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The Evolving Threats of Far-right Extremism and Emerging Technologies

Though far-right extremism remains a more potent threat in the West, its ideological variants have reverberated in other parts of the world as well. At the same time, terrorist groups' use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 3-D printed weapons, largely popular with the Western far-right, have added another layer of complexity to terrorism's landscape. With the passage of time, emerging technologies' accessibility and affordability will have a profound impact on far-right extremism. Likewise, the upcoming presidential election in the United States (US) and parliamentary polls in different European countries will also reshape the far-right threat.

From a policy standpoint, appreciating the diversity and nuances within the Western far-right groups and ideologies is also crucial for developing counter strategies. While terms like far-right, extreme-right and right-wing are used loosely and interchangeably in the media, they are qualitatively different from each other despite their fluidity and existence on the same ideological spectrum. For instance, there are 26 different definitions of far-right extremism and they share five common characteristics, i.e., racism, nationalism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and desire for a strong government.

To put the emerging threats of the far-right extremism and technologies in perspective, the current issue has included five articles looking at far-right and extreme-right threats in Australia, the use of AI and 3-D printed weapons by these groups as well as the potential impact of various elections in the West in 2024 on the far-right threat.

The first article by **Kristy Campion** surveys the current landscape of the Australian extreme right, spanning the milieus of the ethnocentric, religious, anti-government and idiosyncratic extreme right. Key trends in the country's threatscape are also discussed, including the nexus between online extremism and youth radicalisation, and the potential for critical infrastructure to be targeted by extreme right-wing actors driven by accelerationist ideologies and strategies. The author concludes by emphasising how the unpredictable and transnational nature of the Australian extreme right lends to its continued lethality to the general public more broadly and to law enforcement specifically.

Next, **Josh Roose** explores some approaches to address right-wing extremism in Australia. While counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies are more established when it comes to jihadist or Islamist violence, the literature and practice are thinner in respect to the extreme right. The article, based on the Australian context and drawing from the extreme right trends there, offers some insights into how the extreme right narratives and terrorist threats there have evolved, their diverse and diffused nature, and the challenges in countering it. In particular, the author offers some insights on how the role of masculinities, or the problem of "angry men," which is true for other ideologies too but especially pertinent to the extreme right, can be understood and addressed.

The third article by **William Allchorn** explores how Western far-right groups have reacted to, discussed and employed generative AI. Drawing on the author's Telegram-focused study of 12 violent and non-violent far-right groups in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the article asserts that while public chatter indicates tentative inroads into and negative appraisals of AI, these groups still hold aspirations to weaponise the technology for propaganda and attack planning. The author then considers how the study's findings can inform practitioners and policymakers in developing Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) interventions to address the misuse and abuse of AI by far-right groups.

In the fourth piece, **Rueben Dass** looks at 3D-printed firearms and their use by far-right groups. The author analyses terrorist trends and use of the technology using the Global 3D-Printed Firearm database that he has developed. The article discusses the evolution and present nature of the threat before delving into the technology's usage in terms of ideology, regions and perpetrator types. The article also provides a few cases studies to show how the technology is developed and used by a few groups. Based on the trends and observations, some strategies on how the abuse of the technology could be minimised and the challenges that come with these approaches are also discussed.

Lastly, **Kalicharan Veera Singam** assesses the potential impact of the upcoming US presidential and European Union (EU) parliamentary elections on the extreme right threat in the West. The projected gains expected by right-wing political movements in both polls have in turn raised concerns of a further emboldening of the violent extreme

right. In the US, an increasingly polarised political environment has heightened prospects for unrest, especially if Donald Trump fails in his re-election bid. Similar concerns pervade the far-right's capture of political power in parts of Europe in recent years and expected advances in the upcoming EU parliamentary elections.

SOUTHEAST ASIA MILITANT ATLAS

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Right-Wing Extremism in Australia: Current Threats and Trends in a Diverse and Diffuse Threatscape

Dr Kristy Campion

The Australian extreme right currently represents an energetic and diverse threat to the safety and security of the Australian public. The extreme right-wing (XRW) generally has been described as a "moving target… [that] is ever changing and evolving whilst being studied".[1] However, it appears that the online environment, ideological idiosyncratisation and the decreasing age of individuals associated with the Australian extreme right have augmented that challenge further. This evolution has no linear dimension or direction, and is seemingly able to maintain momentum despite the best efforts of counter terrorism authorities.

Introduction

In the past several years in Australia, there have been numerous high-profile incidences. The historic Museum of Democracy in the Australian Capital Territory was the victim of a destructive arson attack in broad daylight. A plot to impersonate federal police to enact a coup was also effectively disrupted across several states, while religious right-wing extremists ambushed and killed law enforcement and a civilian in the state of Queensland. Additionally, numerous individuals across the country associated with extreme right organisations have been charged with Terrorism Act offences, while the country has also borne witness to offences relating to the manufacture of explosives and firearms.

Amidst this, questions continue to be asked of the motivation behind the mass-casualty attack in a Sydney shopping centre on April 13, 2024 by the perpetrator Joe Cauchi, in which he appears to have preferentially targeted women (and a female infant). Cauchi killed six people and wounded 12 others – most of them women, revealing a gender-based dimension to the violence.[2]

This article reviews the current landscape of the Australian extreme right, and then considers the persistent trends and challenges posed by online extremism, the engagement of young people and threats to critical infrastructure. It concludes with a threat assessment. Broadly, it is argued the extreme right is not a homogenous entity in any geographic context, but, in Australia, it is rather represented by a series of overlapping milieus, spanning the ethnocentric, the religious, the anti-government and the idiosyncratic extreme right.[3]

Current Extreme Right Threatscape

Historically, the most visible facet of the Australian extreme right has been the ethnocentric milieu, which comprises neo-Nazism and other forms of fascism, white supremacy and white nationalism.[4] Organised groups remain prominent both online and offline. For example, online groups such as the Nationalist Socialist Movement Australia (NSMA), part of the United States (US)'s Nationalist Socialist Movement, have been issuing ideological statements aimed at recruiting new members by warning of declining white demographics and of the risk of being "slaughtered" by a new "non-white majority".[5]

Rinaldo Nazzaro (aka Norman Spear, or Roman Wolf), the Russian-affiliated leader of The Base – a US neo-Nazi accelerationist group which is a designated terror group in Australia – advised Australian followers to establish a separate organisation, engage in survival and tactical training, and undertake the illegal acquisition of firearms to prepare for when they are "ready to "go hot" or

when the "Collapse" occurs".[6] Offline, both the Nationalist Socialist Network (NSN) and the Sturmjäger Resistance (SR) have reportedly been escalating recruitment initiatives.[7] A number of individuals associated with the extreme right, including the NSN, are facing terrorism charges in a number of states, including New South Wales and South Australia, for a range of offences including acts in preparation for a terrorism offence. Despite this being the most visible milieu of the contemporary extreme right, it is no longer the most lethal in the country.[8]

The religious extreme right, in a single event, has become the most lethal milieu in recent years. On December 12, 2022, two Queensland police officers approached a rural property at Wieambilla as part of a missing persons case. Nathaniel Train, a former school principal, had not made contact with his family in New South Wales since October 9, so Queensland Police were conducting a welfare check and following up on an outstanding warrant at the home of his brother Gareth and partner Stacey Train. When the four police constables arrived at the property, they were ambushed by the Trains. Two constables were shot and then executed at close range, while one constable escaped and another hid in nearby bushland.

The Trains lit a grass field to attempt to flush out the remaining constable, which prompted the arrival of their neighbour, Alan Dare, whom they fatally shot in the back. Police responded and a six-hour siege commenced, which eventually concluded when Special Emergency Response officers breached the property and allegedly shot and killed the Trains. The Trains, it would later manifest, subscribed to a premillennial extremist Christian ideology.[9] This event highlighted the presence of the extreme religious right in Australia, which has been well established in other geographic contexts through diverse movements including Christian Identity, the Wotansvolk, the Order of Nine Angles, the World Church of the Creator and others.[10]

The anti-government milieu also retains its vibrancy, regularly buoyed by conspiratorial vogue. Again, as a contrast to the recent simple plots of the ethnocentric milieu, the anti-government milieu has demonstrated more sophistication. Beyond the December 31, 2021 arson attack by anti-government individuals on Australia's former Parliament House, now the Museum of Australian Democracy, there have been more elaborate plots.

In one instance, a South Australian woman was part of an interstate group which sought to overthrow the government. She was alleged to have been involved in ordering 470 fake federal police badges, as part of a plot to impersonate the police and arrest politicians and public servants.[11] This was disrupted by counter terrorism authorities in 2021. Despite the plot having been doomed to failure, it represented a substantive escalation from the anti-government milieu, which had to that point largely been represented by sovereign citizens incurring traffic offences or becoming subject to High Risk Terrorism Offenders legislation while in prison for other charges.

Finally, the Australian threatscape is also threatened by ideologically motivated individuals who represent more idiosyncratic extremism, where general beliefs might be extreme right, but there exist specific beliefs which contradict others. This phenomenon was recently examined by Brace et al., who suggested that some individuals have mixed or unclear ideologies which are difficult to categorise.[12] An example of this comes from a hostage situation in the town of Windang, New South Wales, where an individual associated with the extreme right also held other incoherent or contradictory beliefs.

Perhaps another manifestation of this comes from male supremacists (elsewhere referred to as involuntary celibates, or incels), who typically perpetrate extreme gender-motivated violence and terrorism. Examples include Scott Beirle, Elliot Rodgers, and the unnamed teenager who attacked a massage parlour in Toronto in 2020. In Australia, on April 13, 2024, Joe Cauchi committed murder at Sydney's Westfield Bondi Junction mall, where he preferentially targeted women. It is not yet known if ideology was a factor in this attack as investigations and an inquiry are still underway. The attack has nevertheless been incorporated in extreme right narratives. It was discussed on the White Lives Matter Telegram channel and described as an "anti-white" attack encouraged by Jews, despite the perpetrator being identified as a white male.[13]

Since November 28, 2022, Australia has maintained its National Terrorism Threat Level from Probable (mid-range) to Possible (low range), citing a moderated threat from Salafi-jihadists, an increase in issue-motivated extremism, and the persistent recruitment and radicalisation efforts of ideologically motivated violent extremists.[14] Despite this, there have been numerous government inquiries into the threat of right-wing extremism, including the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry in 2021 (which lapsed), the Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry into Extremism in Victoria in 2022, and now the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia in 2024.

In the latter inquiry, Australia's intelligence authority, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), claimed that ideologically motivated violent extremism accounted for 25 percent of its current priority counter terrorism caseload.[15] Australian right-wing extremists[16] were noted to have been engaging in private conversations domestically and internationally, with some aspiring to accelerate a race war or potentially attack critical infrastructure. The Australian Federal Police (AFP), in the same inquiry, identified that, in the past four years and over 40 joint counter terrorism operations, they had charged 58 people.[17]

In 2023 alone, five people were charged following five operations, including two right-wing extremists and one individual with a mixed or unclear ideology. The AFP suggested that the number of individuals associated with such ideologies would continue to increase.[18] This inquiry further brought to the fore some key foci in the right-wing threatscape in Australia: online extremism, the engagement of young people, and threats to critical infrastructure.

Trends in the Australian Threatscape

ASIO has indicated that the XRW threat has been abetted by the online extremist environment, which enables fast and often free connection with individuals around the world. The Department of Home Affairs echoed this concern regarding the online environment, and further suggested that the "nexus" between online extremism and youth radicalisation remains a concern.[19] The AFP further noted that the online environment is attractive for extremists, allowing for rapid growth and geographical diversity, the dissemination of ideology, and operational support.[20] Indeed, greater time spent online is thought to increase the opportunity for chance encounters with offensive materials – a consideration proposed by scholars in 2016.[21]

On the burgeoning online gaming sphere, the Australian eSafety Commissioner recently released data stating that 20 percent of adolescent gamers had seen or heard hate speech online, 11 percent had seen or heard misogynistic ideas, and 8 percent had seen or heard ideas regarding the superiority of one nationality, race, religion or culture over another.[22] Academic scholarship augments this, where a survey by Costello et al. found that 46.3 percent of young people had encountered negative material pertaining to ethnicity or race, 24.8 percent had encountered negative material advocating hatred, and 19.9 percent had encountered negative material advocating violence.[23] Going forward, the online environment will continue to be an avenue where Australian right-wing extremists can project their presence, propagandise and recruit. Indeed, neo-Nazi groups such as Antipodean Resistance and Identity Australia once used the online domain to make it clear they were exclusively interested in recruiting young people.

The engagement of young people by XRW entities has also been a noted feature of the Australian security landscape for the past few years. AFP stated that in 2021, they conducted operational activities against individuals aged between 11 and 16.[24] This caseload included young people planning or preparing for acts that would meet the terrorism offence threshold – including the production of explosives. Young people are increasingly being engaged by peers or online extremists during critical developmental periods, when they are developing their identities and "learning different forms of socialisation", and potentially experiencing social dislocation, mental health or neurodiversity challenges, or traumatic events.[25]

This is buttressed by emerging scholarship which has increasingly exposed the presence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the extreme right milieu,[26] and the presence of

neurodiversity across the motivational spectrum (without it necessarily being a causal factor).[27] These vulnerabilities may contribute to the overall susceptibility of young people to supporting violent ideologies and their strategies for social change.

Separately, ASIO recently also suggested that targeting critical infrastructure such as power grids, electrical substations and railways is a possibility.[28] The potentiality of critical infrastructure being targeted comes with the proliferation of accelerationist strategies and ideologies within extreme right contexts. *Siege,* an anthology of pro-Nazi essays by James Mason, promotes accelerationism as a way to achieve "saturation point" – where society becomes so out of sorts and corroded that the entire system collapses.[29] This was promoted heavily on Ironmarch around 2015 (leading to a fringe set of beliefs categorised as "*Siege* culture"),[30] and has since become popular with the ethnocentric milieu, particularly including Christchurch terrorist Brenton Tarrant.

While accelerationism can constitute part of an ideology,[31] it can also be used as a strategy to hasten the collapse of society. The Terrorgram publication *Militant Accelerationism* suggests numerous avenues for the targeting of critical infrastructure to create crises which discomfort the masses ("electricity presides over their life as their great provider, never forget this"),[32] and encourages kneejerk governance which erodes social unity and trust. While terrorism is sometimes defined by its threat to life and targeting of civilians,[33] the ideological and strategic prominence of targeting critical infrastructure in recent years cannot be discounted.

Calibrating Future Threats

While ASIO maintains the current risk of terrorism as "Possible", the precise calibration of terror threats may be more of an art than a science. This is due to the unpredictability of lone actors, and the paucity of knowledge regarding idiosyncratic forms of right-wing extremism, which may not be readily identifiable or reportable by the broader Australian public. In the 2024 Senate inquiry, ASIO suggested that possible attacks would use simple, low-cost weapons (such as knives) and tactics, and would most likely occur in crowded places in major cities, such as shopping centres, or by targeting critical infrastructure.[34] Such simple weaponry is particularly difficult to monitor or prohibit, while crowded spaces are difficult to entirely secure. Nevertheless, Pantucci and Singam suggest that Australia was the most affected Asia-Pacific country by extreme right-wing violence in recent years, noting the persistent challenge posed by neo-Nazis, but conclude that the threat as of 2023 had plateaued in the West despite its increasingly transnational nature.[35]

It is this transnational nature which makes the Australian threatscape so subject to the rise and fall of the tides elsewhere, both offline and online. The online environment is a well-established vector for the proliferation and promotion of extreme right ideologies (both defined and idiosyncratic), which can be readily disseminated to vulnerable young people. Synchronously, such ideologies may be consumed by susceptible individuals with anti-government or religious outlooks, and may recast their worldviews into ones beset by oppression, decadence or threat. This can lead to ideological and conspiratorial interpretations of geopolitics, the glamourisation of the dark celebrities of extreme right violence, and the justification and legitimisation of violence (often constructed as "self-defence"), and could potentially inspire illicit activities or violence, either alone or in unison with others. It preys upon the vulnerable, the young and the misinformed alike.

Pertinently, the Australian extreme right in all its manifestations and across its milieus continues to pose a threat to the lives of Australian citizens domestically through these challenges. The result of this diffuse and diverse activity has been the emphasis on law enforcement: from the ideological calibration of law enforcement as valid targets, to the attempted impersonation of them, through to the ambush and execution of them without provocation.[36] This, in addition to the existing targets of XRW violence, such as ethnic and religious minorities, further demonstrates the diverse and wide target-set thus far exhibited by the milieus.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Australian extreme right-wing landscape is defined by its considerable diversity, diffusion and rapid evolution in nonlinear ways. It is a moving target, with nonlinear expansion and momentum. The online environment is simply an information vector for extremists, but is nonetheless one that allows for extremist attitudes, narratives and beliefs to be disseminated and socialised – especially among young people. Young people are increasingly being targeted for recruitment by extremist organisations and individuals, and being arrested or charged in association with terrorism act offences. While threats have typically manifested as threats to life, threats against critical infrastructure are being maintained in extremist discussions online and would allow for the enactment of popular accelerationist ideology. The Australian extreme right continues to be a lethal – if difficult to predict – threat to the Australian public generally and to Australian law enforcement specifically.

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Countering Right-Wing Extremism in Australia: Key Challenges and the Role of Masculinity

Josh Roose

This article explores contemporary approaches to addressing the (re)emergence of right-wing extremism in Australia. It provides a broad overview of the diversity of right-wing extremism, something not commonly understood, before exploring the challenges of calibrating a policy infrastructure better suited to engaging minority communities than the majority culture. The article asserts the utility of applying a masculinity lens to understand recruitment by right-wing extremists and to assist in the development of alternative narratives and a whole-of-government approach.

Introduction

Challenging right-wing extremism typically provides a different set of challenges for policymakers and practitioners alike. Right-wing extremism is defined by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) as "the support for violence to achieve political outcomes relating to ideologies, including, but not limited to, white supremacism and neo-Nazism".[1] This support may be both subtle and overt and may take different forms. However, it is typically majoritarian in nature, often tying into normative attitudes and myths about the nation, including who belongs, key values, and perceived threats and enemies.

Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programmes (in Australia a countering violent extremism [CVE] paradigm is used) are typically preoccupied with engaging and building trust with minority communities to identify those at the margins, and either assisting in disengagement or disrupting their plans. Yet, as is increasingly the case in Western contexts, the question arises as to what to do when the extremist or terrorist is 'one of us'. More specifically, what steps can be taken to address right-wing extremism when racist, anti-migration, misogynistic, anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-Semitic messaging intersects with the views of sizeable elements of the wider Australian population? How do we reach those most likely to be drawn into the orbit of right-wing extremism to prevent them from becoming radicalised and potentially harming others?

This article commences by providing relevant context on right-wing extremism (also often referred to as the 'extreme right') in Australia, before examining contemporary responses to their emergence across the legislative and policy domains, including responsibility for disengagement programmes. It becomes clear that differences exist in challenging right-wing and Salafi-jihadist extremism, the latter of which has predominated.

The article asserts that the concept of masculinities has significant promise in reaching those 'angry men' most likely to be drawn to violent extremism across the political and religious spectrum. The article explores how right-wing extremist movements target manhood and emotional drivers including anger, resentment, humiliation and shame in their narrative messaging, and how this resonates with some young men. Drawing upon a significant body of empirical work, it asserts the utility of foregrounding masculinity in the development of both alternative narratives and a whole-of-government approach.

Context

Right-wing extremism in Australia has grown and evolved over the past decade. Emboldened by international developments, including the election of former United States President Donald Trump

in 2016, a collection of relatively unsophisticated, yet menacing 'patriots' movements' and 'Proud Boy' copycats[2] has since indigenised and become more sophisticated threat actors.

These movements seek to build a mass movement with the catch cry "Australia for the white man" and to utilise online spaces for recruitment and action. In the post-pandemic environment, they are developing a uniquely Australian brand of right-wing extremism, fusing online activism with public protests deploying extreme right symbology, narrative messaging and, most importantly, masculinity. Physical training and combat sports are an important element of their group identity, and these protest marches consist entirely of men seeking to project physical strength.[3]

Groups such as the National Socialist Network (NSN) and their proxy, the European Australian Movement, consist of angry young white men, most of whom remain masked and will not show their faces or reveal their identities. The capacity for violence by Australian right-wing extremists has been well established. A member of the True Blue Crew, an early patriot movement, Philip Galea remains imprisoned for a terror plot targeting the Victorian Trades Hall in Carlton, Melbourne.[4] The leader of the NSN Thomas Sewell has been prosecuted twice for assaults related to activities he was conducting as a member of the NSN.[5] The violence, explicit and implicit, in NSN rhetoric has deep links to the National Socialist Movement and the Holocaust. It is known that Christchurch terrorist Brenton Tarrant had contacted the Lad's Society (a progenitor to the NSN), praising their activism, though their attempts to recruit him were unsuccessful.[6]

These developments have paralleled the existence of right-wing extremist movements amongst some second- and third-generation Australians, for whom a continuation and evolution of extremist right politics serve as a consolidating and organising feature of their communal identity. These cases have included Croatian ultra-nationalists[7] drawing upon Ustaše fascist symbology, some in Greek communities being linked to the Golden Dawn[8] fascist movement, Serbian ultra-nationalists[9] and Indian Hindu nationalism.[10] Most recently, extreme right ultra-nationalist activists aligned with the Vladimir Putin regime, including "Aussie Cossack" Simeon Boikov, allegedly launched a campaign of targeted hate and harassment of the Ukrainian ambassador in Australia.[11] Notwithstanding the violent rhetoric of these groups and their aspirations for their homeland, these are of secondary concern to the emergence of a new manifestation of right-wing extremism, most clearly evident in the new Australian neo-Nazi groups.

CVE: Executive Structures and Responsibilities

Governmental efforts to address violent extremism cover both the federal and state government levels, and rely on strong communication between them, as well as on work with the private sector and communities. In 2022, the Australian government released the document, *Safeguarding Our Community Together: Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2022*.[12] The precise (and most up-to-date) dimensions of the relationships are spelt out in the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee's *National Counter-Terrorism Plan: 5th Edition 2024* document.[13] It focuses on four key areas of prevention (under which CVE falls), preparedness, response and recovery.

The overarching efforts of the Australian government in CVE are spelt out as follows:

- Support diversion of individuals at risk of becoming violent extremists;
- Build awareness and resilience of communities to violent extremism;
- Rehabilitate and reintegrate violent extremists, including those who have returned to Australia from overseas conflict zones;
- Prevent the exploitation of the internet by terrorists and violent extremists;
- Provide positive, alternative narratives to build the resilience of individuals vulnerable to extremist messaging; and
- Support and invest in measures to strengthen social cohesion to mitigate the social impacts of violent extremism.[14]

Federally, security agencies fall within the remit of the Attorney-General's Department, whilst the Department of Home Affairs houses the Centre for Counter-Terrorism Coordination. State

Departments of Justice typically enact CVE legislation and policies, whilst federal and state police agencies enforce the law, including in the state of New South Wales (NSW). The law here refers to the Terrorism (High Risk Offenders) Act 2017 (NSW), which aims to "provide for the extended supervisor of certain offenders posing an unacceptable risk of committing serious terrorism offences so as to ensure the safety and protection of the community".[15]

The Federal Department of Home Affairs focuses on four core areas, namely, "building strength in diversity and social participation", addressing societal drivers to violent extremism, "early intervention, disengagement and reintegration", working with communities to identify individuals who may be vulnerable, targeted work with vulnerable communities and institutions including training packages, and "addressing terrorist propaganda online".[16]

A core element of this interconnected 'prevention' approach is the Safe and Together Community Grants Program, which engages and "funds communities to deliver activities and programmes to support, at the earliest possible state, individuals who may be vulnerable to developing violent extremist views and behaviours".[17]

Another is the High-Risk Rehabilitation and Reintegration (HRRR) Program, which involves work between the federal and state governments to "deliver high-risk rehabilitation and reintegration services for high-risk violent extremists in custody and the community".[18] Intervention programmes are based on a highly calibrated approach to suit the circumstances of each individual. Family members, friends, community leaders and other trusted associates often play a role in these programmes, alongside the provision of a range of services. These may include psychological support, mentoring, education and employment support.

These programmes have traditionally been calibrated at Australian Muslim communities. They have, over the years, been condemned by Muslim community activists as some form of clandestine attempt to surveil and steer their communities. The question, however, is, how are they reaching young white men drawn to right-wing extremist movements espousing violent extremist ideas and language?

Preventing and Countering Right-Wing Extremism: The Role of Masculinities

A key element of addressing this question has been overlooked in many P/CVE approaches for years. Yet, it cuts across the religious and political spectrum, targeting the core demographic attracted to violent extremism: angry men. Violent extremist recruitment narratives specifically target anger and associated shame, humiliation and resentments amongst men.[19] How can the use of masculinities as a recruitment mechanism by right-wing extremists be challenged, and what alternative narratives can be developed?

The concept of masculinity, understood here as "the social construction of what it is to be a man",[20] invites us to view actors who have been cast in the public imagination as inherently malevolent and fanatical as both human and subject to social processes. This is possible irrespective of where they are situated on the political or religious spectrum.

Masculinity defines the social expectations of manhood and the social structuring of hierarchies based on the privileging of what is considered the masculine and the devaluation of that which is considered feminine. The participants in violent extremist groups are most often men, but beyond this, such groups' origins, ideologies, internal processes and means of recruitment are tied in powerful ways to masculinity.[21] That is, they are tied to the political, cultural and economic relations of many men's lives, to influential ideologies about men and gender, and to narratives about men's roles and positions in society.

As men turn online and find communities of likeminded actors who they may never otherwise have encountered face to face, we have witnessed the formation of an online ecosystem[22] sometimes referred to as 'the manosphere', which consists of a variety of actors from men's rights groups to misogynistic influencers and involuntary celibates, or 'incels'. The manosphere is founded not only

upon the logic of misogyny and anti-feminism, but on male supremacy, an ideological current that seeks the restoration of male power and the re-domestication of women.[23] Terror attacks from extremist actors associated with constituent elements of the manosphere, including incels, who often overlap with right-wing extremist beliefs including racial hierarchies, have spread globally.[24] Participation in manosphere groups is driven by a deeply visceral emotional response to social change amongst those men who do not perceive themselves to be doing well. This is ably exploited by extremists and anti-women grifters, such as misogynistic influencer Andrew Tate and the like.

The core drivers of anger are disempowerment and associated feelings of shame, humiliation and grief resulting from unfairness, injury and frustration.[25] Research demonstrates the gap between expected and actual trajectories and a process of shattering.[26] This can result in the search for an alternate source of meaning, where suffering makes sense.

The search ties directly into hatred, resentment, blame, the desire to hurt and punish, avenge perceived wrongs and reclaim a subordinated manhood. This phenomenon used to be limited to younger men. However, we are increasingly seeing a cohort of radicalised and angry men and, more recently, women, in middle age.[27] Consequently, we are seeing status frustration combined with a sense of nostalgia for a time and place where men were successful, were the head of the household, and had a pathway toward a guaranteed upward economic and social trajectory.

This is precisely what extremist narratives target. Like other forms of extremism, including Salafi-jihadism,[28] the emotional pitch of right-wing extremist messaging is highly calibrated and framed to capture anger. Anger is primarily personal, but can be mobilised toward societal issues and, indeed, can play a role in achieving positive social change. However, in relation to right-wing extremism, the opposite is the case.

It helps to understand what drives anger to understand the success of right-wing extremist groups in tapping into it. Our research interviews with 40 Australian men[29] revealed that over half experienced anger at least weekly, with over three quarters experiencing anger at least monthly. Over half of interviewees stated that being slighted by others drives their anger. Over half also linked their anger to a deficit of some sort, including a lack of ability or control. However, noting the above, just over a third of the men interviewed discussed wider societal injustice as driving their anger. Hatred linked to anger, whilst rejected by the majority, was experienced by almost half of the respondents, due to an experience of personal injustice or maltreatment by another. This is critical. A sense of having been mistreated or slighted is a core mobilising element for the attraction to extremist narratives which make sense of these complex emotions.

A Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Analysis and a discourse analysis reveal that anger and hatred are critical and central to the messaging and narratives of violent extremist and terrorist groups. Such groups are also adept at framing violence through a defensive, rather than offensive, lens, asserting that any attack, no matter how violent, is righteous and just.[30]

How Can Right-Wing Extremist Narratives be Challenged?

The concept of masculinities in its application to P/CVE brings relationships of power and emotion to the fore, and assists us in understanding responses to a lack of respect, recognition and perceived disempowerment, resulting in shame, humiliation, resentment and hate. Masculinities encourage us to look at the man, his social trajectory and emotional drivers. They can help us identify the otherwise invisible.

Efforts to address radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism must address the emotional drivers of radicalisation and, to be sustainable, must be across the whole of government, from economic reform and social services to education and employment. This has two implications.

First, it is critical that governments and practitioners work to develop alternative narratives of manhood that directly undermine the hyper-masculinised conception of manhood. Counter-narrative messaging – put simply, telling someone they are wrong or at risk of ending up in trouble

– can be counterproductive. Alternative narratives are an important alternative approach that emphasise the positive possibilities of engaging in wider society to build an upward social trajectory, and can go hand in hand with positive education that emphasises the development of healthy and prosocial masculinity.[31]

Such approaches emphasise core values and principles as well as critical thinking, which act to inhibit the potential of right-wing extremists' emotionally laden extremist messaging to gain traction. The most effective alternative narrative programmes appear to be grassroots pilot programmes that incorporate alternative messaging into wider resilience and capacity-building programmes, which include education and vocational and social work workshops.

This logically ties into the second implication – the requirement of a whole-of-government approach to addressing the (re)emergence of right-wing extremism. This includes calibrating services to reach those who may be susceptible to right-wing extremist messaging, ranging from economic reform and social services through to building individualised education and employment pathways. It also requires developing a reinvigorated conception of classical citizenship,[32] moving from the rights-based claim-making based on grievances that has become predominant in Western societies, to instilling a sense of societal obligation and responsibility in young people which will assist in developing resilience to narratives emphasising victimhood.[33]

Conclusion

The emergence of right-wing extremism is indicative of and embedded in a wider set of economic, political and social challenges. Right-wing extremism in Australia remains, for the moment, confined to several dozen particularly active angry young men seeking to project an image of hyper-masculine strength and to grow a mass movement. The very real danger of right-wing extremist terrorism from an individual or a group at the fringe of these movements persists.

It is in this attempt to appeal to men at the margins and to mobilise masculinity as a recruitment mechanism that right-wing extremism can be most effectively countered. The use of alternative narratives and a whole-of-government approach to develop upward social trajectories has the capacity to deprive the extreme right of the political oxygen and, most critically, the anger that they rely upon.

About The Author

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Global Far-Right Extremist Exploitation of Artificial Intelligence and Alt-Tech: The Cases of the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand

Dr William Allchorn

The recent public attention paid to generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential exploitation for good and malevolent purposes has not escaped the global extreme far-right. In particular, extreme right groups have explored these technologies as a way to get ahead of state preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) responses in this space. This article contains findings of an exploratory content and sentiment analysis conducted by the author of 12 violent and non-violent far-right groups in the four countries under survey. Each was deemed a representative sample based on their representation of three different ideology proclivities that currently preoccupy the global far-right: racial nationalism, ethno-nationalism and cultural nationalism.[1] Essentially, whilst public 'chatter' by such groups indicates very tentative inroads into and negative appraisals of AI technology, there are aspirations to both foment anxieties within non-aligned constituencies and weaponise AI for illicit propaganda, attack-planning and attack-execution activities.

Introduction

Western far-right groups[2] have increasingly been able to mobilise and weaponise technology for activism and their campaigns. Recent research reports have suggested that such groups are able to exercise an 'opportunistic pragmatism' when using online platforms,[3] creating new bases of convergence and influence in such disparate places as Germany, Italy and Sweden.[4] While success in this space has been limited, such instances demonstrate a shift away from parochial concerns and towards more transnational ambitions in using technology to disseminate far-right messages and ideology to a wider audience.[5]

Indeed, this dialogic turn is symptomatic of the plethora of social media platforms that characterise the modern internet. No longer are far-right groups content with talking amongst themselves, as was the case with the early internet on bulletin boards, chat forums and closed online spaces. Increasingly, these actors have taken advantage of 'likes', 'retweets' and 'pins' on such platforms in order to disseminate (usually sanitised) versions of their messages to a wider audience. What is problematic about this content is its often banal and coded nature, using notions of tradition, heritage and the broader vilification of a mysterious globalist elite.[6] Often, this is done in order to boost followership and widen exposure to nativist[7] narratives and messaging.[8]

A more recent example of how far-right extremists have exploited online technologies for their own propaganda, recruitment and kinetic attacks is the use of AI-based tools. Recent reports have shown how such groups have exploited existing generative AI tools to explore the possibilities of propaganda creation,[9] image creation[10] and the design of recruitment tools[11] in service of nativist ends. This article reports the findings of an exploratory study conducted by this author into how far-right groups in four[12] of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing countries (United States [US], United Kingdom [UK], Australia and New Zealand),

are talking about the uses of AI, and how P/CVE practitioners, including in Southeast Asia, can scaffold timely interventions in this space to meet such efforts.

How Extremists Within the Global Far-Right Discuss Their Uses of AI Methods

The recent public attention paid to generative AI and its potential exploitation for good and malevolent purposes has not escaped the global far-right.[12] In particular, it is important to note how such extremist groups are talking about these technologies as a way to get ahead of the curve when responding to P/CVE responses in this space.

Below are the findings of this author's own exploratory content and sentiment analysis of 12 violent and non-violent far-right groups in the four countries under survey,[13] which were deemed a representative sample based on their representation of three different ideology proclivities that currently preoccupy the global far-right: racial nationalism, ethno-nationalism and cultural nationalism.[14] Great attention was devoted to not just how they intended to use, but how they discussed AI on their Telegram channels. Posts were harvested from October 2023 to February 2024 from 18 public Telegram channels using a key word search (AI, Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, Large Language Models [LLM], Chatbots, Deepfake), qualitative thematic analysis (core themes included xenophobia, racism and exclusionary nationalism, while peripheral themes covered anti-modernity, anti-science and anti-government), and qualitative sentiment analysis (positive, negative or neutral appraisals) of posts collected.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that the earliest mentions of AI within these channels can be traced back to 2017 – well before the current ChatGPT 'hype'. However, one limitation to note is that these discussions represent a fraction (likely under 1-2 percent) of the overall content when compared to the wider range of topics these groups typically engage with. Like mainstream actors, most of these groups are in the preliminary stages of their engagement with AI, focusing on exploring and discussing its potential applications.

Key Findings

The analysis has unveiled three key findings:

Finding 1: *The global far-right's exploitation of AI is preliminary, and the discussion is largely negative.*

In general, the appraisal of generative AI among the global far-right in the four countries under examination was negative, and there was no serious or sustained engagement with the idea of harnessing AI to achieve their goals – besides a few podcasts, blogs and AI image generation attempts – on public-facing channels and platforms. In this study, only a handful of posts portrayed AI in a positive light, encouraging members of the various organisations to engage in 'information warfare', hack mainstream LLMs to serve more nationalistic ends, and generate their own AI images as part of broader community-building activities. The rest (as described below) involved active derision and conspiratorial critiques of the technology.

Finding 2: *Their discussion of AI tends to focus on anti-government and anti-globalist critiques of the technology, rather than core ideological concerns.*

Rather than focusing on their own use of AI, much of these groups' online discourse surrounding these technologies revolved around the conspiratorial and nefarious intentions of mainstream actors (i.e., governments, law enforcement and intergovernmental organisations) in their adoption and deployment of AI. At a more substantive level, discussions within the surveyed Telegram channels often centred on these technologies being perceived as tools for a "replacement" type agenda that would see the "elimination of humanity", institute "global control" and be part of an "anti-human agenda".

At a more marginal level, concerns were expressed by the groups that connected more readily with the exclusionary nationalist core of their far-right ideology.[15] Interestingly, for example, only a handful of posts surveyed actively connected AI with the far-right's core anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic ideology. For example, these groups falsely alleged that European countries' post-pandemic recovery funds were being used to develop AI technology over tackling illegal immigration. Moreover, they also connected the Jewish heritage of the social media platform Facebook's owner, Mark Zuckerberg, to lying AI bots on the platform. This peripherality is perhaps unsurprising given the addition of more populist and conspiratorial narratives to their ideological appeals in recent years.[16]

Finding 3: *Discussions of AI tend to focus on allegations of broader 'liberal' bias and the hacking of established AI models for anti-progressive ends.*

One final common trope among the online postings of the groups surveyed was allegations of bias about the current suite of generative AI tools. For these far-right groups, Google's Bard (now Gemini) and Open AI's ChatGPT, both companies' respective conversational AI services, are inherently political – pushing what they see as a broader (and corrosive) 'liberal' agenda. As an alternative to using well-known, ostensibly 'woke' LLMs, these groups recommended the usage of alternative models that represent a more stridently libertarian or conservative value system. These included ChatGPT clones such as RightWing, Freedom & Truth GPT, and the open-source, decentralised HuggingFace platform, in order to put forward their nationalistic agendas unimpeded.[17]

In particular, the issues discussed here revolved around debates around sexuality and gender identity – layering in moral panics concerning the perversion and 'grooming' of young children. In one post, for example, former UK English Defence League (EDL) leader Tommy Robinson told his followers to "get [their] kids off of Snapchat" due to what he claimed is "non-binary AI". In another, he circulated a screenshot of a user trying to trick ChatGPT into problematic discussions on pregnancy and gender roles – suggesting that heteronormative conversations were in violation of ChatGPT's content moderation policy. This – like with anti-government and anti-globalist tropes – was used to stir moral panics among his followers and act as an opportunity for recruitment.

The use of hacking, tricking or short-circuiting AI models to either produce certain answers or to give instructions that might lead to malicious ends was not, however, uncommon in the sample surveyed. In particular, the former leader of the neo-Nazi accelerationist group The Base, Rinaldo Nizarro, was the most persistent in trying to find workarounds and the prompting of instructional guides from generative AI that might be used in preparation for violence. In particular, his use of Open AI's Chatbot to elicit information about guerrilla warfare should be viewed with an element of caution and concern for future kinetic attacks by global far-right actors.[18]

Discussion

The findings found here align with and extend some of the observations made by other nascent and emerging studies on the role of extremists' exploitation of AI. In a December 2023 report by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), Busch and Ware, for example, posited that Deepfakes could be used to create false, inflammatory information or statements by trusted authority figures, election misinformation, or other distortions of social and political events, which are all likely to incite violence.[19] Meanwhile, Siegel in a June 2023 GNET Insight found that some far-right users on 4Chan, a loosely moderated and user-anonymous imageboard website, had adapted Meta's LLaMA model, while others used publicly available AI tools to create new and problematic chatbots.

The leaking of Meta's AI language model LLaMA's source code in February 2023 allowed far-right extremists on 4chan to develop chatbots capable of enabling online radicalisation

efforts by imitating victims of violence that lean into stereotypes and promote violence.[20] Moreover, Koblentz-Stenzler and Klempner in a January 2024 GNET Insight found on more extreme far-right boards and channels (mainly Gab, 4chan and 8chan) as well as online far-right publications (namely The Daily Stormer and others), that far-right actors primarily discussed AI through four key themes: (i) belief in bias against the right; (ii) anti-Semitic conspiratorial ideas; (iii) strategies to overcome and bypass AI limitations; and (iv) malicious use of AI.[21] This is not just a far-right threat problem. Similar stories have emerged when it comes to jihadist and Islamist extremist groups – with research articles, reports and news stories detailing how in recent months jihadists have used AI to amplify apocalyptic propaganda,[22] radicalise individuals,[23] and put out a guide, sourced from mainstream/Western tech sources, about how to use ChatGPT and AI-supported chatbots to enhance jihadist messaging and online activities.[24]

Conclusions/Recommendations

In contrast to the far-right's adept use of social media, their use of AI in propaganda, recruitment and attacks is still in its infancy. Whilst there have been some experimental efforts, as outlined above, such efforts remain tentative at best, and are mainly met with negativity and conspiratorial scepticism. However, it is important to recognise that violent groups may harness AI for offline activities, for example, to support endeavours like 3D-printing weapons,[25] or drone technologies for kinetic attacks.[26]

Looking forward, it is advisable for practitioners and policymakers, including in Southeast Asia, to get ahead of and proactively address these trends. This could involve blue-teaming potential AI uses for P/CVE interventions, such as the creation of assets for counter-messaging campaigns. Other actions could include incorporating regulation and incentives for safe-by-design to prevent the harmful uses of AI products by terrorist or violent extremist actors, and using responsible rhetoric to temper moral panics or fears concerning this new technology.

Security agencies and law enforcement should also consider engaging in red-teaming exercises to assess possible extremist exploitation and uses. Moreover, policymakers in the region should approach the release of open-source versions of AI technologies cautiously, compelling technology companies to involve end-users in discussions and to avoid hasty releases without thorough safety testing.

Finally, our understanding of this issue is still in its nascent stages. There is a pressing need for studies providing a deeper understanding of the extent of the scale and potential for real-world threats posed by extremist exploitation of AI. These are essential to better inform law enforcement and security agencies about the potential application of AI in kinetic attacks. These efforts are pivotal in redirecting the trajectory of this emerging technological field towards safety, prevention and the promotion of pro-social uses. By investing in these initiatives, security actors can mitigate the risk of further exploitation by malicious actors, ensuring that AI serves as a force for positive societal change, from the automation of menial tasks to the building of capacity around security threats.

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[1] Posts were harvested from October 2023 to February 2024 from 18 public Telegram channels using a key word search, qualitative thematic analysis and qualitative sentiment analysis of posts collected.

[2] Here 'far right' is used to describe a broad plethora of cognate paramilitary groups, political parties and protest movements that could be considered as harbouring nativist, authoritarian and populist policy platforms (see Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right in Europe* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007]). These include groups whose aims include "a critique of the constitutional order without any anti-democratic behaviour or intention" (see Elisabeth L. Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005], p. 22) and those which actively "espouse violence" and "seek the overthrow of liberal democracy" entirely (see Roger Eatwell, "Ten Theories of the Extreme Right," in *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg [London: Routledge, 2003], p. 14). These are often referred to as the radical right and the extreme right, and range from anti-Islamic campaign groups right through to formally constituted neo-fascist and neo-Nazi political parties.

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3D-Printed Firearms and Terrorism: Trends and Analysis Pertinent to Far-Right Use

Rueben Dass

This study examines the proliferation of 3D-printed firearms and their use by terrorist groups. Examining several case studies, a data-driven analysis of the 3D-printed firearm, looking into the geographical spread, ideological breakdown, individual profiles and most popular types of firearms, is presented. Due to ideological and geographical factors, 3D-printed firearms are more prevalent among far-right groups as opposed to jihadists or other ideological groups. Finally, the article discusses the evolving threat landscape and implications for counter terrorism efforts, and suggests strategies to mitigate this emerging security challenge.

Introduction

3D-printing, also known as additive manufacturing, is an industrial engineering method that was first developed in the early 1980s. In simple terms, 3D-printing involves downloading computer-assisted design (CAD) files (similar to Word files in standard 2D-printing) which are available online and feeding them into a 3D-printer that produces a 3-dimensional object using specialised plastics or polymers as its raw material. It was first called rapid prototyping because of its ability to create cost-effective prototypes for industries.[1] Ever since the 1980s, 3D-printing technology has evolved rapidly, becoming cheaper, easier to use and more user-friendly. The applications of the technology span several areas and industries, namely, construction, medicine, engineering, aerospace and other commercial uses.

As with other dual-use technologies, 3D-printing has been taken advantage of by certain parties for the manufacture of weapons, in particular, firearms. In 2013, University of Texas law student Cody Wilson designed and produced the first 3D-printed gun called the Liberator.[2] Inspired by the FP-45 Liberator, a single-shot pistol designed by the United States (US) military during World War II,[3] Wilson's Liberator was a single-shot pistol that consisted of 16 parts, out of which 15 were 3D-printed.[4] The only non-3D-printed component was a regular nail that acted as the firing pin. Several law enforcement agencies test-fired the gun and, despite its limitations, noted that it was a potentially lethal firearm.[5]

Ever since then, 3D-printed firearms, sometimes known as 'ghost guns' due to their untraceability as they have no serial numbers, have proliferated. Designs for new and more lethal guns are being developed and tested on a daily basis. This is facilitated by online communities of ghost gun designers, enthusiasts and testers which have mushroomed on social media platforms such as X, Rocket.Chat, Reddit and Odysee. While most of the individuals involved in 3D-printing firearms are gun enthusiasts, this technology has garnered the attention of several terrorist cells and extremists who have either used or attempted to use them in terrorist attacks.

Classification

Armament Research Services (ARES) classifies 3D-printed firearms into three categories: Fully 3D-printed (F3DP); Hybrid; and Parts-Kit Completion (PKC).[6] As the name suggests, F3DP are firearms that are almost entirely 3D-printed except for certain minor non-printed parts.[7] The majority of the firearms in this category are single-shot pistols or guns that are only usable for a minimum number of shots, such as the Liberator, Songbird and Washbear-type pistols.[8] Likewise, hybrid firearms are also primarily 3D-printed, but utilise commercial, unregulated (mostly hardware store) materials to complete

the assembly. In most cases, the lower receivers (frames) are printed and the firearms are supplemented by commercial hardware store materials such as steel tubing and springs that are modified to re-enforce the assemblies and to act as barrels and chambers.[9] Examples of firearms in this category are the FGC-9, Urutau and the Shuty.

Meanwhile, PKCs are firearms that have a 3D-printed receiver (or frame). Most or all of the pressure-bearing components such as the slide, barrel and bolt are commercial, factory-made components.[10] The difference between PKCs and hybrid firearms is the fact that PKCs make use of commercially available firearm components to complete assembly, whereas hybrid firearms make use of hardware store materials that are modified. PKCs are generally more reliable than other types of firearms with 3D-printed parts, but may be more challenging to assemble, especially in countries where the sale of commercial firearm parts is banned.[11] An example in this category is the Glock-type handgun.

Global Trends – 3D-Printed Firearms and Terrorism

The analysis below is based on the author's Global 3D-Printed Firearm database, where an incident/case is defined as any report of an arrest, raid or discovery of a 3D-printed firearm/component [12] The classification of 3D-printed firearms in this study follows the ARES classification with the addition of a separate category called 'firearm components', where components of printed firearms that have not been assembled into a workable firearm are discovered. The data collection for the database was primarily based on open-source media reports, academic literature, open-source law enforcement databases and certain social media channels. The analysis below was based on 165 cases recorded between 2013 and March 2024.

Geographically, the number of incidents involving 3D-printed firearms was concentrated in North America and Europe (see Figure 1). A significant number of cases were recorded in Asia due to the relatively high use of 3D-printed weapons in the ongoing Myanmar conflict.[13]
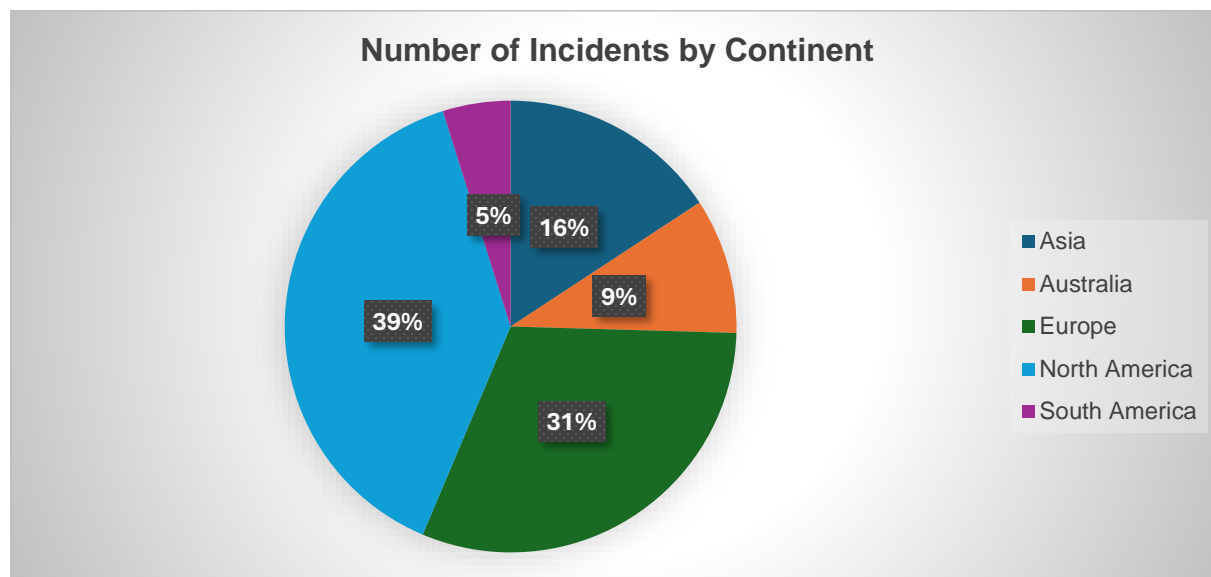

Number of Incidents by Continent

- Asia
- Australia
- Europe
- North America
- South America

5% | 16% | 9% | 39% | 31%

Figure 1: Geographical distribution of 3D-printed firearm cases.

The use of 3D-printed firearms is a relatively recent phenomenon, with a significant jump occurring between 2020 and 2023 as shown in Figure 2. A possible reason for this is the advancement of 3D-printing technology, which has become cheaper and more accessible in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic may also have played a role. Given the heavy role of online communities and activities in the proliferation of 3D-printed firearms, the lockdowns resulting from the pandemic may have prompted

individuals to seek refuge in online spaces and hence sparked their interest in these firearms in the same way we saw an increase in online extremism and radical activity during the same time.[14]
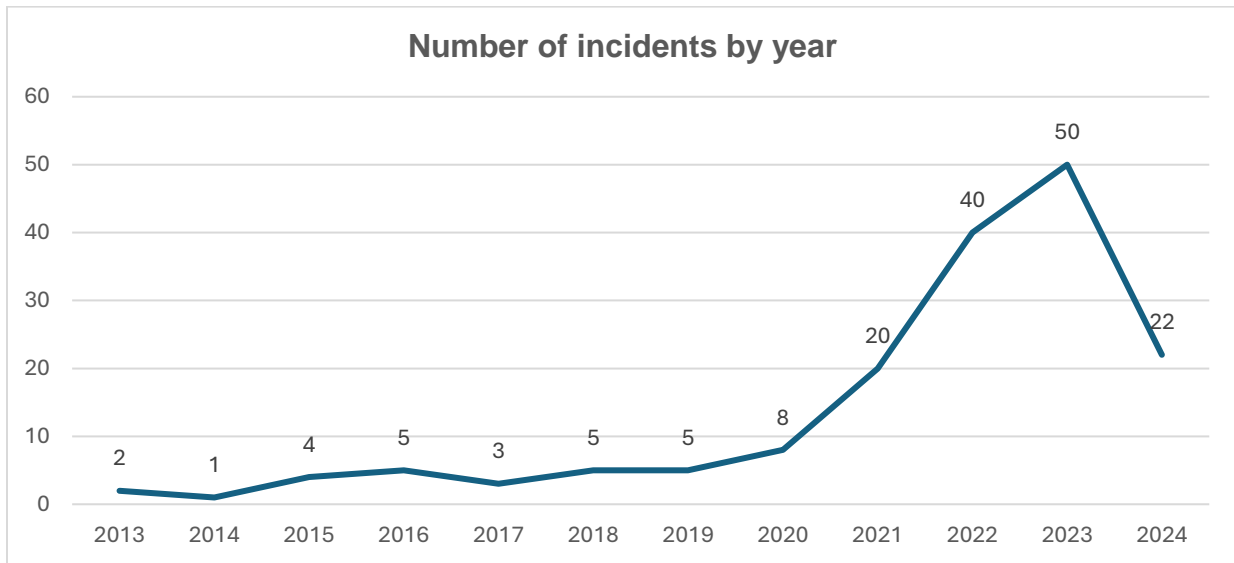

Figure 2: Timeline of 3D-printed firearm cases.

Figure 3 shows that while majority of the cases (60 percent) were criminal in nature, 15 percent of the 165 cases of 3D-printed firearms were linked to terrorism. Among the terrorism-linked cases, 3D-printed firearms seemed to be the most popular with the far-right, as seen in Figure 4.
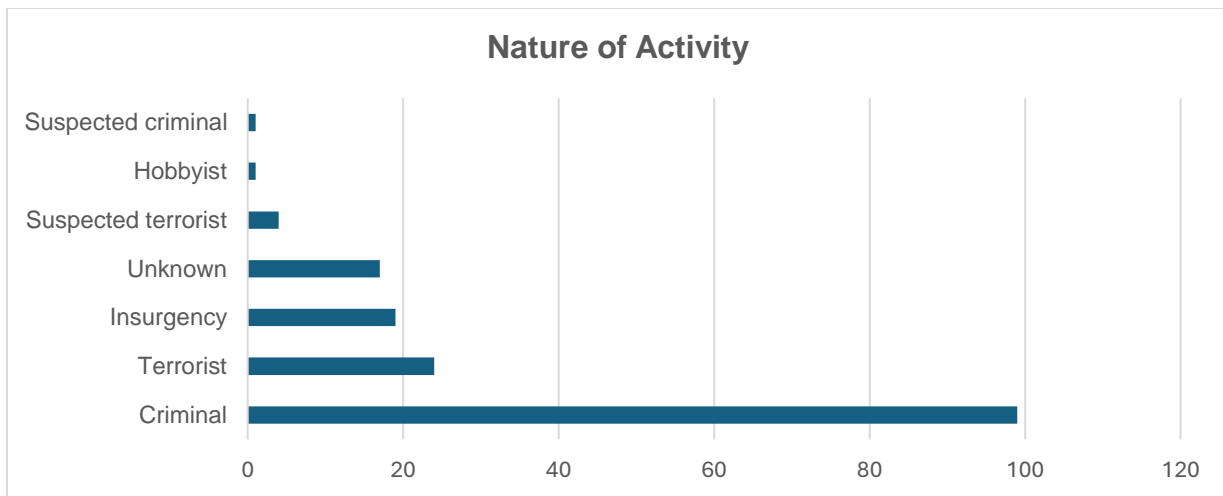
Figure 3: Distribution of 3D-printed firearm cases by nature of activity.
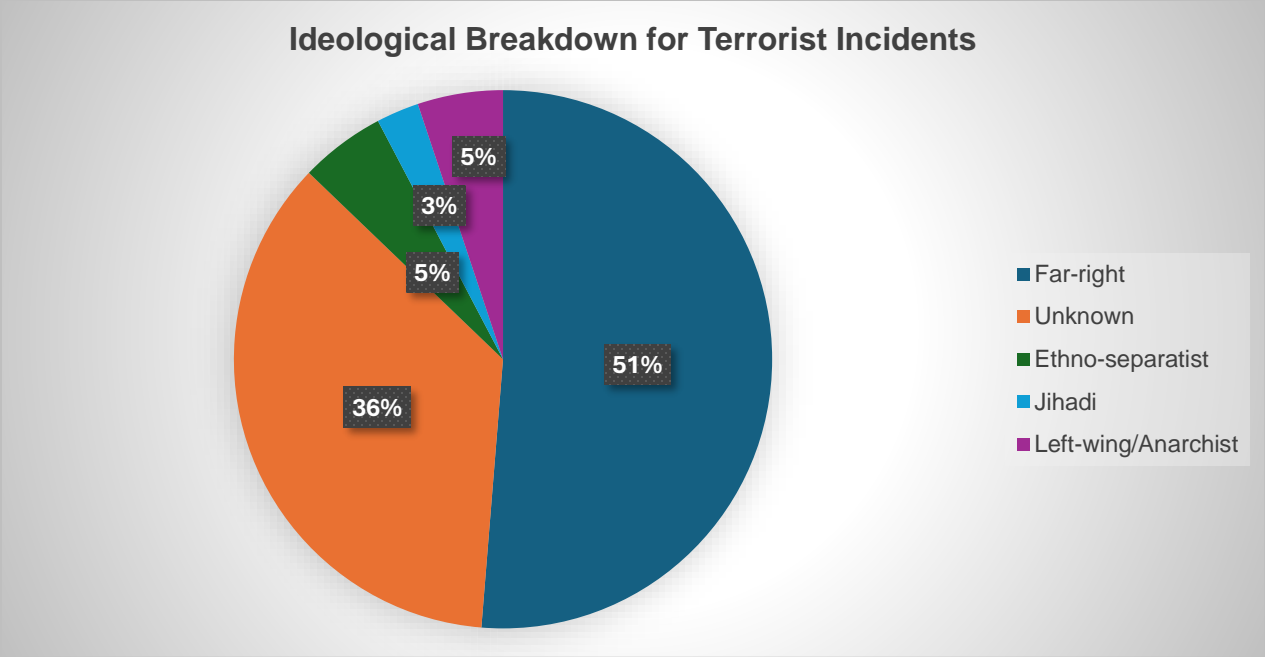
Figure 4: Ideological breakdown of 3D-printed firearm cases.

Europe, particularly the United Kingdom (UK), recorded the highest number of far-right-related 3D-printed firearm cases, contributing to 46 percent of the total number of far-right cases across all continents (see Figure 5). This may possibly be due to the fact that these cases are being reported much more frequently in the UK than in other countries, or that this technology has gained the most traction in the UK. Other European countries that recorded far-right cases were Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. A single far-right case was recorded in Brazil.
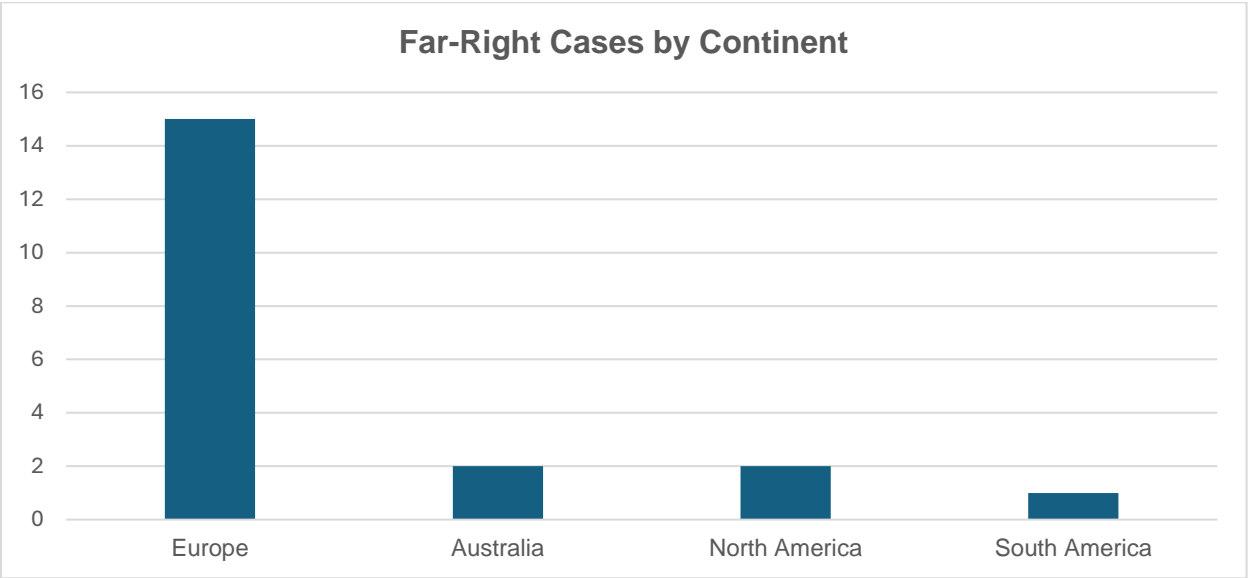

Figure 5: Far-right case distribution by continent.

In terms of the perpetrator type, most of the far-right cases involving 3D-printed firearms were lone actors and cells as shown in Figure 6.[15]
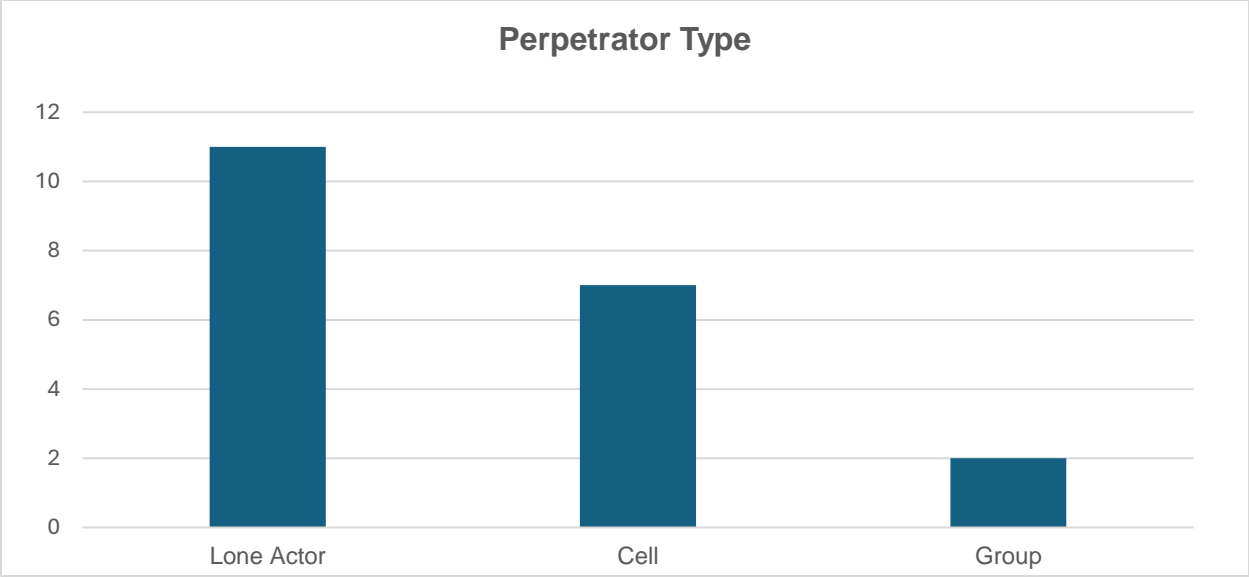
Figure 6: Far-right case distribution by perpetrator type.

Interestingly, 82 percent of the far-right cases involved the manufacture of the firearm (see Figure 7). Out of all the cases, only one was a success – whereby the perpetrator had discharged the firearm. The rest of the cases (95 percent; 19) were failures, in that the perpetrator(s) were interdicted or arrested before they were able to discharge the firearm. The high number of failures could be attributed to effective law enforcement that was able to detect these individuals before they had the opportunity to carry out attacks or use the weapons.
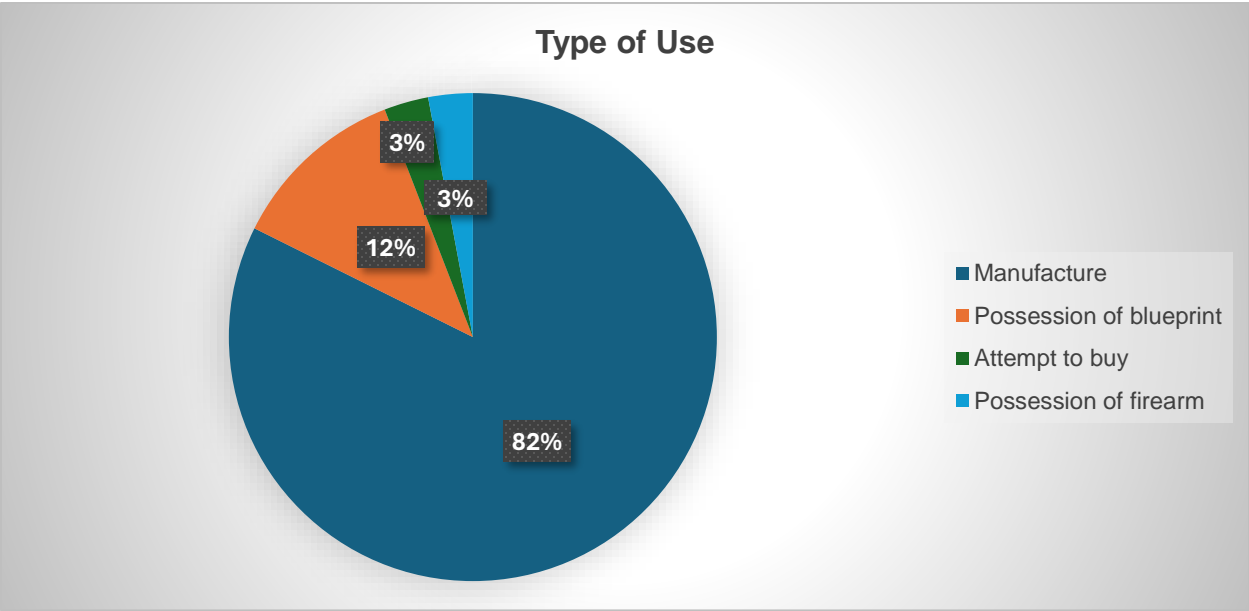

Figure 7: Distribution of 3D-printed firearm cases by type of use.

Figure 8 shows the countries where youth (aged between 15-24) were involved in far-right activity linked to 3D-printed firearms. Youth involvement was primarily centred in Europe, with the UK recording the highest number of cases. Youth involvement by perpetrator type (see Figure 9) showcases a similar pattern as Figure 6.
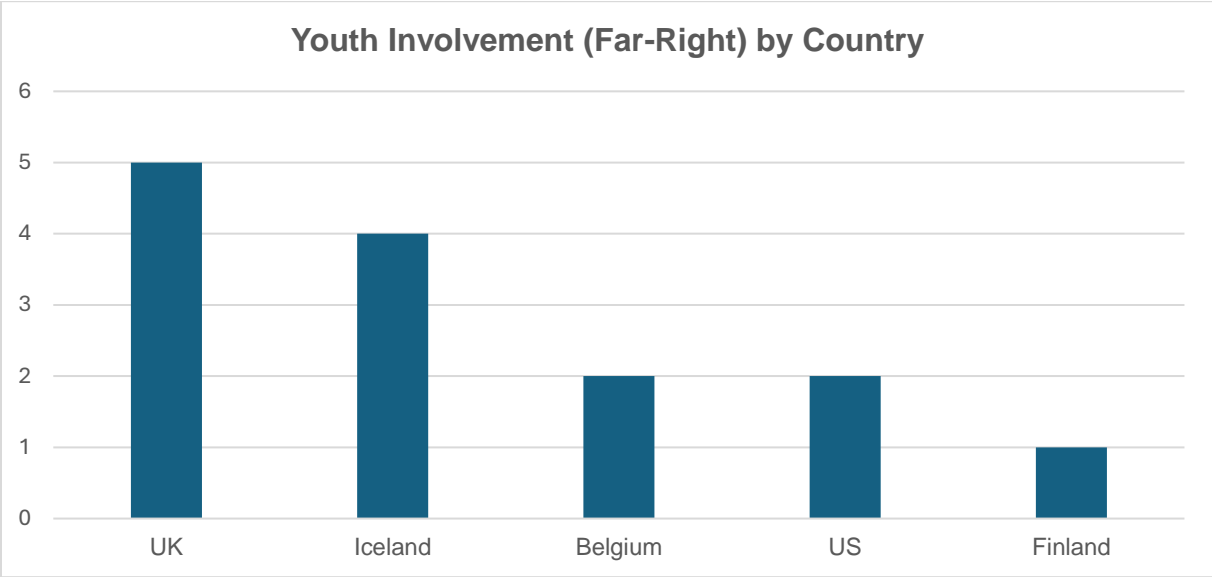
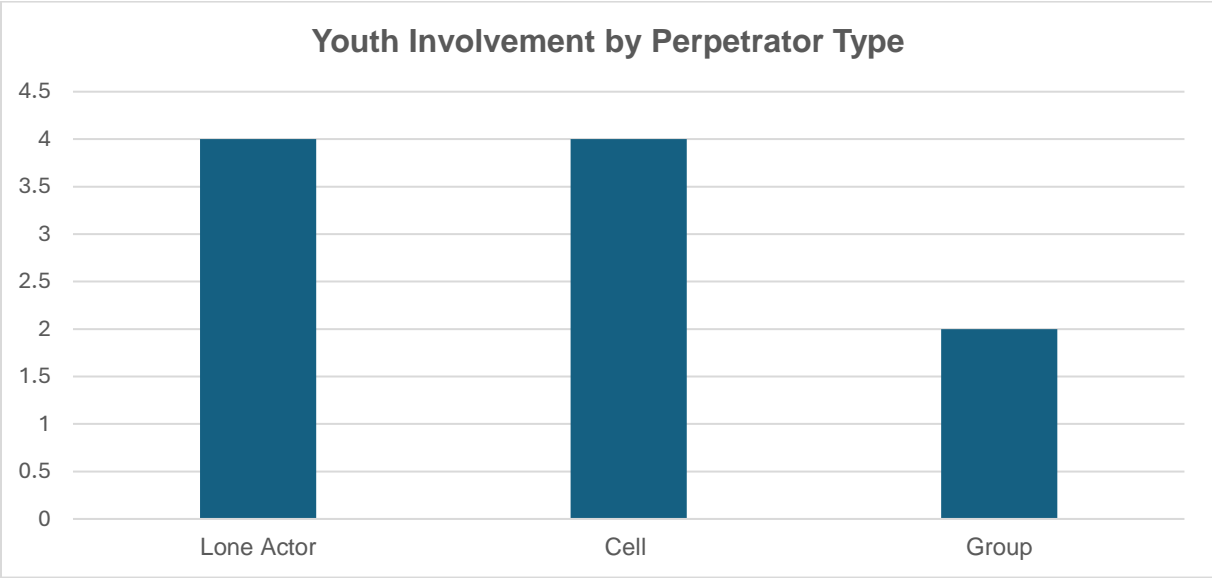**Figure 8: Distribution of youth by country.**

Figure 9: Distribution of youth by perpetrator type.

In terms of the firearms, the most prominent type that was used/recovered in far-right cases were hybrid firearms, in particular the FGC-9,[16] and firearm components (see Figures 10 and 11). 'NA' refers to cases where the perpetrators were in possession of blueprints without having manufactured the firearm. No F3DP firearms linked to far-right cases were detected.
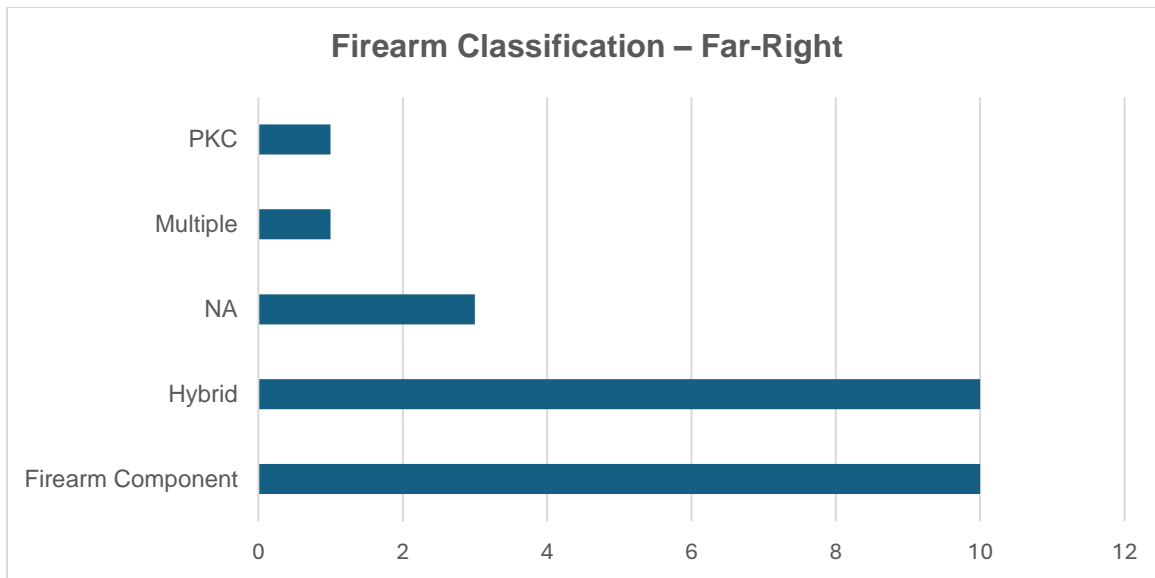
Firearm Classification – Far-Right

Figure 10: Distribution of firearms by classification.

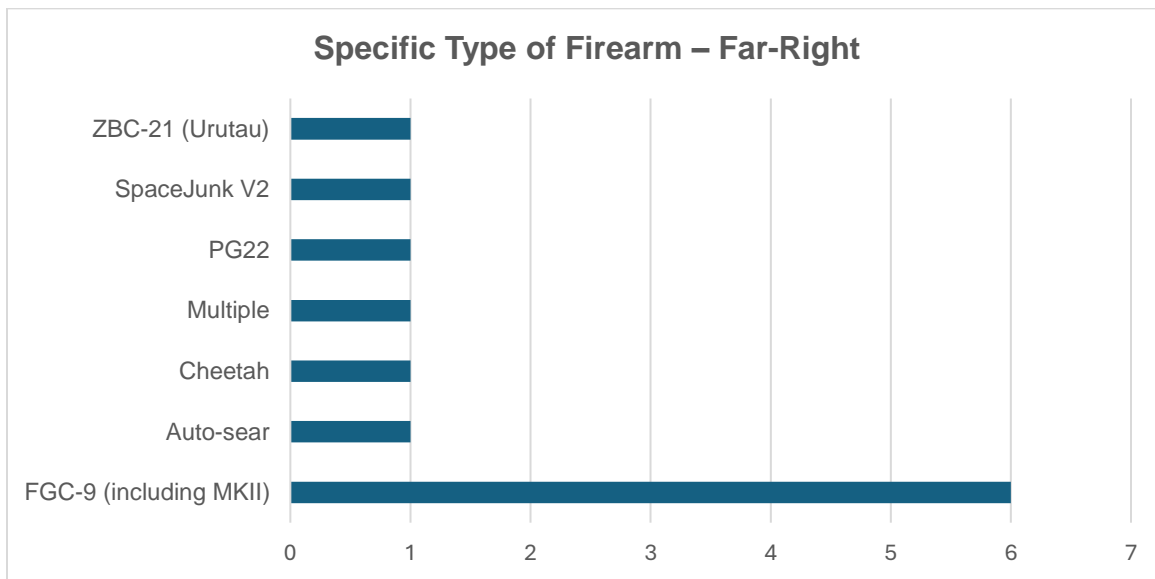**Specific Type of Firearm – Far-Right**

Figure 11: Distribution of firearms by specific type.

Prevalence with the Far-Right

As the data above shows, 3D-printed firearms have been most prevalent with the far-right compared to other extremist groups such as jihadists due to ideological and geographical factors. Within the ideological spectrum, far-right ideologies seem to place a prominent emphasis on the stockpiling of weapons and firearms.[17] Far-right forums have also been found to share blueprints and materials relating to 3D-printed firearms more widely compared to other ideologies, for example, the jihadists.[18]

3D-printed weapons and firearms have not been featured prominently in jihadist chat rooms, forums and propaganda. Jihadist groups like the self-styled Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda still prefer to use

tried-and-tested attack methods such as explosives, conventional weapons, suicide bombings, and knife and vehicular attacks. The author's observations indicate that brief discussions of 3D-printed firearms were found on IS social media channels, but these were not followed up. The lack of emphasis on this technology compared to other modes of attack may have played a role in the strategic calculus of jihadist groups with regard to the adoption of this technology.[19]

Another reason for the absence of adoption among jihadists groups may be the lack of a successful attack on the jihadist front using 3D-printed firearms. Jihadist groups and sympathisers tend to emulate past successful attacks.[20] Lack thereof of any using a new technology like 3D-printing may steer prospective actors to tried-and-tested methods of attacks instead of new ones. On the other hand, within the far-right sphere, the 2019 Halle attack in Germany carried out by Stephan Balliet serves as a precedent 'success' story that prospective far-right attackers may look up to.[21]

Balliet was a far-right extremist motivated primarily by anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and anti-feminism.[22] He attempted to storm a Jewish synagogue and carry out a shooting attack.[23] He killed two individuals before he was arrested. This was the first terrorist attack that made use of firearms with 3D-printed components, i.e., a hybrid Luty submachine gun.[24] Balliet's firearm, however, malfunctioned in the process of the attack, reducing the number of casualties. Nevertheless, the Halle attack is regarded as a success and several far-right plotters have since been found to be in possession of his manifesto, possibly serving as an inspiration.[25]

Another figure that is widely regarded within the 3D-printed firearm community is Jacob Duygu (who went by the online moniker "JStark1809"). Duygu was famously known for designing the FGC-9, a hybrid, semi-automatic pistol caliber carbine that requires no regulated parts.[26] Apart from the printed parts, it can be completed with regular hardware store components, making it a weapon that can be entirely assembled at home.[27] The FGC-9 has become one of the most prevalent hybrid firearms within both the far-right and criminal networks. It has also inspired the development of other hybrid weapons with no regulated components such as the Urutau and Nutty9.

The main motivation for the creation of the FGC-9 by Duygu was to circumvent gun laws in Europe and enable anyone to own and manufacture firearms.[28] He founded an online community of enthusiasts and gun designers called Deterrence Dispensed to enable them to share printed gun designs and encourage their use.[29] As a result, he has been revered as a martyr for the right to bear arms.[30] Duygu was found to have xenophobic, anti-Semitic and incel tendencies.[31]

A far-right-linked individual named Jim Holmgren from Sweden was alleged to have sourced firearm designs from Duygu's Deterrence Dispensed and was active in its online community.[32] Holmgren was found to have attempted to manufacture several types of 3D-printed firearms. In addition to ideological factors, geography plays a role in the prevalence of 3D-printed firearms among the far-right. The far-right is primarily centred in Europe, where gun laws are relatively strict and access to weapons is challenging. In Europe, buying a gun would require access to the black market and it would cost approximately £ 5,000 GBP.[33] 3D-printing offers a cheap, viable alternative to obtain weapons which would only cost at most a few hundred pounds.

Jihadist groups, on the other hand, are primarily centred in the Middle East and North Africa, where weapons are easily available through the black market and smuggling networks. Thus, there is no incentive on the part of the jihadists to engage in 3D-printing of weapons. It must be noted here that 3D-printed weapons require a substantial amount of time and effort, and a considerable amount of skill to manufacture. It is not as easy as 'Download-Print-Shoot'. The quality and efficacy of the weapon is highly dependent on the skill and experience of the maker.[34] Therefore, conventional weapons remain the more effective weapon of choice, particularly in areas where they are readily available compared to regions where they are difficult to obtain. 3D-printed weapons may be an attractive option only in the latter scenario.

Selected Case Studies

In February 2024, a three-man far-right cell comprising two youths aged 24 and a 33 year old, were accused of plotting an attack on an Islamic centre in Leeds using a 3D-printed firearm.[35] During the raid, British police discovered a 3D-printed FGC-9 firearm, a 3D-printer and instructions of how to make 3D-printed firearms, alongside neo-Nazi material.[36] The cell was part of a Telegram chat group that discussed arms and terrorist plotting.[37]

In October 2023, a German cell whose members were believed to be part of a German right-wing extremist group called Knockout 51, was found to be in possession of 3D-printed firearm parts, and 3D-printing equipment, materials and instructions.[38] Similarly, in July 2023, Finnish police uncovered a four-man accelerationist cell that had manufactured FGC-9s and had intended to use them in ethnic and racially motivated attacks against public infrastructure and politicians.[39] Likewise, a far-right-linked individual was arrested in Tenerife, Spain, in 2020 for allegedly running a 3D-printed weapons workshop.[40]

In April 2024, a 35 year old from California was arrested for possession of 3D-printed firearm components and two 3D-printers.[41] He was affiliated with a racially motivated violent extremist group called San Fernando Valley Peckerwoods, and had used social media to post anti-Semitic remarks and to offer to manufacture 3D-printed firearms for others.[42]

While most terrorist cases linked to 3D-printed firearms are far-right in nature, other ideologies also emerge from time to time. For instance, in March 2024, a 23-year-old youth from Pescara, Italy who was allegedly influenced by left-wing anarchist ideology was arrested for manufacturing an FGC-9.[43] He had also attempted to manufacture ammunition and intended to spread these weapons among anarchist circles.[44]

An Evolving Threat

The threat from 3D-printed firearms is evolving rapidly. Information, material and manuals pertaining to the manufacture of these weapons are readily available on the open-source web. 3D-printing technology is also becoming cheaper and easier to use. New firearm designs that are becoming increasingly easier to produce and that make use of lesser commercial parts (entirely homemade and improvised) are being developed.

Considering these developments, while still primarily a criminal enterprise, 3D-printed firearms are becoming increasingly more attractive to terrorist elements, particularly the far-right in Europe. These weapons will be the weapon of choice for individuals who prioritise secrecy and anonymity as these can be manufactured almost entirely at home and without any interaction with the outside world.[45] Although the durability of these weapons is heavily dependent on the skill of the maker and quality of the material used, these weapons are still very capable of localised, small-scale attacks. Walther notes that the threat projection can be divided into three categories: gun designers developing better models; advances in chemistry leading to the development of stronger plastics and polymers; and advancements in 3D-printers themselves.[46]

While 3D-printing is primarily done with plastics, the dawn of metal printing is a new development that needs to be monitored. In 2013, a Texas-based engineering firm successfully built the first metal 3D-printed firearm – a Browning 1911 pistol – a standard issue firearm for the US military until 1985.[47] The gun managed to successfully fire 50 rounds.[48] While expensive industrial-level printers were used then,[49] advancements in technology cannot discount the possibility of metal 3D-printers becoming cheaper and more accessible in the same way as polymer 3D-printers. Some metal milling machines

costing as low as US$1200, which allow users to mill firearm components (such as lower receivers from steel and aluminium) at home, are commercially available on the market.[50]

Counter Measures

The dual-use nature of 3D-printing technology poses several counter terrorism challenges to the authorities. In this regard, strong legislation, cyber-intelligence and intelligence sharing among authorities are vital. As the primary starting point for printing a weapon is in the online manuals, some countries such as Singapore have banned the possession and downloading of these manuals.[51] The National Crime Agency in the UK has called for similar measures to be enforced in the country.[52] Under Canadian law, the production and possession of 3D-printed firearms are prohibited.[53]

3D-printing is heavily dependent on online communication and activity. As such, cyber intelligence and patrolling of online chat rooms and social media channels by law enforcement is key to interdicting this phenomenon. Apart from cyber intelligence, cooperation with other services such as postal and delivery services is crucial. For example, if an individual is found to be purchasing commercial parts such as barrels and slides without the lower receivers, this can be considered a red flag and an indication that the individual might be manufacturing his or her own receivers.

In conclusion, the rapid evolution of 3D-printed firearms presents a multifaceted challenge, with readily available information and advancing technology making these weapons increasingly accessible. Addressing this threat necessitates strong legislation, enhanced cyber-intelligence capabilities, and international cooperation among various stakeholders, combined with a mix of preventive and proactive measures to contain and prevent it from spilling over into a national and international security concern.

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2024 Elections in the West: Are They Helping the Extreme Right?

Kalicharan Veera Singam

2024 has been dubbed the "ultimate"[1] election year, with more than 60 countries and territories worldwide undertaking major elections. Some elections in many parts of the West come as the world is transiting through a post-COVID-19 phase amidst further intensifying Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts and a general economic slowdown. Across the West, the political centre has somewhat eroded, and a sizeable segment of the political right has shifted further to the right. Worryingly, extreme right-wing terrorist incidents in the United States (US) have increased in recent years,[2] and the threat has "remained significant" and stable in Western Europe.[3] This article assesses how the extreme right-wing terrorist threat could evolve and take advantage of the inroads the right-wing political movement has made in the just concluded 2024 European Union (EU) parliamentary election and the upcoming US presidential election.

The Far-Right's Complex Relationship with Mainstream Politics

Right-wing politics is a major and legitimate component of the political landscape in Western democracies, where political affiliations and positions are often broadly grouped as 'left' and 'right'. Across the political spectrum, people with diverse value systems, beliefs and positions hold varying stances on a range of issues. Generally, right-leaning people and groups hold conservative and traditional views on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and fiscal policies. The far-right, in itself a broad category, is a subset of right-wing political ideologies that espouse "extreme nationalism, nativist ideologies, and authoritarian tendencies".[4] The far-right advocates for lesser (or in some cases no) immigration from non-Western countries and take anti-Islamic, anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ+ positions. Some Western far-right groups are also driven by and promote Christian nationalism to replace secular, liberal democracies.[5]

Given the diverse nature of the West's right-wing political movements, there is often non-standardisation of the use of terms related to the far-right. This article adopts the definition by the political scientist and eminent scholar of the Western far-right, Cas Mudde. According to Mudde, the far-right comprises the radical and extreme right.[6] While the radical right rejects liberal democracy and promotes an illiberal order, the extreme right rejects democracy altogether,[7] although sometimes it is challenging to clearly demarcate the two. Some far-right parties have put forward very intolerant political views targeted at particular minority communities, especially Muslims and the LGBTQ+ community. Geertz Wilders, whose party won a shocking victory in the Dutch parliamentary elections in December 2023, for instance, had proposed banning mosques and the Quran in the Netherlands.[8] The proposal was later retracted during considerations to form a political coalition with moderate parties.[9] While Geertz later fell out of the running to become the Dutch prime minister, the agenda seemed rather extreme.

For its part, the extreme right can, on occasion, take things further by explicitly calling for violence against communities that it deems undesirable. Unlike the far-right political parties in the West, the extreme right takes an "anti-democratic position towards democracy"[10] and seeks to upend the democratic and liberal order in the West through violence.

Extreme Right-Wing and the 2024 US Presidential Election

In the United States (US), former President Donald Trump's legal troubles have not dampened his popularity, including among a few extreme right groups. The former president is set to be the Republican Party's presidential nominee for the November 2024 election in a rematch with the incumbent Joseph Biden. The extreme right in the US gathered momentum during Trump's first

term in office from 2016 to 2020.[11] This culminated in violent rioting by some Trump supporters and members of extreme right groups such as the Proud Boys, Three Percenters and No White Guilt, at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.[12] In the lead-up to the polls, Trump's rhetoric has been categorised in some quarters as more overtly authoritarian and polarising, raising concerns that if re-elected, his presidency could embolden the extreme right further.[13]

The Biden-Trump 2024 election rematch is galvanising the extreme right again, but there are some differences this time around. Curiously, there has been a drop in the public appearances and activities of the Proud Boys, which is unusual and uncharacteristic for a group that promotes and engages in political violence, and which played an important role in the US Capitol insurrection in 2021.[14] The greater public scrutiny of the group and the conviction and jailing of its key leaders, such as Enrique Tarrio, who has been sentenced to decades in jail,[15] could have motivated some to leave the group. Some who left the Proud Boys are believed to have joined other even more extremist groups that have since emerged, such as Active Chaos, Patriot Front and Blood Tribe.[16]

There is also potential for violence from the extreme right if Trump does not win the 2024 election.[17] Trump's many legal civil and criminal civil cases and a possible conviction might erode the support of some relatively moderate Republicans.[18] But these legal troubles, which the former president alleges are politically motivated and witch hunts, might end up further motivating his hardcore base. Extreme right groups and some of their followers who are serving long jail sentences for their involvement in the 2021 Capitol Hill riots might be banking on Trump's victory and a subsequent presidential pardon.[19] Some commentators have gone as far as to claim that if the former president faces jailtime, amid his mounting legal troubles and conviction in the hush money trial,[20] some extreme right groups and hardcore supporters may even try to mount a jailbreak to free the former president.[21] A few experts have also cautioned that, in a worst-case scenario, the US could be headed towards a civil war-like situation,[22] and Trump's court cases and the 2024 presidential election might serve as inflection points.

The extreme right's conspiratorial narratives related to the election also need to be watched, given their apparent expanding reach. According to one estimate, around a quarter of Americans – an increase from previous years – believe in the QAnon conspiracy.[23] The QAnon conspiracy originated in 2017, and is centred upon the idea that the political opponents of Trump in the US' Democratic Party are running a secret cabal and child-trafficking ring and are conspiring against the former president. QAnon continues to inspire acts of violence,[24] raising concerns that more incidents might follow in the rest of the year. Another related conspiracy theory is the "Red Caesar", which promotes the idea that an authoritarian right-wing leader, i.e., Trump, is needed to restore the Republic.

Christian nationalism is also on the rise.[25] Some obscure groups and societies, such as the very secretive Society for the American Civic Renewal, have been advocating for a redefining of American politics with a greater role for Christianity.[26] This has not had wide traction previously. However, increasingly some actions and statements of former President Trump are directed at galvanising support from Christian groups,[27] to an extent unseen before. In a video pitch, believed to be for raising funds for his lawsuits and election campaign, he promoted the "God Bless the USA" Bible,[28] which contains religious scripture along with the American Constitution. Trump has also accused Democrats of being anti-Christian and called November 5, the date of the presidential election, as "Christian visibility day".[29]

Extreme Right-Wing and the 2024 EU Parliamentary Elections

Unlike the US presidential system, which has become increasingly politically polarised, a number of countries in Western Europe operate as parliamentary democracies. Also, as the European Union (EU) is a regional bloc, there is no central figure in Europe like Trump who can galvanise the far-right, and the movement is thus more fragmented. But there are still concerns over the inroads the far-right has made in the recently concluded EU parliamentary elections and what that might mean for violence from the extreme right – according to some observers, the far-right's electoral gains can increase the possibility of violence.[30]

There was a steady level of terrorist incidents from the extreme right even whilst far-right parties were making significant gains in their national politics in the past few years in the EU countries.[31] While the data does not show a clear trend of a rise or fall in terrorist incidents and arrests, there was a steady level of activity that should warrant continued attention to the problem. The number of "completed", "failed" and "foiled" attacks remained low in single digits.[32]But there were a considerable number of arrests for "right-wing terrorist offences" in the EU member states, with France, Germany and Italy having the greatest number of arrests.[33]

In a few countries in Europe, such as Hungary and Italy, far-right parties have become part of governing coalitions in recent years.[34] The far-right's capture of political power in these countries reflects a sea change in political sentiments, also noticeable to some degree in other parts of Western Europe. In France and Germany, far-right political parties have gained significant momentum in the political opposition. However, their rise is also being challenged by parties in the political centre and the left, which still constitute the core political base in these countries. The Alternative for Germany (AfD), a far-right political party which adopts some of the most hardline positions on immigration and minorities, has gained greater traction as a political force in recent years.[35] In the recently concluded EU parliamentary elections, it is expected to improve further on its performance from the 2019 election   .[36] This is even while the AfD is suspected of supporting extremism.[37] Entities like the AfD also face significant opposition from civil society groups, who organise counter-movements and protests.

In other non-EU Western democracies, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, the far-right still operates very much on the fringes. But even in these countries, certain far-right narratives on immigration and conservative policies might be slipping into the political 'mainstream' as centrist parties try to appease voters leaning to the far-right.

Thus far, the far-right's impact has been largely seen in the national elections of individual countries in Europe. The surge by far-right coalitions Identity and Democracy (ID) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ERC)in the 2024 EU parliamentary elections on the other hand, could shape the character and influence the agenda of the regional bloc. There are, however, disagreements within the far-right parties and among their leaders over issues such as support for Vladimir Putin in Russia's war on Ukraine and the deportation of immigrants.

Concerns over the infiltration of state apparatuses, such as the police, the military services and other institutions by right-wing extremists have further increased recently. A "culture of extremism" with an increase in sympathy for far-right ideas and racism has developed among some segments of the UK and European police forces.[38] The situation is particularly acute in Germany, where at least 400 officers at various levels of government are currently being investigated for having right-wing extremist views or conspiracy ideas.[39] Some of these officials have been found to have spread extremist right-wing ideas, engage in racist rhetoric and "relativize Nazi crimes".[40] The political inroads by the far-right in the EU bloc can make this threat even more pronounced.

It is as yet unclear how the inroads by the far-right political parties in the 2024 EU parliamentary elections will impact extreme right-linked terrorism in the member countries. It is possible that the political gains of the far-right can appease and placate some demands of the extreme right, as some policy positions of the far-right may appear to come close to what the extreme right seeks to achieve through violent acts. But there is also a limit to the far-right's influence in EU policies. Although the far-right parties have increased their numbers in the EU Parliament and would seek to steer the bloc,[41] they may only be able to exert limited influence in major policies. The set-up of the EU Parliament, with an independent EU Council helming it, also makes it harder for a far-right takeover of the institution. Also, some centrist and left parties have formed a firewall to not work with the far-right parties. The far-right ID coalition excluded the AfD in the lead-up to the EU parliamentary elections, considered a major shake-up in right-wing politics in Europe, as a key leader of the latter sought to downplay the role of the SS, a Nazi paramilitary group, in manning concentration camps during World War II. It is therefore possible that while the far-right is gaining ground politically, some in the extreme right may not see it as a gain for their movement.

Countering the Extreme Right

Countering the extreme right is relatively under-explored. Given the increasing mainstream political association of some right-wing extremist sentiments, it is likely to become even harder to challenge the extreme right. However, some policy approaches can help limit the spread of extremist sentiments and violence associated with the ideology. In the UK context, for instance, where right-wing extremism among security forces has emerged as a concern, enhancing vetting processes, addressing "hypermasculinity and racism", and improving accountability mechanisms have been highlighted as relevant approaches that can help manage the threat.[42] While these approaches were derived based on the UK context, which is also set for a general election on July 4, they can also be applicable in the EU countries that share parallels with the UK. Also, "reducing motives", "reducing means", and "removing opportunities" for violent actors can be some ways through which law enforcement can lower the possibility of violence happening in and around the election period,[43] especially in the US, where the political landscape is extremely polarised.

Conclusion

The 2024 elections in the US and the EU might be watersheds. In the EU, they could usher in an era of a shift to the political right, one that has already happened at the national level in some countries. Trends in the US suggest there is a possibility that the presidential election in November could be a major inflection point. While it will be an important year for the far-right, it remains to be seen how it will impact the extreme right movement. Caveats apply, but the situation appears to be more polarised and volatile in the US than in the EU, with a potentially greater degree of large-scale violence from the extreme right in the former.

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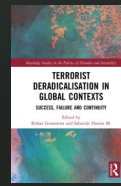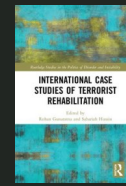
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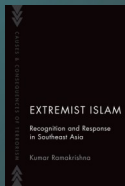
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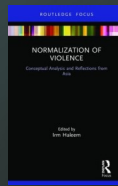
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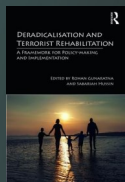
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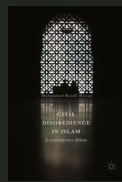
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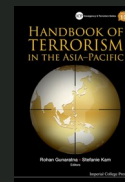
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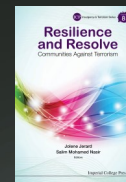
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