Towards ICCS 2025

Masculinity, Online Radicalisation, and the Far Right: A Global Perspective

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SYNOPSIS

The intersection of masculinity, online radicalisation, and far-right extremism has become an increasingly pressing concern, as digital platforms provide a gateway for disaffected young men to be drawn to extremist ideologies. Hyper-masculinity plays a central role in this process, with both global and local case studies demonstrating the transnational nature of far-right narratives. A comprehensive approach to counter-extremism is required, encompassing the redefinition of masculinity, the promotion of community engagement, and the regulation of online spaces to disrupt extremist recruitment strategies.

COMMENTARY

The terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, by a white supremacist during which he live-streamed his deadly assault on two mosques, remains a stark illustration of the dangers posed by online radicalisation. This incident highlights the global reach and influence of extremist ideologies, demonstrating how acts of terror can inspire copycat attacks across borders.

In a chilling demonstration of the attack's ideological reach, a 17-year-old Singaporean, inspired by the Christchurch massacre, identified five mosques as potential targets in June 2024, [intending to carry out a mass killing](#) before taking his own life. Such cases underscore the urgency of understanding the underlying factors that drive young men toward violent extremism. Such alarming instances of youth radicalisation emphasise the critical need to delve deeper into the factors that make young individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies.

Far-right extremism remains predominantly male-driven, yet discussions on radicalisation often fail to incorporate a gendered perspective. Policy approaches have traditionally centred on ideological and socioeconomic drivers, neglecting the [role of masculinity](#) as a key factor in the radicalisation process. While these conventional approaches have their merits, they fail to adequately address a fundamental aspect of radicalisation: the complex interplay between masculinity and extremist ideologies.

Understanding how young men navigate identity formation in the context of shifting gender norms and economic uncertainties is crucial to comprehending the appeal of far-right extremism. By examining these factors, we can gain valuable insights into why far-right extremist groups hold such allure for certain young men. These groups do not merely propagate ideological doctrines; they provide a framework for belonging, purpose, and an [alternative conception of masculinity](#).

Masculinity as a Driver of Radicalisation

Far-right movements strategically appeal to young men who feel alienated in a rapidly evolving social landscape. The erosion of traditional notions of masculinity, historically associated with dominance, control, and authority, has led to a sense of disempowerment among certain demographics.

Extremist narratives capitalise on this sentiment, framing gender equality and multiculturalism as existential threats to male identity. The resulting grievance fuels recruitment, as online communities reinforce the perception that masculinity itself is under siege.

Scholarly analyses, such as [Michael Kimmer's work on masculinity and extremism (2018)](#), highlight how far-right groups function as pseudo-fraternal spaces, offering young men a structured pathway to reclaim their perceived lost status. He suggests that these groups offer a means for young men to try to reclaim what they believe is their rightful place in society.

These groups do not merely radicalise individuals ideologically; they provide mentorship, guiding recruits through a process that equates violence with a legitimate assertion of manhood. The glorification of aggression within these communities normalises violent action as a necessary response to perceived societal decline.

Digital Platforms as Incubators of Extremist Masculinity

Radicalisation no longer requires physical congregations or face-to-face recruitment. Online spaces, particularly within the so-called "[manosphere](#)", function as breeding grounds for extremist ideologies. Platforms such as 4chan, Reddit's incel forums, and encrypted messaging applications serve as digital arenas where masculinity is redefined in reactionary terms. These platforms cultivate an environment in which traditional masculinity is not only venerated but framed as being under direct attack.

A range of digital content, from memes to YouTube commentaries and podcasts, reinforces the notion that young men are victims of feminism, political correctness, and cultural diversity. While figures such as [Jordan Peterson](#) and [Andrew Tate](#) do not explicitly endorse violent extremism, their rhetoric often provides a gateway to

reactionary politics. Far-right organisations build upon these narratives, escalating them into calls for direct action against perceived adversaries.

Groups such as the [Proud Boys](#) exemplify how masculinity crises are exploited to radicalise individuals. Their structured initiation rituals, which emphasise loyalty, physical toughness, and ideological commitment, replicate traditional male bonding experiences. This digital brotherhood offers an intoxicating sense of identity and purpose, making disengagement exceedingly difficult. Radicalisation in this context extends beyond ideological indoctrination; it operates as a form of emotional and psychological manipulation.

The [Christchurch attacker's manifesto](#) illustrates the extent to which gendered anxieties underpin contemporary extremist ideologies. His writings reflect not only racial and religious prejudices but also a fixation on restoring traditional masculinity through violent means. This highlights the necessity of considering gender as an integral factor in counter-radicalisation efforts.

Singapore: A Local Manifestation of a Global Phenomenon

Singapore, despite its reputation for multicultural cohesion, is not immune to these global trends. The increasing prevalence of radicalised youth, including individuals as young as 15, demonstrates that far-right ideologies and hyper-masculinity transcend geographical boundaries. Hence, these concepts, similar to "whiteness", are not merely racial constructs but rather [ideological frameworks](#) that circulate through digital networks, influencing young people regardless of their ethnic background.

In a highly connected society like Singapore, social media algorithms play a pivotal role in amplifying extremist content. Vulnerable youths can transition seamlessly from consuming fitness advice to engaging with far-right propaganda. The radicalisation process is neither incidental nor organic; it is engineered through sophisticated online mechanisms designed to exploit personal insecurities.

Policy Considerations for Countering Far-Right Extremism

Traditional counter-extremism measures, which focus primarily on surveillance and law enforcement, are insufficient in addressing the root causes of radicalisation. Arresting individuals after they have been radicalised addresses only the symptoms of the problem rather than the underlying conditions that drive young men toward extremism.

A broader strategy is required – one that integrates community-based interventions, digital governance, and reform of notions of masculinity. To address these underlying conditions, a multifaceted approach is necessary.

One crucial aspect of this broader strategy involves addressing the immediate social environment of vulnerable individuals. Strengthening [familial and social support structures](#) is essential. Parents and guardians must be equipped to engage with young men on issues related to emotional resilience, identity, and sense of belonging. [Education systems](#) should incorporate mental health support, emotional intelligence

development, and anti-bullying initiatives to mitigate the factors that contribute to vulnerability.

Moving beyond digital interventions, it is pertinent to create tangible alternatives in the physical world. While addressing offline factors is essential, the online landscape presents its own set of challenges that must be tackled. Regulating digital spaces must be a priority. Technology companies have a responsibility to curtail the spread of extremist content through algorithmic adjustments and stronger community guidelines. While de-platforming efforts are a necessary step, they must be complemented by proactive interventions that disrupt recruitment pathways.

Community engagement initiatives should be expanded to offer alternative avenues for identity formation. Structured mentorship programmes, team sports, and volunteer initiatives can provide young men with a sense of belonging that far-right organisations currently monopolise.

At the core of many extremist ideologies lies a distorted view of masculinity, which must be addressed head-on. Redefining masculinity is particularly critical, necessitating the promotion of role models who embody emotional intelligence, inclusivity, and resilience rather than aggression and dominance.

To further combat extremist narratives, bridging the generation gap is essential. Facilitating intergenerational dialogue is another vital strategy. Encouraging conversations between older and younger generations on themes of gender, diversity, and societal change can pre-emptively counter the narratives that drive young men toward extremism.

Conclusion

Far-right extremism thrives in environments of anger, isolation, and disillusionment. Without meaningful alternatives, extremist groups will continue to attract vulnerable individuals. Countering radicalisation is not merely about preventing violence; it is about fostering a society in which young men feel valued, heard, and empowered to contribute positively.

Addressing the intersection of masculinity and radicalisation is imperative for disrupting the cycle that fuels violent extremism. The question is not whether action is necessary, but rather whether societies can afford the consequences of inaction. Failing to address this connection could have serious consequences for society.

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