born sentiments rooted in racism, bigotry, and hatred. However, over the past several years, as far-right groups continue to grow in prevalence and forge global connections both online and in-person, law enforcement, as well as political leaders, have begun recognizing the expanding reach of violent extremism.

As noted earlier, the traditional approach to counter far-right extremism has been understood through the framing of domestic terrorism. As such, tracking emergent transnational contacts between far-right groups and individuals poses a challenge for local and international law enforcement and intelligence officials and requires a new set of tools and approaches. As the majority of these interactions occur over online chat forums or with the aid of encrypted messaging software, officials struggle to assess the extent of formal connections. However, growing interest in countering the proliferation of far-right violence, both by government institutions and research organizations, has led to a surge in identifying the connections between far-right actors.

The most visible far-right interactions between the U.S. and Europe occur between neo-Nazi and other white supremacist groups. Evidence reveals that thousands of American white supremacists have traveled across the Atlantic to meet their European counterparts. Far-right Americans who travel to Europe often visit sites associated with Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler. In several documented cases, American neo-Nazis have visited Auschwitz and other concentration camps to pose for photographs and celebrate the Holocaust.

“ Furthermore, American white supremacists have openly visited large neo-Nazi gatherings tolerated by small towns in Germany and elsewhere. These gatherings offer a relatively secure environment for American and European white supremacists to discuss conspiracy theories, share tactics to prepare for impending race wars, and to casually spew hateful rhetoric without fear of reprisals (Engel & Denne, 2020).

Anti-fascist protesters usually rally outside of these gatherings, but local law enforcement habitually does well to provide adequate buffer zones.

Additionally, individuals affiliated with anti-government groups (often holding white supremacist ideologies), have gathered to conduct paramilitary training exercises or to share tactics to implement in the hope of future race wars. In 2018, photos on social media accounts associated with the California-based Rise Above Movement confirmed that several of the group’s members had travelled to Ukraine to participate in military training exercises with the Azov Regiment in Odesa (Kuzmenko, 2020).



Image 11 (left): Two American white supremacists deported from Ukraine after attempting to join the Azov Regiment. Source: Security Service of Ukraine, 2020.



Image 12 (right): RAM founder Robert Rundo (center) with Ukrainian members of the Azov Regiment at the Reconquista Club in Kyiv, Ukraine. Source: RFE/RL, 2018.

Many prominent figures of far-right groups in the U.S. and Europe have been open about their interactions with one another. Rather than simply professing far-right views, these individuals believe that coordination between Americans and Europeans, primarily those holding white supremacist/ethno-nationalist aspirations, is the only way to launch race wars and overthrow governments. These people do not perceive violence as an act in and of itself, but rather as a step towards eventual revolution.

“ For them, violence will help propel civil wars and allow an opportunity to gain control of the Western world for ethnic Europeans.

However, as alluded to earlier, most of these transnational interactions occur primarily online, and far-right people are not typically connected through formal networks. In a sense, these people form a global community around far-right ideas but fall short of cementing any clear objectives in the pursuit of violence. The lack of a unity, however, does not stymie the potential for violence. In fact, the interconnectivity of these individuals serves to embolden individuals to engage deadly actions.

In 2019, Brenton Tarrant live-streamed the murder of more than fifty Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand. In a manifesto published before the attack, Tarrant credits the murders carried out by Anders Breivik in Norway and Dylann Roof in South Carolina as inspirations for his violence. Less than six months later, Patrick Crusius murdered twenty-three people at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, expressing his inspiration from Tarrant in a manifesto posted to 8chan. While completely uncoordinated, these violent actions show that far-right affiliated individuals do not rely on centralization to perpetrate violence, but rather coalesce around central ideologies and acts that justify their violence. The perpetrators of these violent acts held to the dogma of accelerationism. While these individuals acted alone, they did not perceive themselves as “lone-wolves” executing violence in a vacuum, but rather as contributors to a global movement with shared goals – to accelerate ethnic clashes and spur white resurgence.

Furthermore, far-right groups are not only meeting with one another in-person and online to build connections and comradery but have also been adopting tactics to enhance recruitment and spread rhetoric. In October 2021, France’s national intelligence and counterterrorism coordinator Laurent Nuñez warned that French far-right groups had begun embracing anti-government

conspiracy theories perpetuated by American counterparts (Barnes, 2021). While Mr. Nuñez did not point to any formal connections between far-right groups, he cautioned that spreading conspiracy theories emanating from the U.S. marked a concerning trend across Europe (Barnes, 2021). Conspiracy theories, many associated with the globally present QAnon movement, have infiltrated multiple countries in Europe and have increased in popularity tremendously.

The concerns of the French are echoed by counterparts across Europe. Following the January 6 insurrection of the U.S. Capitol (detailed below), governments across Europe respond by heightening security measures at state buildings and listening closely to online chatter. In Germany, authorities increased security around the parliament building in Berlin – an institution which nearly faced an incursion by far-right protestors only months earlier (Bennhold & Schwirtz, 2021).

2020: Pandemic, Racial Tensions, and a Presidential Election

An American living in 2019 could hardly predict the turmoil that would await the U.S. in the year to come. Jumpstarted by a global pandemic, spurred by racial violence, and exacerbated by a contentious presidential election, 2020 offered fertile grounds for far-right groups to heighten their visibility and embolden their actions.

Throughout 2020, tightening pandemic-related restrictions across the U.S. fueled the proliferation of far-right anti-government and militia groups, which capitalized on the mounting public unrest to criticize government leaders and expand followers.

“ In all corners of the country, anti-government groups became prominent features at rallies and protests, contending that pandemic restrictions intended to protect public health were in fact a smokescreen designed to debase American freedoms.

Extremists succeeded in turning the pandemic's societal disruptions into a battle cry against perceived government overreach. Anti-government groups flooded Internet forums and social media, urging so-called patriotic Americans to defend their rights and act against government officials. Ignoring mask mandates and often mocking health workers, many of these protests occurred at state capitol buildings, residences of local elected officials, and in some instances healthcare facilities. These rallies were particularly prominent in states governed by Democrats, which often enacted more restrictive pandemic mandates than those led by Republicans.

In perhaps the most visible instance of anti-government extremism, the FBI arrested 13 men for their involvement in plans to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, who had come under fierce criticism from political opponents, including President Trump, for introducing pandemic restrictions in the state (Gross, 2021). Two self-styled militiamen, Adam Fox and Barry Croft, met with anti-government groups from five states to present their plans to kidnap Gov. Whitmer. The ringleaders claimed association with a local Michigan militia group called the "Wolverine Watchmen." In the weeks preceding their arrest, Fox and Croft conducted military training exercises designed to penetrate buildings and extract victims and instructed co-conspirators to case Gov. Whitmer's lakeside vacation home for vulnerabilities (Gray & Tompkins, 2021). Later testimony revealed that Virginia Governor Ralph Northam may also have been targeted for a similar attack (Jones, Doxsee & Harrington, 2020).

While many new militia and local anti-government groups emerged in the wake of the pandemic, some lifelong adherents of far-right ideologies have lavished the notion that a new civil war was imminent. Many anti-government groups, most of which retain tenets of white supremacy, used the pandemic as an opportunity to conduct violent acts against minority communities. The New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness noted that "domestic extremist groups [are] taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic by spreading disinformation" and targeting violence toward ethnic minorities and immigrants (MacFarquhar, 2020). Such groups used the Internet to stoke disinformation about the pandemic and its origins, claiming that people of color and Jews were primarily responsible for the disease's rapid spread.

Furthermore, racial tensions in the U.S. gained renewed urgency following the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, in Minneapolis in June 2020. Floyd died as a result of unsanctioned restraint methods conducted by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who was later sentenced to 22.5 years in prison for second-degree murder. In the wake of Floyd's murder, cities and towns across the U.S. witnessed an uptick in violence as far-right

and far-left individuals usurped peaceful protests and clashed with one another on the streets. Inflamed racial tensions brought fringe extremists from across the U.S. to Minneapolis and other major cities – brawls, looting of private businesses, and instances of arson hijacked much of the social justice conversations. In Portland, Oregon, far-left protestors occupied sections of the city and confronted anti-government protesters and white supremacists who came from the city’s periphery. Chauvin’s murder of Floyd added to the national unease that was already gripping the country in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns, exacerbating divisions between Americans and fueling heated political debate.

As the 2020 election between incumbent President Donald Trump and Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden approached, the national spotlight centered largely on domestic issues, including COVID-19 responses, economic recession, violent extremism, and racial tensions.

Trump gained widespread condemnation after urging the “Proud Boys” – a self-described group of misogynist white supremacists – to “stand back and stand by.” The Proud Boys, and other observers, perceived this statement as a message of support in confronting left-wing progressive ideologies (Ronayne & Kunzelman, 2020). Furthermore, the proliferation of QAnon – an online conspiracy group spreading disinformation about COVID-19, presidential elections, and civil protestors – further ignited the prevalence of far-right rhetoric in mainstream media (Roose, 2021). The issues stemming from racially motivated violence and COVID-19 restrictions came to dominate the media landscape and political debate in the second half of 2020.

Following the electoral victory of President Biden over Donald Trump, millions of Americans, including those who did not subscribe to far-right ideologies, adopted unfounded theories that the Democratic Party stole the election by manipulating ballots. Due to the widespread adoption of mail-in ballots as a means of preventing the spread of COVID-19, several state contests saw Biden overcome Trump late in the counting process. Mail-in ballots are typically counted after in-person votes are tallied, and registered Democrats voted more by mail than Republicans did. President Trump largely fueled these theories, adopting the rhetoric of far-right individuals and threatening to challenge the results of several key states.



Image 13: Rioters on January 6, 2021, scale the Capitol Building before overwhelming law enforcement and forcing entry. Source: O'Fanaye, 2021.

Tensions ultimately spilled over on January 6, 2021, when violent far-right protestors fought law enforcement and entered the U.S. Capitol as members of Congress were certifying the election results. During a rally held outside the White House that morning, President Trump urged supporters to march on the Capitol in order to defend American democracy. The event gained worldwide attention as millions watched Senators and House Representatives rushed to safety as far-right Trump supporters desecrated the Capitol building and entered congressional chambers. Later reports allege that President Trump had attempted to convince Vice-President Mike Pence, who was responsible for overseeing the process, to dismiss the election results. The resulting incursion into the U.S. Capitol halted the certification process for several hours while Capitol Police regained control of the building. Despite the clear willingness of President Trump to exacerbate and empower far-right groups, several Republican members of Congress still petitioned to challenge election results in the states they represented.

The year 2020 marked a tumultuous period in U.S. culture and politics, and encouraged many to reflect on the future of far-right extremism in the country. In reviewing the results of the 2020 election, one can argue that President Trump's association with far-right groups and adoption of far-right rhetoric harmed his ability to win a second term. Across many states, support for Trump at the ballot box among registered Republicans dropped substantially, with many supporting Biden or an alternative candidate. Evidence suggests that more centrist Republicans, who were willing to dismiss Trump's inflammatory actions and division rhetoric in 2016, could no longer accept his presidency. Results of the 2020 election show that suburban and college-educated Republicans largely abandoned Trump.

Co-opting Political Parties

Many extremist groups in the United States have sought to co-op with political parties to further legitimacy, expand membership, and justify violent actions. Unlike most European countries, extremists in the U.S. cannot easily associate themselves with or establish their own right-wing parties, given the calcification of an enduring two-party system. Whereas European extremists can often find homes in far-right parties, which afford them an isolated degree of political legitimacy and participation, far-right and far-left groups in the U.S. often aim to associate themselves with one of the two main existing parties. On both ends of the political spectrum, the Republican Party and Democratic Party have served as vessels for extreme actors to perpetuate their ideologies and push political agendas in line with their objectives.

In today's era of extremism, far-right groups and individuals, including anti-government organizations and white supremacist factions, have succeeded to a limited extent in linking themselves with the Republican Party, due in part to some rhetoric professed by a small number of elected leaders. This occurrence can be a two-way street. While far-right groups may seek to gain legitimacy from political parties, elected officials and candidates may employ rhetoric that encourages these groups, lending them with a "sense of impunity" (Felbab-Brown, 2021).

Mainstream media also plays a volatile role in perpetuating the idea that extremist views pervade and define both parties. Left-wing media and

mainstream media (which tends to be more left) often lump all Republicans into the same boat with fringe extremists, rather than understand the nuances of issues that matter to everyday American Republicans. The same can be said of right-wing media, which has consistently tied anti-fascist groups such as Antifa or social movements such as Black Lives Matter to the Democratic Party. As a result, national political rhetoric tends to focus on the extremes of both parties rather than the commonalities that exist at the center where most Americans place their political stance.

To an extent, the bifurcated American political system, where candidates compete in first-past-the-post, or winner-take-all, contests contribute to deepening divisions. In order to ensure electoral victory, candidates in many electoral districts must adopt stances that not only prove palatable to the majority of Americans living in the center of the political spectrum, but also motivate those living on the fringes.



In recent elections, both Republican and Democratic candidates have sought to mobilize the extreme members of their respective parties to the detriment of Americans holding more centrist views. In many districts, elections have become a race to the fringe.

However, comparisons in voter turnout and ballots between the 2020 and 2021 election shows that many Americans are seeking a return to the middle. In 2021, two states, Virginia and New Jersey, held elections for state governors. In both states, more Republicans voted for the Republican candidate than they did for Donald Trump in 2020. The trends show that many Republicans and independent voters, many of whom voted for Trump in 2016, turned away from his candidacy and sought to bar him from a second presidential term.

Therefore, defining a political party by its members that exist on the fringe, disserves American democracy and unduly accuses well-to-do Americans of sympathizing with extremist views. The reality in the U.S., as in most democracies, remains that most voters are good, upstanding citizens. If the elections of 2021 reveal anything, it's that Americans living closer to the political center still have the power to control their democracy and quell the voice of extremists on the far ends of the political spectrum.

Government Actions to Address Extremism in the U.S.

Finally, the U.S. government has begun taking piecemeal steps to recognize and address the encroachment of far-right violence, both domestically and internationally. Mounting domestic extremism has caused the federal government to increase its vigilance of far-right groups and revamp strategies aimed at stymieing the proliferation of far-right ideas and individuals.

In 2018, the Trump Administration's counterterrorism strategy underlined that violence from domestic extremists was on the rise. The report recognized that many extremists were motivated by race and ethno-nationalism. However, the report received criticism for equating far-right extremism with that of far-left environmental groups that largely target property, rather than people and government institutions. The report also clearly pointed toward a new worrying trend – the increasing transnational connections being formed between far-right extremists in the U.S. and Europe.

In October 2020, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued its inaugural *Homeland Threat Assessment* to inform elected officials of the various dangers confronting the safety of American citizens and U.S. government institutions. In addressing terrorism, the report underscored the rapidly expounding threats posed by domestic violence, noting that “racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists – specifically white supremacist extremists – will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020).

Following the events of January 6, 2021, FBI Director Christopher Wray delivered a testimony before Congress on the subject of domestic terrorism. Wray stated that “the problem of domestic terrorism has been metastasizing across the country for a long time now and it’s not going anywhere soon” (Tucker & Jalonick, 2021). According to Wray’s testimony, the number of domestic terrorism cases being investigated by the Bureau ballooned from 1,000 cases in 2017 to about 2,000 by the Spring of 2021 (Tucker & Jalonick, 2021). At a subsequent hearing in September 2021, Wray affirmed that the case count had grown further to 2,700, surpassing the number of cases focused on foreign terrorism for the first time since 9/11 (Seldin, 2021).

In June 2021, the Biden Administration announced the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism – the first federal action plan to design a comprehensive approach toward mitigating the drivers and purveyors of domestic terrorism. The new strategy presents four core pillars: to enhance

cross-state and cross-agency information sharing and assessing links to foreign entities; to prevent recruitment and mobilization of violence, including on online platforms; to consider new legislation to curb domestic terrorism; and to address systemic issues such as racism and bigotry, which often contribute to the proliferation of domestic terrorism (Smith, 2021). The strategy was also accompanied by an additional 100 million dollars built into the fiscal year 2022 budget to provide additional analysts and resources to disrupt domestic terrorism (Smith, 2021).

Interestingly, the report also emphasizes the need to better understand the extent to which domestic terrorist groups retain links established with foreign entities. Under Strategic Goal 1.3: Illuminate Transnational Aspects of Domestic Terrorism, the strategy warns that “terrorists and their supporters increasingly connect with each other via Internet-based communication platforms... and point to ideologically similar foreigners as inspirations for their acts of violence.” The strategy notes that the U.S. federal government is also working with allied countries to determine whether individuals and groups who form international connections can be designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations or Specially Designated Global Terrorists. Doing so would allow the U.S. and its international partners to crack down more aggressively on any individuals conducting training exercises or sharing communications on potential terrorist plots abroad and at home.⁸

As Americans look ahead, the spotlight will certainly remain on far-right groups and individuals. Lingering COVID-19 restrictions and implications, rampant inflation and a weak economy, and a seemingly never-ending border crisis have left Americans feeling anxious, uncertain, and in some cases fearful – all powerful fodder for far-right groups. Similar sentiments remain in Europe as well, and despite some successful elections which lessened the voice of far-right groups, the future of resilience in combating far-right extremism remains far from certain. Both Americans and Europeans, whether elected leaders, law enforcement officials, or everyday citizens, must at all opportunities work against the tide of far-right extremism. New government approaches on both sides of the Atlantic must build resilience and seek opportunities to work together to counter the growing threat of transnational far-right cooperation.

8 Full-text of the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, June 2021 - <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>

Conclusions and Takeaways

The proliferation of far-right extremism within the U.S. has resulted in decentralized lone-wolf attacks being more prevalent as opposed to attacks from coherent organizations.

The majority (57 %) of all domestic terrorist attacks between 1994 and 2020 were perpetrated by far-right extremists.

Due in part to the internet, coherent groups are growing in number throughout the U.S., but they often remain decentralized and work in loose association around shared values, rather than through centralized coordination.

These connections are often transnational and have led to multiple instances of transcontinental interactions between groups, though the decentralized nature and lack of concrete cohesion often keeps these groups from committing to actual violence or action as a group.

The global pandemic has only exacerbated tensions and emboldened far-right extremists.

Far-right organizations within the U.S. may have pseudo influence when it comes to political parties, but they do not hold any overt or authorized influence.

Recent efforts from far-right groups have produced attempts to gain traction within the established political parties of the U.S., but the efforts have resulted in almost zero success.

Voting statistics suggest that most Americans desire a return to the political center.

The current U.S. Administration has extended efforts to disrupt far-right extremism both at the federal and state levels.

Role of the Internet

Alia Taladiar

The Internet has been a community where individuals come together and connect. While it has simplified interactions, it also became a breeding ground for hatred and far-right views. In 2016, German political groups with extremist content were rapidly increasing in popularity online. An internal report on Facebook found that 64 % of the individuals that joined these extremist groups did so because the recommendation system led them there (Horwitz & Seetharaman, 2020). Within far-right extremism in Europe, the influence the Internet has in radicalization is often taken for granted. This part of the study will examine the behavior of far-right groups on the Internet and its impact on the real world.

Stumbling upon extremist content online is not as rare as it may seem. Social media and websites give online users the content that interests them and advertisements that they will find intriguing. However, it also can recommend content far from the central spectrum of the user's interest. Klein (2012) raises the notion of "Information Laundering." It explains the delay and failure of search engines and networking sites to identify the difference between extremist and mainstream posts. For example, a study found that Holocaust denial content is recommended actively through the algorithm in Facebook (Guhl & Davey, 2020). As a result, it can lead to online users unintentionally coming across extremist content.



The problem is that most users are unaware of how mainstream social media sites prioritize maximizing engagement and how it does not focus on whether the content provided is pleasing or even truthful. For that reason, filtered news feeds create biased ideologies and limit users from other views besides their own. Parsier (2011) called it the “Filter Bubble,” highlighting that having a personalized feed can create isolation from opposing perspectives. Because of these downfalls, social media sites could radicalize everyday online users unintentionally, and portray a one-sided perspective of how they view reality in the real world.

Since then, far-right groups have been successfully taking this defect as an advantage in enlarging their numbers. Qlobal Change, a German-language QAnon YouTube channel, reached more than 18 million views and more than 100,000 subscribers (“Qlobal-Change’s YouTube stats”, n.d.). Despite QAnon being an American far-right based movement, it has spread globally and has effectively become a popular crowd in Germany. At the same time, Martin Sellner, an Austrian activist in a far-right group called Generation Identity (GI), has a YouTube channel with more than 33 million views where he expresses his extremist ideas (“Martin Sellner’s YouTube stats”, n.d.).

Mainstream websites

Mainstream sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube allow users to present their content to a larger audience. However, the issues of the Filter Bubble and Information Laundering benefit extremist behavior. Far-right users on these social media sites disseminate their ideas and use various strategies that help their content gain attention (Davey & Ebner, 2019). According to Graham (2016), “Piggy-Backing” is a popular tactic being used. It occurs when a post has both a trending topic and extremist ideas in one post. For example, having the hashtag #HappyNewYear and #WhiteGenocide in one post together misleads online users. When QAnon used the hashtag #SaveTheChildren, they linked it to their far-right conspiracy theories. It reached the United Kingdom, which led to QAnon-themed protests in more than 20 cities (Bennhold, 2020).

On the other hand, Discord and Telegram are also social media platforms that extremists use.

They are structured differently since they are both messaging apps. Extremists have used Telegram as their main communication platform because of the “secret chats” with an end-to-end encryption and lack of overseeing regulations on white supremacist groups, neo-Nazi groups, and other far-right extremist

groups. Telegram’s ignorance is an interesting take. When ISIS groups appeared on the platform, they banned those channels immediately. However, when it came to right-wing extremists, nothing was done to ban or restrict the content they were posting. Simply analyzing this shows the power and privilege that these groups and individuals uphold.

Saint Calendar is one of the far-right channels that promote terrorists and popular extremists, who are presented as legends. In the channel, they provide accessible information regarding numerous far-right terrorists and refer to them as “saints.” Their posts include a summary of targets, weapons, notable actions, recommended links, and raw footage videos of attacks.

The image shows a Telegram post from the channel 'Saint Calendar'. The post is dated 10 Oct, 18:43 (11 days ago) and is titled 'SAINT STEPHAN BALLIET (2) - 10/09/2019'. The post contains a detailed profile of Stephan Balliet, including his birth year (1992), occupation (former German military), motivations (hatred of Jews), affiliation (Saint Tarrant's 4th Discipline), location (Landsberg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany), targets (race traitors), weapons (Luty SMG 9MM, Slam-bang shotgun, pistols, knives, IEDs), and status (life in prison). It also includes a quote from Balliet, a manifesto link, and a list of notable actions. On the right side of the post, there is a sidebar with various links and categories such as 'THE SAINT OF DIY', 'DAY OF ACTION', 'LINKS', 'VIDS', 'LIVESTREAM', 'ATTACK FOOTAGE', 'FATAL SHOOTING', 'TRIAL BEGINS', 'ARTICLES', and 'MAIL THE SAINTS'. The post is marked as an 'Attached file'.

Image 14: A post by Saint Calendar on Stephan Balliet in Telegram. Source: “@SaintCalendar - Channel statistics Saint Calendar. Telegram Analytics,” 2021.

Beyond that, the Atomwaffen Division (AWD), a neo-Nazi group whose founding principles are based on James Mason's book "Siege", is also one of the popular groups that uses Telegram for discussing their plans, meetings, and thoughts.

“ The AWD uses Telegram to recruit minors and circulate instructions on how to build a “slap gun” from Mason's book, which he described as being a makeshift replacement for a shotgun (Hayden, 2019; “Far-Right Extremists...”; Manemann, 2021).

Their influence has had the greatest impact on Poland, Ukraine, and Germany (Manemann, 2021). Similarly, other extremist channels have referenced books such as “Mein Kampf” and “The Turner Diaries” with sections and texts dedicated on how to make homemade weapons or how to run a militia (Venkataramakrishnan, 2019). Homemade guns, 3D printed weapons, improvised explosives, incendiary devices, ammunition, and silencers are crucial to the conversation because there is an increasing number of charges and attacks that have been associated with them (Dearden, 2021).

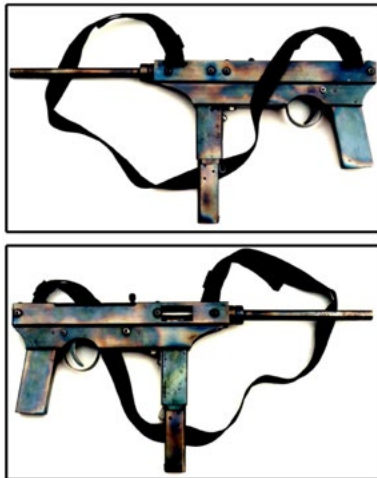


Image 15: Homemade Firearms by Philip A. Luty. Source: Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium, 2021.

Most of the far-right extremists that have been caught with homemade weapons stated that they were inspired by the guides from far-right social media groups (The Crown Prosecution Service, 2019). Although it's not a surprising dilemma, since within only 48 hours of one post on gun-making instructions in Telegram, it gained 2,000 views (Hayden, 2019). “Far-Right Extremists...”). Stephan Balliet, the Halle synagogue shooter in Germany, was a core influencer in radicalizing other users and introducing them to the 3D printing of guns, which he eventually used during his attack. In a study, Caniglia, Winkler and Métais (2020) found



Image 16: Homemade Firearm by Philip A. Luty. Source: Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium, 2021.

that “supplementary to the 3 [sic] documents completing Balliet’s manifesto, folders containing numerous downloadable files that could be run through a 3D printer to make the same firearms, as well as ammunition, are present online” (p. 8). Balliet also included suggestions to use the manual of Philip A. Luty, an English anti-gun control activist that provided instructions on homemade firearms.

Memes and shitposting

Humour is one of the best ways to gain an audience on the Internet. A main strategy used by far-right users is the prolific use of memes and shitposting. According to Evans (2019), from Bellingcat, “Shitposting refers to the act of throwing out huge amounts of content, most of it ironic, low-quality trolling, for the purpose of provoking an emotional reaction in less Internet-savvy viewers [where] the ultimate goal is to derail productive discussion and distract readers.” Shitposting and memes contain “irony, sarcasm, and other linguistic tropes” that have become harder to identify by artificial intelligent tools (Pohjonen, 2021). For instance, the “Pepe the Frog” meme was appropriated by far-right users to express their racist, anti-Semitic, and white supremacist views. Studies show that posts through images are harder to detect compared to a text form, making it easier for extremist memes to evade AI moderation tools (Cambridge Consultants, 2019, p. 33). Unfortunately, its smooth pathway may enable regular users to participate and form manifestations of violent attacks in the real world, while not being entirely privy to their immediate actions.



Image 17: Pepe the Frog memes that are used in the discussions within the fringe websites. Source: Evans, 2019. “The Poway synagogue shooter left another manifesto — here’s why you should ignore it”.

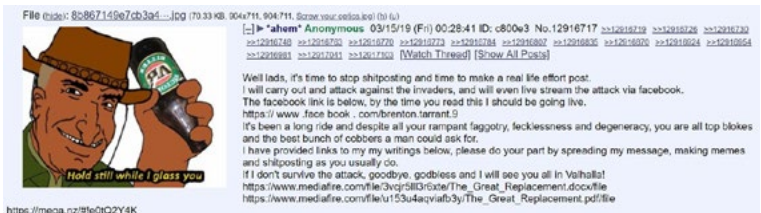


Image 18: An 8chan post by Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch mosque shooter in New Zealand. In this photo, he discusses his attack while also inciting his audience to spread his messages through memes and shit-posting. Source: Evans, 2019. “Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch mosque Massacre - bellingcat”.



Image 19: An 8chan post in response to Tarrant’s post. Source: Evans, 2019. “Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch mosque Massacre - bellingcat”.

Fringe websites

On the Internet, approaches of far-right users in fringe and mainstream websites are not similar. Fringe websites like 4chan and 8chan began as communities that posted opinions and theories online, but because of its loosely moderated chat forums and anonymous accounts, it attracted numerous right-wing users and white supremacists. These types of websites consist of imageboards, serving as discussion forums, each comprising a discussion thread. Any user can start a thread by posting an image or text as the opening post (Fielitz & Ahmed, 2021). As time passed, it went from a diverse group of communities to a hub for young, white, male users posting disturbing and vile content (“How 8chan Became The Worst Place on The Internet”, 2019).



Image 20: 8chan users encouraging each other to commit a violent attack. Source: Evans, 2019, “The Poway synagogue shooter left another manifesto — here’s why you should ignore it”.

8chan users identify themselves as "Anon"⁹ and frequently use memes to communicate with each other. Likewise, websites such as Iron March and Fascist Forge also share the same structure but with a specific aim to widen the community for young neo-Nazis and neo-fascists. According to Hayden (2019), “Iron March was ultimately affiliated with or offered support to at least nine fascist groups in nine different countries by the time the website mysteriously disappeared in 2017. The other groups included Serbian Action of Serbia, Casa Pound of Italy, Golden Dawn of Greece, Antipodean Resistance of Australia, Skydas of Lithuania, and Azov Battalion of Ukraine.” Despite its shutdown, it still led to the creation of another similar site called Fascist Forge, where users come from Ukraine, France, Slovakia, Finland, and Norway. Within the site, they post the same extremist content and deeply admire Alexander Slavros,

9 Anon: a term that 8chan users use to identify themselves.

the founder of Iron March. Users from the site prominently post his writings and his 10-part video series called “Fascism 101” (Anti-Defamation League, 2019).

In recent years, fringe websites started to gain popularity since several far-right attackers were associated with them. Consequently, legal overseers monitored their online behavior, which led to some websites being shut down. Fringe websites have become home to extremist individuals; however, an end to their websites does not mean an end to their movement. So far, Fascist Forge replaced Iron March while 8kun and EndChan became alternative platforms for 8chan followers to continue their right-wing extremism path.

The spawn of far-right attackers and their link with these fringe websites has not been different in European countries. Instead, they are silently catching on quickly. For example, the year 2019 was a wake-up call for society to the growing threat of far-right violence. It was not unusual for the terrorists to be associated with the popular 8chan or EndChan sites. Stephan Balliet, the Halle synagogue shooter in Germany, was one of them. He live-streamed his attack on Twitch¹⁰ and posted a manifesto in Telegram. During the stream of his violence, he called himself an anon, and in his manifesto pointed out the 8chan forum (“Far-Right Terrorism: Deadly Attack Exposes Lapses in German Security Apparatus”, 2019).

“ He had a regular engagement with a community in 8chan and was given praise for his attack.

Balliet was not the only one who had a connection to these extremist websites. That same year Philip Manshaus, the Bærum mosque shooter in Norway, was also linked to a similar 8chan-like website called EndChan. Before his attack, he was an active EndChan user and was vocal about his anti-immigrant and Islamophobic views (“Norway mosque attack: Bruised suspect Manshaus appears in court”, 2019). Manshaus stated that he took inspiration from Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch mosque shooter in New Zealand, who also had a strong involvement with 8chan (Burke, 2019). Across Europe, Brenton Tarrant became an inspiration for far-right groups and individuals to commit cruel acts, whether online or offline. To this day, in Telegram, Ukrainian neo-Nazi terrorist channels continue to prevail in admiring Tarrant. This admiration even led to channel administrators selling language translations of Tarrant’s manifesto, calling for others to follow in his footsteps (Colborne, 2020).

¹⁰ Twitch: a live streaming platform where users can broadcast any time to its audience.



Image 21: An 8chan post discussing about Brenton Tarrant’s attack. Source: Evans, 2019, “Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch mosque Massacre - bellingcat”.

Finally, considering the impact the far-right online users had made, it became severely exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the next chapter explains, far-right conspiracy theories were soaring in number.

There are many implications of what makes an extremist. The influence of the Internet should not be taken for granted. Often trends of far-right online communication are through using memes, gathering in fringe websites, and disseminating ideas on social media platforms. Owners of these websites have been trying to address this issue through content moderation. The European Union also took steps to enforce regulations to eliminate terrorist content online (The Soufan Centre, 2021). In the end, moderating right-wing extremists will not be an easy fight, but recognizing the roots of their growth is the first step.



Image 22: A Ukrainian translation of Brenton Tarrant’s manifesto from Ukrainian neo-Nazi group Karpatska Sich, whose members urged their followers in 2019 to buy the manifesto. Source: Colborne, 2020.

Conclusions and Takeaways

“Piggy-Backing” occurs when a post has a trending topic and extremist ideas in one post together (e.g., hashtags #HappyNewYear and #WhiteGenocide).

Extremists have used Telegram as their main communication platform because of the “secret chats” with an end-to-end encryption and lack of overseeing regulations.

Fringe websites like 4chan and 8chan attract a high number of right-wing users and white supremacists, including famous far-right terrorists.

Stephan Balliet, the Halle synagogue shooter in Germany, live-streamed his attack on Twitch and posted a manifesto in Telegram. His manifesto also pointed out the 8chan forum.

The internet became a breeding ground for hatred and far-right views to prosper.

Far-right users often use memes and shit-posting. Posts through images are harder to detect compared to a text form, making it easier for extremist memes to surpass.

Social media and websites give users the content that interests them and advertisements that they will find intriguing, which can include extremist content.

The conversation of bringing light towards the Internet’s hidden harms are not often talked about, which has led to the radicalization of youths and intense mental-health problems.

The Role of Conspiracy Theories and Disinformation

Frederik Brekk

Conspiracy theories have existed for centuries, but it was not until the advent and subsequent rapid development of the Internet and its related technologies that these theories have become more serious threats to larger society. In the last three decades, we have seen vastly improved interconnectivity, allowing people to engage with each other easily and seamlessly from across the globe on a range of platforms. This has provided significant benefits to people's personal lives, businesses, economies, and many other aspects. Simultaneously, how to govern this new space, without overreaching and stifling innovation, has been a pressing and, as of today, unresolved issue.



In recent years, and only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories and disinformation (CTD) have become much more prevalent, threatening societal and communal cohesion, and, in some instances, resulting in violence. This chapter discusses the origins and natures of select CTD, how they are leveraged by movements and individuals, and why this is a serious threat to the EU and Europe more generally.

Dissemination of CTD

The freedom that the Internet and various online platforms offer has allowed non-state actors and organizations to manipulate them towards their own ends. Although not exclusively, the general trend suggests it is far-right organizations and supporters in Europe and the U.S. which both push and are targeted by CTD¹¹. Prominent examples of such groups include the Atomwaffen Division (US) and its European affiliates, Kohti Vapautta! (Finland), Blanche Europe (France), and the Nordic Resistance Movement (Sweden), to name just a few.¹² That being said, there is a significant amount of overlap between these organizations, various movements, and individuals, as well as a mixture of both online and offline influences. The complexity and unpredictability of CTD and its sources make combatting it difficult, but there are certain characteristics many far-right groups exhibit which can help formulate a general profile, in turn helping

11 Groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaeda have also been known to produce their own CTD.

12 The 'European affiliates' referred to are: Feuerkrieg Division (Baltics), AWD Deutschland (Germany), Nuovo Ordine Sociale (Italy), AWD Russland (Russia), and Sonnenkrieg Division (UK).

to better understand the motivators and causes of far-right violence. Common indicators include a “deep-seated distrust of government institutions, political infrastructure and official/mainstream narratives”, “highly structural thinking styles”, and a clear “us vs. them” mentality (Basit, 2021, p. 3). A significant difference between Europe and the U.S., in regard to conspiracies as well as not, is that Europe is preoccupied with **external threats** – whether it is the “Russia threat” or mass Muslim immigration. The U.S., on the other hand, focuses generally on **internal threats**, such as QAnon and the alleged “deep state”.

Use of social media

Initially, far-right CTD was spread through mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Following a crackdown on CTD by these and other platforms, many far-right extremists have flocked to less-regulated and encrypted messaging apps such as Telegram, Viber, and WhatsApp (UNICRI, 2020). Additionally, more subtle CTD and recruitment methods still use mainstream social media, but implement “out-linking” to websites such as Gab and VK.¹³ The anonymity and virtually free nature of posting information on the Internet lowers the threshold for promoting ideas, false or not. CTD tends to play the role of “multiplier” and ‘enabler’ of radicalization”, with violent extremists utilizing CTD to “advance their ideologies, identify scapegoats and legitimize the use of (indiscriminate violence)” (Basit, 2021, p. 4). Such strategies tend to leverage conspiracies which have strong emotional appeal, including “pedophilia, child abduction, freedom struggles and victimhood narratives” (Basit, 2021, p. 4). The Christchurch mosque shooter, Brenton Tarrant, published a manifesto prior to his attack, in which a perfect example of this strategy of emotional appeal can be found. He describes the death of a young Swedish girl, Ebba Åkerlund, at the hands of an ‘Islamic attacker’ – an ‘invader’ (Tarrant, 2019, p. 10). He claimed that he could not ignore such attacks any longer, and that they constituted “attacks on my people, attacks on my culture, attacks on my faith and attacks on my soul” (Tarrant, 2019, p. 10).

13 “Out-linking” refers to the strategy of redirecting followers and visitors to less-controlled and encrypted channels, where more extreme content can be shared.

State-sanctioned disinformation

In recent years, China and Russia have sensed an opportunity, enthusiastically ramping up their disinformation campaigns against Western democracies, primarily targeting pre-existing schisms regarding distrust of government, economic trauma, and general uncertainty. The use of “non-human accounts and social bots to deploy large-scale disinformation campaigns” has allowed foreign actors to overwhelm governments and fact checkers, rendering them defenseless (UNICRI, 2020, p. 4).¹⁴

“ By the time a piece of disinformation has been proven false, enough time has passed that the target audience has already moved on to the next issue, not to mention they have little incentive to believe new information which contradicts their opinions.

¹⁴ A study from Carnegie Mellon University claims that “45 % of the Twitter accounts sharing more than 200 million messages on coronavirus are likely to be social bots [and] those accounts have fuelled over 100 false narratives about the pandemic between January and May 2020” (UNICRI, 2020, pp. 16-17).

This strategy is demonstrated well in the “Lisa case”. For two weeks in January 2016 in Germany, the media “focused on Lisa, a 13-year old Russian/German girl, who had gone missing for 30 hours and was reported to have been raped by Arab migrants” (Mahairas & Dvilyanski, 2018, p. 23). German law enforcement officials quickly discovered that Lisa had been with friends during the time in question, and that the story was entirely fabricated. Despite this, and the speed with which this was made known to the public, the story had already spread widely enough to have had its intended effect. Further investigations have determined that the story began taking shape on Russia’s Channel One and was later picked up by Russia Today (RT), RT Deutsch, and Sputnik. These are all government-controlled media outlets and have consistently played similar roles in other disinformation stories and campaigns.

Conclusions and Takeaways

Conspiracy theories and disinformation (CTD) have become more prevalent, threatening societal and communal cohesion, and even resulting in violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the ideal environment for CTD to thrive in.

While non-state actors have come to the fore as sources of false information, state actors, such as China and Russia, have also been actively engaged in strategic disinformation campaigns, aimed at fanning the pre-existing flames in Western society.

Common patterns of far-right CTD include a deep-seated distrust of government institutions, political infrastructure and official or mainstream narratives, highly structural thinking styles, and a clear “us vs. them” mentality.

Far-Right Conspiracy Theories

Frederik Brekk, Alia Taladiar

A variety of both non-state and state actors have promoted a host of CTD, usually with the goal of affecting radical change and/or destabilizing adversarial societies and governments. A report by Francesco Farinelli provides an exceptional definition of conspiracy theories in a contemporary context:

Conspiracy theories are morality tales based on archetypal narratives about right versus wrong, good versus evil. Providing “black and white” world views, they foster societal divisions between in-groups and out-groups by exacerbating intolerance against “the other” and delegitimising different voices as being part of the conspiracy. Extremist groups use conspiracy theories as a tool for recruitment and to advance their radical agendas exploiting uncertainties, fears, socioeconomic issues and mental health disorders amongst vulnerable people. In recent years, right-wing extremism has proven to be active and efficient in the dissemination of conspiracy theories aimed at targeting individuals or groups blamed to be responsible for the evil in society.

(Farinelli, 2021, p. 4)



Strategies utilizing conspiracy theories tend to “enhance the appeal of extremist narratives [...] erode the trust between people and governments [...] spread hate speech [...] demolish the respect for evidence [...] mobilise violence [...] and even cause death” (Farinelli, 2021, p. 4). This creates a volatile and dangerous climate where extremists feel they have few options to affect meaningful change and, as a result, turn to violence as the only feasible solution. In the following section the most prevalent CTD and examples are explored, ranging from white supremacism (accelerationism and Eurabia) and anti-Semitism to the COVID-19 pandemic/vaccine (“The Great Reset” and “The Great Replacement Theory”) and 5G.

Accelerationism

Accelerationism is a right-wing extremist conspiracy which revolves around the idea that governments, particularly in the West, are irreversibly corrupt, and that “the best thing white supremacists can do is accelerate their demise by sowing chaos and creating political tension” (Beauchamp, 2019). Accelerationism is one of the most dangerous and prevalent far-right conspiracies, with proponents openly advocating for violent attacks against the alleged ‘culprits’, usually ethnic and religious minorities.

“ Any and all violent acts are justified by the belief that they ‘accelerate’ current society’s demise, eventually resulting in a total overthrow of society as we know it.

Accelerationists have a tendency to believe that the “current societal systems are inherently biased against them” (Koblentz-Stenzler & Pack, 2021, p. 3). An example of this is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which far-right extremists criticize for allegedly prioritizing black lives over other (i.e., white) lives – this being based on the very name of the movement. By espousing such beliefs, far-right extremists misunderstand the very nature of the movement (deliberately or not), and in turn this ‘misunderstanding’ provides confirmation that ‘whites’ are under attack by ‘non-whites’. As a result, accelerationists feel they must disrupt this societal trend before it wipes them out, usually by advocating for a total societal reset.

Nick Land, a British philosopher, is typically accredited with introducing and/or initiating the spread of accelerationism. Land’s series of essays, ‘The Dark

Enlightenment’, explores his vision of a ‘gov-corp’ society, which includes a system led by high-status CEOs and an exceptionally flexible economic sector (Land, 2012). He predicts the collapse of Britain in the future, and advocates for both accelerationism and a commitment to advancing both capitalism and technology as a panacea, creating a clear pathway towards his envisioned ‘utopia’. Land’s works include pro-eugenicist ideas, and he argues that it is necessary for true development and change. Land also suggests improving humankind by encouraging white people to procreate solely with their own race.

Others, such as American neo-Nazi James Mason, have added their own contributions to far-right literature, forming a basis on which future far-right works have been written. In the 1980s, Mason published a newsletter titled ‘Siege’, which included accelerationist beliefs and methods. This work eventually made its way into the periphery of various neo-Nazi groups, amplifying its exposure. In ‘Siege’, Mason incorporated the ideas of another American neo-Nazi, George Lincoln Rockwell – namely, that any changes to the current governing system are irrelevant as it is bound to fail regardless. According to Mason, “at this point, anything which contributes to friction, chaos, and anarchy can only help us in the long run” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2015). At the same time, Mason deeply admired the American cult leader Charles Manson, and was inspired by his actions. Mason identified similarities between Rockwell’s ideology and Manson’s traits in the sense that they both sought societal collapse in order to facilitate a Nazi takeover (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2015). ‘Siege’ gained immense attention, and his work established the foundation upon which various neo-Nazi and far-right groups were created.

William Pierce, another American neo-Nazi, also made significant contributions to far-right literature and its exposure. Pierce’s ‘The Turner Diaries’, is a fictional work depicting a future race war in the U.S. The work includes mass hangings of “race traitors” (such as Jews, gays, and those in interracial relationships or marriages) followed by a systematic ethnic cleansing deemed “terrible yet absolutely necessary” (Anti-Defamation League, 2021). Through this work, Pierce hoped to demonstrate that committing violence and facilitating further polarization creates a ‘responsible conservative’ citizen.

Land, Mason, and Pierce’s publications, as well as others, have become central to instigating and inspiring far-right violence and shaping the principles of several extremist organizations. The Atomwaffen Division (AWD), for example, are strong supporters of Mason and Pierce’s works. Although Mason has long denied involvement with such groups, reports and investigations have suggested otherwise. The Anti-Defamation League found photographs which showed Mason taking part in several AWD meetings.



Image 23: Charles Mason with the Atomwaffen Division. Source: Anti-Defamation League, 2019, “Atomwaffen Division (AWD)/National Socialist Order (NSO)”.

Mason’s direct involvement with such groups suggests that he, and others, use extremist groups to capture a subsection of the younger generations and promote and spread their literature to future generations. AWD members who self-identify as neo-Nazi accelerationists dominate the far-right online world and have become the prominent promoters of accelerationism. The promotion of accelerationism began on Iron March, an online neo-Nazi forum, and gradually began spreading the conspiracy theory on other platforms such as Fascist Forge (Anti-Defamation League, 2019).

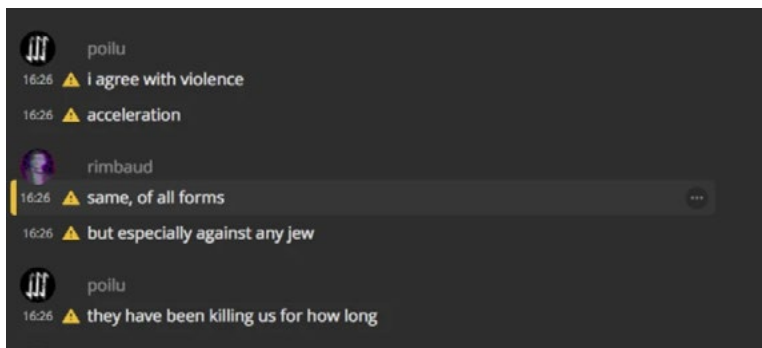


Image 24: Chat group on Fascist Forge discussing accelerationism. Source: Makuch & Lamoureux, 2018.

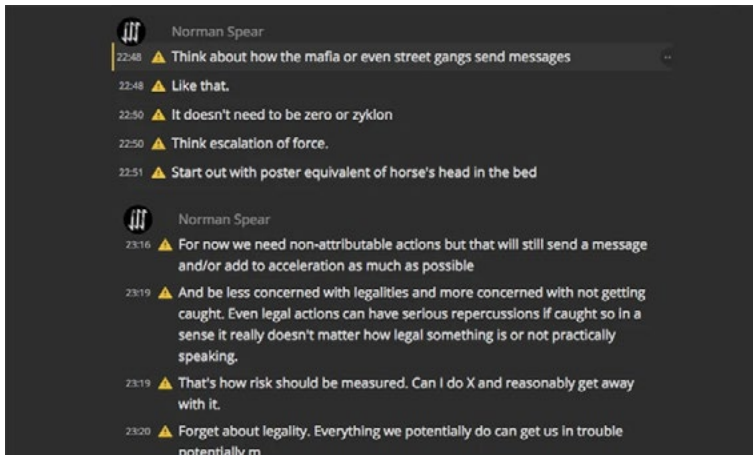


Image 25: Chat group on Fascist Forge discussing accelerationism. Source: Makuch & Lamoureux, 2018.

While originating in the U.S., AWD has managed to spread its influence, primarily through the online sphere, to Europe. Some of the more acutely affected countries include the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, and Ukraine (“Trans-Atlantic Hate: Neo-Nazi ‘Atomwaffen Division’ Spreads Fear in Germany”, 2019). AWD has inspired the creation of related organizations with similar principles, including the Feuerkrieg Division (Baltic states), AWD Deutschland (Germany), and the Sonnenkrieg Division (UK) (“Trans-Atlantic Hate...”, 2019). Accelerationists tend to connect on fringe websites and social media which allows them to discuss radical topics and plan their next attacks.

“ The ‘Bowl Gang’ and ‘The Base’ have also been involved in the promotion of accelerationism online, however, The Base stood out due to its focus on youth recruitment which led to the ideology’s increased exposure.¹⁵

The Base has also utilized strategies targeting potential ‘lone wolves’ on various popular social media platforms (Makuch & Lamoureux, 2018). This group’s influence has extended beyond just the US, having also made it to countries such as Finland.

¹⁵ The “Bowl Gang” are supporters of American white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and mass murderer Dylann Roof, and “The Base” is a white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and accelerationist paramilitary hate group based in the U.S.

As technology becomes increasingly intertwined with our everyday lives, it is unsurprising that extremist groups have begun co-opting it in order to amplify their respective ideologies. **Brenton Tarrant**, who carried out a targeted attack against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 March 2019, has become one of the more prevalent accelerationist figureheads. In addition to Tarrant livestreaming the event – something which clearly demonstrates the recent conflation of technology and extremist movements – he also published a manifesto online prior to the terrorist act. Titled ‘The Great Replacement’ after the conspiracy theory discussed later on in this chapter, the manifesto is filled with anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric. One section of this manifesto, entitled “Destabilization and Accelerationism: tactics for victory”, is dedicated to promoting the conspiracy theory and justifying acts of violence. The Anti-Defamation League (2019) has stated that “accelerationists identify a domino effect that is set into motion – a chain of societal reactions that further exacerbate the feeling of alienation among white supremacists, and, theoretically, inspiring a greater impulse to engage in violence or other destructive behaviour.” Fueling conspiracy theories and pushing controversial topics with the aim of inspiring a radical, and often violent, reaction has become a staple of accelerationists, as well as far-right extremists more generally.

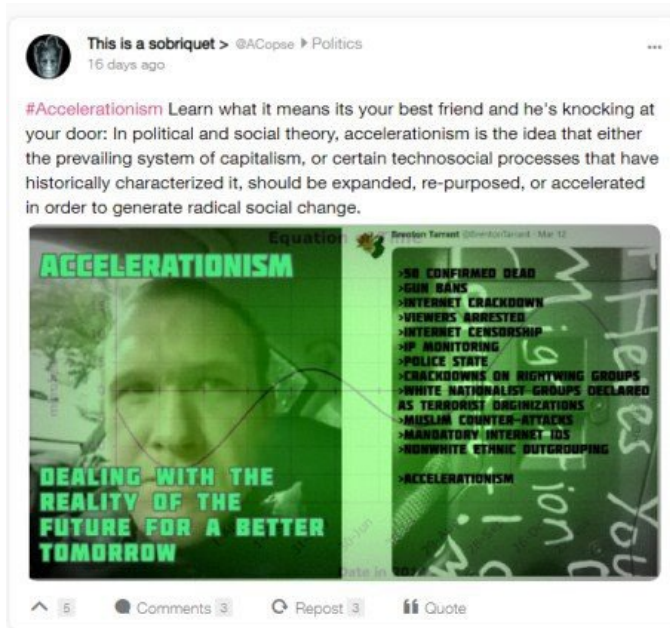


Image 26: A post on social media describing accelerationism. Source: Anti-Defamation League, 2019, “White Supremacists Embrace ‘Accelerationism’”.

In Austria and Germany, far-right groups have been largely drawn to accelerationism and the ‘Day X’ phenomenon. German neo-Nazi groups have claimed that this Day X is when the democratic order collapses and they will retake control (Taub & Bennhold, 2021).

“Nordkreuz”, a far-right extremist group which included police officers and soldiers, plotted to “round up political enemies and those defending migrants and refugees on Day X, put them on trucks and drive them to a secret location [and] kill them” (Taub & Bennhold, 2021).

Accelerationism feeds off the vulnerability of isolated netizens and right-wing extremists. However, the inherent problem with the conspiracy theory is that it is touted as a solution without presenting any substantial framework or explanation for what happens after their ‘success’. Much akin to a dog which finally catches the car it is chasing, if accelerationism succeeds, its supporters will likely be left asking “now what?”



Image 27: A post on social media describing accelerationism. Source: Anti-Defamation League, 2019, “White Supremacists Embrace ‘Accelerationism’”.

Eurabia

Coined in the 1970s by Gisèle Littman, an Egyptian-born Jewish woman who published a series of books under the pseudonym ‘Bat Ye’or’, ‘Eurabia’ is a conspiracy theory which claims, in short, that “the EU, led by French elites, implemented a secret plan to sell out Europe to the Muslims in exchange for oil” (Brown, 2019). The belief that Europe is a co-conspirator in its own doomed future and that it faces cultural extinction in the face of a “ruthless Islam” is central to the Eurabia conspiracy theory. Benjamin Lee, of the University of Lancaster, explains that Littman suggests that Europe has “surrendered to Islam and is in a state of submission (described as dhimmitude) in which Europe is forced to deny its own culture, stand by silently in the face of Muslim atrocities, accept Muslim immigration, and pay tribute through various types of economic assistance” (Lee, 2016, p. 3). The European Economic Community’s (the EU’s predecessor) Euro-Arab Dialogue (EAD), established in response to the Yom Kippur War and 1973 oil crisis, is seen by supporters of Eurabia as a key factor in the Islamic ‘takeover’ of Europe.

In Brussels in 2017, a conference was arranged (in part by Jürgen Conings’ party Vlaams Belang, which is expanded on later in this chapter) to bring together supporters of the Eurabia theory, with the aim of transforming the idea into a movement. Littman was the keynote speaker and other far-right notables were present as well, including Gerard Batten, briefly the leader of UKIP in Britain, and Ted Ekeroth, a Swedish member of parliament belonging to the nationalist right-wing Sweden Democrats party (Brown, 2019).

The concept of Eurabia has been featured in several manifestos, including that of Norwegian domestic terrorist **Anders Behring Breivik**. Breivik’s attack, which occurred in what is widely considered a peaceful and stable country, shocked Europe, and emboldened sympathizers to carry out similar attacks. On 22 July 2011, Anders Behring Breivik bombed a government building in Oslo, Norway, killing 8, and went on a shooting spree on the island of Utøya, outside of Oslo, killing another 69. Breivik represents a unique form of far-right extremism in the sense that he was self-radicalized. He was a regular reader of various far-right blogs (e.g., ‘Gates of Vienna’ and ‘The Brussels Journal’) and was a supporter of

Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen, also known as ‘Fjordman’.¹⁶ These blogs espouse similar beliefs, usually claiming that “a liberal cabal was conspiring with hostile Muslim powers to hand over the decent working people to Islam” (Brown, 2019).

Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, also known as Tommy Robinson, is a British far-right and anti-Islam activist, and promoter of the phrase ‘#GermJihad’ – a concept which focuses on COVID-19 as a biological weapon utilized by Muslims. A former leader of the English Defense League (EDL), a far-right Islamophobic organization based in the UK, he has repeatedly spread anti-Islam conspiracies and materials, including labelling Muslims as ‘corona bombs’ on Telegram. In turn, Yaxley-Lennon has inspired acts of far-right violence, including the 2017 Finsbury Park attack in London, England. This attack, perpetrated by **Darren Osborne**, resulted in one death and nine injured. In the lead-up to the attack, Osborne had received emails from Yaxley-Lennon and had read his tweets. Yaxley-Lennon had told Osborne “You know about the terrible crimes committed against [name redacted] of Sunderland [and] police let the suspects go [because they] are refugees from Syria and Iraq” (Dearden, 2018). Yaxley-Lennon was then accused of inciting the attack, although he claims that “I’m not justifying it [but] I’ve said many times if government or police don’t sort these centres of hate they will create monsters as seen tonight” (Molloy, 2017). He then went on ‘Good Morning Britain’ the following day, held up the Qur’an, and stated that it is a “violent and cursed book” (Good Morning Britain, 2017). In another instance, Yaxley-Lennon had incited violence against a Syrian refugee boy at a school in England in October 2018. He had falsely accused the victim of having attacked two schoolgirls, resulting in an **unnamed 16-year-old schoolboy** physically attacking him and claiming, “I’ll drown you” (“Syrian refugee, 15, fears school after playing field attack”, 2018).

16 “Gates of Vienna”, its name inspired by the Ottoman defeat at Vienna in 1683, and the “Brussels Journal” are far-right, anti-Islam, and/or anti-EU blogs. “Fjordman” is a proponent of the Eurabia conspiracy theory, and his blog posts had significant influence on Breivik’s self-radicalisation (Brown, 2019).



Image 28: The AfD poster described above. Source: Brown, 2019.

It is not just lone-wolf actors, however, which believe in, and push, the Eurabia conspiracy theory. The German nationalist, populist, and right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) regularly and explicitly leverages the concept of Eurabia in its strategies, with one AfD poster depicting “a naked white woman being pawed by dark-skinned men in Arab headgear [with the caption:] “Europeans, vote for AfD, so that Europe will never become ‘Eurabia’”” (Brown, 2019).

Anti-Semitism

Jews have remained a common scapegoat for a variety of societies' ills for centuries, and one of the more prominent conspiracies regarding them is the existence of the Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG). The conspiracy theory claims there is "a Jewish cabal secretly [controlling] major world governments" and many neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups use slogans such as 'Smash ZOG', 'Death to ZOG', and 'Kill ZOG' (Farinelli, 2021, p. 12). There is also 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', an "infamous forgery [and] notoriously Hitler's favourite hoax document" which is still circulated within far-right circles (Farinelli, 2021, p. 12). The forgery alleges that Jews are:

“ Secretly conspiring to conquer and dominate the world through Masonic lodges; controlling the press and the media to discourage independent thinking and keep people under their rule; controlling international banks, manipulating the economy and promoting financial speculation; weakening the church and the state; having a tyrannical world view; controlling governments through elected officials; plotting to suspend democracy by exploiting a state of emergency to hold the power permanently. (Farinelli, 2021, p. 13)

This document is an example of forgeries being cited and used as proof of Jewish conspiracies, and use of such documents is common across political and religious spectrums.¹⁷ A primary issue with this practice of using forgeries is that it is unimportant whether or not the document is true. What matters is that it provides supposed 'evidence' which either supports the beliefs some extremists already possess, or offers an easy scapegoat to those not yet radicalized. This, in turn, has led to persecution of Jewish, or Jewish-related, entities such as the Rothschild Jewish banking dynasty or Hungarian-American

17 There is a strong overlap between right-wing, left-wing, and Islamic extremism in regard to using Jews as scapegoats.

financier George Soros. The evidence supporting such behavior are regularly found to be lacking, however, as mentioned, this is irrelevant in the minds of extremists.

Additionally, there is a nascent trend which is a by-product of the recent pandemic.



People have been increasingly conflating the Holocaust and other atrocities with governmental guidelines and mandates pertaining to vaccination requirements (depending on your line of work), vaccine passes, and mask requirements.

This is most prevalent in France, Italy, and the UK. One protester in Italy claimed that vaccine passes will result in the establishment of “first-class citizens” and “second-class citizens”, who each have different rights, leading, in his words, to another “apartheid [or] Holocaust” (Barry, 2021). In some cases, protestors have gone as far as wearing the yellow Star of David.

In regard to the method of dissemination of anti-Semitic conspiracies, Telegram is among the worst offenders (Jee, 2021). That being said, it is far from the only platform where anti-Semitic sentiment has been allowed to grow.¹⁸ A common issue is that while the parent organizations/owners of these apps have been moderately successful in removing anti-Semitic organizations, removing anti-Semitic content produced by individuals has proven more difficult (Jee, 2021).

On 9 October 2019, **Stephan Balliet** killed two and injured another two in an attack on a synagogue in Halle, Germany. Like Tarrant’s attack, Balliet livestreamed the event, during which he denied the Holocaust and claimed feminism led to fewer births (and therefore increased immigration) – he blames ‘the Jew’ for these issues (Schwarz & Gensing, 2019). He had also written a manifesto prior to the attack, and considered Breivik and Tarrant as personal heroes.

18 Another serious offender has been the popular video-sharing app TikTok.

COVID-19 and vaccines

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a golden opportunity for CTD and those who peddle it. Linking anti-vaccine sentiment and general skepticism of the pandemic with existing conspiracy theories has helped far-right organizations spread their messages and expand their supporter bases at an alarming rate. Central to CTD in the COVID-19-era is the belief that those promoting these false narratives possess some form of ‘real’ knowledge about the virus and pandemic, and that they are attempting to reveal the ‘truth’. During the pandemic, we have seen that extremist movements “have instrumentalised and exploited recent crises to mobilise and justify and extend their narratives”, often with worrying success (Khalil, 2021, p. 109). In turn, and particularly during the pandemic, this has allowed for alliances to be forged across the political spectrum, strengthening those involved and even providing legitimacy in some instances. In Germany, a “greenish alternative-left camp and a traditional nationalist authoritarian camp [...] are suddenly on the stage together, hugging each other” (Corlin, 2021). This has also allowed some conspiracies to become more mainstream, strengthening such movements.

A report by Liram Koblenz-Stenzler and Alexander Pack astutely highlights five main themes of far-right groups’ attempts to leverage anti-vaccine sentiment:

1. **“Increasing Chaos and Accelerationism** – While continuing to post content questioning the legitimacy of the potential vaccines, far-right social media users also discussed how fear of the vaccine forwards the accelerationist movement and supports the white race in destabilizing the existing social and governmental systems”;
2. **“Increasing Recruitment and Radicalization** – Far-right actors advocated co-opting and targeting the anti-vaccine movement to recruit and radicalize potential supporters; they view the anti-vaccine movement as an ideal target as a result of their pre-existing distrust of vaccines”;
3. **“Connecting COVID-19 Vaccine to Conspiracy Theories** – To assist with their overall recruitment and radicalization efforts, far-right extremists have engaged in a concerted effort to link COVID-19 vaccines to existing white nationalist conspiracy theories; specifically, the “Great Reset” conspiracy and the “Great Replacement Theory””;

4. “**Fostering Anti-Minority Sentiment Related to the COVID-19 Vaccine** – Far-right actors have engaged in an online campaign to encourage members of minority communities to take the vaccine”;
5. “**Leveraging Anti-Vaccine Conspiracies to Encourage Individual-Initiative (Lone-Wolf) Attacks** – Far-right actors have begun to signal a movement from only discussion and action in cyberspace to also actions in the real-world by advocating for individual-initiative (lone-wolf) attacks against COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers” (Koblentz-Stenzler & Pack, 2021, p. 15).

Jürgen Conings, a Belgian corporal in the armed forces, and member of the right-wing populist party Vlaams Belang, harbored far-right extremist sympathies and was motivated and inspired by several conspiracy theories (primarily relating to vaccines). Conings had stolen weapons from a military barracks in Leopoldsborg, Belgium, and written letters containing violent threats targeting the Belgian government and virologists.¹⁹ He then fled to a nearby national park with the stolen weapons, where he was eventually found dead by apparent suicide. This then fueled new (albeit debunked) conspiracy theories about whether he really committed suicide or if he was killed by the government as a cover-up (Verheyden & Vanmeldert, 2021).

In southern Europe, far-right organizations have called for national governments to wrest power back from the EU. This is most prevalent in **Greece, Italy, and Spain** – countries which remain bitter about their treatment during the 2008 financial crisis as well as the 2015 migrant crisis. According to a review conducted by EU officials, these three countries also saw a sharp increase in Kremlin-backed disinformation campaigns, likely because they were identified as weak links in the EU community (Scott & Overly, 2020).

19 Marc Van Ranst, a central figure in Belgium’s COVID-19 response, was a primary target.

Immigration policy, as is the case in many other European countries, has become an essential part of Italian political discourse. In a recent report, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) identified three main narratives in **Italian** media regarding immigration and COVID-19:

1. "The Italian government and nongovernmental organizations are encouraging new arrivals of immigrants in the South, despite the fact that Italians are suffering from the COVID-19 outbreak";
2. "Recent Italian governments have cut public healthcare funding while increasing funding to help immigrants, but if they had done the reverse, the crisis could have been averted";
3. "Despite the high number of immigrants allowed to land in the country, only a small percentage have been tested for COVID-19" (DFRLab, 2020).

The larger and more influential European countries have not been immune to conspiracy theories and societal schisms either. **Germany** has repeatedly dealt with counter-lockdown protests, based on the belief that states of emergency are being used as "tools of social control and evidence of authoritarian tendencies, playing into the concern that temporary restrictions will become a permanent feature of life and governance" (Khalil, 2021, p. 110).

France has experienced pushback from both extremes of the political spectrum, with far-right leader Marine Le Pen arguing that the new French "health pass" goes against personal freedoms, and far-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon arguing that it is an abuse of power. Some have even gone so far as to break into and vandalize vaccination centres, graffitiing "vaccination = genocide" and the Cross of Lorraine (a symbol of the French Resistance during WWII) (Wheeldon, 2021). According to Andrew Smith, a professor at the University of Chichester, the conflation of French anti-vaxxers and the French Resistance represents a "worrying manipulation of history" (Wheeldon, 2021).

The Great Reset

Originating from a misunderstanding of the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) 2020 plan titled ‘The Great Reset’, this eponymous conspiracy theory claims that the COVID-19 pandemic was “orchestrated by a group of ‘global elite[s]’ to institute radical policies for their benefit” (Koblentz-Stenzler & Pack, 2021, p. 6). Such a strategy would involve rolling out “radical policies such as forced vaccinations, digital ID cards and the renunciation of private property”, allowing the ‘elites’ to take full control of the global economy at the expense of average citizens (Slobodian, 2020). This conspiracy theory did not truly take off until U.S. President Joe Biden’s victory in November 2020, driven partially by a Fox News narrative claiming that “since last spring, powerful people began to use this pandemic as a way to force radical social and economic change across the continents” (Ingraham, 2020).

“ This theory is reinforced by the fact that the financial elite have, in fact, done quite well under the pandemic

(one can imagine that convincing citizens to take the next short mental step towards believing that it is all connected would not be overly difficult). Proponents of The Great Reset also claim that the various mutations of COVID-19 are also part of an elaborate attempt to prompt more lockdowns, in turn allowing for stricter and more invasive governmental measures. Additionally, there is the belief that vaccines contain microchips, which are used to track citizens’ movements and personal data, and is closely connected to conspiracies about 5G technology.

It is worth mentioning that two particular elites – Bill Gates and George Soros (the latter of which is also a target of anti-Semitic conspiracies, as mentioned earlier) – are regular targets of conspiracy theories. Examples include alleged conspiring between Bill Gates, George Soros, Jeffrey Epstein, and Anthony Fauci, as well as claims that IG Farben, a company “‘heavily involved’ in experiments during World War II [and] run by Soros, a ‘Jewish Nazi’ who later became an American citizen” and reformed this company into Moderna, is complicit (Cox, 2020). Gates and Soros have both regularly engaged in philanthropic endeavors (such as attempts to eradicate malaria, especially in Africa, and mass vaccination efforts more generally) and are politically left-leaning, making them ideal scapegoats and targets for far-right organizations and their conspiracy theories.

The Great Replacement Theory

The ‘Great Replacement Theory’ has also been regularly linked to vaccines and the pandemic. Initially popularised by French author Renaud Camus in 2012, this “ethno-nationalistic conspiracy theory” claims that non-whites (i.e., usually minorities) are gradually and systematically replacing the ‘white-race’ (Koblentz-Stenzler & Pack, 2021, p. 9). In turn, far-right organizations have linked this theory to vaccines, claiming that they contain sterilizing agents aimed at white populations. This belief has resulted in some far-right organizations encouraging minorities to get vaccinated, as it would help the ‘white’ cause if minorities could not reproduce (Koblentz-Stenzler & Pack, 2021, p. 11). The Great Replacement Theory has been explicitly cited in several far-right manifestos and other literature, including in Brenton Tarrant’s, the 2019 Christchurch shooting perpetrator, manifesto, itself eponymously titled ‘The Great Replacement’. Tarrant’s manifesto suggests that this conspiracy theory shares similarities with the ‘White Genocide’ conspiracy theory – both warn of a systematic replacement and/or elimination of white populations across the globe.²⁰

On 19 February 2020, **Tobias Rathjen** targeted two shisha bars in Hanau, Germany, going on a shooting spree before returning home to kill his mother and commit suicide – the total death toll was 11, including the perpetrator. He was partially motivated by reading news reports on fights between Germans and foreigners – a typical ‘us vs. them’ scenario, dominated by a fear of being replaced by new waves of immigrants.

20 The “White Genocide” conspiracy theory was popularized by American neo-Nazi David Lane in 1995, and has been used in propaganda in Australia, Europe, North America, and South Africa – it is considered a broader and more extreme version of the “Great Replacement Theory”.

5G

Conspiracy theories involving mobile phone technology have existed since at least the 1990s, including fears of powerlines and microwaves. The development and launch of 5G technology unfortunately coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed it to become a source of additional conspiracy theories. CTD regarding mobile phone technology can be traced to fears about “mind control experiments, subliminal messaging and supposed secret U.S. military weapons projects” (Ahmed, Downing, Tuters & Knight, 2020).

“ The 5G conspiracy theories are particularly worrying as its believers are not exclusively far-right extremists. Anti-vaxxers also support these theories due to their inherent and ingrained distrust of anything pharma. In turn, this would allow organizations from a range of political beliefs (including far-right) to forge alliances under the goal of ‘stopping’ the 5G rollout.

In recent years, extremists have gone from voicing their opinions in “online ravings [to] physical harassment of telecom engineers and torching of ‘base station’ site antennas – masts and Internet connections worth hundreds of thousands of euros” (Cerulus, 2020).

Although violence related to 5G conspiracy theories are minimal compared to some other CTD, minor incidences still occur. A number of attacks on 5G masts have been recorded in countries, including **Belgium, Cyprus, France, Germany**, Italy, the **Netherlands, Sweden**, and the **UK** (Basis, 2021, p. 6). These attacks are fueled by the belief that 5G masts spread droplets containing COVID-19, with the goal of coercing people to get allegedly microchip-implanted vaccines.

Conclusions and Takeaways

Conspiracy theories create a volatile and dangerous climate where extremists feel that they have few options to affect meaningful change and, as a result, turn to violence as the only feasible solution.

The most prevalent conspiracy theories used by the far right are related to white supremacy (accelerationism and Eurabia), anti-Semitism, the COVID-19 pandemic (“The Great Reset” and “The Great Replacement Theory”), and 5G.

Many of the theories are leveraging the “us vs. them” concept, polarizing society in ways that are difficult to combat.

Accelerationism: Violent acts are justified by the belief that they “accelerate” current society’s demise, eventually resulting in a total overthrow of society as we know it.

The belief that Europe is a co-conspirator in its own doomed future and that it faces cultural extinction in the face of a “ruthless Islam” is central to the Eurabia conspiracy theory.

In 2019, Stephan Balliet killed two and injured another two in an attack on a synagogue in Halle, Germany. He livestreamed the event, during which he denied the Holocaust, claimed feminism led to fewer births (and therefore increased immigration), and blamed “the Jew” for these issues.

Linking anti-vaccine sentiment and general skepticism of the pandemic with existing conspiracy theories has helped far-right organizations spread their messages and expand their supporter bases at an alarming rate.

Jürgen Conings, who was motivated and inspired by several conspiracy theories (primarily relating to vaccines), stole weapons, and wrote letters containing violent threats targeting the Belgian government and virologists.

The Great Reset theory did not truly take off until Joe Biden's victory in November 2020, driven partially by a Fox News narrative claiming that "since last spring, powerful people began to use this pandemic as a way to force radical social and economic change across the continents".

The belief in the Great Replacement Theory has resulted in some far-right organizations encouraging minorities to get vaccinated, as it would help the "white" cause if minorities could not reproduce.

The development and launch of 5G technology unfortunately coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed it to become a source of additional conspiracy theories.

Gamification of Far-Right Violence

Alia Taladiar

Gamification is not an uncommon practice in contemporary society. Coming across loyalty cards based on points systems and leader boards used for children in schools are everyday examples of how it is used. But firstly, what is gamification? According to Growth Engineering (2021), “Gamification is about taking something that is not a game and applying game mechanics to increase user engagement, happiness, and loyalty.” It provides a playful attitude in all walks of life. However, unsurprisingly, it has been also exploited by right-wing extremists for their own political interests. This chapter seeks to discover how gamification has evolved within the far right and draw upon the dark side of gaming that extremist groups have devised. It also aims to explain the crucial difference between the gamification of terrorism and the radicalization of games.

Gamification at its core carries a positive appeal that has accelerated productivity in learning. Its methods have been effective in solving issues concerning performance, development, and engagement. In light of the growing globalization, numerous daily practices have improved, and for some individuals gamifying their lifestyle plays the most active role. This procedure is often used in workplaces; however, the younger population has increasingly inclined towards it as well. While it has several advantages, the ugly side of gamification is that it became popular among the far right and has even encouraged terrorism through it.



Live streaming of attacks

In gaming platforms, terrorists and extremists have gravitated to live-stream their attacks inspired by other terrorists like Brenton Tarrant²¹ and Stephan Balliet²².

Tarrant plays one of the main actors when it comes to the gamification of terrorism. His attack gained widespread attention globally and online, because he live-streamed it in the manner of a first-person shooter game. Many extremists like Tarrant use online platforms to spread their word and boost engagement for other regular users to notice. For instance, in 4chan, Tarrant wrote about “his desire to ‘beat his high score’ – in other words, kill as many people as possible” (Mackintosh & Mezzofiore, 2019).



Image 29: 4chan users gamifying Brenton Tarrant's attack. Source: Wells & Lovett, 2019.

21 Brenton Tarrant: the terrorist who committed the Christchurch mosque shootings.

22 Stephen Balliet: the terrorist who committed the Halle synagogue shootings.

Similarly, with Balliet, researcher Jacob Davey at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), a UK-based counter-extremist organization, told CNN that "In the immediate aftermath of the shooting in Halle, image and message boards were awash with comparisons to the New Zealand attack. In chilling posts across message boards and encrypted chats, anonymous trolls criticized the Halle gunman for not killing more people" (Mackintosh & Mezzofiore, 2019).

"Even people criticizing the attacker shows how these attacks have become gamified – their criticism was that his score wasn't high enough. That's the way these people think that these attacks are to be consumed, scored, and dissected like a video game," Davey said (Mackintosh & Mezzofiore, 2019).

Seeking to find a terrorist kill count is a concerning security threat and has been emerging not only in the United States and New Zealand but also around Europe. Schlegel (2020) found that

“Anders Breivik recalled how he prepared for his attack that killed 77 people in Norway in 2011 with first-person shooter games and how he felt like he became his avatar – that is, his on-screen character – during the shooting.”

With this ideology, extremists have gained a satisfactory feeling of living like characters in games and ignoring the differing reality between the offline and online worlds.

The radicalization

Gaming culture plays a major influence in far-right terrorism, but that doesn't mean games are the root cause of enacting violent attacks. Because of the diversity of backgrounds gamers have, the chance of coming across an extremist is not impossible. For a better outcome in gaming, many users find the need to communicate with other online users. Thus, after hours and days of playing with other gamers, language and mannerisms are slowly picked up on. The dilemma here is that many extremists and radicalized gamers act in disguise to resonate with regular users and then gradually after intense gaming conversations may slip towards their far-right interests and ideologies. Gaming places a reality for extremists to be themselves and act in ways that are not accepted in the real world.

Going further, it is necessary to distinguish between regular gamers and extremist gamers who have already been radicalized. Many researchers have assumed that first-person shooter, battle, and survival games carry a high risk of behaving similarly in real life. However, experts have discovered that it may only come down to this when there are pre-existing problems that a gamer faces in the outside world (DW Documentary, 2020) — for instance, isolation and mental health issues.

The online freedom may be appealing to many, but it has also become a space for extremists to wander, especially in video games. Taking that into account led extremist organizations to create their own games, ranging from games targeting the LGBT community to recreating Tarrant's attack.



Image 30: A terrorist shooting game made to recreate the pride parade targeting the LGBT community. Source: “How outsiders become assassins”, 2020.



Image 31: A first-person shooter video game based on footage of the Christchurch terrorist attack. Source: Stevens, 2019.

Similarly, the Identitäre Bewegung (Identitarian Movement) group has been one of many creators that have done this. The group created an app called Patriot Peer, which sought to gamify the experience of its supporters. The app included the collection of points for connecting with other members, rewards for attending events or visiting cultural sites, and also Pokemon-Go-like features to spot like-minded individuals nearby (Schlegel, 2020).



Image 32: Patriot Peer is an app created by the Identitäre Bewegung (Identitarian Movement). Source: Prinz, 2017.

Conclusions and Takeaways

Gamification became popular among the far right and has encouraged terrorism through it.

In gaming platforms, terrorists and extremists have gravitated to live-stream their attacks inspired by other terrorists like Brenton Tarrant and Stephan Balliet.

In 4chan, Tarrant wrote about the push to "beat his high score" in the context of how many he murdered.

Extremists found Twitch, initially meant for users to live-stream their games, as a flexible and lenient platform to showcase their attacks.

Many extremists and radicalized gamers act in disguise in order to resonate with regular users, and then gradually slip from intense gaming conversations to their far-right interests and ideologies.

Extremist organizations began creating their own games, ranging from games targeting the LGBT community to recreating Tarrant's attack.

Far-right Extremism in European Security Forces

Emma Schubart

Recent incidents of far-right extremism within security forces across Europe have emphasized the danger posed by a threat from within. That is, the threat posed by extreme right-wing ideologies when they are exercised by radicalized individuals who have access to weapons, confidential information, training, and who are typically protected and trusted by the state they are meant to serve. This chapter will examine the connection between right-wing extremism and security forces across Europe by analyzing specific cases in Germany, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom.



Case study: Germany

One of the most recent high-profile cases of far-right extremism within security forces occurred in Germany. On February 3, 2017, Franco Hans A., a German national and an officer of the Bundeswehr (German armed forces), was arrested²³. He was arrested on terrorism charges after entering a restroom for the disabled at the Vienna-Schwechat airport and trying to break open a maintenance shaft on one of the walls. The law enforcement officials police team which arrested him had been expecting that someone would try to retrieve a gun, which had been stored in the restroom. A week earlier, a cleaning person had discovered the handgun hidden in a shaft in the restroom and notified law enforcement officials. The shaft was then outfitted with an electronic alarm system. After his arrest in Vienna, Franco A.'s phone and a USB stick were confiscated, and his fingerprints were taken. Then he was released and sent back to Germany.

However, the police investigation into Franco A. soon uncovered that his fingerprints matched those of a Syrian refugee registered in Germany. In fact, Franco A. had posed as a refugee fleeing from the civil war in Syria in 2016 and had applied for asylum in Germany. The German General Federal Prosecutor opened a case against Franco A., accusing him of plotting to assassinate German politicians under the false identity of a refugee. According to the Federal Prosecutor's office, "[m]otivated by a nationalist attitude, he planned to carry out an attack at an unknown time on high-ranking politicians and public figures who stood up for what the accused regarded as an especially refugee-friendly policy... He wanted people to believe that his attacks were related to radical Islamist terrorism committed by somebody who had been granted asylum" ("German soldier accused of planning to kill politicians, frame refugees", 2017). He was arrested in April 2017 and in December 2017 he was charged with preparing a severe state act of violence endangering the state, violation of gun laws, theft, and fraud (Bundesgerichtshof, 2019). His trial in Frankfurt is ongoing.

Franco A.'s initial arrest in early 2017 marked a watershed for investigations of right-wing extremism within German security forces. "The mysterious case cracked the door open to a network of far-right extremists inside the German military and the police. They are preparing for the collapse of democracy — a coming apocalypse they call Day X" (Jackson et al., 2021).

23 In Germany, because of privacy laws, criminal suspects and those charged with crimes are generally only identified by their first name and the first initial of their last name.

Day X refers to a plot formulated in 2017 by individuals within the Kommando Spezialkräfte of Germany's Bundeswehr to assassinate several left-leaning politicians.

“ In 2020, it was discovered that German police officers had been providing right-wing extremists with the addresses of German refugees (Saragerova, 2020).

In September 2020, German authorities revealed that almost 30 of its agents participated in WhatsApp groups, in which they shared racist photos, texts and neo-Nazi propaganda (Saragerova, 2020).

Collectively, the number of cases of right-wing infiltration of German security forces since 2017 is alarming. Between January 2017 and the end of March 2020, there were 319 suspected cases of right-wing extremism on the state level, in addition to 58 suspected cases among federal security services, including 44 cases in the police, 6 in the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) and a handful in customs authorities, the office for the protection of the constitution, and the federal intelligence service (Connolly, 2020). What's more, since the end of March 2020, there have been more than 125 new incidents of right-wing infiltration of security forces across Germany.

Political response in Germany

For years, the German government has been accused of downplaying, and even blatantly ignoring, hundreds of instances of right-wing extremism within German law enforcement and its military. One of the most egregious examples of the failure of German intelligence and law enforcement personnel in this respect occurred in the early 2000s. Unfortunately, “it took eleven years for the German police to discover the deadly Nationalist Socialist Underground (NSU), which operated from 2000 and 2007. The right-wing terrorist organization murdered 11 people – 9 immigrant business owners and two female police officers. Police focused on the victims' families and were unsuccessful in discovering the real motive of the NSU, whose activity stopped only after two of its members took their own lives in 2011” (Saragerova, 2020).

More recently, in an effort to salvage the reputation of law enforcement, German authorities continued to downplay the danger posed by the far-right within German security forces. In 2020, Horst Seehofer, the Minister of the Interior, refused to allow an independent study into the incidents of extremism within uniformed services. Instead, he called for members of the domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which is overseen by his ministry, to carry it out. In October 2020, he told reporters at a news conference that 99 % of security personnel “stand firmly anchored in the law” and that “We are only dealing here with a minor number of cases” (Connolly, 2020). However, at the time of this statement, there were 1,064 cases of right-wing extremism among military personnel, and 370 separate incidents among police and intelligence officers. Clearly, this was not a “minor” number of cases.

The right-wing extremists who have infiltrated German security forces pose a formidable threat to the German public and government. This was emphasized by Germany’s first nationwide report into right-wing extremism in the security services, which was released in March 2020. The report uncovered “hundreds of incidents across the police and military that contravened the country’s constitution” and stressed that these incidents need to be taken seriously and dealt with urgently (Connolly, 2020). In the words of the report, “state and society are in considerable danger if an official who is armed becomes an extremist” (Connolly, 2020).

Case study: Belgium

The most high-profile case of right-wing extremism infiltrating security forces in Belgium is that of Jürgen Conings. Conings was a 46-year-old corporal in the Belgian Air Component and a shooting instructor. He was an experienced sniper. Since at least 2019, Conings was known by his colleagues and the Belgian military intelligence service ADIV to harbor right-wing extremist ideals. After receiving two disciplinary sanctions for the threats he issued to Marc Van Ranst, a left-leaning Belgian virologist, Conings was demoted to weapon bearer. However, this position secured him access to the armory. Indeed, “[e]ven though the security services listed the soldier as a ‘potentially dangerous extremist,’ Belgium’s defense minister said in a parliamentary hearing that Mr. Conings had an access card to an ammunition depot after his demotion” (Pronczuk & Ryckewaert, 2021).

On May 17, 2021, Conings wrote three farewell letters to his girlfriend, in which he threatened both the Belgian government and Belgian virologists, and was particularly hostile towards the COVID-19 containment measures implemented in Belgium. “The so-called political elite and now virologists decide how you and I should live...[they] have taken everything away from us” (Pronczuk & Ryckewaert, 2021). That same day, without authorization, he loaded his car with four M72 LAW rocket launchers, an automatic FN P90 Personal Defense Weapon, a semi-automatic FN 5.7 pistol and over 2000 5.7 x 28 rounds of ammunition cartridges (Van Horenbeek, 2021).

On May 18, the Belgian military was alerted of Conings’ disappearance and began a manhunt. The Belgian authorities believed that Conings was hiding in Hoge Kempen National Park. As such, from 19 to 23 May, the national park was closed to the public for the manhunt, during which the Belgian army conducted several sweeps of the park. They were supported by the German Federal Police's counter-terrorism unit GSG 9 as well as the Dutch and Luxembourgish police forces. None of the sweeps of the national park were successful.

On 20 May, the Federal prosecutor's office started a judicial investigation against Conings for “attempted murder and illegal possession of firearms in a terrorist context” (Decre & Hiroux, 2021). Two days later, Conings' name was added to the Interpol red notice list. On 20 June, the Mayor of Maaseik, Johan Tollenaere, noticed the smell of a decaying body in the Dilserbos forest. Sources from the Belgian federal police and Federal Prosecutor's Office confirmed that the body was Jürgen Conings' body (“Marc Van Ranst opnieuw thuis nu lichaam Jürgen Conings gevonden is”, 2021). The same day, virologist Marc Van Ranst, who Conings targeted, returned to his home after his stay at a safehouse for the duration of the manhunt. According to the autopsy, the cause of death was suicide by gunshot (“Autopsie bevestigt zelfdoding Jürgen Conings”, 2021).

Political response in Belgium

The unsuccessful sweeps of Hoge Kempen National Park by the Belgian law enforcement officials, who were eventually assisted by German and Dutch forces, were national embarrassments. As the New York Times reported, “The long, unsuccessful manhunt had become the source of bitter jokes in a country roughly the size of the state of Maryland” (Pronczuk & Ryckewaert, 2021).

In addition, there was outrage over Coning's access to weapons after his demotion. In May 2021, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo declared in Parliament, "It is unacceptable that someone who is perceived as dangerous should still have access to weapons" (Horenbeek, 2021). Defense Minister Ludivine Dedonder emphasized that "as soon as it became clear what ideas he [Conings] adhered to, the man should no longer have come near weapons... He should have been followed more closely by the [military] hierarchy" (Horenbeek, 2021).

On a positive note, Dedonder pledged to work to prevent this type of situation from happening again in Belgium. "Hard measures will be taken in the short term, such as entry bans to quarters or armories, suspensions, but also, in case of conduct incompatible with military status, dismissal" (Horenbeek, 2021). She promised, "I will do everything I can to put things in order" (Horenbeek, 2021).

Case study: France

French security forces have recently been the subject of investigations into incidents of right-wing extremism. On July 8, 2020, Mediapart, an independent French online investigative journal published the findings from its survey, "Neo-Nazis make a career in the French army" ("Des néo-nazis dans l'armée française, selon Mediapart", 2020). The survey uncovered dozens of soldiers with the French military who had publicly posted images on social media which espoused Nazi ideology. For example, one of these soldiers was "Alan V.", a soldier of the 27th battalion of Alpine hunters. In June 2018, he posted on Facebook about the necessity of sticking "a good bullet in the neck" of migrants (Suc & Bourdon, 2020). In response, the National Center for Defense Clearances released a defensive statement, "by construction, we do not have the means to follow the publications of our 140,000 personnel when they express themselves on the Internet. Not all of them mention their military status in their publications or express themselves under another identity. [...] A minority of soldiers express themselves via their personal accounts on social networks or on extremist sites without the Army being able to detect it" ("Des néo-nazis dans l'armée française, selon Mediapart", 2020). As Mediapart reported, these brazen displays of pro-Nazi and anti-immigrant sentiments did not lead to these soldiers losing their jobs. Indeed, "[t]his does not prevent them from continuing their career" (Suc & Bourdon, 2020).

The next year, on March 25, 2021, Mediapart published its findings after conducting another investigation into the existence of neo-Nazi sympathizers among French military personnel (Bourdon et al., 2021). The investigation concluded that there were 50 members of the French armed forces who subscribed to Nazism, “many of who brazenly posted photos and videos on social media illustrating their admiration of Nazi ideology” (Bourdon et al., 2021). The journalists who conducted the investigation pointed that their findings “could not be exhaustive” because their “investigation, carried out mainly in open sources (that is to say by consulting publications on social networks accessible to all) with the means which are those of a newspaper and not of the State” (“Does the French army have a neo-Nazi problem?”, 2021). With this in mind, the journalists at Mediapart warn that the findings from this second investigation present very possibly only a small subset of a much larger issue (“Does the French army have a neo-Nazi problem?”, 2021). Unlike the investigation carried out a year prior, this investigation led to statements from the French Armed Forces Minister and France’s Chief of Defense staff, in which they promised to punish extremists within security forces.

Even so, French officials have continued to downplay the severity of the situation, claiming that extremism has only infiltrated a small, non-representative subset of the French armed forces. While this may be true, the French military has been showing signs of moving farther and farther towards the extreme right. In fact, in April 2021, over 1,000 former service members, including 18 on active duty, signed an open letter which was published in *Valeurs Actuelles*, an extreme right-wing magazine. The letter “warned of a military intervention and ensuing civil war if the French government failed to take action to uphold the country’s ‘civilizational values’ against ‘suburban hordes,’ this is in reference to the banlieues, or suburbs, which are home to large immigrant populations” (Davidson, 2021.) On May 2, 2021, the same magazine published another anonymous letter penned by soldiers who described themselves as active-duty soldiers from a younger generation, and signed by over 250,000 members of the French public (Davidson, 2021). This letter was addressed to Macron and his cabinet, and, like the previous letter, focused on the impending threat of civil war in France, and cited grievances over the French government’s alleged “concessions” to Islam. The letter read, “They [French soldiers] gave their skin to destroy the Islamism to which you [Macron’s administration] are giving concessions on our soil” (Schofield, 2021). Even though these sentiments have been publicly published, it is difficult to assess the extent to which right-wing extremism has infiltrated the French armed forces, especially since the signatories of this letter remain anonymous.

Political response in France

The French government condemned both letters. These letters are rare instances of French active-duty military personnel making public political statements. The French military is traditionally expected to operate outside of the realm of politics. Indeed, citing a violation of military obligations, Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Francois Lecointre encouraged the signatories to “leave the institution in order to freely express their ideas and convictions” (Méheut, 2021).

Prime Minister Jean Castex described the first letter as “an initiative against all of our republican principles, of honour and the duty of the army” (“Ex-generals face sanctions after they warn of 'civil war' in France”, 2021). In response to the second letter, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin accused the anonymous signatories of “lacking courage,” and Defense Minister Florence Parly dismissed it as part of a “crude political scheme” (“French government furious over new military letter warning Macron of 'survival' of France”, 2021). General Lecointre stated that the soldiers who penned and/or signed the letters will face disciplinary action, and in some cases will face enforced full retirement. However, the letters were received quite differently by far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who spoke out in support of the signatories of the second letter who are in the French armed forces. She even encouraged them to join her campaign.

The UK and the Netherlands

Even if not to the same extent as in Germany, Belgium and France, right-wing extremism has infiltrated security forces within other European countries, specifically the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In the United Kingdom, Benjamin Hamman, a London-based Police Constable, was arrested in April 2021 for belonging to a far-right terrorist group. Hamman was sentenced to four years and four months in prison for his membership in the National Action, a banned neo-Nazi terrorist group in the UK, between 2016 and September 2017, prior to joining the police force (Ghosh, 2021)²⁴. This case has worried authorities within the UK that right-wing extremism could begin to penetrate its security forces. These fears may be well-founded. Over the past two and a half years, at least 16 members of the UK armed forces have

24 In the UK, according to the Terrorism Act, membership within a banned organization represents a criminal offence carrying a sentence of up to 10 years in prison (Home Office, 2013).

been investigated by Prevent, the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, which seeks to avert radicalization. The majority of these investigations were conducted in response to concerns about cases of far-right extremism (Quinn, 2021). As Scottish National party MP Stuart McDonald explained, "These figures are really concerning, but not hugely surprising as we know our dedicated armed forces personnel have increasingly become a target for infiltration and exploitation by far-right extremists" (Quinn, 2021). He went on to emphasize that UK government officials must address these cases with far more urgency than they have previously. "We also know there have been warnings in the recent past that the threat posed by violent right-wing extremists is not being treated seriously enough by the UK government. It is still far from clear that this lack of focus and action has been rectified" (Quinn, 2021).

More recently, on January 8, 2022, an undercover Mail on Sunday reporter joined approximately two hundred supporters of the violent anti-vax group, Alpha Male Assemble, in Chasewater Country Park, Staffordshire. The group is led by ex-Royal Fusilier Danny Glass, who is a member of a secret band of ex-Army veterans. Troublingly, Alpha Male Assemble has 7,000 followers on Telegram. The group met on January 8 to practice smashing through police lines and to conduct other military-style drills. Glass told all in attendance, "We are targeting the police... we are going to be arresting police officers for failing to uphold their common-law oath" (Powell, 2022). A woman present told the attendees, "We need to target vaccine centers, schools, councils and local directors of public health... we are doing this for our children" (Powell, 2022). Experts believe the training sessions conducted by Alpha Male Assemble are evidence of the "growing militancy" of the anti-vax movement and anti-coronavirus restrictions in the UK. Indeed, these incidents should not be taken lightly (Hume, 2022).

In the Netherlands, armed forces have been targeted by the far-right as well. In 2019, it was reported that over the course of the past 5 years, the Military Intelligence and Security Service investigated 21 Dutch soldiers over suspicions of radicalization. The majority of these cases involved right-wing extremism, as opposed to Jihadism or Salafism (Romkes & Shermers, 2021).

Conclusions and Takeaways

The far-right threat is, among others, posed by radicalized individuals who have access to weapons, confidential information, training, and who are typically protected and trusted by the state they are meant to serve – the national security forces.

National governments should focus on preventing their security forces from radicalization.

Individuals within the Kommando Spezialkräfte of Germany's Bundeswehr planned to assassinate several left-leaning politicians as a part of the “Day X” plot.

In an effort to salvage the reputation of law enforcement, German authorities continued to downplay the danger posed by the far-right within its security forces.

The French and UK’s militaries have been showing signs of moving further towards the extreme right.

In April 2021, over 1,000 former French service members signed an open letter, which warned of a military intervention and ensuing civil war if the French government failed to take action to uphold the country’s “civilizational values” against “suburban hordes” (reference to the banlieues, or suburbs, which are home to large immigrant populations).

Between 2014-2019, the Dutch Military Intelligence and Security Service investigated 21 soldiers over suspicions of radicalization, the majority of which involved right-wing extremism, as opposed to Jihadism.

Possible Solutions

Right-wing extremism, which has been increasingly spreading during the COVID-19 pandemic, is a growing concern across the European continent. It is on the rise globally and is a formidable threat. Authorities have several options to respond, especially with relation to the online space, gaming, and countering CTD. The common basis for all of these recommendations is the focus on prevention.





Increase cooperation between governments and social media companies, platforms, and apps

Targeting specific, particularly harmful platforms and apps is essential to constricting the flood of CTD. Reinforcing and improving upon current fact checking frameworks should be a priority. Although it will likely prove difficult to find the right balance between freedom of speech and protecting society and its citizens, it is something which must be done. Harsh punishments should be levied against social media companies which refuse to cooperate sufficiently, and larger civil society should be allowed to monitor interactions between the government and such companies in order to avoid ulterior motives influencing the process.

While tech giants have taken steps to prevent CTD, anti-CDT measures, both governmental and non-, have been insufficient.²⁵

“ The difficulty of countering the spread of CTD is that once disseminated, it becomes significantly more difficult to convince believers and followers that it is false.

As such, several scholars have suggested that a significant emphasis should be placed on *prevention*, and not *containment*, whenever possible (Farinelli, 2021).

Improvements in governmental-social media company engagement and education are likely not enough. Most extremists avoid sources of information deemed “mainstream” due to a deeply ingrained distrust (they fear that such sources have been co-opted by the very “elites” they are concerned about). Instead, more private channels where extremist dialogue occurs must be specifically targeted and regulated (e.g., on Telegram). Again, this would require oversight from civil society in order to avoid abuse of this process.

25 “WhatsApp, owned by Facebook, limited how users can forward messages to large groups of people”, “YouTube, owned by Google, [has] expanded its fact-checking program”, and “Facebook [has] expanded its work with fact-checking organizations” (Cerulus, 2020).

2.

Educate the younger generations on the effects of, and incentives driving, CTD to avoid further radicalization

Younger generations have become much more involved on the Internet, and this will only increase in the coming decades with newer generations. As such, proper education, focusing on teaching proper “media literacy [...] disinformation, extremist propaganda and conspiracy theories” is imperative in combatting the spread of CTD to an increasingly vulnerable group (Farinelli, 2021, p. 20).

It is of little surprise that many members of far-right groups are youths. In an effort to combat youth incorporation into these groups, a vast network of organized youth outreach programs that focus on inclusion, community building, societal assimilation, peer-to-peer learning, and open and clear dialogue, should be created. Disenfranchised youth must be discouraged from seeking out inclusion within violent extremist organizations that prey on them.

3.

Provide a foundation of digital and Internet literacy to the public

The lack of digital literacy is an issue that should be urgently discussed, and with the generational gap that policymakers have, numerous aspects have been left unconsidered. Banning and regulating certain content or violent games may continue over time but will not stop users from creating new ones. Thus, providing a foundation of digital and Internet literacy to the public is beyond significant, especially in the growing technological change.

4.

Narrow the focus on varying degrees of far-right extremism as well as what is and is not far-right extremism

If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Governments are quick to blanketly label any and all extremists as being one and the same, and that is a mistake. As stated by German and Mauleón (2019), “Law enforcement should always focus specifically on the relatively few individuals and organized groups that engage in serious criminal activities rather than the many who merely espouse odious views” (p. 5). This essentially means that while sharing and making, tweets, memes, etc. online may have connections to far-right views, the system must focus more on the actual threats that commit to actual violence as well as legitimate organizations. However, as stated by Bjørgo and Ravndal (2019), “it is necessary to understand and monitor these online subcultures” (p. 16) in an effort to ensure the differentiation between words and actions can be accurately made.

5.

Apply stricter vetting for entry into law enforcement and military organizations and monitor behavior during initial training

The overall concern remains the threat specifically within law enforcement and military organizations. Due to their unique access to arms that is often forbidden for civilian use, the threat present cannot be overlooked. The first step would be simply to widen the vetting process for entry into these organizations from the beginning. As witnessed in Germany, the vetting process for military members has widened to a more in-depth background, which includes cross-referencing applicants with other extremist databases (Flade, 2021). Upon entry, ensuring adequate and appropriate monitoring of behavior is equally as important.

6.

Conduct internal investigations to discover the degree of proliferation

Fighting while blind is objectively wrong. After vetting processes have been made more stringent, the next course of action should be to uncover the full scope of the threat within. The United States Army (1996) conducted such an investigation using methods that included the creation of specific teams for specific tasks such as policy review, soldier interviews, or even working with other governmental bodies. They also conducted these investigations across multiple military installations (pp. 42-43).

7.

Increase awareness among law enforcement and military units about extremism

A large part of the problem in governmental responses stems from a lack of gravity and understanding of the problems. As stated by Bjørge and Ravndal (2019), “In parts of Western Europe, the problem was not that police turned their backs on extreme-right violence, but lacked the imagination to understand that series of violence and murder might have an extreme-right motivation” (p. 15). This suggests that the law enforcement cannot enforce laws if they are not entirely certain they are dealing with a law breaker. German and Mauleón (2019) further substantiate this with regards to the United States by stating, “Law enforcement officials often underestimate the true scope of the violence far-right groups commit each year” (p. 5). Increased awareness among both law enforcement and military organizations may help lead to a better understanding of the threat within, thus allowing for stronger opposition to it.



Ensure a zero-tolerance policy for proven offenders within law enforcement and military organizations

Within the United States Military, a stance of zero tolerance appears to be established. In 2019, a soldier with direct and distinct connections to far-right extremism was arrested for distributing bomb making instructions to an undercover FBI investigator as well as expressing thoughts about committing violence with these bombs (Helsel, 2020). The soldier faces up to 20 years in prison for these crimes, but it should be noted that he did not actually follow through on any of these actions nor did he make any actual bombs. This case shows that despite not taking direct violent action, the U.S. military and U.S. government offered little sympathy or acceptance towards passive acts.



Strict punishments for offenders, particularly within organizations where members are expected to not only uphold the laws but also enforce them, appears to be a good deterrent.



Establish avenues of communication across departments

Communication is key to remove any form of extremism. Within the military and law enforcement, cross channel communications are essential for ensuring data and information are available for all parties combating extremism. This recommendation was brought up recently by Germany (Flade, 2021) in response to combatting their internal threats.



Seek to improve the general socioeconomic conditions in Europe

Many extremists' and conspiracy theorists' radicalization can be attributed to a general feeling of hopelessness and exasperation. Eliminating, or at least improving on, this contributing factor can help significantly in the war not only against conspiracies.

Some of those taken in by CTD are done so due to a general malaise – an unhappiness and discontentedness about their current situation in life. A solution or explanation is therefore offered to them through CTD. To alleviate this, governments should also study and improve the general socioeconomic condition of particularly sensitive and vulnerable communities. This can be partially done through various outreach programs which aim to alleviate feelings of “uncertainty, mistrust, powerlessness, and lack of control” (Farinelli, 2021, p. 20).



Advocating the importance of mental health within communities

Following the previous recommendation, extremists often have backgrounds from households that neglect their emotions or are surrounded with an environment that upholds toxic masculinity for men. This results in emotional suppression and becomes dangerous as it grows, since they would fall unto frustration, anger and violence. Taking a first step towards having accessible resources that offer support and help to these individuals may enable them to understand and cope with their own issues and not project it online to innocent users.

12.

Invest in youth-led groups that uphold digital and Internet literacy goals

While there are plenty of young delegates involved in voicing out their concerns within legislations, discussions are often tackled on broad issues. Elevating the voices for young delegates that aim to take action towards specific goals in this area may accelerate the process of change.

As the younger generation has become more prone to extremist content, investing in youth-led organizations will facilitate an effective approach to reach out in educating other young people, since they have common experiences and upbringings.

For instance, Log Off²⁶ is a rising Generation Z-led organization that promotes a healthier existence on social media. The organization acts in ways that appeal to the younger generation and raises awareness in the growing tensions that young people face online.

Online culture changes rapidly. For that reason, collaborating with the youth will expedite the process in tackling issues, since trends often originate from young users.

26 Log Off Movement: <https://www.logoffmovement.org/>

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