

Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses

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In this paper, Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal attempt to conceptualise the extreme-right, in the context of its tendency to be overshadowed by the larger-scale, higher-casualty, Jihadism. As a result of this international and scholarly focus on Jihadist terrorism, the authors note the consequent deficit in research on the topic of violence and extremism from the extreme right—in particular, on target selection, perpetrators, patterns of action, and facilitating conditions. In an effort to begin to fill this gap, and thus improve practitioners' ability to deal with the threat, the authors bring into focus the distinctions between extreme-right violence and Jihadism. This Policy Brief concludes with recommendations on how relevant authorities can and should respond to this distinct form of political violence.

Introduction

Extreme-right violence and terrorism has a long and painful history in many countries, including mass killings such as the bomb attack on the train station in Bologna in 1980 and the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995. However, the general pattern of violence and terrorism from the extreme right has, until recently, been characterised by relatively frequent incidents with a low number of fatalities. Being overshadowed by large-scale, high-casualty Jihadi terrorism during the last two decades, extreme right terrorism has been low on the security agenda. However, even small-scale (but frequent) attacks by extreme-right activists have, for instance, killed several hundred migrants in Russia between 2006 and 2010. In the United States since 9/11, more people have been killed by right-wing extremists than by Islamist extremists. Furthermore, the 22 July 2011 attacks in Norway and the mosque attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand on 15 March 2019 demonstrated that lone actors inspired by extreme-right views are willing and able to kill large numbers of people. These incidents of mass murder are no longer exceptional cases but appear to have set a novel standard for a new generation of extreme right terrorists. They are operating alone but are tied together through virtual communities on the Internet, where several individuals have been inspired to emulate the modus operandi of their role models and even try to outdo them in mass murder.

With more policymakers, politicians, and researchers belatedly realising the extreme right's potential for terrorist violence, the subject is now back on the agenda. There is a need for more research-based knowledge about such issues, namely on volume of violence, target selection, perpetrators, and facilitating conditions.

Conceptualising the extreme right

What do we mean by such terms as the far right, the radical right, or the extreme right, and by concepts like extreme-right violence, extreme-right terrorism, and hate crime? These terms are often used interchangeably, but should be used in ways that are more precise to avoid ambiguity about which phenomenon we discuss or measure.

The terms left and right stem from the French revolution and are closely associated to the idea of egalitarianism: whereas leftists generally support policies designed to reduce social inequality, rightists regard social inequality—and corresponding social hierarchies—as inevitable, natural, or even desirable.¹ To the right of the traditional conservative parties is a broad landscape we may call the far right, characterised by authoritarianism and nativism.² We can also distinguish between radical and extreme versions of both the far left and far right, where radical movements work for change within the framework of democracy whereas extremists reject democracy and are willing to use violence or other non-conventional means to achieve their goals.³ Below is an attempt to construct a family tree of

¹ Norberto Bobbio, trans. Allan Cameron, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

² Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) pp. 15-23.

³ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis". PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2017.; Alex Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation and Literature Review: A Conceptual Discussion," ICCT Research Paper, Vol. 4, No. 2 (March 2013).

the far right. Note that the categories are ideal types; for specific groups and activists the distinctions may be less clear-cut:

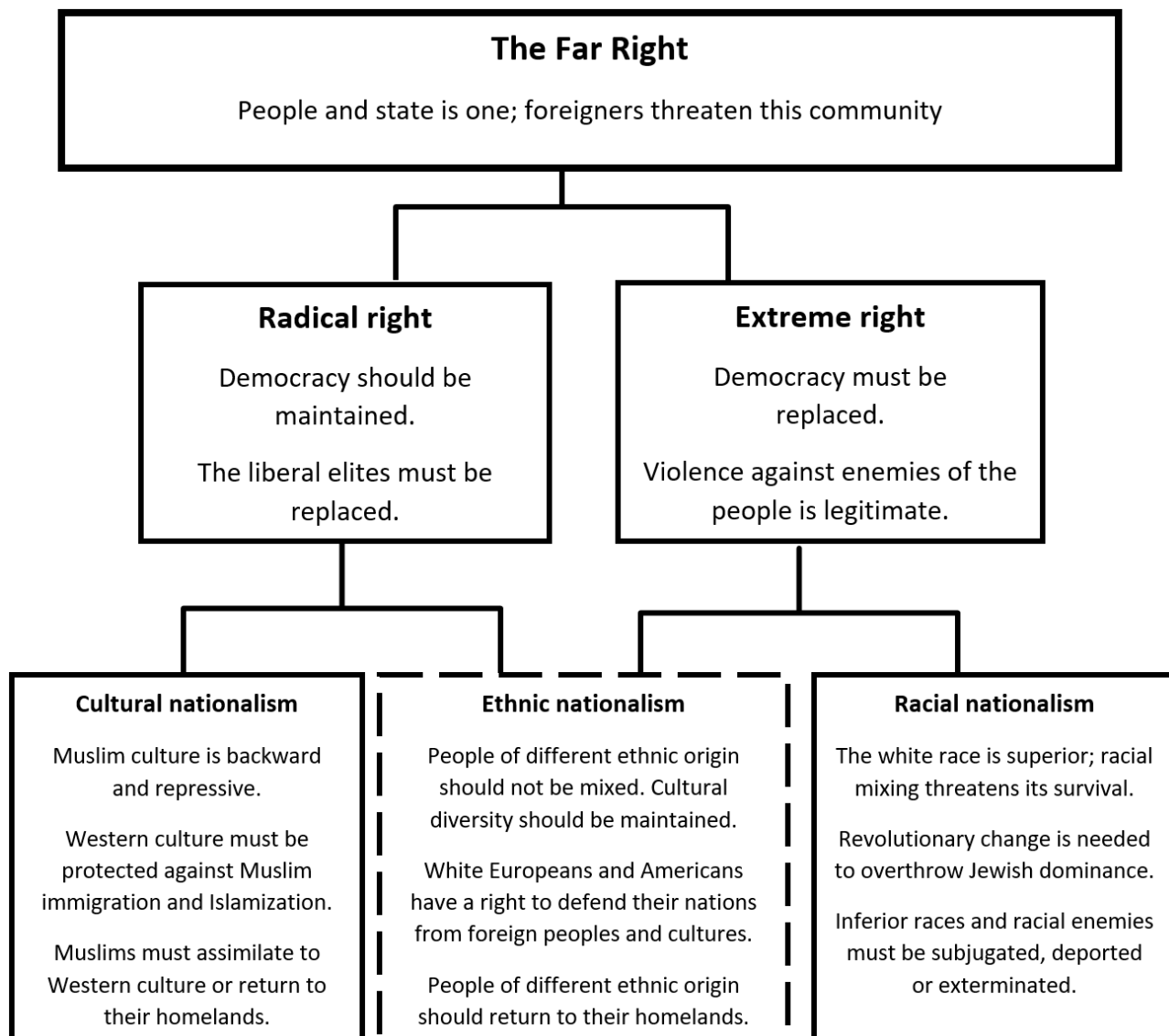


Figure 1. Originally developed by Berntzen (2018), revised in collaboration with Bjørge and Ravndal, and conceptually based on Mudde (2002) and Teitelbaum (2017)

What distinguishes extremists from radicals, is that extremists reject democracy and promote violence or other illegal or non-democratic means as legitimate. If we move down to the lower level of this family tree, we can distinguish between three main “families” of far-right movements: cultural nationalists, ethnic nationalists, and racial nationalists.

Cultural nationalists are typically represented by radical-right populist parties and movements against immigration and Islam. These parties and movements generally operate within a democratic framework and do not promote violence, although they may differ in their degree of radicalism. Some activists use violent rhetoric, like calling opponents “traitors” and hint at a future showdown. These movements are usually not preoccupied with racial differences but focus on cultural differences, claiming that Islam is incompatible

with Western culture and society. Therefore, they promote assimilation (i.e. the idea that immigrants of a different ethnic and cultural origin should abandon their original culture and adopt Western culture). In recent years, some of these movements have embraced liberal values such as women's liberation and gay rights: values they claim are threatened by Islam's "invasion" of Europe and North America.⁴

Ethnic nationalists are exemplified by the Identitarian movement in Europe and the moderate wing of the Alt-Right movement in the USA. The Identitarians avoid speaking about "race" altogether, preferring to use the less stigmatised notion of "ethnic identity" instead. They believe that all ethnic groups, including whites, have an equal right of self-preservation. Furthermore, to maintain ethnic diversity, which they see as valuable, different ethnic groups should be kept separate in order to preserve their unique norms, cultures, and characteristics. This idea is often referred to as "ethnopluralism" by the Identitarians—while others might see it as a new version of "apartheid". Ethnic mixing and assimilation are considered to be harmful. In contrast to many cultural nationalists, Identitarians tend to distance themselves from many core liberal values and promote conservative views on gender roles. They strongly oppose immigration. The Identitarians have embraced and popularised the conspiracy theory of "The Great Replacement", claiming that policies by global liberal elites are intentionally replacing the native European populations with non-European peoples in a "genocide by substitution". They claim that in order to prevent the so-called "great replacement" of ethnic Europeans, it will be necessary that all or most people of foreign descent return to their homelands. However, it is hard to envision how such "remigration" can be voluntary and implemented without some element of force.⁵ "The Great Replacement" rhetoric has subsequently been adopted by cultural nationalists as well as by racial nationalists, and was on the title page of the manifesto of the Christchurch terrorist.

In the United States, elements of *the Alt-Right movement* may be considered as an American version of ethno-nationalism. However, many Alt-Right activists are closely associated to white supremacy culture and are less hesitant to talk about race. They often present themselves as "white nationalists". These white nationalists experienced a boost when Donald Trump was elected as president of the US, seeing that some of their views had support in the White House. While the Alt-Right and the Identitarian movements both fall within the ideal type of ethno-nationalism, the European Identitarians gravitate more towards cultural nationalism, whereas the American Alt-Right/white nationalists gravitate more towards racial nationalism. Ethno-nationalist groups generally distance themselves from the use of violence (although some activists do not). However, these movements' views clash with basic values on human rights, equality, and democracy to the extent that some varieties are close to extremism. Other varieties present themselves in so moderate terms that they are closer to radical right populists or cultural nationalists.

Racial nationalists fight for a society based on ideas of racial purity and embrace totalitarian principles. They draw ideological inspiration from ideas derived from National Socialism,

⁴ Lars Erik Berntzen, "The Anti-Islamic Movement: Far Right and Liberal?" PhD thesis., Florence: European University Institute, 2018

⁵ Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the north: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).;

José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, IN.: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).;

George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017)

Fascism, Christian Identity, or varieties of white supremacy. Their worldview is typically based on anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, claiming that Jews promote immigration, egalitarianism, and racial mixing to destroy the white race. These movements reject democracy and notions of universal human rights and consider violence necessary and legitimate to achieve their stated goals. They expect that a race war will eventually come. When it does, racial nationalists advocate for “racial traitors” and people of the “wrong race” to be exterminated or, at the very least, expelled from the country.⁶

The distinctions between these three ideal types are never sharp in practice. Although a specific group or organisation may be placed with one of these main families within the far-right, there might be wings or individuals that lean towards one of the other types. There are also links and collaboration between groups and activists from different ideological camps. Nevertheless, the differences summarised in Figure 1 offer a starting point for understanding the far-right and assessing the different goals and potential threats it represents.

Extreme-right violence, extreme-right terrorism, and hate crime

The above distinction between three far right “families” enables a more nuanced perspective on those groups and individuals most likely to use violence. These are primarily to be found within the extreme-right. Within this current, violence is considered as a legitimate, necessary, and often laudable course of action. Adherents of racial nationalism, such as neo-Nazis, fascists, and white supremacists, figure high among perpetrators of extreme-right violence.⁷



Figure 2. Right-wing violence and right-wing terrorism

The term *extreme-right violence* covers a broader range of attacks than “extreme-right terrorism”. All violent attacks whose target selection is based on extreme-right beliefs and corresponding enemy categories—immigrants, minorities, political opponents, or governments—qualify as right-wing violence. This could also include vandalism and spontaneous violence. To be considered as terrorism, an attack must be premeditated and intended to instil fear in a wider population to affect a political outcome.⁸

⁶ Andrew Macdonald (aka William L. Pierce), *The Turner Diaries* (Hillsboro, WV: National Vanguard Books, 1980)

⁷ Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Tore Bjørge, “Terrorism from the Extreme Right” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Special issue, Vol. 12, No. 6 (Dec. 2018a)

⁸ Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Tore Bjørge, “Investigating Terrorism from the Extreme Right: A Review of Past and Present Research.” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (2018b) pp. 5-22.; Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV dataset,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 10, No. 3 (June 2016) for a discussion of these terms.

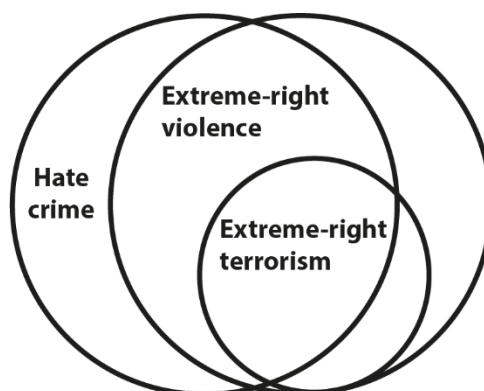


Figure 3. Right-wing violence, right-wing terrorism and hate crime

To complicate matters further, we can include a third—and partly overlapping—category: *hate crime*. Hate crimes may include incidents that qualify as extreme-right violence or terrorism but also includes acts that are non-violent, such as racial harassment and hate speech. Hate crimes are defined by national legislation. Generally, they are crimes motivated by bias or hatred against certain categories of people, such as religious, racial, or sexual minorities or people with disabilities. However, the categories of people protected by hate crime legislation vary considerably between different countries and legislations.⁹ For example, in most countries, including in Norway, homosexuals are specifically protected by hate crime legislation, but strangely, hateful acts against transgendered people are not, probably by mistake. In 23 out of 49 European countries, sexual orientations are *not* protected by hate crime legislation¹⁰—and that is probably *not* by mistake. Thus, what is legally defined as “hate crime” varies considerably between countries, and political winds play a major role in deciding what kinds of target groups that are included.¹¹

Adding another level of complexity to the discussion, hate crimes are also frequently committed by people motivated by issues *other* than right-wing extremism, e.g. hatred against Shias or Jews by Sunni Muslims. In several Western European countries, a majority of anti-Jewish hate crimes are *not* carried out by right-wing extremists, but by Muslims.¹² There are also many cases of extreme-right violence or terrorism that are not hate crimes by hate crime legislation. For instance, Anders Behring Breivik’s attacks on the government district and the political youth camp in Norway on 22 July 2011 definitely qualify as extreme-right terrorist attacks. However, they would not fall within hate crime legislation, as the targets were government buildings and Labour Party youth activists. In contrast, the recent attacks on Muslims in New Zealand would certainly fit all three categories.

Because these terms are often ambiguously defined and used interchangeably, it can be difficult to know what kind of violence we are talking about, and statistics are often misleading. Statistics on frequency levels and trends of (extreme-right) violence, terrorism, and hate crimes are usually not comparable across time and between countries because

⁹ Nathan Hall, *Hate Crime*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013)

¹⁰ ILGA Europe 2014, cited in Piotr Godzisz and Dorota Pudzianowska, “Do Some Identities Deserve More Protection Than Others? The Case of Anti-LGB Hate Crime Laws in Poland,” in Schweppe and Walters, *The Globalization of Hate: Internationalizing Hate Crime*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

¹¹ Jon Garland and Corinne Funnell, “Defining Hate Crime Internationally: Issues and Conundrums,” in Schweppe and Walters, *The Globalization of Hate: Internationalizing Hate Crime*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).; Nathan Hall, *Hate Crime*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013)

¹² Johannes Due Enstad, “Antisemitic Violence in Europe, 2005-2015: Exposure and Perpetrators in France, UK, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Russia,” Oslo: C-REX/HL-senteret, 2017, https://www.hlsenteret.no/aktuelt/publikasjoner/digitale-hefter/antsemittisk-vold-i-europa_engelsk_endelig-versjon.pdf

national statistics count the same types of events under different labels, or different types of events under the same label.¹³ In Europol's annual Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (TE-SAT), right-wing terrorism appears as a negligible problem. This is partly because some European countries register such events as either "hate crime", "right-wing extremist violence", or just ordinary violence — not as terrorism.

Some scholars have made important advances in producing more reliable and comparable datasets on right-wing extremist violence and terrorism, using consistent definitions across countries. Jacob Aasland Ravndal developed a database on right-wing terrorism and violence (RTV) in Western Europe, including reliable records of deadly events, which are less likely to go unreported than less serious attacks.¹⁴ Johannes Due Enstad used the same coding criteria and method to make a database of deadly right-wing violence in Russia.¹⁵ An even more extensive database covering lethal attacks motivated by extreme-right beliefs in the United States, but also non-lethal attacks as well as attacks motivated by Islamist and animals right/environmental beliefs, has been developed by group of American colleagues (Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald, & Parkin, 2014).¹⁶ Such comparable data sets make it possible to assess trends over time and differences between countries or groups of countries.

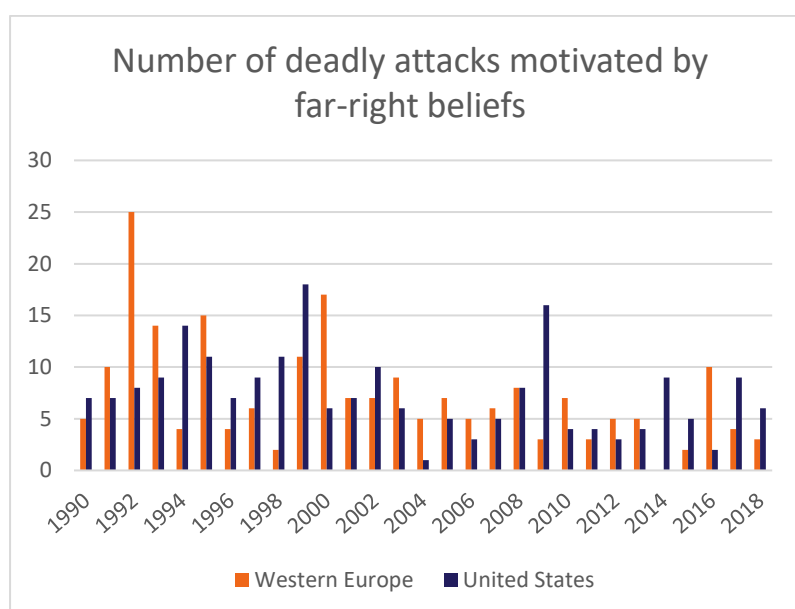


Figure 4. Based on Ravndal (2016); Freilich et al. (2014), and personal correspondence with the creators of the RTV and ECDB datasets for the latest numbers. These are numbers of deadly attacks, not fatalities.

Western Europe had a peak of deadly right-wing attacks in the first half of the 1990s, and again around the turn of the millennium, but the general trend has been slightly downward. In 2014, there were no fatal right-wing attacks in Europe, and in 2015 there was only one, but it raised to ten deadly attacks in 2016, probably related to the refugee crises. The downward trend continued in 2017 and 2018, which include fewer attacks than the average for the whole period. The trends are quite similar in the US, with a slightly higher number of attacks in the

¹³ Nathan Hall, *Hate Crime*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013).; Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Tore Bjørge, "Terrorism from the Extreme Right" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Special issue, Vol. 12, No. 6 (Dec. 2018a)

¹⁴ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV dataset," *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 10, No. 3 (June 2016)

¹⁵ Johannes Due Enstad, "Terrorism and Violence in Putin's Russia" *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, No. 6 (Dec. 2018).

¹⁶ Joshua D Freilich, Steven M. Chermak, Roberta Belli, Jeff Gruenewald and William S. Parkin (2014). "Introducing the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB)." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26 (2014), pp. 372-384.

1990s than during the last decade, but with some significant peaks. One big peak was in 2009. It is probably no coincidence that this was the first year in the presidency of Barack Obama, the first black president of the USA—an event that caused shock to the American extreme right.

These figures relate to deadly attacks only. We do not know exactly to what extent these trends correspond with the annual numbers of hate crimes or less severe right-wing violent attacks, where registration is far less reliable or non-existent in many countries. We know, for instance, that there was a remarkable spike of arson attacks on homes for refugees in countries like Germany (see figure 5 below) and Sweden in 2015-16. However, people were rarely injured in these cases as houses were often set ablaze before refugees moved in. These attacks were clearly incidents of hate crime and extreme-right violence, but many do not reach the threshold to be considered terrorism. Preliminary figures for Western Europe (from the RVT database) indicate that during the refugee crisis there was an increase in deadly attacks as well.

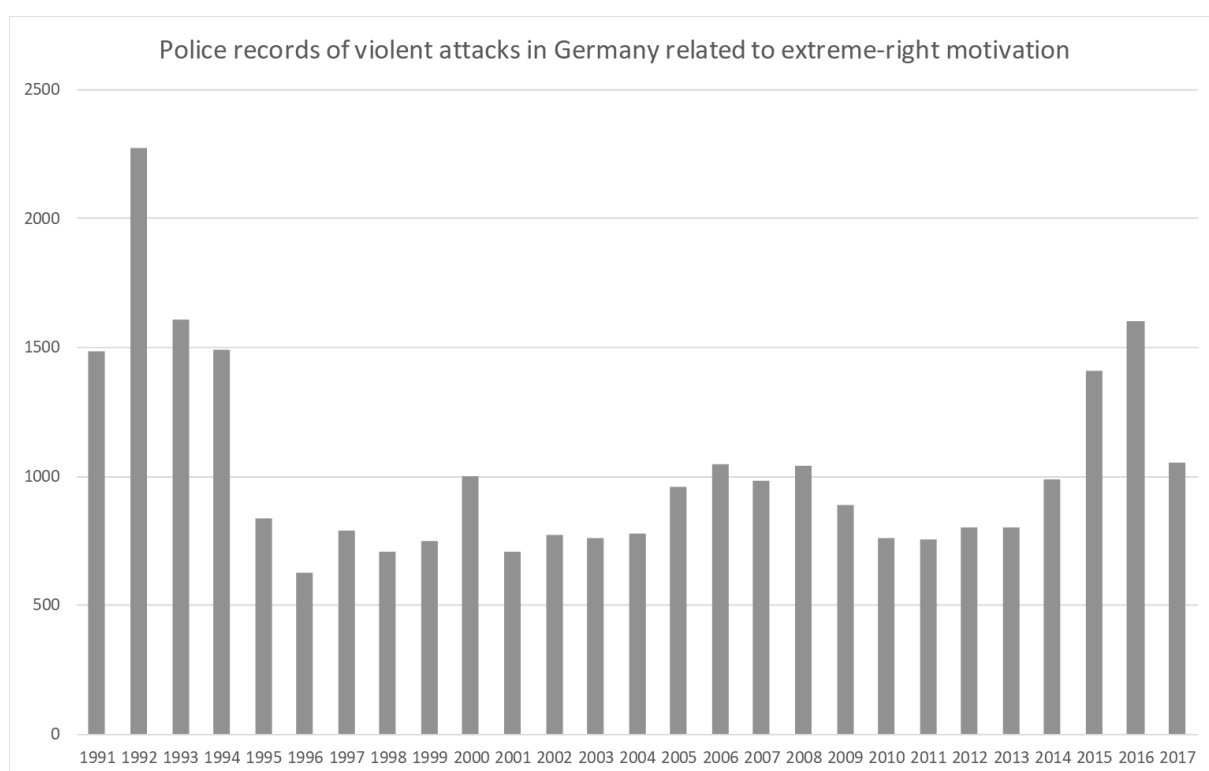


Figure 5. Based on numbers from annual reports of the German security service, *Verfassungsschutz*.

Islamist and extreme-right violence compared

Available data also shows that right-wing violence and terrorism differs significantly from attacks by Islamist extremists in terms of frequency and intensity. Between the 9/11 attacks and 2016, Islamist extremists killed 119 people in 31 deadly attacks in the US, while right-wing extremists killed 158 people in 89 deadly attacks.¹⁷ During the same period (2001-2016) in Western Europe, Islamist extremists killed 539 people in 17 deadly attacks, while right-wing

¹⁷ Islamist and Far-Right Homicides in the United States, Start Inforgraphic, February 2017, https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_ECDB_IslamistFarRightHomicidesUS_Infographic_Feb2017.pdf

extremists killed 179 people in 85 deadly attacks.¹⁸ Out of these 179 people, 77 were killed in the 22 July attacks.

Islamist terrorism appears to be characterised by a low frequency but high intensity (or lethality) pattern, with relatively few attacks with many people killed. In contrast, extreme right terrorism has a high frequency but low intensity pattern, with many attacks with only one or two fatalities.¹⁹ However, there have also been a few outlier events on the extreme right: high-casualty attacks by lone actors like the 22 July 2011 attacks in Norway (77 killed) and the recent mosque attacks in New Zealand (51 killed).

Due to the high lethality per attack, Islamist terrorism is considered by European security services and scholars as a more severe terrorist threat than terrorism from the extreme right (Schuurman 2019). However, the picture is complex. In many countries, extreme-right activists have killed more people than Islamists. This is the case in countries like Norway, Sweden and Germany, as well as in the United States post-9/11. This fact is not reflected in American counter-terrorist policy or threat assessments, where the focus has been one-sided on the threat from Jihadi terrorism.²⁰ Europe is not so different in this respect.

Another important difference between Islamist terrorism and right-wing terrorism, at least in the European context, relates to the form of organisation. The large majority of jihadi attacks are organised by terrorist groups and networks, directly or indirectly affiliated with groups such as al-Qaeda or ISIS, or individuals acting on behalf of such groups.²¹ In contrast, the RVT database on extreme-right violence and terrorism in Western Europe²² shows that the large majority of lethal attacks are carried out by gangs, lone actors and unorganised perpetrators.

¹⁸ The figures on Islamist terrorism are based on personal correspondence with Dr. Petter Nesser from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), while the figures for right-wing violence are collected from the RTV dataset.

¹⁹ Jacob Aasland Ravndal and Tore Bjørge, "Investigating Terrorism from the Extreme Right: A Review of Past and Present Research." *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (2018b), pp. 5-22

²⁰ Nicholas J. Rasmussen, Hearing Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Current Terrorist Threat to the United States", 2015

https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/Current_Terrorist_Threat_to_the_United_States.pdf

²¹ The figures on Islamist terrorism are based on personal correspondence with Dr. Petter Nesser from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), while the figures for right-wing violence are collected from the RTV dataset.

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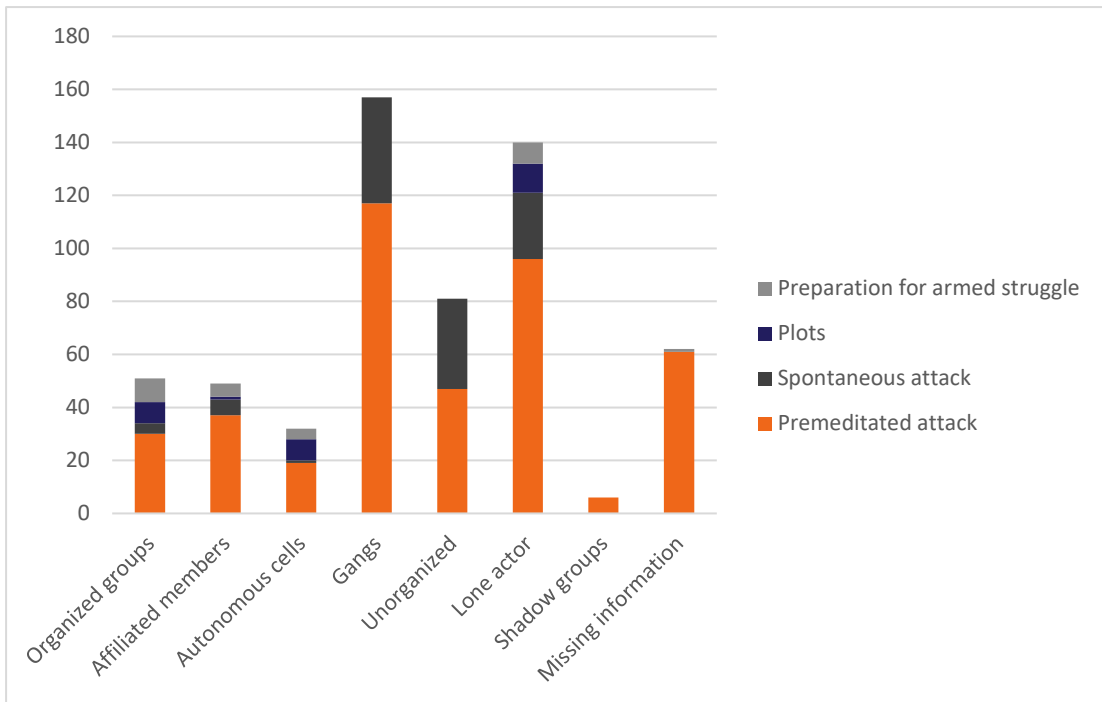


Figure 6. Extreme-right terrorism: actor and attack types (Graph and data: Ravndal, 2016).

Data on extreme-right violence in Europe

When considering the incidence rate by population size in Western Europe between 1990 and 2015, Sweden has had the highest number of deadly extreme right attacks per million inhabitants, followed by Germany (note that countries with small populations, such as Norway and Ireland, will receive a relatively high score on this particular measure with only a handful of deadly attacks). Other European countries with a high number of deadly attacks include the UK and Spain.²³

Table 1. Deadly RTV events by country 1990-2015

Country	Deadly RTV events (number killed)	Deadly events per average million inhabitants 1990–2015
Austria	1 (4)	0.1
Belgium	3 (5)	0.3
Denmark	1(1)	0.2
Finland	-	-
France	9 (11)	0.1
Germany	82 (104)	1.0
Greece	6 (7)	0.6
Iceland	-	-
Ireland	3 (4)	0.8

²³ Figures from the RTV database, see Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV dataset," *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 10, No. 3 (June 2016)

Italy	5(6)	0.1
Luxemburg	-	-
Netherlands	3 (3)	0.2
Norway	3 (79)	0.7
Portugal	3 (3)	0.3
Spain	22 (22)	0.5
Sweden	17 (20)	1.9
Switzerland	1 (1)	0.1
United Kingdom	31 (33)	0.5
Sum	190 (303)	

However, if we expand the European comparison to include Russia, the picture is dramatically different. During the period 2000-2017, there were 406 deadly attacks by extreme-right perpetrators in Russia, resulting in 458 people killed.²⁴

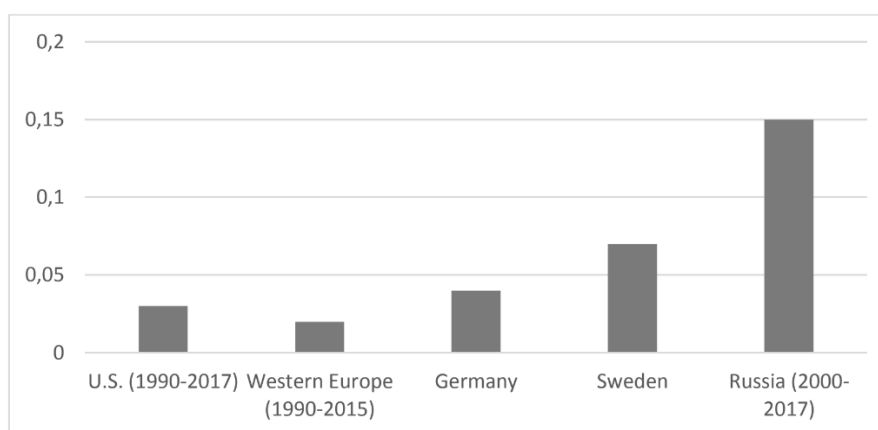


Figure 7. Deadly right-wing extremist events by per million inhabitants per year (Graph: Enstad 2018)

In addition to the much higher rate of lethal violence in Russia compared to Western Europe, Enstad (2018) points to another marked difference: the ratio of premeditated to spontaneous attacks, amounts to 1.2:1 in Western Europe and 7.5:1 in Russia. Enstad argues that “Russia’s low share of lone actors and high share of premeditated attacks suggests a higher level of organised militancy and a stronger ideological commitment among activists”²⁵

In Western Europe, three main victim groups stand out as the most frequently targeted by extreme-right perpetrators: immigrants, left-wingers, and homeless people. The “other” target category includes Muslims and homosexuals. Government representatives are also frequently targeted. A trend is that Jews have been less targeted in recent years whereas Muslims have been increasingly targeted by the extreme right perpetrators.²⁶ At the same time, European Jews are now increasingly being targeted by militant Muslims. In Russia, immigrants (considered “racial enemies”) are the main target group, with 78% of all fatalities, but homeless people are also frequently killed by right-wing extremists.

²⁴ The RVT-RUSSIA dataset was compiled by Johannes Due Enstad (2018), patterned on Jacob Ravndal’s RVT dataset on Western Europe, using the same definitions and variables, thereby providing comparable data.

²⁵ Johannes Due Enstad, “Terrorism and Violence in Putin’s Russia” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, No. 6 (Dec. 2018) p.92

²⁶ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV dataset,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 10, No. 3 (June 2016)

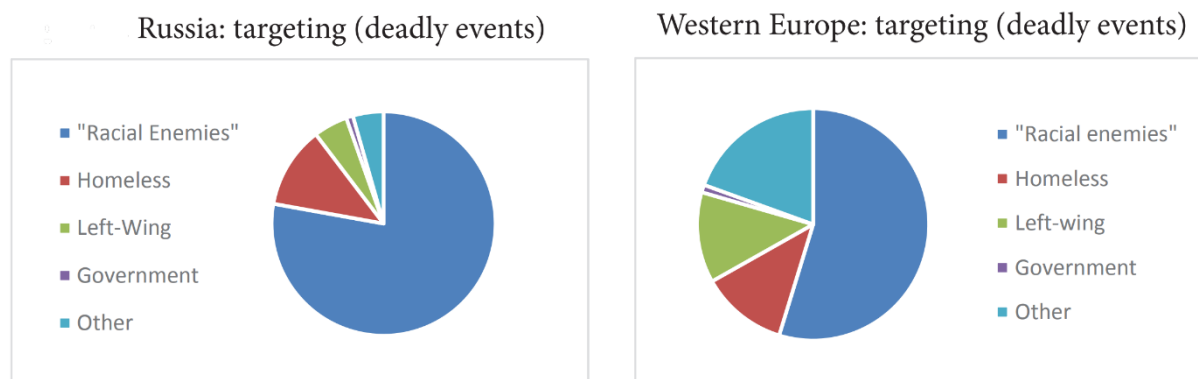


Figure 8. Extreme right target selection in Russia and Western Europe (deadly events). Figures by Johannes Due Enstad (2018), data on Western Europe by Jacob Aasland Ravndal (2016).

Developments in the European far-right

As noted (see figure 5), there has been a considerable decrease in the number of lethal attacks carried out by extreme-right perpetrators in Western Europe since the 1990s. One possible explanation is a change in perpetrator types.

Skinhead gangs carried out many of the killings during the 1990s. For them, violence against immigrants or political opponents was an integral part of their subcultural life-style. In Western Europe, the skinhead subculture subsided or disappeared after the turn of the millennium, also leading to a reduction in such gang violence. In many countries, the far-right *youth* scene has diminished, along with the skinhead subculture. There are few attractive social arenas that can pull youths into extreme-right or racist movements. The White Power music scene, which was very influential during the 1990s, has diminished or disappeared in many European countries.²⁷ In Norway, for example, the remaining far-right activist scenes mainly consist of adults and elderly people, not teenagers.²⁸

However, there *are* significant youth scenes in several European countries. For example, Generation Identity has a solid foothold in countries like France, Germany, and Austria, but these youth movements tend to be less violence-oriented. They tend to recruit less marginalised youths than the skinhead scenes did.²⁹ There are also fascist and extreme nationalist movements with a youth appeal and a more violent potential in several European countries, like Italy, Germany, Greece and Poland. These groups are sometimes involved in hate crimes and violent clashes with opponents, but rarely in terrorist attacks.³⁰

There is another important development that also had an impact on the level of physical violence: the arenas for extremist activism have to a large extent—but not completely—

²⁷ Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the north: Sounds of the New Nordic Radical Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

²⁸ Bjørge, Tore (ed., 2018). *Høyreekstremisme i Norge: Utviklingstrekk, konspirasjonsteorier og forebyggingsstrategier*. (Oslo: Norwegian Police University College. PHS Forskning, (2018: 4) <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/2568904>; Bjørge, Tore, "Right-Wing Extremism in Norway: Changes and Challenges. *Right Now!*", C-REX, 2019, <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/right-wing-extremism-in-norway.html>

²⁹ José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*. (Notre Dame, IN.: The University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).

³⁰ Tore Bjørge, & Miroslav Mareš, eds., *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*. (London and New York: Routledge (in press), 2019); Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Francis O'Connor, and Lasse Lindekilde "Italy, No Country for Acting Alone? Lone Actor Radicalisation in the Neo-Fascist Milieu." *Perspectives on Terrorism*, (Special Issue on Terrorism from the Extreme Right), Vol. 12, No. 6, (2018).

moved from physical meetings and street activism to the Internet and various types of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, VKontakte, Discord, and MeWe. One of the consequences is that there are fewer opportunities for physical clashes between far-right activists and, for instance, left-wing militants. In the past, such clashes frequently had a radicalising impact, leading to spirals of violence and sometimes lethal terrorist attacks. In recent years, street-oriented movements on the far right (e.g. Pegida) have tended to be less confrontational than their predecessors from the 1990s.³¹

With the skinheads largely gone, the main violent and terrorist challenge from the extreme right in Western Europe today comes from lone actors and small autonomous cells. In the past, lone actor terrorists have usually had a very limited violent capacity, and rarely killed more than a few people.³² Unfortunately, there are exceptions, and perhaps, increasingly so. Mass murderers like Brenton Tarrant killed 51 Muslims and injured many more in his gun attacks on two mosques in New Zealand. He was inspired by Anders Behring Breivik, who killed a total of 77 people and injured hundreds in his 2011 car bomb attack on a government building in Oslo and the subsequent shooting massacre on youths at a political youth camp.

There seems to be a copycat process at play here, as a handful of prospective lone actor terrorists are emulating these “role models”. Several plots inspired by Breivik—some more serious than others—have been disrupted, and at least two have led to mass killings.³³ Six weeks after the attacks in New Zealand, a person claiming to be directly inspired by Tarrant killed one Jewish person and wounded three in a shooting against a synagogue in Poway, California. The attack could have led to far more casualties had the perpetrator’s gun not jammed.³⁴ This attack was in turn followed by another attack in a Walmart store in El Paso on 3 August 2019, killing 22 people and injuring 24. Then, seven days later, a person attempted to commit a shooting at a Mosque in Bærum just outside the Norwegian capital Oslo. However, the attacker arrived shortly after the prayer had ended and was quickly overwhelmed by two of the three persons remaining in the mosque.

What these four attacks have in common is that their perpetrators appear to have been self-radicalised within a particular online subculture found in unedited online forums such as 4chan and 8chan. Over the past years, these forums have become a global breeding ground for solitary far-right extremists. Having started as a countercultural playing ground for young outsiders interested in Japanese manga and anime, online gaming, anarchism, and anti-fascist trolling, they have later expanded to include a wide range of topics, including politically incorrect threads mixing ideas and memes from the quickly expanding and misogynist incel (involuntary celibate) subculture with some of the most extreme elements from the far right universe. In particular, there has been a reinvigoration of an extremely violent and revolutionary mind-set, based on a collection of texts written by James Mason during the 1980s, referred to as the Siege-collection after the name of his newsletter. Thus, after years of languishing in obscurity, Mason has been rediscovered by a new generation

³¹ Lars Erik Berntzen and Manès Weisskircher, “Anti-Islamic PEGIDA Beyond Germany: Explaining Differences in Mobilisation”. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. No. 37:. (2016), pp. 556-573
doi: 10.1080/07256868.2016.1235021

³² Ramón Spaaij, *Understanding lone wolf terrorism: global patterns, motivations and prevention*. (Dordrecht/New York: Springer, 2012).

³³ The other Breivik-inspired attack was a shoot-out killing nine people on a shopping mall in Munich, carried out by an 18-year-old German-Iranian youth on the five-year anniversary of the 22 July attacks in Norway. He was apparently a victim of bullying, taking revenge.

³⁴ Bridget Johnson, “Another Synagogue Shooting: Manifesto Attributed to Poway Attacker Claims Christchurch, Pittsburgh as Influences.” *Homeland Security Today*, April 27, 2019. <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/another-synagogue-shooting-manifesto-attributed-to-poway-attacker-claims-christchurch-pittsburgh-as-influences/>

Notably, the perpetrators from Christchurch, Poway, El Paso, and Bærum all pre-announced their attacks on 8chan or related forums. Some also uploaded their manifestos in these forums, and some even provided links to live-streams of the attacks, so that fellow forum users could watch the atrocities live as they unfolded (the Poway and Bærum attackers tried this but failed due to technical difficulties). In doing so, the perpetrators, who all seem to have accepted the possibility of dying during the attack, appear to be at least partially motivated by a desire to excite and gain recognition from fellow forum users and gain martyr status for their common cause. However, while many users celebrate the acts of some of these attackers, and rank them according to how many people they managed to kill, many also claim to do so in a deeply ironic fashion, meaning that they do not truly support their cause or actions. Thus, in doing so, they take part in a dark and morbid subcultural practise that has become a trademark for these forums, leading vulnerable people to commit atrocities for the “lulz” of others. However, a handful of fairly newly established groups with some degree of organisation do mirror and even serve as inspiration for this largely online-based subculture-of-a-subculture, most notably *Atomwaffen Division*, mainly based in the United States, *Sonnenkrieg Division*, mainly based in the United Kingdom, and *Feuerkrieg Division*, apparently active in multiple countries. At the same time, we also see that many members of the more organised extreme-right scene try to distance themselves from these attacks as well as the writings on these forums, as they are considered to be too infantile, extreme, unserious, and essentially hurting their cause.

A different modus operandi than the mass-murder shooting attacks is practised by extreme-right serial killers who attack one victim at a time. Sweden has had two such serial killers: the so-called “Laser man” (John Ausonius), who carried out nine shooting attacks against immigrants between 1991 and 1992, killing one; and Peter Mangs, who carried out a series of shooting attacks on immigrants between 2003 and 2010, and was convicted of killing two people in nine potentially lethal attacks (he may have been behind more attacks).³⁵ Between 1993 and 1997, the Austrian lone actor Franz Fuchs was behind at least 23 letter bomb attacks on immigrants in Austria and Germany, resulting in 4 fatalities. In the US, right-wing extremist Joseph P. Franklin killed a high (but still unknown) number of people between 1977 and 1980, becoming a role model for other lone actors. The serial killing of individual victims was also a method used by one of the rare extreme-right terrorist cells, the National Socialist Underground, consisting of a core of three persons, but with an external support structure. They operated in Germany between 2000 and 2007, killed nine immigrants and a police woman, and carried out several bomb attacks.³⁶

The strategy of leaderless resistance became popular among right-wing militants from the 1980s onwards, as they realised that traditional terrorist organisations were vulnerable for detection and infiltration. Acting alone, or in small, isolated cells, reduces the risk of being detected. Communication and interaction between participants in a plot of terrorist groups represent possibilities for security services to detect that something suspicious is going on, and then start surveillance and eventually disrupt the plot. Prospective terrorists are very aware of this, and may adapt to that risk by doing their preparations and operations alone.

³⁵ Tore Bjørge, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, perpetrators and Responses*, (Oslo: Tano Aschehoug, 1997).; Mattias Gardell, “Urban Terror: The Case of Lone Wolf Peter Mangs.” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (2018). pp. 793-811. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1444796>

³⁶ Daniel Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: The 'National Socialist Underground' and the history of terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017)

Responses to extreme right violence and terrorism

Although jihadi terrorism is considered the most severe terrorist threat facing Europe, there may have been a tendency to underestimate the terrorist threat from the extreme right—at times with severe consequences. As the following paragraphs illustrate, the saying that “the police is blind in the right eye” sometimes has truth to it.

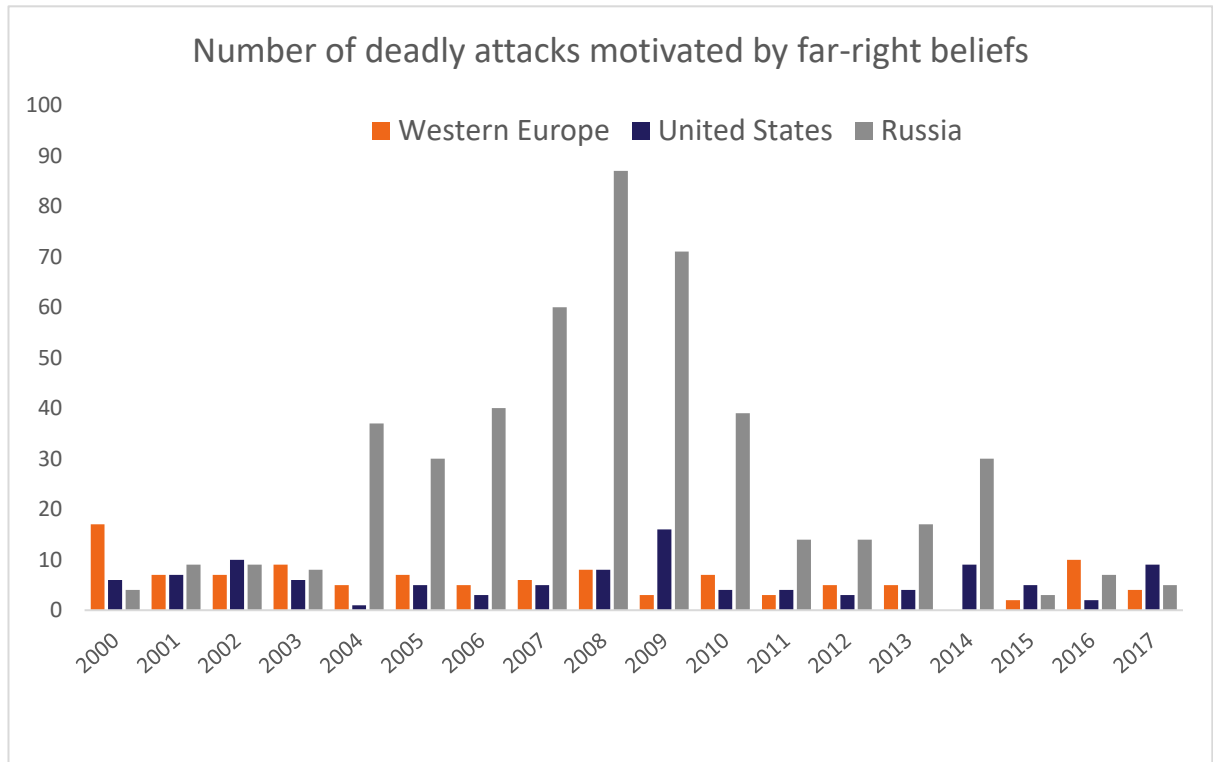


Figure 9. Number of deadly attacks motivated by extreme-right beliefs: USA, Western Europe and Russia (2000–2017). Figure produced by Jacob Aasland Ravndal, based on data from Ravndal (2016), Enstad (2018) and Freilich et al. (2014). Note that eleven deadly events from Russia are left out because information about the year they occurred is unavailable.

The most severe example of this took place in Russia between 2006 and 2010, when racist skinhead gangs and other extreme-right groups, year-after-year continued to murder large numbers of immigrants as well as others considered as enemies by the Russian extreme-right scene. The Russian police literally turned their backs on these killings, and were reluctant to intervene. A forceful response did not happen until the government and the police leadership decided that this violence had to stop and ordered the police to crack down on the activist networks. The police eventually did so, and from 2009 onwards leaders and perpetrators were arrested and received long prison sentences. As a result, the number of killings dropped dramatically.³⁷

In parts of Western Europe, the problem was not that the police turned their backs on extreme-right violence, but lacked the imagination to understand that series of violence and murder might have an extreme-right motivation.

³⁷ Martin Laryš, “Violent Attacks against Migrants and Minorities in the Russian Federation.” in Tore Bjørge, & Miroslav Mareš, eds., *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*. (London and New York: Routledge (in press), 2019).; Johannes Due Enstad, “Terrorism and Violence in Putin’s Russia” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, No. 6 (Dec. 2018).

This was the case in Germany, where the police and security services failed to realise that the so-called “kebab murders” of ethnic Turks and Kurds were not in fact a gang war related to the criminal underworld, but a terrorist campaign by the National Socialist Underground (NSU). Lives were lost because the police looked in wrong places. The security service did not share important information with the police investigators because they protected their sources in the extreme-right milieu.³⁸

A similar blindness was also a factor in 2000s Malmö, Sweden, where the police for years believed that a series of murderous pistol shootings on people with an immigrant background had its background in the criminal underworld. Once again, the police looked in the wrong places. Even after the serial murderer Peter Mangs was arrested, the criminal investigators failed to consider seriously that he was a highly ideologically motivated racial killer. It was not until later that a scholar, Mattias Gardell (2015, 2018), through lengthy interviews with the perpetrator, documented convincingly that he was indeed a racially motivated lone actor terrorist.³⁹

In recent years, the terrorist threat from the extreme right appears to be taken more seriously at a policy level as well as by security services and police. This is partly due to the 22 July attacks in Norway in 2011. The series of connected attacks in Christchurch, Poway, El Paso and Bærum in 2019 will probably contribute further to more activities among policy-makers and security services. However, the fact that terrorism from the extreme right generally is a high frequency, low casualty threat, with a few exceptional mass casualty attacks in between, may hide the fact that cumulatively, such terrorism kills and injures many people, and terrorises many more.

Although it's tempting to consider the threat from extreme right terrorism and violence is equal to the threat from Islamist terrorism, it is not the same. Although it might be just as lethal, the patterns of violence are different, the perpetrators are different, and the organisational style is different. The responses need to take into account that the most severe terrorist threats from the extreme right do not come from traditional organisations, face-to-face networks, or skinhead gangs but increasingly from individuals operating alone, finding their ideological justifications, tactical inspiration, and social support in extremist communities online. To prevent future attacks, it is necessary to understand and monitor these online subcultures. Closing down specific extremist sites may have a short-time disruption effect but will only lead to a cat-and-mouse game and make it more difficult to monitor them.

Although lone actor terrorists are notoriously difficult to detect and stop, there are possibilities to disrupt attacks at different stages in the process.⁴⁰ It is well established that most lone actors and mass murderers tend to speak about their violent intentions to family, friends, or others before they carry out their attack.⁴¹ Pre-attack preparations and changes in behaviour may also alert those surrounding them that something strange is going on. In order

³⁸ Daniel Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: The 'National Socialist Underground' and the history of terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017)

³⁹ Mattias Gardell, *Raskrigaren* [The Race Warrior]. (Stockholm: Leopard, 2015).;

Mattias Gardell. "Urban Terror: The Case of Lone Wolf Peter Mangs." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (2018) pp. 793-811. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1444796>

⁴⁰ Tore Bjørge, Counter-terrorism as crime prevention: a holistic approach. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, Vol.8, No.1, (2016), pp. 25-44, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2015.1108352>

⁴¹ James Silver, John Horgan and Paul Gill "Foreshadowing targeted violence: Assessing leakage of intent by public mass murderers." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* No. 38 (Dec. 2017). DOI: 10.1016/j.avb.2017.12.002 (2017).

to bring such worries to the knowledge of the relevant authorities, it is important that the public is made aware of potential threats and where to go with their worries. This requires that people have a basic level of trust in the police and security services. Such trust is built in peacetime by establishing a reputation of fairness by being perceived as serving and protecting the community.

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Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses

Tore Bjørge & Jacob Aasland Ravndal

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