

# Testament to Murder: The Violent Far-Right's Increasing Use of Terrorist Manifestos

Author: Jacob Ware

Over the past few years, several major far-right terrorist attacks have been accompanied by detailed, published manifestos, which outline ideology, motivation, and tactical choices. Given that such manifestos are rapidly becoming an essential part of far-right violence, they urgently require more detailed analysis. In this Policy Brief, Jacob Ware assesses the manifestos for common themes, before discussing implications for counterterrorism scholars and practitioners.

## Introduction

Shortly after news broke of another devastating far-right terrorist attack striking the United States—this time in El Paso, Texas on August 3, 2019—a disturbing manifesto surfaced on social media sites. The piece originated on 8chan, a message board site, and detailed a hatred of Hispanics and fear of immigration. The manifesto’s authenticity was soon confirmed, leaving it as enduring testament to America’s latest terrorist attack. Just months later, another far-right attack—this time in Halle, Germany—produced yet another manifesto, the latest in a recent trend in which far-right attackers pen and publish manifestos in an effort to justify their attacks and inspire copycats.

These manifestos have been well covered in the media, with reporting mostly focused on rhetoric and meme culture,<sup>1</sup> the message boards where the manifestos are most-often posted,<sup>2</sup> and the debate on censorship.<sup>3</sup> The manifestos have also begun to garner government attention, with the September 2019 U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence* repeatedly noting recently-penned manifestos and their impact in inspiring subsequent attacks.<sup>4</sup> They have, however, somewhat evaded academic analysis. Academic research so far has focused on older individual cases,<sup>5</sup> language,<sup>6</sup> and the role

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Kevin Roose, “A Mass Murder of, and for, the Internet,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2019; Jane Coaston, “The New Zealand shooter’s manifesto shows how white nationalist rhetoric spreads,” *Vox*, March 18, 2019; Luke Barnes, “With each new attack, far-right extremists’ manifestos are being ‘memeticized,’” *ThinkProgress*, April 30, 2019; Lizzie Dearden, “Revered as a saint by online extremists, how Christchurch shooter inspired copycat terrorists around the world,” *The Independent*, August 24, 2019; and Tess Owen, “How the Germany Synagogue Shooter’s Manifesto Follows the Far-Right Playbook,” *Vice*, October 10, 2019;

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Marantz, “The Poway Synagogue Shooting Follows an Unsettling New Script,” *New Yorker*, April 29, 2019; and Drew Harwell, “Three mass shootings this year began with a hateful screed on 8chan. Its founder calls it a terrorist refuge in plain sight.” *Washington Post*, August 4, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> James S. Robbins, “El Paso shooting: Extremist manifestos key to understanding, stopping political violence,” *USA Today*, August 7, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> “Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence,” *Department of Homeland Security*, September 2019, 10.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Sveinung Sandberg, “Are self-narratives strategic or determined, unified or fragmented? Reading Breivik’s manifesto in light of narrative criminology,” *Acta Sociologica* 56, no. 1 (February 2013): 69-83; Mattias Gardell, “Crusader Dreams: Oslo 22/7, Islamophobia, and the Quest for a Monocultural Europe,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 1 (2014): 129-155; Sveinung Sandberg, “Terrorism as Cultural Bricolage: The Case of Anders Behring Breivik,” in Daniel Ziegler, Marco Gerster, and Steffen Krämer (eds), *Framing Excessive Violence: Discourse and Dynamics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 177-196; Brett A. Barnett, “20 Years Later: A Look Back at the Unabomber Manifesto,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (2015): 60-71; Alejandro Beutel, “The New Zealand Terrorist’s Manifesto: A look at some of the key narratives, beliefs and tropes,” *START UMD*, April 30, 2019; and Paul Stott, “The White Wolves: The Terrorist Manifesto That Wasn’t?” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 4 (August 2019): 56-62; Rishi Chebrolu, “The racial lens of Dylann Roof: racial anxiety and white nationalist rhetoric on new media,” *Review of Communication* 20, no. 1 (2020): 47-68.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Kaati, Amendra Shrestha, and Katie Cohen, “Linguistic analysis of lone offender manifestos,” Paper presented at 2016 IEEE International Conference on Cybercrime and Computer Forensic (ICCCF), Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (2016).

manifestos play in non-violent movements,<sup>7</sup> as opposed to ideological and political content and strategic impact for terrorists, particularly when concerning the rising violent far-right. The latter presents a gap in the terrorism literature, which requires urgent attention given the rise in attacks and accompanying manifestos.<sup>8</sup> In the following paragraphs, these texts will be recalled and analyzed for their ideological themes and their counter-terrorism implications.

## A Rising Trend

“In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.” So began the El Paso gunman’s own manifesto, before stating, with chilling concision, “this attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.”<sup>9</sup> Patrick Crusius would continue for four more pages. But, in 21 short words, the 21-year-old gunman had already laid out his justification for the attack that killed 22 shoppers at the Walmart at Cielo Vista Mall in El Paso, Texas. The social media-hosted manifesto went on to repeat many themes prevalent on far-right message boards, and recalled several racial and political grievances shared by far-right terrorist predecessors.

In addition to Crusius’ text, this Policy Brief will analyze five further far-right terrorist manifestos. Stephan Balliet, a German neo-Nazi, published several online documents before opening fire outside a synagogue in Halle, Germany in October 2019. Shortly before attacking the Chabad of Poway synagogue in Poway, California in April of that year, 19-year-old John Earnest published an open letter to 8chan, discussing many of the grievances later echoed by Crusius. A document raising similar themes was uploaded to 8chan by Brenton Tarrant prior to his massacre at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand a month earlier. Dylann Roof, the perpetrator of the June 2015 Charleston church shooting, uploaded his manifesto to a website titled [www.lastrhodesian.com](http://www.lastrhodesian.com). And, finally, Anders Breivik published a 1,518-page document prior to his devastating attacks in Norway in July 2011.

Each of the selected manifestos clearly outlines white supremacist or neo-Nazi views, and is directly linked to attacks, each of which are part of the recent rise in violence that began with Breivik’s 2011 mass murder. There are others, too, not directly relevant here but important nonetheless: the individual who committed the Knoxville Unitarian Universalist church shooting in July 2008 published a manifesto outlining his hatred of liberals;<sup>10</sup> the incel—a community of young men angry at perceived sexual rejection and connected to the alt-right—perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista massacre released a 107,000-word justification for his violence;<sup>11</sup> the far-right 2016 Munich shooter wrote, but never published, a manifesto explaining his motivations;<sup>12</sup> and the

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah Harrison, “Decoding Manifestos and Other Political Texts: The Case of Extreme-Right Ideology,” in Michael Bruter and Martin Lodge (eds), *Political Science Research Methods in Action* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 47-63.

<sup>8</sup> Certain scholars have taken steps to address the gap, and their work should be expanded. See, for example, J.M. Berger, “The Dangerous Spread of Extremist Manifestos,” *Atlantic*, February 26, 2019; Cristina Ariza, “Are we witnessing the rise of a new terrorist trend?” *openDemocracy*, November 5, 2019; and Graham Macklin, “The El Paso Terrorist Attack: The Chain Reaction of Global Right-Wing Terror,” *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 11 (December 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth,” August 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Kaati, Shrestha, and Cohen, “Linguistic analysis of lone offender manifestos.”

<sup>11</sup> Keegan Hankes and Alex Amend, “The Alt-Right is Killing People,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, February 5, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Berger, “The Dangerous Spread of Extremist Manifestos.”

perpetrator of the March 2017 murder of a black man in New York City penned a screed titled “Declaration of Total War on Negroes.”<sup>13</sup> Anti-government attacks in the United States have also been accompanied by manifestos, including an anti-IRS screed published by 2010 Austin attacker Andrew Joseph Stack III<sup>14</sup> and an anti-government social media post uploaded by Jerad Miller, who attacked police officers along with his wife in Las Vegas in 2014.<sup>15</sup> These are not included in this analysis for the sake of controlling for ideology and intent. The attacks were either (i) not perpetrated in the name of white supremacist or neo-Nazi ideology, (ii) were apparently driven more by personal grievances than by strict ideology, or (iii) were not terrorist attacks targeting a broader community. One additional notable omission is the manifesto accompanying the February 2020 shootings in Hanau, Germany. Unlike the others, the screed was not published in English, and the gunman’s writings indicated serious mental health issues.<sup>16</sup>

Those who do not formally publish their own manifestos might reference other influential works. *The Turner Diaries*, a novel published by William Luther Pierce in 1978, has been cited by many attackers—including Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh—and has influenced perpetrators of over 200 killings since its publication.<sup>17</sup> The perpetrator of the July 2019 Gilroy Garlic Festival shooting implored his social media followers to read *Might is Right*, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century work popular with the online extreme right.<sup>18</sup> Organized groups also draw inspiration from published texts. For instance, the Atomwaffen Division bases much of its ideology off *Siege*, a string of newsletters produced by neo-Nazi James Mason in the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> While such works do not constitute “manifestos” in the traditional sense, they are important nonetheless: like manifestos, they crystallize ideology and, in the attackers’ minds, justify attacks.

## Themes

An analysis of the six aforementioned far-right terrorist manifestos highlights a number of important themes, four of which are discussed here: race, Europe, the political climate, and the portrayal of an act of terrorism as self-defense and as a last resort.

Firstly, the manifestos all invoke race, immigration, and religion, suggesting that a perceived clash of races and civilizations is the most important galvanizing factor for today’s extreme right. Where the El Paso shooter cited “cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion” as his motivation, narrowing the “Hispanic community” as his target,<sup>20</sup> Earnest framed Jews as the enemy: “To the Jew. Your crimes—innumerable. Your deeds—unacceptable. Your lies—

<sup>13</sup> Michael E. Miller, “Hunting black men to start a ‘race war,’” *Washington Post*, December 27, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Joe Weisenthal, “The Insane Manifesto Of Austin Texas Crash Pilot Joseph Andrew Stack,” *Business Insider*, February 18, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Howard Koplowitz, “Read Las Vegas Shooter Jerad Miller’s Anti-Government Manifesto,” *International Business Times*, June 9, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Hume, “‘Not a Classical Neo-Nazi’: What We Know About the German Hookah Bar Terrorist,” *Vice*, February 20, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> J.M. Berger, “The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism’s Deadly Bible,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague*, September 2016, 3.

<sup>18</sup> David Ingram, Brandy Zadrozny, and Corky Siemaszko, “Gilroy Garlic Festival gunman referred to ‘Might is Right’ manifesto before shooting,” *NBC News*, July 29, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Jacob Ware, “Siege: The Atomwaffen Division and Rising Far-Right Terrorism in the United States,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague*, July 2019, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

everywhere. The European man will rise up and strike your squalid and parasitic race into the dust. And this time there will be nowhere for you to run.”<sup>21</sup> Tarrant referenced the popular far-right “white genocide” conspiracy theory and “fourteen words” mantra, specifically denoting Muslim “invaders” as the greatest threat. And Roof’s manifesto railed against blacks, Jews, and Hispanics, complaining that “integration has done nothing but bring whites down to level [*sic*] of brute animals.”<sup>22</sup> The centrality of race, immigration, and religion to today’s far-right extremist ideology is reflected in the above attackers’ chosen targets: a predominantly Hispanic city, synagogues, mosques, and a historic black church.<sup>23</sup>

A bedrock policy platform for more organized and less militant far-right parties in Europe and the United States, race and immigration have long been central issues electrifying the extreme right bases.<sup>24</sup> With that said, three additional sub-themes emerge within these manifestos and the broader movement which warrant further discussion. Firstly, many extremists obsess over conspiracy theories suggesting the Western world is currently under a deliberate assault by what Stephan Balliet called “anti-whites.” Titled the “white genocide” or “great replacement”—the name of Tarrant’s manifesto—these theories are prominent among the extreme right,<sup>25</sup> who often claim immigration is a deliberate ploy orchestrated by a global Zionist Occupied Government to eradicate the white race.<sup>26</sup> Relatedly, so-called “birthrates” represent another central concern. Both Balliet and Tarrant—who opened his manifesto with “It’s the birthrates. It’s the birthrates. It’s the birthrates.”—referenced greater birthrates among immigrant communities, and its importance in apparently diluting the white race in the West. And finally, several attackers frame their attacks as the opening salvo in some kind of broader, imminent war against minorities. Dylann Roof, for instance, infamously intended his shooting to set off a race war, and in another attack, a 2014 anti-government shooting targeting several police officers in Las Vegas, Nevada, the assailants left a note claiming “this is the beginning of the revolution.”<sup>27</sup> Extremism expert Cas Mudde argues that “far-right ideologies are built around a strict us-versus-them opposition;”<sup>28</sup> this is reflected in the attackers’ own manifestos, which make racial, immigrant, and religious outgroups central narratives.

<sup>21</sup> John Earnest, “An open letter,” April 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Dylann Roof, “rtf88,” June 2015.

<sup>23</sup> There is often much debate on the impact of rising immigration on terrorism. As Richard McAlexander expertly showed, immigration can, indeed, lead to terrorism—but only the right-wing variety. See Richard J. McAlexander, “How Are Immigration and Terrorism Related? An Analysis of Right-and Left-Wing Terrorism in Western Europe, 1980–2004,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 1 (2020): 179-195.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Martin Halla, Alexander F. Wagner, and Josef Zweimüller, “Immigration and Voting for the Far Right,” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 15, no. 6 (December 2017): 1341-1385; Roger Karapin, “Far-Right Parties and the Construction of Immigration Issues in Germany,” in Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg, and Patrick Hossay (eds), *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 187-219.

<sup>25</sup> For more, see Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, “The Great Replacement: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Pete Simi and Robert Futrell, *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement’s Hidden Spaces of Hate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 3.

<sup>27</sup> The attackers, Jerad and Amanda Miller, also wrote a manifesto prior to their attack, but their attack was inspired by anti-government views, not the white supremacist and neo-Nazi ideologies that inspired the manifestos documented here. David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (New York: Verso, 2017), 181.

<sup>28</sup> Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 46.

Secondly, the terrorists see the preservation of “European” culture as a key goal. As Arie Perliger, an expert on far-right extremism and terrorism, notes, recent manifestos have shifted away from purely racial justifications, as “the battle has moved from genes to culture;” Europe’s apparent status as the historic epicenter of Western culture and values is therefore a key mobilizing factor for far-right militants around the world.<sup>29</sup> Beyond Balliet and Breivik, whose European focus goes without saying, Crusius invoked the threat to Europe, declaring that “our European comrades don’t have the gun rights needed to repel the millions of invaders that plague their country. They have no choice but to sit by and watch their countries burn.”<sup>30</sup> The Poway gunman opened his manifesto by introducing himself as “a man of European ancestry. The blood that runs in my veins is the same that ran through the English, Nordic, and Irish men of old.”<sup>31</sup> Tarrant, despite being born and raised in Australia, similarly considered himself European: “The origins of my language is European, my culture is European, my political beliefs are European, my philosophical beliefs are European, my identity is European and, most importantly, my blood is European.”<sup>32</sup> Dylann Roof, meanwhile, cited “what was happening in Europe” as central to his radicalization.<sup>33</sup>

The narrative linking modern whiteness to a European ethnic homeland has long been embedded in the extreme right. Europe, for starters, has long supplied its transatlantic counterpart with ideological and symbolic inspiration: American Neo-Nazis, for instance, have adopted Nazi German iconography like swastikas and SS flags, while the largely far-right skinhead culture originated in post-war Britain.<sup>34</sup> But many of the attackers discussed here also portrayed themselves as protectors of the European continent from some perceived assault, even embedding themselves into a broader historical narrative of a Europe under attack.<sup>35</sup> Some attackers, for instance, date the immigration and race battle to the time of the Crusades, portraying immigrant Muslims as an “ancient enemy” of Christianity and its European origin.<sup>36</sup> No terrorist adopted the Crusades narrative as adamantly as Breivik, who dubbed himself the “Justiciar Knight Commander for Knights Templar Europe,” a reference to an elite Catholic order founded in the 1100s.<sup>37</sup> The Crusades iconography was copied by James Harris Jackson, perpetrator of the March 2017 stabbing of a black man in New York City.<sup>38</sup> Breivik, meanwhile, also named his manifesto after the year, 2083, by which he hoped his dream would be realized: “a monocultural, patriarchal Christian Europe without Muslims, Marxists, multiculturalists, or

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<sup>29</sup> Arie Perliger, “From across the globe to El Paso, changes in the language of the far-right explain its current violence,” *The Conversation*, August 6, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

<sup>31</sup> Earnest, “An open letter.”

<sup>32</sup> Brenton Tarrant, “The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society,” March 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Roof, “rtf88.”

<sup>34</sup> Amy Beth Cooter, “Neo-Nazi Normalization: The Skinhead Movement and Integration into Normative Structures,” *Sociological Inquiry* 76, no. 2 (2006): 147.

<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that, in a trend sometimes called “identitarianism,” non-violent far-right extremists also tie their ideology to the protection of Europe. The alt-right’s Richard Spencer, for example, publishes a journal called *Radix*, which aims to preserve the “heritage, identity and future of European people in the United States and around the world.” See “American Racists Work to Spread ‘Identitarian’ Ideology,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, October 12, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Ariel Koch, “The New Crusaders: Contemporary Extreme Right Symbolism and Rhetoric,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 5 (2017): 14.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Wollenberg, “The new knighthood: Terrorism and the medieval,” *Postmedieval* 5 (2014): 21–33.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, “Hunting black men to start a ‘race war.’”

feminists.”<sup>39</sup> And Tarrant claimed to carry out his attack “to take revenge on the invaders for the hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by foreign invaders in European lands throughout history.”<sup>40</sup> Even those far-right terrorists who are not European cite the protection of the continent as a significant catalyst in their mobilization. Far-right extremists from across the globe hold an obsession with Europe and perceived “European” race and culture, and immigration’s supposed assault on Europe was a major rallying cry for all the terrorists analyzed herein.

Thirdly, today’s manifestos reference ongoing political discourse, often even incorporating terminology employed by established political parties.<sup>41</sup> The El Paso shooter, for instance, mentioned the first Democratic debate of the 2020 election cycle and—in Trumpian fashion—derided the media as “fake news.”<sup>42</sup> Breivik’s rambling manifesto touched on several ongoing developments, including U.S. presidential elections, the alleged downfall of the European Union, and “the Islamisation of Europe.”<sup>43</sup> Even Brenton Tarrant, an Australian committing an attack in New Zealand, showed an interest in American politics, claiming to carry out his attack using guns “to create conflict between the two ideologies within the United States on the ownership of firearms in order to further the social, cultural, political and racial divide within the United states [*sic*].”<sup>44</sup> Tarrant, likely tongue-in-cheek, also named American conservative activist Candace Owens as “the person that has influenced me above all.”

The profound politicization of terrorist manifestos falls in line with the body of academic research on terrorist motivations, which holds that terrorists should not be considered irrational or suicidal but calculated and strategic. “Terrorism,” scholar Martha Crenshaw writes, “can be considered a reasonable way of pursuing extreme interests in the political arena.”<sup>45</sup> By raising current events and justifying their acts in an ongoing political context, today’s terrorists indicate that they too align with this model: they are, ultimately, thoughtful activists who have decided that peaceful activism is no longer sufficient, and that violence is necessary to achieving their aims. This is an important conclusion: when terrorists are dismissed as mentally ill or irrational—their acts the inevitable work of a hopeless madman, and not as committed political warriors advancing their cause through violence—we risk misinforming the public about the size and scope of the threat and, in turn, implementing policies that are not commensurate with the dangers we face.<sup>46</sup> Terrorism is, as leading terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman writes, “ineluctably political in aims and motives,” and today’s far-right terrorists show a keen knowledge of current political events, both inside their country and across the globe.<sup>47</sup> This is reflected in their recent manifestos.

Finally, manifestos uniformly portray the acts they justify as self-defense and as the last resort. Terrorists like to see themselves as the hero of an oppressed class, as “reluctant warriors, driven

<sup>39</sup> Gardell, “Crusader Dreams,” 131.

<sup>40</sup> Tarrant, “The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society.”

<sup>41</sup> Perliger, “From across the globe to El Paso.”

<sup>42</sup> Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Berwick, “2083: A European Declaration of Independence,” 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Tarrant, “The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society.”

<sup>45</sup> Martha Crenshaw, “The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice,” in Walter Reich (ed), *Origins of Terrorism* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 7-24.

<sup>46</sup> See Allison Betus, Erin Kearns, and Anthony Lemieux, “‘Terrorism’ or ‘Mental Illness?’: Factors that Impact How Media Label Terrorist Attacks,” (2019).

<sup>47</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* (New York: Columbia Press, 2017), 43.



by desperation.”<sup>48</sup> The El Paso shooter, for instance, claimed that “they are the instigators, not me,” and that “I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion.”<sup>49</sup> Earnest declared that “I willingly sacrifice my future—the future of having a fulfilling job, a loving wife, and amazing kids. I sacrifice this for the sake of my people.”<sup>50</sup> Describing his motive, Tarrant also portrayed himself as an altruist, claiming that “any invader you kill, of any age, is one less enemy your children will have to face. Would you rather do the killing, or leave it to your children? Your grand-children?”<sup>51</sup> Roof similarly explained that “I have no choice,” that “someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.”<sup>52</sup> And Breivik even concocted a biblical justification for his act, claiming that “the Bible couldn’t be clearer on the right, even the duty; we have as Christians to self-defence.”<sup>53</sup> By purporting to act in self-defense, far-right extremists aim to deflect blame and lionize themselves; this mission is evident across every far-right manifesto studied for this essay.

This is not to suggest that there are no other important themes. Much research has been conducted, for example, on antifeminist trends within the radical right.<sup>54</sup> Breivik’s manifesto lamented that “The ‘man of today’ is expected to be a touchy-feely subspecies who bows to the radical feminist agenda,” before going on to warn that “the feminisation of European culture is nearly completed.”<sup>55</sup> Stephan Balliet, the Halle shooter, meanwhile tied feminism into his concerns over race, opening his livestream by declaring “feminism is the cause of declining birth rates in the West.” Anti-feminism also ties the far-right to the nascent incel movement—to which Balliet was possibly an adherent.<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere, many on the far-right, as Mudde explains, obsess over the topic of security, both individual and collective.<sup>57</sup> Dylann Roof, for example, claims to “have never been the same” since the day he first googled “black on white crime.”<sup>58</sup> What role does fear for one’s own safety and security play in radicalization, and does that manifest itself in a terrorist’s own writings? Future studies of recent far-right manifestos should assess these themes.

## Counter-Terrorism Implications

The use of manifestos should be of concern for counter-terrorism officials and policymakers, for three reasons: (i) they inspire new attackers, (ii) they are testament to the far-right’s growing transnational connections, and (iii) they suggest that political rhetoric is an important terrorist motivator.

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<sup>48</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 22-23.

<sup>49</sup> Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

<sup>50</sup> Earnest, “An open letter.”

<sup>51</sup> Graham Macklin, “The Christchurch Attacks: Livestream Terror in the Viral Video Age,” *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 6 (July 2019): 23.

<sup>52</sup> Roof, “rtf88.”

<sup>53</sup> Berwick, “2083: A European Declaration of Independence.”

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Helen Lewis, “To Learn About the Far Right, Start With the ‘Manosphere,’” *The Atlantic*, August 7, 2019; and “When Women are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy,” *Anti-Defamation League*, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Gardell, “Crusader Dreams,” 131.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Koehler, “The Halle, Germany, Synagogue Attack and the Evolution of the Far-Right Terror Threat,” *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 11 (December 2019): 16.

<sup>57</sup> Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Roof, “rtf88.”



Firstly, manifestos often act as inspiration for ideological companions, both violent and non-violent.<sup>59</sup> Much of it dates back to Breivik: as J.M. Berger, a leading expert on extremism and the far-right, notes, “that manifesto became the baton in a relay race of extremists, passed from one terrorist murderer to the next through online communities.”<sup>60</sup> Tarrant himself referenced “Knight Justiciar Breivik,” claiming he “only really took true inspiration” from the Norwegian.<sup>61</sup> Then, the El Paso shooter opened his own manifesto by praising Tarrant, saying “in general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.”<sup>62</sup> Resulting from what Graham Macklin calls “the self-referential nature of extreme-right terrorism,”<sup>63</sup> far-right terrorists revere their predecessors, and are motivated to attack in no small part by their heroes (as was highlighted by Tarrant’s chosen gun, which was emblazoned with the names of several far-right extremists).<sup>64</sup> “This digital ecosystem is fueling a cumulative momentum,” Macklin writes, “which serves to lower ‘thresholds’ to violence for those engaged in this space, both in the United States and elsewhere, as one attack encourages and inspires another, creating a growing ‘canon’ of ‘saints’ and ‘martyrs’ for others to emulate.”<sup>65</sup> Also notable: all six of the attackers studied here survived their attacks. A stark contrast to jihadist martyrdom, this is often a deliberate strategy.<sup>66</sup> As Tarrant himself testified in his manifesto, “survival was a better alternative to death in order to further spread my ideals by media coverage.”<sup>67</sup> Today’s far-right attackers hope to survive their attacks, leaving them to tell their side of the story and stir ideological comrades to action.

In fact, there is a fifth theme observable across the analyzed manifestos: a call for further attacks. The Poway synagogue shooter, for instance, ended his manifesto by imploring readers to follow his lead: “More than anything I wish I could’ve seen your faces and fought alongside with you on the battlefield. Give them hell for me. Give. Them. Hell.”<sup>68</sup> And the Halle gunman’s manifesto was full of tactical advice, with his stated primary goal to “prove the viability of improvised weapons;” in other words, to pioneer an alternative route for those without easy access to firearms.<sup>69</sup> As J.M. Berger notes, publishing terrorists “seek to lead their readers through the same process of self-education that led them to act.”<sup>70</sup> Among the far-right’s dark internet rabbit holes, this has led to

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, William Underhill, “Anders Breivik’s Manifesto Echoes Loudly in Britain,” *Daily Beast*, July 25, 2011; Isaac Stanley-Becker, “‘They hate white males’: A Norwegian mass murderer inspired the Coast Guard officer accused of plotting terror, feds say,” *Washington Post*, February 21, 2019; and Jason Burke, “Norway mosque attack suspect ‘inspired by Christchurch and El Paso shootings,’” *Guardian*, August 11, 2019.

<sup>60</sup> J.M. Berger, “The Strategy of Violent White Supremacy is Evolving,” *The Atlantic*, August 7, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Tarrant, “The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society.”

<sup>62</sup> Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

<sup>63</sup> Macklin, “The Christchurch attacks,” 23.

<sup>64</sup> “New Zealand terror suspect wrote Italian shooter’s name on his gun,” *The Local Italy*, March 15, 2019. See also Weiyi Cai and Simone Landon, “Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing. So Are Their Connections.” *New York Times*, April 3, 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Macklin, “The El Paso Terrorist Attack,” 1.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Åsne Seierstad, *One of Us: The Story of Anders Breivik and the Massacre in Norway* (New York: FSG, 2015), 338-339.

<sup>67</sup> Tarrant, “The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society.”

<sup>68</sup> Earnest, “An open letter.”

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, “Is 3-D Printing the Future of Terrorism?” *Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Berger, “The Dangerous Spread of Extremist Manifestos.”

what some have called the “gamification of terror:” 71 enthusiastic commentators discuss “high scores,” and—in extreme cases, such as Christchurch and Halle—terrorist attacks have even been live streamed, reinforcing the video game narrative.<sup>72</sup> Parts of manifestos are even written specifically to maximize their impact on the chat boards.<sup>73</sup> The far-right and its individual attackers are operating under a propaganda-by-the-deed-style strategy: by not only committing attacks but publishing manifestos to be shared and celebrated by the extremist masses, terrorists are issuing a call-to-arms for the next generation to rise up and join the fight.

Does this mean manifestos should be censored? As an example, recent attacks raised the question of whether to shut down 8chan, a hotbed of far-right views which originally hosted three of the six manifestos discussed here (8chan was eventually shut down, but soon reappeared as 8kun).<sup>74</sup> Berger argues that the manifestos’ impact on ideological companions mean they should be suppressed, that “the heady marriage of words to action makes old hatreds new again” and directly inspires new attacks.<sup>75</sup> “The success of terrorism is measured largely by its reach,” he elaborates, arguing that publicizing manifestos only serves to spread extremist propaganda. An op-ed issued by USA Today counters that “banning an extremist work would give it instant authority among fringe groups as something too dangerous to be published, the forbidden fruit the power structure doesn’t want you to see.”<sup>76</sup> Their content certainly has no place being broadcast on social media and television news, as that allows attackers to achieve a degree of fame and spread their ideology. But they are also important for law enforcement and terrorism scholars, as we wrestle to understand motivations for violence and any future threat. Regardless, there certainly is room for more debate on this point.

Secondly, the manifestos provide further evidence that the far-right movement is growing increasingly transnational.<sup>77</sup> A manifesto issued by a Norwegian neo-Nazi inspired an Australian anti-immigrant fanatic, whose screed in turn inspired a Texan white supremacist. Right-wing extremists from around the world venerate Europe as a cultural and racial homeland in urgent need of protection. Tarrant’s aforementioned weapon included names of far-right attackers from Canada, Sweden, Italy, and elsewhere.<sup>78</sup> And the threat posed by far-right “nodes” and the

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Evans, “The El Paso Shooting and the Gamification of Terror,” *BellingCat*, August 4, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Macklin, “The Christchurch Attacks,” 18-29.

<sup>73</sup> Roose, “A Mass Murder of, and for, the Internet.”

<sup>74</sup> For more on 8chan and the debate on whether to shut the site down, see, for example, April Glaser, “8chan Is a Normal Part of Mass Shootings Now,” *Slate*, August 4, 2019; Kevin Roose, “‘Shut the Site Down,’ Says the Creator of 8chan, a Megaphone for Gunmen,” *New York Times*, August 4, 2019; Daniel Byman, “How to Create a Terrorism Designation Process Useful to Technology Companies,” *Lawfare*, August 5, 2019; and Kari Paul, “8chan: ex-users of far-right site flock to new homes across internet,” *Guardian*, August 8, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Berger, “The Dangerous Spread of Extremist Manifestos.”

<sup>76</sup> Robbins, “El Paso shooting: Extremist manifestos key to understanding, stopping political violence.”

<sup>77</sup> For more, see Seth Jones, “The New Zealand Attack and the Global Challenge of Far-Right Extremism,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 15, 2019; Art Jipson and Paul J. Becker, “White nationalism, born in the USA, is now a global terror threat,” *The Conversation*, March 19, 2019; Joshua A. Geltzer, Mary B. McCord, and Nicholas Rasmussen, “The Christchurch Shooting: Domestic Terrorism Goes International,” *Lawfare*, March 19, 2019; and Lois Beckett and Jason Wilson, “‘White power ideology’: why El Paso is part of a growing global threat,” *Guardian*, August 5, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> “New Zealand terror suspect wrote Italian shooter’s name on his gun.”

possibility of white supremacist foreign fighters is increasing.<sup>79</sup> According to expert Seth Jones, “foreign connections have provided far-right groups with an opportunity to improve their tactics, develop better counter-intelligence techniques, harden their extremist views, and broaden their global networks.”<sup>80</sup> Facilitated by the internet—the far-right was, after all, the first extremist movement to adopt early computer technology—the global extreme right has strengthened its internal bonds, and now poses a significant threat across the globe.<sup>81</sup>

The increasing ease and enthusiasm with which far-right extremists connect across borders should be particularly concerning for policymakers and law enforcement for two reasons. Firstly, it allows hidden hands to play an increasing role in the domestic affairs of another state. Revelations in the *Guardian* that the leader of U.S. neo-Nazi group The Base was living in Russia was testament to this fact.<sup>82</sup> Russia has played a surreptitious role in the recent rise in far-right terrorism, as Elizabeth Arsenault and Joseph Stabile write, “intentionally stoking neo-Nazi sentiment and permitting extremist actors to use Russia as a transnational paramilitary training ground.”<sup>83</sup> And in Ukraine, groups such as the Azov Battalion have welcomed Western extremists to train in real combat situations, with law enforcement agencies largely powerless to stop it.<sup>84</sup> Mimicking the challenge of jihadist foreign fighters returning from Syria and Iraq, far-right fighters are also now heading home, many with a newfound wealth of fighting experience.

In addition, increasing internationalization of far-right extremism provides a challenge because it confuses a state’s legal and law enforcement options. U.S. law enforcement has, for instance, rounded up members of The Base, but the group’s leader will likely remain in Saint Petersburg, out of reach of America’s police and intelligence agencies. American scholars and policymakers have suggested a number of remedies, from designating domestic extremist groups with international connections as “foreign terrorist organizations” under State Department jurisdiction, which would allow law enforcement to monitor group communications and share intelligence with partner agencies;<sup>85</sup> to establishing a pan-ideological domestic terrorism legislation to criminalize intent to commit acts of terrorism, regardless of origin or motive.<sup>86</sup> European states have more leeway to criminalize extremist ideas, but also have improvements to make in their tackling of the increasingly international threat, including by expanding their support for government and non-governmental CVE programming and by allocating greater funds

<sup>79</sup> TSC, “IntelBrief: The Transnational Network That Nobody Is Talking About,” *The Soufan Group*, March 22, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Jones, “The New Zealand Attack and the Global Challenge of Far-Right Extremism.”

<sup>81</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “Back to the Future: The Return of Violent Far-Right Terrorism in the Age of Lone Wolves,” *War on the Rocks*, April 2, 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Jason Wilson, “Revealed: the true identity of the leader of an American neo-Nazi terror group,” *Guardian*, January 23, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault and Joseph Stabile, “Confronting Russia’s Role in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism,” *Just Security*, February 6, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, TSC, “White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement,” *The Soufan Center*, September 2019.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Max Rose and Ali H. Soufan, “We Once Fought Jihadists. Now We Battle White Supremacists,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2020; and Amy Collins, “If the Shoe Fits: Designating Foreign White Supremacist Extremist Groups,” *War on the Rocks*, February 4, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Mary B. McCord and Jason M. Blazakis, “A Road Map for Congress to Address Domestic Terrorism,” *Lawfare*, February 27, 2019; and Jon Lewis and Seamus Hughes, “Our laws have a problem calling domestic terrorism what it is,” *The Hill*, February 6, 2020.

to respond to the threat.<sup>87</sup> The internationalization of far-right extremism has been underway for several years now, the effect both of social media weakening national borders and what historian Aristotle Kallis calls “far-right contagion.”<sup>88</sup> As part of that trend, manifestos are inspiring terrorists around the world to commit new violence, and are in turn exposing our collective unpreparedness for tackling far-right extremism.

Finally, the manifestos highlight an important lesson for today’s politicians: rhetoric matters. As mentioned, each of the attackers was keenly aware of ongoing political discourse, and sought to invoke it in their works; this suggests that events occurring in the public space impact extremist ideology and actions. For instance, the impact of divisive rhetoric is epitomized by the El Paso manifesto’s use of words such as “invasion” and “replacement,” popular with President Trump and right-wing media but rarely used by the media before this administration.<sup>89</sup> And Trump has repeatedly aired conspiracy theories popular among the extreme right and been unwilling to condemn far-right extremists committing attacks.<sup>90</sup> White nationalists are now “enjoying the most hospitable political environment they have seen in decades,”<sup>91</sup> and as long as political leaders refuse to reject extremism of all forms—as Trump, for instance, did by placing “blame on both sides” after the attack at Charlottesville in August 2017—extremism, and the far-right terrorism problem, will worsen.<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

Attackers themselves are grasping the impact of their work: In his rambling manifesto, Anders Behring Breivik, the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s deadliest far-right terrorist, offered potential copycats advice on how to maximize their impact: “Explain what you have done (in an announcement distributed prior to operation) and make certain that everyone understands that we, the free peoples of Europe, are going to strike again and again.”<sup>93</sup> The El Paso shooter similarly declared, “I figured than an under-prepared attack and a meh manifesto is better than no attack and no manifesto.”<sup>94</sup> Notably, even manifestos compiled by international terrorists, including Breivik in Norway and Stephan Balliet in Germany, were written in English, evidence of the attackers’ desire to spark a global impact.<sup>95</sup> Breivik even published under an anglicized nom de guerre—Andrew Berwick.

<sup>87</sup> Daniel Koehler, “Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague*, February 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Aristotle Kallis, “Far-Right ‘Contagion’ or a Failing ‘Mainstream?’ How Dangerous Ideas Cross Borders and Blur Boundaries,” *Democracy and Security* 9, no. 3 (2013): 221-246.

<sup>89</sup> Jeremy W. Peters, Michael M. Grynbaum, Keith Collins, Rich Harris, and Rumsey Taylor, “How the El Paso Killer Echoed the Incendiary Words of Conservative Media Stars,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2019.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, David Frum, “A President Who Condone Political Violence,” *The Atlantic*, October 26, 2018; Stephen Tankel, “Riding the Tiger: How Trump Enables Right-Wing Extremism,” *War on the Rocks*, November 5, 2018; Daniel Byman, “Trump’s Rhetoric Is Raising the Risk of Right-Wing Terrorism,” *Slate*, January 21, 2019; Adam Serwer, “The Terrorism That Doesn’t Spark a Panic,” *The Atlantic*, January 28, 2019; and Frank Figliuzzi, “I Predicted More Hate-Based Violence. El Paso Won’t Be the End of It.” *New York Times*, July 31, 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Berger, “The Strategy of Violent White Supremacy is Evolving.”

<sup>92</sup> Ware, “Siege,” 9.

<sup>93</sup> Berwick, “2083: A European Declaration of Independence.”

<sup>94</sup> Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

<sup>95</sup> Koehler, “The Halle, Germany, Synagogue Attack,” 16. Note, again, that the manifesto accompanying the February 2020 shootings in Hanau, Germany, is not included in this analysis. While that gunman’s

Terrorists of other ideologies, noticing the success of their far-right counterparts in publicizing their acts, have also begun to pen manifestos. The Saudi gunman who murdered three at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida in December 2019 posted an anti-American screed on Twitter before the attack,<sup>96</sup> whilst police investigating the Black Hebrew Israelite-linked shooting in Jersey City, New Jersey the following week also found a written justification.<sup>97</sup>

As mentioned, future studies should assess the manifestos for other themes—including anti-feminism and feelings of security. Future studies should assess similar manifestos perpetrated by terrorists situated on the extreme right but not in the white supremacist and neo-Nazi mold, including anti-government screeds accompanying the aforementioned attacks in Austin, Texas, and Las Vegas, Nevada. Manifestos should also be assessed for cross-ideological inspiration. Brenton Tarrant and Patrick Crusius, for instance, both displayed strands of environmental extremism in their ideologies, Tarrant calling himself an “eco-fascist” and Crusius declaring that “the decimation of the environment is creating a massive burden for future generations.”<sup>98</sup> Were they also inspired by texts professing far-left views on the environment? Research by Ramon Spaaij has highlighted the role that personal grievances can play in lone actor terrorism, that “lone wolf terrorists tend to create their own ideologies that combine personal frustrations and aversion with broader political, social, or religious aims.”<sup>99</sup> We do not currently know why some extremists are mobilized to violence and the role that manifestos play in that process, and a better indication of the personal factors that might push an individual towards far-right views, violence, and the desire to share written testament would strengthen our chances of intercepting radicalization and preventing future attacks. And, finally, a broader discussion is needed on the merits and drawbacks of internet censorship, particularly regarding the sites and servers which have typically hosted these manifestos. Academics need to contribute to that dialogue, assessing past experiences, best practices, and risks that need to be managed.

The far-right manifestos published by Crusius and his predecessors represent a rising trend in the terrorism world. Not only do terrorists want to cause carnage; in the words of Arie Perliger, “they want the world to know why they did it.”<sup>100</sup> Right-wing extremists have now killed more Americans since 9/11 than Islamist extremists,<sup>101</sup> yet have recently received less than two percent of the attention of terrorism academics.<sup>102</sup> More attention and research into the threat is urgently needed. If not, we risk allowing new innovations to take hold; for instance, Tarrant’s live-streamed attack, already copied in Poway and Germany, might become the next new model.

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 manifesto was not in English, he did post videos in English seeking to explain his ideology and justify his attacks. See Hume, “Not a Classical Neo-Nazi.”

<sup>96</sup> Brendan Farrington and Mike Balsamo, “Saudi gunman tweeted against US before naval base shooting,” *Associated Press*, December 8, 2019.

<sup>97</sup> Michael Gold and Ali Watkins, “Jersey City Shooting: Suspect Linked to Black Hebrew Israelite Group,” *New York Times*, December 11, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

<sup>99</sup> Ramón Spaaij, “The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism: An Assessment,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (2010): 866.

<sup>100</sup> Perliger, “From across the globe to El Paso.”

<sup>101</sup> Daniel Byman, “Right-Wingers Are America’s Deadliest Terrorists,” *Slate*, August 5, 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Bart Schuurman, “Topics in terrorism research: reviewing trends and gaps, 2007-2016,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 12, no. 3 (2019): 470.

Social media-hosted far-right manifestos mark a major new innovation on the terrorism stage. It's time we pay attention.

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## About the Authors

### Jacob Ware

Jacob Ware holds an MA in Security Studies from Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service. He also holds an MA (Hons) in International Relations and Modern History from the University of St Andrews.

# Testament to Murder: The Violent Far-Right's Increasing Use of Terrorist Manifestos

Jacob Ware  
March 2020

## About ICCT

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## Contact ICCT

T: +31 (0)70 763 0050  
E: [info@icct.nl](mailto:info@icct.nl)