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The Rising Threat of Far Right and Religious Extremism: Safeguarding Singapore's Social Harmony

By Mohamed Nassir

SYNOPSIS

The rise of far-right and religious extremism poses significant challenges to Singapore's social harmony, with recent cases of radicalisation underscoring the dangers of misinformation, disinformation, and extremist narratives circulated online. Strengthening social cohesion, promoting responsible online engagement, and fostering community collaboration are key to combating such extremism.

COMMENTARY

It is disturbing to learn about the detention of a Singaporean student, [Nick Lee Xing Qiu](#), just 18 years of age, under the Internal Security Act (ISA), as well as the cases of radicalised Singaporean, [Hamizah Hamzah](#) who was issued with a restriction order in January 2025, and the 34-year-old Malaysian worker, Saharuddin Saari, who was detained and since been repatriated. Their radicalisation is a reminder that extremist ideologies continue to persist online and will, unfortunately, radicalise individuals, young and old.

The Rise of Far-Right Extremism and Its Impact

Lee identified himself as an "East Asian supremacist" who idolised the lone-wolf terrorist Brenton Tarrant and role-played him [attacking Muslims in Christchurch](#), New Zealand, on 15 March 2019. The attacks killed 51 men, women and children.

Lee believed in the "Great Replacement Theory", which posited that non-White immigrants are replacing white populations in the West. Lee feared that the Chinese majority in Singapore was in danger of being replaced by a "rapidly growing Muslim population". He envisioned starting a race war by posting anti-Malay/Muslim

propaganda online, which he hoped would sow enmity between the Chinese and Malays.

Far-right extremism is likely to grow worldwide as far-right activists increasingly engulf segments of western socio-politics, fuelled by like-minded politicians advancing their agenda and energising hate groups.

The history of far-right terrorism in the US dates back to 1865 with the establishment of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which is considered the first case in America of a [homegrown terrorist movement](#). Since then, domestic terrorism in the US has [continued to rise](#), with the largest category being racially- or ethnically-motivated extremism.

Kumar Ramakrishna, the Professor of National Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, highlighted that the danger of white supremacy lies in its [fusion of white nationalism and Christianity](#), rejecting the concept of a secular multiracial democracy.

Impact of the Israel-Hamas Conflict

The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza continues to perpetuate radicalism, most recently radicalising Singaporean Hamizah Hamzah, a 56-year-old housewife. Her journey began as she closely followed the developments in the war and supported the military operations of the Axis of Resistance (AOR), comprising groups like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. She even helped to manage several pro-AOR social media groups and promoted their activities online, glorifying armed violence and martyrdom.

The prospect of forcibly expelling Palestinians from Gaza, as proposed under Trump's plan to transform the enclave into the "[Riviera of the Middle East](#)", poses a grave threat to Middle East stability and would dramatically intensify the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, risking a broader regional war. The plan, likely to be perceived as "[ethnic cleansing](#)", would provoke widespread outrage across the region.

The displacement of Palestinians would fuel existing grievances, embolden militant groups and destabilise the region further. The resulting escalation of violence and imageries of the war will resonate globally, particularly through social media, amplifying feelings of despair, anger and revenge. Extremist groups could exploit these developments to advance their narratives and further radicalise individuals. The global repercussions would be profound and could lead to heightened security threats far beyond the Middle East.

Balanced and Responsible Online Engagement

The sufferings of the Palestinians under occupation are palpable, and being moved by their plight is natural. While there is nothing wrong with consuming content about Palestinian suffering or empathising with the people of Gaza and the West Bank, it is crucial to approach such issues with a balanced perspective.

The actions of individuals cannot affect global politics or resolve the plight of Palestinians facing unrelenting oppression. Doomscrolling online content and

[prolonged exposure](#) to the news and imagery of war can be detrimental to one's mental health and may even lead to radicalism and extremism. One should, therefore, adopt a balanced perspective and channel one's energy to the well-being of those suffering by supporting humanitarian efforts to rebuild their lives.

Building Resilience Against Radicalisation

It is deeply concerning to see people becoming radicalised, often because of misinformation and disinformation. Armed violence is never a solution – it only perpetuates suffering and deepens division. The key to resilience against misinformation and disinformation lies in moderation, not just in our reactions but also in how we consume online content, even if they are accurate.

For religious people in doubt, it is crucial to seek guidance from credible religious teachers who can help them navigate the challenges while staying true to authentic religious and personal values. Surrounding oneself with trustworthy mentors and immersing oneself in sound knowledge is essential in resisting harmful ideologies.

Conclusion

The Singapore authorities, working with community groups – religious and non-religious – will undoubtedly keep abreast with extremist, exclusivist and radical ideologies and trends, wherever they may emanate from, using all available measures to curb them.

The alarming trend of far-right extremism and radical Islamic extremism illustrates the persistent threat extremist ideologies present worldwide and not just to Western or Middle Eastern nations. In a globalised world, extremist narratives will find their way into Singapore's social fabric through the media, online platforms, and transnational influences.

If left unchecked, such toxic ideologies will undermine Singapore's precious social harmony. This underscores the stark necessity of continued vigilance, proactive efforts, and authentic narratives to counter extremist ideologies, whether or not they are conveyed through misinformation or disinformation.

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