SPECIAL REPORT

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The transnational element of a 'domestic' problem

Policy solutions to countering right-wing violent extremism in Australia

Diane Liang

ASPI
AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC POLICY INSTITUTE

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About the author

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About ASPI

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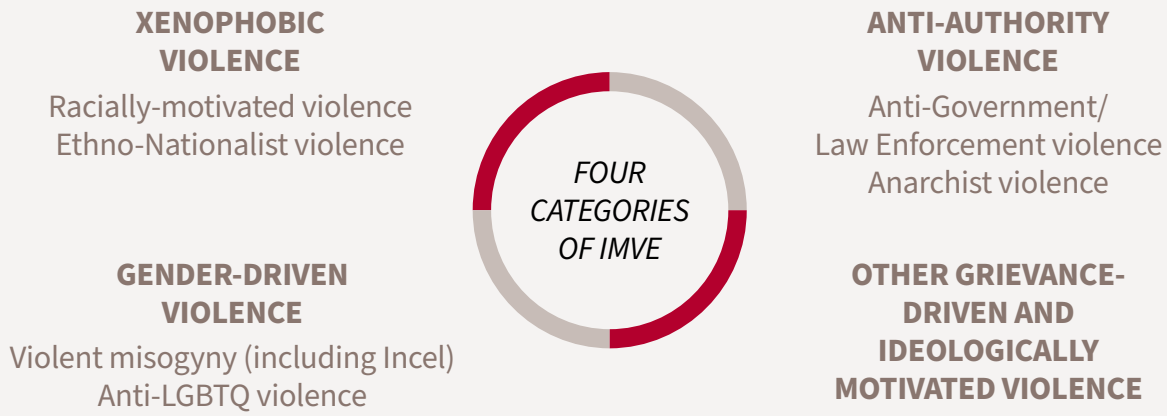
Contents

The problem

Right-wing extremism (RWE) encompasses different but related and overlapping ideologies, often linked by hatred, fear, anger and hostility towards an 'other' or perceived outgroup.[1] RWE is an umbrella term; its ideologies can be grouped along several axes. Key categories include xenophobic and racially driven violence, gender-driven violence and anti-authority violence (see Figure 1, which uses the term 'ideologically motivated violent extremism', or IMVE).[2] Although I use the term 'RWE' in this report, it should be noted that, while I was writing it, agencies including the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) began shifting away from 'RWE' and towards 'IMVE' in order to reflect the fact that some of these ideas can't be neatly captured on the left–right spectrum.[3] This change in terminology recognises the changing nature of the threat.

Figure 1: Breakdown of ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE)



Note: Some countries (including Australia) have moved away from referring to extremism as 'right-wing' and 'left-wing' and instead adopted the term 'IMVE'.

Source: Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), CSIS public report 2019, Canadian Government, April 2020, 40.

Conventional views of RWE violence frequently assume that the key inspirations and points of grievance have domestic sources.[4] Although RWE violence may be rooted within a domestic context, the RWE threat has transnational dimensions. This is in part facilitated by the internet: RWE actors have been early adopters and make heavy use of the internet and social media platforms[5]—spaces that are in many ways transnational. They do so in order to, among other things, air grievances, spread and exchange ideas and propaganda, connect with like-minded individuals, find and create communities, and recruit and expand membership.[6] Such online spaces allow not only domestic but global connections.[7]

It's important that governments be more effective and nuanced in their response to RWE because of the sets of harms RWE poses. One obvious harm is the threat of physical violence. But RWE also touches on consequential issues at the forefront of public discussion, especially disinformation and misinformation, angry divisions within

societies, and democratic resilience. This overlap exists because some RWE beliefs are rooted in conspiracy theory, rebukes of common truths and facts and distrust in public institutions, and they can be virally self-reinforcing. Moreover, RWE beliefs can involve rejections of the basic human dignity of fellow citizens, which makes the path to violence against those 'others' easier—as we see repeatedly in the context of war, war crimes and genocide. *As such, the fabric and character of democracy—especially that of the multicultural and multi-ethnic democracies that are the focus of this report—are put under stress by the rise of RWE.*

Governments, including the Five Eyes members (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US and the UK), have stood up substantial counterterrorism programs and tools. However, many of those measures are aimed at addressing religiously motivated violent extremism—especially 'Islamist' extremist terrorism—or assume that the threats are external in nature. To the extent that systems and tools to counter RWE exist within governments, those tools may be unevenly applied and insufficiently responsive to RWE and to its online interactions. Further, security organisations may be hesitant to take action on RWE adherents or narratives within their own ranks[8] and find dividing lines between freedom of expression and extremism hard to draw.

This report draws attention to transnational elements of how RWE and RWE violence is inspired and how it can be countered. Conventionally, governments have categorised the threat as either domestic or international, but that might not be fully responsive to the reality of RWE violence today, or take full advantage of toolsets and partnerships that could be available to combat the threat. RWE includes several interlinked categories of ideological motivation that together produce transnational threats and create transnational networks. Understanding those diverse motivations, their resonance with each other, and how they are projected and enabled through transnational networks is key to government responses to the growing RWE threat.

This report urges governments to take RWE seriously by helping to reframe how we understand the RWE threat. Several key ideas animate my analysis and that reframing. First, governments must recognise that RWE isn't solely a domestic issue, but one with transnational implications—and, therefore, one with transnational solution sets. Second, RWE's harms aren't merely ones of violence and criminality; rather, RWE undercuts democracy itself. Our approaches and solutions must recognise this threat to democracy. With those revisions in framing in mind, the case for devoting greater attention and resources to countering RWE is clearer, as is how countering RWE can be linked to complementary existing domestic and international agendas that seek to bolster democratic resilience and counter dis/misinformation.

Moreover, I hope to underscore that it's not only important that governments take RWE seriously; it matters *how* governments do so. Therefore, several key principles guide this report's recommendations. First and foremost, democracies must be accountable and must respect fundamental rights and freedoms. It would be naive to think that any government can strike some objectively correct balance of appropriate restrictions and preservations of freedoms, never mind doing it repeatedly. Therefore, it's important that governments consult and communicate when making those decisions.

Governments must also be open to revision—and to explaining those revisions well to the public. This is for several reasons. First, the threat is unlikely to stay constant; accordingly, our analysis and responses must be re-examined, too. Second, governments can get things wrong. Government would do well to recognise both those factors and explain why and how it's changing course. Reflecting on the nature of the threat, how policy meets those challenges, and shortcomings of current policy helps to refine and update policy responses.

Consulting widely helps a government access more and different kinds of information and insights. Communicating with the public helps preserve legitimacy. And continuing to do both, alongside reflection and revision, helps keep the government accountable and is a mechanism to help remedy ineffective and harmful policies.

International coordination helps governments access more information. Moreover, politicians can act in concert to shape the information space by refusing to endorse RWE ideas and instead bolstering visions of inclusive democracy. Governments can converge on norms and expectations and, together, more effectively engage with private-sector stakeholders and align policy.

This report offers overviews of how governments are currently approaching the issue and how the internet and online social media platforms have enabled transnational sources of inspiration and connections for RWE actors. Each section of the report outlines key lessons, challenges and recommendations. (See the 'Recommendations' section for full summary tables of challenges and recommendations.)

I offer two sets of recommendations that centre on how Australia can begin regarding and responding to RWE violence as an issue with a transnational nexus. The recommendations point to early steps Australia can take to improve international collaboration and coordination to counter RWE. This also includes work to be done in Australia to set up solid ground for effective international engagement. International collaboration and integrated strategy across actors and sectors will help address the gaps between geographical jurisdictions and online platforms.

The first set of recommendations focuses on messaging and the policy change process. It offers suggestions on how to elevate the importance of countering RWE, emphasises that transparency and public engagement are crucial in the policy change process, stresses that democratic values must inform policies, and recommends coordinating government statements and messaging on RWE.

The second set of recommendations focuses on government toolboxes and terminologies. In light of the evolving nature of RWE, the online and transnational dimensions of RWE and the challenges identified, I suggest taking stock of the existing toolbox to counter RWE, reviewing key terms and mandates, and aligning the terminologies and approaches among the Five Eyes.

Methodology

To investigate transnational elements of RWE, I used three research methods: case studies, qualitative interviews and a literature review. The case studies focus on RWE violence that's primarily driven by ideologies of white supremacy and misogyny, conducted by individual actors, and including a strong online element (see Appendix 4 for case summaries). RWE actors might typically be regarded as domestic terrorists, but they have sources of inspiration and audiences beyond their countries of citizenship. All cases cited here took place within and were conducted by citizens of Five Eyes countries:

1. Isla Vista shooting (Elliot Rodger, May 2014, US)
2. Quebec mosque shooting (Alexandre Bissonnette, January 2017, Canada)
3. Toronto van attack (Alek Minassian, April 2018, Canada)
4. Christchurch mosque attacks (Brenton Tarrant, March 2019, New Zealand).

The virtual dimensions of each case show that transnational sources of influence can not only inform the attacker's ideas but also inspire their violence. The cases also show how RWE attackers have sought to create legacies and influence future attackers and to connect with audiences that aren't bound by national borders.

I interviewed a small number of people currently working in US and Canadian public-sector agencies with responsibilities relating to RWE, counterterrorism, national security, public safety and online hate speech.

The interviews and literature review together informed my review of key challenges and frictions that stymy a more effective strategy to counter RWE domestically and internationally.

RWE: an overview

For this project, I reviewed publications on RWE, dis/misinformation, hate groups, hate crimes, hate speech, and terrorism published by government, academic, and other sources. Several points are worth drawing out.

First, the literature affirms that RWE actors make heavy use of online spaces and that online spaces make possible domestic and global connections. For example, in an April 2020 report, the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive underscored the transnational and virtual dimensions of RWE: 'As the [racially and ethnically motivated terrorism] threat has increased, extreme right-wing terrorist groups and individuals are becoming transnational.'[9] It notes that the academic literature has 'long recognized the potential of internet uses and transnational links', and evidence suggests the confirmation of insights in that literature.[10]

Second, RWE shouldn't be considered merely as violent crime. Rather, addressing RWE requires public-facing work to counter hatred more broadly and promote inclusive communities and democracies.[11] This is because 'behaviours underpinned by an extremist ideology that are not violent … nonetheless can cause harm to individuals and create fear and division within societies.'[12] Further, those behaviours can create an environment that's conducive to violence,[13] including by shifting the boundaries of acceptable public debate.[14] Governments have a key role to play in shaping the public discourse. Moreover, government efforts to address RWE should be shaped by engagement with a wide array of stakeholders.[15]

In particular, New Zealand's royal commission of inquiry into the terrorist attack in Christchurch in March 2019 considered RWE through a wider lens. The commission's report notes the 'often "fluid boundaries" between hate crime and terrorism, especially in the case of right-wing extremism'.[16] Its recommendations emphasise the importance of public engagement and social cohesion. It states that 'Social cohesion is desirable for many reasons, one of which is that it is critical to preventing the development of harmful radicalising ideologies and downstream violent extremism.'[17] It recommends that 'Improvements in the approach of [p]ublic sector agencies towards promoting social cohesion will make a significant contribution to the prevention of extremism and thus violent extremism.'[18]

Third, the literature notes important limitations of existing government tools to address RWE. Two criticisms are prominent: that the tools to address terrorism, especially as conceived and expanded after 9/11, disproportionately harm racialised communities,[19] and that terrorism charges aren't evenly applied.[20]

I also conducted a limited number of qualitative interviews with members of public-sector agencies with relevant mandates in the case study countries in order to shed additional light on the available literature.[21] Their responses are reflected in the analysis that follows.

Current actions by governments

Key lessons

Governments and public-sector agencies within the Five Eyes countries have been criticised as being slow or reluctant to recognise and respond to the RWE threat.[22] They're also criticised for their uneven use of 'terrorism' as a term and as a criminal charge, and for the resulting impression that RWE is less dangerous than other forms of extremism.

However, Five Eyes governments have begun making changes and drawing attention to RWE. Although ASIO[23] and Public Safety Canada[24] assess that religiously motivated violent extremism poses a bigger threat to their countries than other forms of extremism, both note the 'growing' threat of RWE.[25] Both countries also highlight the role of online spaces in content and connections.[26] The US has made sharper public statements. For example, in 2020, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) characterised the primary terrorist threat inside the US as 'lone offenders and small cells of individuals, including Domestic Violent Extremists (DVEs) and foreign terrorist-inspired Homegrown Violent Extremists'.[27] The National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism released by the White House in 2021 noted that the intelligence community assesses that domestic violent extremism poses an 'elevated' threat to the US homeland.[28] It also drew attention to online and transnational elements. It highlighted that, among domestic violent extremists, racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists have 'the most persistent and concerning transnational connections because individuals with similar ideological beliefs exist outside of the United States and frequently communicate with and seek to influence each other.'[29]

Some shifts can also be seen in terminology. Australia's intelligence chief recently announced that ASIO would be shifting its terminology from 'RWE' towards terms such as 'ideologically motivated terrorism', explaining that this change aims to better capture the current threatscape and to be responsive to criticisms of harms posed by previously used terms, and noting that this aligns with terms adopted by the Five Eyes partners.[30] In a move relevant to the cases studied in this report, the Canadian Government has recognised so-called 'incelibate' or 'incel' beliefs as a subset of extremist beliefs and has funded efforts to address incel radicalisation.[31] Other shifts can be seen in counterterrorism (CT) operations and conceptions of the threat. For example, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has noted overlaps and complementarities in its domestic terrorism and hate crime units and stated that it has tried to dedicate resources accordingly.[32] The US National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism has underscored the utility of sustained collaboration between counterterrorism and hate-crime investigators and prosecutors in both the FBI and the Department of Justice.[33]

In describing their strategies to counter RWE and RWE violence, Australia and its Five Eyes partners countries align on several points, suggesting that lessons have been learned from past counterterrorism policies. They observe that multisector and multistakeholder approaches will be valuable. They note the need to further engage the online dimensions of RWE. That means directly interfacing with tech companies and funding additional research, but also engaging the public on digital literacy, on early signs of radicalisation, and on resources and reporting mechanisms. They also emphasise that strategies should be congruent with and supportive of democratic values and constitutional rights.

The pace and scope of action can be modulated by current events, which can expose risks, generate waves of heightened recognition and urgency about RWE, and galvanise action. The public attention that such events draw may be useful, too, by placing pressure on or enabling governments to act. For example, the Christchurch attack sharpened some public-sector agencies' and tech companies' willingness to take action, one reflection of which was New Zealand's launching of the Christchurch Call.

More recent events may spur yet another wave of attention and action. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has sparked anti-lockdown protests, compounded challenges in disinformation and conspiracy theories, and inflamed incidences of racially and ethnically motivated hate. The 6 January Capitol 'insurrection' in Washington DC has also focused attention on the RWE threat, both in the US and in the capitals of its key allies and partners. Under the Biden administration, the US looks poised to pay greater attention domestically to ideologically motivated violent terrorism. The National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism outlines key pillars of the US strategy. While primarily domestically focused, the strategy nonetheless points to international and transnational dimensions. It makes 'illuminat[ing] transnational aspects of domestic terrorism' a strategic goal.[34] It notes that critical partners include foreign allies and partners, civil society, and the technology sector.[35] And its recommendations include working with foreign allies to share information and best practices and to explore tools that can stem domestic terrorism[36] and engaging with partner governments, technology companies and civil society organisations to address terrorist content online.[37] Even if the US's focus were to remain largely domestic, that still affects the RWE threat. RWE adherents and potential actors pay attention to the politics and politicians of other countries. It matters that the US is not perceived as a 'safe haven'[38] for RWE ideas. The Capitol riot has already prompted some steps outside of the US. Canada, for example, designated the Proud Boys and other RWE groups as terrorist entities in February 2021.[39]

Current events can not only lead to more attention and action, but also help shift frameworks and definitions, and that can change resource allocations. For example, in US Attorney General Merrick Garland's confirmation hearing, Garland said he would define domestic terrorism as 'the use of violence or threats of violence in an attempt to disrupt democratic processes'.[40] That frames RWE as a threat to democracy that demands greater government attention and resources and better links between existing domestic and international agendas on democratic resilience and dis/misinformation. The events at the Capitol, the shocking headlines they generated around the world and the invigorated US attention to RWE *create a moment for more robust and coordinated international efforts on RWE and support more robust domestic efforts, as demonstrated in Biden's 2021 strategy for countering domestic terrorism*.[41]

Challenges

It's important to understand the challenges that have slowed government responses to RWE and that governments must navigate when they step up action against RWE.

Challenge 1.	**Acknowledging the problem: reluctance to acknowledge and dedicate resources.**
	Absolute size of the RWE threat
	Relative size of the RWE threat
	Who is in the room—diversity and recognition issues
	Who is in the room—vigilance about RWE within security agencies

The first challenge in galvanising public-sector action is a perceived reluctance to acknowledge the RWE threat and dedicate resources to disrupting it. Interviewees repeatedly expressed frustration that government responses to RWE are inadequate. One part of the frustration relates to recognising the absolute size of the RWE threat; the other is concerned with how RWE is compared to other threats—especially to 'Islamist' extremist terrorism, which frequently dominates discussion of terrorist threats even as the threatscape may be shifting. Naming and identifying the changing nature of the threatscape is crucial to allocating and redirecting resources in ways that are responsive to those changes. Shifting terminology towards 'IMVE' is one such first step that agencies have taken.

Several factors may contribute to a perceived unwillingness to acknowledge the RWE threat, notwithstanding 'objective' assessments of scale of the threat. One factor may be bureaucratic 'stickiness' or inertia. Another, however, is about *who* is in the room: the demographic make-up of public-sector agencies and their leadership may contribute to difficulty in recognising the RWE threat. Interviewees were concerned that teams aren't diverse enough. Harms that disproportionately affect women, racialised communities and other marginalised groups might not be as apparent to or be taken as seriously by less diverse teams. This has knock-on consequences: when marginalised groups feel that harms that most affect them aren't taken seriously, that negatively affects community engagement efforts by law enforcement as well as the perceived legitimacy of government, government agencies and their counterterrorism and public-safety actions.[42] Further, teams that lack a diversity of perspectives from the beginning could also miss approaches to understanding and addressing issues. Even as teams diversify, they and the organisations they belong to must make cultural changes in the workplace so that diverse ideas can be raised and considered.

Another version of the 'who is in the room' challenge is troubling: some in the room might hold or be sympathetic to RWE beliefs. Canada,[43] the US[44] and Germany[45] have raised concerns about RWE among their security forces. This suggests that other security agencies shouldn't assume themselves to be immune but should be more vigilant about radicalisation within their own ranks[46]—especially when trends in society more broadly are troubling. To the extent that there are already regulations covering association or affiliation with specific groups or ideologies, those policies would need to apply to RWE and be well enforced to be meaningful.[47] At the same time, agencies must take care to avoid wielding ideology policy so broadly as to overstep into 'witch-hunt' territory.

Challenge 2.	**Defining the problem**
	What are harms? When are they concerning?
	Framing the threat
	Recognising complementary efforts

A second set of challenges revolves around how governments understand the RWE threat and what it threatens.

This challenge relates to not only how governments focus their attention and resources but to how they're perceived to do so. Here, a key criticism was that governments are too narrowly focused on harm relating to the eruption of physical violence and are insufficiently engaging across the fuller spectrum of harms. For example, online harms may be taken less seriously than offline harms, even when similarly hateful speech is used in both forums. One interviewee expressed frustration that harms short of 'dead bodies on the ground' often don't garner concern (even if counterterrorism units aren't necessarily the correct vehicle).[48] However, harms driven by RWE but that fall short of violence can nonetheless contribute to environments that are more conducive to violent extremism and thus exacerbate the RWE threat.[49] Furthermore, inaction by governments feeds into perceptions that harms that disproportionately affect racialised and marginalised communities are simply taken less seriously—or, worse, tacitly condoned.

It's not only important to ask *what* harms we identify but *how* the harms of RWE are framed. The issue can be framed, one interviewee noted, in terms of national security, physical security, human rights and democracy, each of which designates responsibilities to different parties and garners different attention and resources.[50] Oversecuritising the problem, for example by focusing on 'bodies on the ground', may underemphasise harms that fall short of violence. Additionally, current counterterrorism efforts (especially against religiously motivated extremist violence) inflict harms on communities that are often also the targets of RWE.[51] A framing in which human rights are dominant risks isolating the problem and the harms to specific communities and individuals. One interviewee suggested that framing RWE—and the hateful content that propels it—as a threat to democracy could be effective. This would make RWE a problem for *everyone* and something government can be held responsible for.[52] It's also a framing that probably helps make sense of people's lived experience of the anger and division that grievance-based protests and groups demonstrate and perpetuate.

Another dimension of this challenge is in recognising potential complementary efforts, agendas and resources. For example, critics urged stronger recognition of the links between RWE violence, hate speech (online and offline) and disinformation. The inputs to and outputs of those phenomena can reinforce each other. All undermine the fabric and character of democracy, including by denigrating others' membership in society, truth, shared facts and values, and trust in government institutions, fomenting anger and division inside our society. Hatred, terrorism and RWE violence also share 'fluid boundaries'.[53]

Taken altogether, these criticisms suggest that it would be valuable for governments to engage more robustly and with a wider lens on what RWE harms are, as well as the levels at which the challenge must be addressed. For example, tackling extremism would mean not only managing programs that are targeted at the extreme ends, but societal-level efforts to address those pernicious ideas and to proactively reinforce ideas supporting inclusive democracy. Such efforts could also help to reduce the influence of RWE adherents by nullifying the idea that they have their governments' tacit support, and would build trust and communication between governments and communities targeted by RWE. Linking the RWE challenge to interlinking agendas and to a democratic frame could also better elucidate the current and potential costs of and the resources needed to meet such a pressing problem.

Challenge 3.	Approach to the problem
	Balancing rights, values and interests
	Political concerns and public engagement

As governments step up or alter their approaches to RWE, they face two challenges. First, they must balance democratic rights and values. Second, they must also take into account and engage with the public.

Their efforts must strike a balance among key interests, including:

- upholding the basic human dignity of community members
- upholding civil liberties and freedom of speech
- limiting the ability of illiberal governments to use such efforts to justify their own practices of widespread, arbitrary or otherwise objectionable repression.

That isn't an easy balance to strike. It's likely to be different in different countries, and may shift over time. This may cause some friction in aligning transnational efforts to counter RWE.

Public, political concerns might also modulate government efforts. For example, governments may hesitate to act if they believe voters to be sympathetic to RWE, even while rejecting violence resulting from such extremism. On the other hand, greater public attention to and appreciation of the RWE threat could grant governments more scope for action to combat RWE and RWE violence.

Where governments commit to more robust actions against RWE, public engagement will be crucial in helping to determine the shape and scope of their counter-RWE strategies. This is particularly relevant, given recent criticisms of the shape of government action against religiously motivated violent extremism.[54] Governments should engage in robust, transparent public debate and messaging to ascertain, shift and legitimise the balance struck in their own countries in their efforts to counter RWE. Furthermore, they should be receptive to feedback, revisions and reassessments of the balance struck and the policies in force, especially as the nature of the threat evolves.

Recommendations

The key recommendations relevant to the challenges identified above are briefly presented here. They make up most of recommendation set 1: messaging and policy change process. These recommendations focus on how the Australian Government can augment attention and urgency to RWE and should approach progressing policy change and action.

Recommendation 1: The government should elevate the importance of more robust efforts to counter RWE.

The case for increased attention and efforts can be made in several ways, to domestic and international audiences.

First, there have been key changes in the character and size of the RWE threat. Australia and its closest allies have witnessed a rise in concern about RWE violence. In addition, RWE isn't a strictly domestic problem, but one with online and international dimensions. Public-sector agencies must not only register those changes but respond to them. Government can elevate the profile of the RWE threat internally and externally and increase the appetite for action against the threat.

Second, the relevance of countering RWE can be augmented by linking it to broader government agendas and priorities on democratic resilience, disinformation, reducing hate and division and increasing social cohesion. As discussed in Challenge 2, a democracy framing gives everyone a role to play in rejecting hate, dislodging RWE, and upholding diverse and inclusive democracies.

Third, the government can emphasise not only the importance of taking action, but the urgency and timeliness of doing so. This moment may be especially ripe for international coordination and cooperation. The 6 January Capitol riot focused the US's attention on countering RWE and raised the alarm for the government and publics of close allies. Australia should rise to this moment and push forward.

Recommendation 2: Australia should emphasise that transparency and engagement with the public are crucial pillars in informing policy change—especially where security agencies' powers and tools are increased.

It's not only important that governments take RWE seriously, it matters *how* governments do so. Transparency and public engagement are crucial.

Outreach efforts are important for informing the government's priorities and approach. They help illuminate the public's appetite, demands and concerns. That, in turn, can inform how governments weigh interests and tensions. Those insights can also generate more nuanced policy. Furthermore, outreach efforts also help ensure that the effort to counter violent extremism becomes more robust, and is responsive to and 'valued by the people it seeks to protect'.[55]

Moreover, placing transparency and public engagement centre stage is foundational to legitimising policies. Such efforts may be especially valuable where governments engage in a review or expansion of tools and powers to address RWE. They may also help to address existing concerns about the applications of terrorism charges, the perceived minimisation of RWE, and the reach and powers afforded to security agencies.

Recommendation 3: Australia should strongly emphasise the importance of crafting policy informed by democratic values and of communicating the value of a diverse and inclusive democracy.

Again, it matters *how* governments take RWE seriously. Governments should emphasise democratic values in their policies and communications.

First, Australia and the Five Eyes members are democracies; their governments are responsible for upholding democratic values and strengthening their own democracies. Their policies and communications domestically and internationally should reflect that commitment.

Second, governments help set the tone for legitimate public discourse. Their consistent affirmation of the value of inclusive, respectful societies helps bolster positive messaging, especially as their populations become more diverse. This messaging can also help to undercut RWE ideas and their mainstreaming.

Visibly upholding democratic values is also useful for foreign policy reasons and national self-image. Australia is likely to wish to differentiate the CT tools and processes that are acceptable and valid within democracies from the tools and actions employed by illiberal, authoritarian states. This may be particularly pertinent, given broader geopolitical concerns.

Transnational networks fuelling attacks

Key lessons

RWE involves transnational linkages that are important to understand when considering both RWE and strategies to counter it. Here, case studies help to shine light on interconnection across national boundaries, through which acts of violent extremism can echo each other in style and execution as well as in beliefs.

Some of these linkages are manufactured by the actor—for example, in their manifesto-like publications and their attempts to determine their legacies. Others are forged by online audiences, and others can be understood through the actor's online footprints. Table 1 lists attacks that the actors in our case studies cited as informing their own beliefs and actions, and events that the actors in our case studies are understood to have inspired elsewhere (see Appendix 4 for detailed case summaries). Figure 2 outlines the key inspirational links between these attacks.

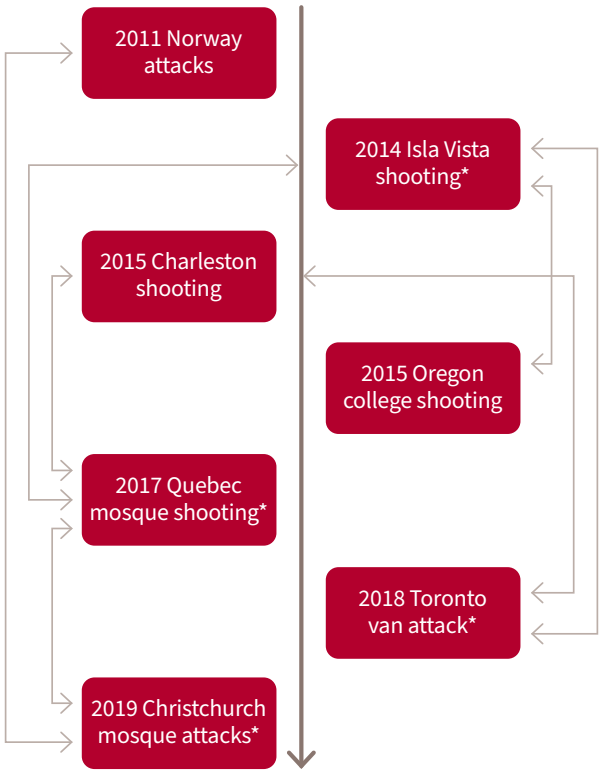
Table 1: Selected RWE attacks and brief descriptions

2011 Norway attacks	• Anders Breivik (Norwegian citizen) • Truck bomb + shooting • Anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, Islamophobia, anti-multiculturalism, white supremacy • Wrote 1,000+ page manifesto, sent it to 1,000 email addresses and posted it to online forum; uploaded YouTube video • Inspired other violent extremists, including Dylann Roof and the Christchurch shooter; celebrated by some neo-Nazi groups; an extremist icon, hailed by some as a 'saint'
2014 Isla Vista shooting*	• Elliot Rodger (US citizen) • Shooting + vehicular attack near school campus • Incel, misogynistic violence (+ white supremacy) • Created YouTube videos and manifesto • Became 'patron saint' of incels; later cited by the Toronto van attacker; interest from other mass shooters, including the Oregon college attacker and Quebec mosque attacker
2015 Charleston shooting	• Dylann Roof (US citizen) • Shooting at a church • White supremacy • Wrote manifesto and posted online to a website registered in his name; also posted photos with white supremacist and racist symbols
2015 Oregon college shooting	• Chris Harper-Mercer (US citizen) • Shooting near school campus • Loneliness and resentment; frustrated that he had 'no friends, no job, no girlfriend, [and was] a virgin' (incel-like) • Wrote six-page manifesto • Interested in other mass shooters (including Rodger, also cited in manifesto), both idolising and critiquing their methods

2017 Quebec mosque shooting	• Alexandre Bissonnette (Canadian citizen) • Shooting at mosque • Anti-Muslim, Islamophobia, anti-immigration, far right (+ anti-feminist) • No manifesto • Later referenced by Christchurch attacker
2018 Toronto van attack*	• Alek Minassian (Canadian citizen) • Vehicular attack • Incel, violent misogyny • Didn't write manifesto, but wrote online post urging a 'beta uprising' ahead of attack • Claimed contact with US mass shooters, including the Isla Vista and Oregon college attackers; some incels claimed him as 'one of their own' and a 'saint'
2019 Christchurch mosque attack*	• Brenton Harrison Tarrant (Australian citizen) • White supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigrant • Wrote and shared manifesto online; live-streamed attack • Showed interest in other mass shooters (Canada, Norway, US), writing some of their names on his weapons

*Events included in case studies.

Figure 2: Inspirational links between selected RWE attacks



* Events included in case studies.

The cases also help to highlight the emerging connectedness across strands of RWE ideology—in particular, among white supremacist ideas and misogynistic ones. For example, men's rights activism has been described as a 'gateway drug for the alt-right'.[56] That overlap can be seen in Case 1 (Rodger): an 'incel' ('involuntary celibate'), who writes about his own sexual frustrations and entitlement and perceptions of physical attractiveness with reference to racial hierarchies and white supremacy.[57] Case 2 (Bissonnette) also expressed interest in prominent white supremacist *and* incel actors.

One explanation is that adherents of misogynistic beliefs and white supremacist ones believe that 'those with the most power in contemporary society'—be they men, white people, or white men—'are the true victims of oppression.'[58] More generally, both misogynistic and white supremacist ideas emphasise hierarchies—racist, gendered, or both. They make claims about the 'right' kinds of people and members of society, seeking to demarcate who is worthy of being respected as an individual with agency and welcomed in society, and who isn't.

Here, it's worth briefly outlining key points from the four cases (greater detail on the motivations and inspirations in each case is in Appendix 4).

To summarise: in three out of the four cases, the actors took inspiration from outside their own countries, while the one remaining case served as inspiration for later actors**.** In Quebec, Bissonnette cited immigration policies and political figures in France and the US. Further, he looked up mass shooters such as Marc Lépine (Canadian), but also those outside his country of citizenship, including incel mass shooter Elliott Rodger (American, Case 1) and white supremacist mass shooter Dylann Roof (also American). The Toronto attacker, Minassian, claimed to have connected with two American incel mass shooters—Elliott Rodger (American, Case 1) and Chris Harper-Mercer (American), who also held white supremacist beliefs. The Christchurch attacker, too, showed sympathy to non-co-national mass shooters, including Dylann Roof (American) and Anders Breivik (Norwegian). Further, he expressed hope that his actions in New Zealand would spark action in the US that would lead to the destruction of the US 'melting pot'.[59] The Christchurch attacker wasn't a citizen in the location of his attack, adding a further international dimension.

Regardless of the veracity or strength of their claims and transnational ties, the online activities of these actors nonetheless indicate that sources of RWE inspiration aren't strictly domestic. This should inform how the term 'terrorism' and its related terms or subcategories are applied, whether in the context of criminal charges, policy discussions or the public narrative about these cases.

Furthermore, while these actors clearly looked towards other violent extremists, such extremists weren't their only sources of inspiration. They also looked towards the politics and politicians of other countries. This suggests that it's not only the dark corners of the internet or extremist ideas that are worth paying attention to. In considering the scope of and inputs to the problem, legitimate politics at home and abroad are also influential—even if those ideas aren't necessarily mainstream.

Challenges

RWE actors' transnational links raise questions around governments' toolboxes and communications.

Challenge 4.	Tools to address the problem: fit for purpose?
	Legislation on harms and hatred (offline and online)
	Charges and punishments for different kinds of violent extremism

Existing government toolsets might not be fit for purpose, especially where the online, transnational dimensions of the problem and the broader sets of harms posed are concerned.

One focus of criticism was the toolset on hate. Hate is relevant to RWE because RWE is informed and enabled by hateful content. Existing legislation may punish hateful activities and speech that takes place in public spaces *offline*, but not in online spaces, even if the cybersphere is analogous to a public square. One interviewee raised the concern that lawmakers appear to consider online harms as less 'real' and requiring of government intervention than offline ones.[60] Yet, what happens online has implications for what happens offline. When a punishable act takes place, governments could reconsider how hate is taken into account at sentencing.[61]

Another focus of criticism was about how governments treat RWE compared to other forms of violent extremism. There was recurring criticism that RWE actors tend to be treated as 'just' extremists and not as terrorists. This criticism was especially sharp when comparing RWE actors to those motivated by religiously motivated violent

extremism. For instance, the Quebec mosque shooter (Case 2) wasn't charged with terrorism,[62] even as politicians referred to his actions as such.[63] One explanation of this prosecutorial gap is that it's difficult to prove terrorism charges in court, especially when definitions hinge on whether the act was international or domestic in nature. However, this makes the disparity between different forms of violent extremism even sharper. For example, a review found that, between 2001 and 2019, Canadian law punished al-Qaeda-inspired extremism more seriously than far-right extremism and stigmatised the former more,[64] even though the latter killed or injured more Canadians over that period.[65]

These criticisms carry several implications. Governments may be stymying their own analysis. Understandings of RWE and approaches to countering it might focus too narrowly on offline spaces and the individual actors and underappreciate the transnational and cross-platform interactions, as well as the systemic issues and political conditions that make fertile ground for RWE ideas. Furthermore, governments might also be stymying their own actions if they're perceived to be applying the tools available to them unevenly. Public perception of inequities can undermine public trust in governments' efforts to counter RWE. This would undercut the legitimacy of existing and expanded government efforts.

Challenge 5.	**Terminology**
	Terms used among departments and countries
	How the problem is defined and housed, affecting how we act

One basic challenge is that the terminology used to refer to threats and the definitions of key terms can differ within and across governments. How those terms are used might also not be well understood among partners or by the general public.

Moreover, existing terminology might not capture RWE violence well—especially the type in these case studies. Further, government agencies might not only understand and employ terms differently, but their mandates shape their priorities, modes of action and limitations.

Combined, these challenges can hamper domestic and international collaboration, coordination and information sharing. Increased clarity on both terminology and mandates can improve understanding of how each country is approaching the RWE threat, where approaches align and diverge, and how to best leverage the different capacities each partner brings.

Challenge 6.	**Adapting existing CT arrangements**
	More explicit thinking about how current CT tools and models of cooperation do or do not apply to RWE, identifying gaps and determining desirable changes
	Better visibility into priorities, capacities and risk profiles as related to the threat of RWE violence

Many of our CT tools were built in the post-9/11 environment. They're aimed at addressing terrorism by religiously motivated extremist groups.[66] However, the make-up of the threatscape has changed. It isn't clear that our focus, tools and resources have responded accordingly. Experts and interviewees warn against simply applying existing CT tools to RWE. Governments need fit-for-purpose tools to address RWE.

International CT arrangements, tools, and mechanisms are also oriented against religiously motivated violent extremism. Agencies might not be well primed to see the connectivity of RWE between countries and to structure their CT efforts accordingly. They might mistakenly dismiss the interconnectivity of RWE and the cross-applicability of information, lessons and best practices. This risks creating gaps in analysis and prevention.

As governments step up efforts to respond to RWE, they'll need to do more explicit thinking and engagement on adopting and adapting CT tools and models of cooperation to RWE. Five Eyes governments have visibility into each member's priorities, capabilities and risk profiles as they relate to religiously motivated extremist violence; similar shared understandings will need to guide a coordinated response to the RWE threat.

Challenge 7.	Coordinating among stakeholders
	Reducing divisions and gaps that allow RWE to flourish
	International coordination to pressure actors, push change, and create more cohesive norms

Because of the interconnectivity of RWE, intra- and intergovernmental coordination are important in undercutting RWE.

Governments must pay attention to what they say and what the public—and RWE adherents—hear. Public leaders have a key role to play in reducing gaps that RWE adherents might understand to be tacit or explicit encouragement or inspiration. It's crucial that governments take firm stances against RWE and in favour of inclusive democracy. Further, because those messages are heard by audiences at home and abroad, it matters not only that Australia communicates a firm stance against RWE but that other Five Eyes governments do too.

Governments shape the parameters of public discussion in other ways. Coordinating among the Five Eyes members to coalesce on norms, expectations and pressure may be especially useful for engaging with tech and social media giants on addressing how RWE content travels online.

Recommendations

Several recommendations follow from the analysis and the challenges identified. These round out recommendation set 1 with one additional note on messaging, and form recommendation set 2 (government toolboxes and terminologies). Some recommendations are also applicable to the next section (global connections online), but details specific to that section are discussed there.

Recommendation 4: Australia should coordinate public-facing statements and messages among leaders within Australia and among counterparts abroad.

Coordinated messaging is vital for reinforcing democratic values and reducing gaps that RWEs may consider to be tacit endorsement or take inspiration from. Australia should seek to create coordinated, shared messaging among major government leaders (the members of the national cabinet, for example) as well as leaders of key public-sector agencies with mandates in CT, public safety and national security. Showing coordination and commitment to countering RWE is important in rebutting the mainstreaming of RWE views and in modulating the tenor of public discourse.

Moreover, this work should be done both within Australia and with Australia's key allies and partners because the policies and politics of one country inform those of others—especially where close cultural and political ties already exist. Shared messaging affirms norms internationally, on the one hand, and reduces sources of RWE inspiration and normalisation. Additionally, the partners can help to create coordinated stances and pressure on key non-government actors, including tech companies, to change how RWE content travels.

Recommendation 5: Australia should take stock of and reassess its existing toolboxes and practices in the context of the RWE threat.

A review should examine Australia's domestic and international CT toolboxes for responsiveness to the RWE threat and the changing threatscape. The review could be expanded to include tools responsive to broader spectrums of harms and radicalisation stages. In addition, Australia could also consider its sources of information, where gaps in information exist, and possible remedies. For example, Australia could consider creating a centralised database on hate crimes and hate incidences, akin to those already maintained by some Five Eyes members, examine police training, and collaborate with civil society groups. Those efforts can help to reduce blind spots. Better collection of information will create a fuller picture of the landscape of RWE harms and activities, enable more nuanced analysis and better direct resources and planning.

The outcomes of such reviews can also inform Australia's domestic agenda and its engagement with Five Eyes partners. Multidirectional and multiparty conversations can help inform and refine smarter tooling up by Australia and the other Five Eyes. The Five Eyes members may also benefit from efforts to more rapidly and systematically gain better visibility into each member's priorities, capacities and risk profiles as they relate to the RWE threat.

Questions that a review could consider include:

- how existing government tools apply to the RWE threat
- shortcomings and harms of existing tools and practices, and ways to mitigate them
- which new or expanded tools and capacities are needed to address RWE violence, and how protections will be balanced and communicated to the public
- mechanisms to better and more regularly integrate knowledge and best practices from government and non-government sources (such as researchers and civil society)
- mechanisms for future reviews of tools and practices.

Recommendation 6: Conduct a domestic review of key terms and mandates among agencies with responsibilities in national security, public safety and CT in the light of the RWE threat and the changing terrorism threatscape.

A review of terminology is crucial because terminology helps set parameters and priorities for what is studied. The Australian Government should conduct a review to better understand how terms are used by different agencies and to align terms among stakeholders. For example, ASIO's terminology seems to provide a starting point for such an alignment. The clarity given by such a review could help public-sector agencies better understand each other's work. It could help them speak more clearly, share information more usefully, and work together more effectively.

Additionally, a review of terminology and of mandates can form a useful foundation for assessing existing government efforts and mapping those efforts against the challenge at hand. Such a review, especially if paired with a review of existing tools (Recommendation 4), could help to identify shortcomings, existing synergies and potential areas for further action.

A review of key terms and mandates can inform Australia's domestic agenda as well as inform its positions and preferences when engaging with Five Eyes partners.

Questions that a review could consider include:

- whether existing terms are useful and accurate for capturing the current threatscape
- how well aligned terms are among key government agencies
- how terms are applied
- what changes in terminologies and mandates may be needed.

Recommendation 7: Increase efforts to understand the key terms, priorities and approaches of each Five Eyes country, as applicable to RWE.

These efforts should help to clarify key partners' approaches to RWE and set the ground for future cooperation.

Efforts among Five Eyes countries to increase cross-agency and cross-country understanding can include:

- conducting a review of key terms, with the aim of better aligning and streamlining the terms and definitions among the members and their key agencies
- short of aligning the terms, considering the creation of a 'cheat sheet' for the five countries (this could highlight terms, commonalities and differences or suggest shared definitions to be used in interagency discussions and day-to-day operations and collaboration)

- engaging in a series of frank discussions about the priorities, capacities, and risk appetites of the members, and using this stocktake to inform future planning and better identify synergies to bolster and gaps to bridge.

In any version of these efforts, Australia should seek to create mechanisms to facilitate the systematic updating of and access to this information. Doing so would help to avoid making knowledge and cooperation dependent on personnel and interpersonal ties.

Global connections online

Key lessons

Another transnational dimension of RWE is the global connections that RWE adherents and actors forge online. The literature makes clear that RWE adherents employ online spaces for manifold reasons. They may seek community online and be influenced and radicalised by RWE content online. But RWE actors aren't merely receptacles for online RWE content. The case studies help to show how actors also seek to create legacies for themselves, including by engaging online communities to draw attention to their actions and to the beliefs that they purport to espouse (see also Appendix 4).

In three out of the four cases, the actors created manifestos or videos that they shared online ahead of their attacks. The manifestos and videos communicated the ideas that the RWE actors were either motivated by or sought to position themselves as having been motivated by. In the Isla Vista attack, Rodger made YouTube videos and manifestos shared online ahead of the attack and was later made into an 'incel saint'. In Toronto, Minassian might have been more oblique in broadcasting his intentions, but he nonetheless urged a 'beta uprising' for the next day, drawing on Rodger's legacy while doing so and employing terminology common to incel circles. He, too, was made an 'incel saint'. The Christchurch attacker not only wrote a manifesto and attempted to widely share it online, but also sought to live stream his attack.

Furthermore, the case studies show how the actors sought to link their own actions to other RWE adherents and to locate themselves in the context of the wider RWE community. They did so even though their acts of violence were undertaken individually. In two of the four cases, the actor appeared to intentionally link his ideas and actions to other RWE actors (including to the other two cases examined). They may have done so to affirm shared ideas, or simply to draw eyeballs. For example, the names of mass murderers and far-right white supremacists, including Bissonnette (Case 2), were reportedly written on equipment used by Tarrant (Case 4).[67]

The use of online platforms has allowed RWE content, inspirations and legacies to reach beyond national borders.

Challenges

The global connections that can be forged online bring forth several challenges. While some of those challenges are discussed elsewhere in this report, this section emphasises elements that are most pertinent to global connections online.

Challenge 2: Defining the problem

Online connections—and the beliefs, behaviours and communities enabled online—raise questions about the kinds of harms governments and publics are concerned about and the range of appropriate responses.

For example, responding to global connections online may be relevant to multiple lines of work and government agendas on RWE, hate speech and disinformation. These are potential areas of synergy. They also present opportunities to pool information and identify new data points. Doing so could help create both broader and deeper understandings of RWE and linked challenges. However, to capture those synergies, governments will need to work to minimise the duplication of work and siloing of efforts, and to augment useful collaborative potential and build on multiple framings of the RWE challenge.

Challenge 3: Approach to the problem

Governments must wrestle with important questions about balancing and upholding key rights and values as they step up efforts to address RWE. The online global connections formed among RWE adherents, however, bring this challenge into sharper relief as questions about freedom of expression are brought to the front.

As a democracy, Australia has responsibilities to not only protect its citizens, but to protect the *rights* of its citizens. This can make for uncomfortable balances—such as protecting people's ability to say things that are unpleasant and offensive.

Such balances are not only difficult to strike, but there's no single answer or optimal solution. The government should be prepared for backlash and criticism, wherever the balance is struck. Some criticisms will be important to take into account and should inform future revisions and finetuning of policy. However, some criticisms—such as that the government is 'censoring' people—may feed into ideas that are related to RWE, conspiracy thinking and other antidemocratic ideas. Because of that risk, it's doubly important that governments explain themselves and maintain public accountability. Efforts in transparency outreach, and responsiveness are crucial to legitimising any government approach to the problem.

In addition to questions about the desirability of addressing how information travels online, governments may need to contend with questions about the feasibility of changing or limiting how information travels online within and across national borders.

Challenge 4: Tools to address the problem

Given global online connections, it's especially important to review the tools that governments use. Frustrations about legislation on harms and hatred come to the fore. Governments may wish to reconsider how legislation applies to online spaces, especially where it's currently narrowly focused on offline spaces. Governments will also need to reckon with the ways in which online harms and hatred translate to offline environments and pose offline harms to individuals and to societies. As governments seek to better address exposed gaps and the multiple dimensions of the problem, any revisions or additions of tools will need to take into account equity and rights.

Challenge 7: Coordinating among stakeholders and power loci

Global online connections underscore the importance of coordinating not only among countries but also among non-government stakeholders.

Combating RWE is likely to involve changing norms governing the kinds of content that should be on the internet and the responsibilities of different parties. This will require each government to develop clear policy preferences.

Although such work could stop at domestic borders, it would be valuable to seek alignment among the Five Eyes members. If governments coordinate and converge on shared goals and norms, advocacy efforts and policy change can be made more effective and efficient. A coordinated front helps create a set of expectations for key actors, such as tech companies, and can increase government's bargaining power. Better alignment in common policy also reduces the room for division to be exploited and for content that fuels RWE.

Coordination may be especially valued by the non-US members of the Five Eyes. Although the grouping's citizens may be active on the same online platforms, many of those platforms have been created by US companies. In this study, non-US interviewees noted this mismatch between user bases and which countries, systems and publics tech companies feel *most* answerable to. Some of the frictions in creating new regulations and negotiating with the tech giants to shape the information space can be managed via forums, such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT). To act effectively, Five Eyes governments will benefit from coordinating on these issues.

Generally, interviewees and the literature said that there was more room for stronger synergies across the domestic and international spaces, public policy and academia. Stakeholders such as researchers, the academic community and civil society groups are valuable and powerful partners for governments. Their research, knowledge, lived experiences and critiques should inform government policy development.

Recommendations

Recommendations that are responsive to the analysis of and challenges related to global connections online are presented here. They draw on both recommendation sets (messaging and policy change process, and government toolboxes and terminologies). While some are discussed elsewhere in this report, this section emphasises elements most pertinent to global connections online.

Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 5 are relevant to and should be informed by analysis of RWE and global connections online. Recommendation 4 is worth highlighting in the context of RWE and global connections online.

In short, Recommendation 1 provides ideas for how governments can increase attention to, reframe and create urgency of action on the global online communities and spaces that RWE actors are able to access and shape. Recommendations 2 and 3 emphasise the values that must be preserved and balanced in both the substance and process of policymaking and toolbox enlargement.

Recommendation 5 asks that governments take into account the transnational dimensions of the RWE challenge—including the *online* connections—in assessing the diversity, efficacy and propriety of their toolboxes. The key here is reckoning with and taking seriously the online dimension of RWE. A recurring question is likely to be whether and how online spaces and online versions of activities are treated differently from their offline counterparts. The goal isn't necessarily to make the two equivalent, but to examine the online dimension and consider adopting and adapting informed responses.

Recommendation 4 highlights the importance of coordinating public-facing statements and messages among leaders not only within Australia but also among counterparts abroad. Coordinated messaging is not only important for the very statements that government leaders are delivering, but also for how governments engage with external stakeholders. The latter is especially important for engaging with RWE and global connections online.

Shared messaging, especially among governments, is vital precisely because of the global reach of information. RWE actors don't only look to their own countries for sources of beliefs and inspirations. Nor is the impact of RWE adherents and violence restricted by geopolitical boundaries. The ideas politicians campaign for not only garner attention, but inform what 'normal' sounds like.

Moreover, shared messaging by governments can help create coordinated stances and pressure on key actors, such as media and tech companies (thus tying into Recommendation 5). Efforts such as the GIFCT and the Christchurch Call are a good start. If countries converge more closely on shared norms, goals and positions, they reduce frictions in the kinds of changes and policies sought, and the path forward for them and for private-sector stakeholders is made clearer. The Australian Government and other governments may find it beneficial to coordinate efforts, rather than unilaterally exert pressure, in order to elicit the cooperation and input of tech companies and social media platforms.

A solution? Cross-sectoral prevention work and looking outwards to partners

This report attempts to nuance and highlight how RWE has important transnational dimensions. Those dimensions might not be well reflected in governments' conventional conceptions of terrorism and ideologically motivated violence as being 'internal', as opposed to 'external'. Any path forward must be responsive to the changing threat landscape and how RWE operates today.

This report also aims to emphasise that it matters not just that governments take RWE seriously, but how governments do so. Fundamentally, democratic governments must centre democratic values and norms in their approaches to the RWE challenge. They should centre transparency and continued engagement in their processes. Furthermore, they should take seriously shortcomings in their policies—whether in terms of falling short of achieving the desired outcome (such as reducing the incidence of RWE violence and the volume and spread of RWE content online), *as well as* in terms of harms (intended and unintended) posed by those very policy solutions.

With this in mind, *cross-sectoral and transnational engagement offer important ways forward*.

Cross-sectoral engagement enables governments to be better appraised on the RWE threat as it and best practices to counter it evolve. Cross-sectoral approaches also enable governments to be better informed on harms posed by both the challenge and the solutions adopted. Governments would benefit from being responsive to criticisms, including of recent CT efforts as related to religiously motivated violent extremism, and building mechanisms for reflection and revision. Doing so would also recognise the fallibility of policy—whether because of design flaws, trade-offs or changes in the threatscape. That helps a government assess both whether it's achieving its professed goals and whether work to reduce both anticipated and unanticipated consequences is adequate. Engagement with stakeholders can help the government access and consider different sources of information and analysis.

Furthermore, cross-sector engagement can help the government take a wider look at the problem. Rather than focusing narrowly on criminality and the physically violent dimensions of RWE, cross-sectoral engagement can help the government examine the problem at a larger scale and make longer term investments into resilient, inclusive, diverse democracy. Government efforts to step up to the RWE challenge would be better served by recognising the myriad broader harms that are both inputs to and products of RWE.

Thus, governments stand to benefit from not going it alone, although they firmly shoulder responsibilities to uphold democratic, inclusive societies. Stakeholders such as researchers and civil society organisations can carry out crucial research work, test ideas, reach diverse community members and access different insights. All of those activities can inform and refine government approaches. Stakeholders such as technology and social media giants are important in understanding the problem and to implementing solutions, and those efforts are likely to be more effective if they're bolstered through transnational engagement. Non-government stakeholders are also important partners in implementing solutions. Civil society groups are especially crucial partners in intervening at different points in the radicalisation process, addressing hatred and bolstering society's resilience to RWE.

Not going it alone also extends to international coordination of effort. International coordination helps stem the RWE challenge by offering additional sources of information, enabling additional policy levers and reshaping public discourse. Promisingly, governments appear to be shifting towards being willing to recognise the value of cross-sector and transnational approaches to addressing RWE and the violence it inspires. This has been most noticeable in the wake of the Christchurch attack.

After the Christchurch attack, the New Zealand Government pushed for a number of changes domestically and internationally. Internationally, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron spearheaded the 'Christchurch Call' two months after the attacks, at the sidelines of a Group of 7 (G7) meeting.[68] The call is 'a commitment by Governments and tech companies to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content' online. It emphasises that 'Respect for freedom is fundamental. However, no one has the right to create and share violent extremist content online.'[69] The New Zealand Government credits the call as being the driving impetus for the reform of the GIFCT,[70] which brings together the technology industry, government, civil society and academia to collaborate on countering violent extremist activity online.[71] The New Zealand Government also notes that three crisis protocols that help enable rapid and coordinated responses by governments and companies to online events, and which didn't exist before the Christchurch attacks, have become operational.[72] Such commitment to and changes in international and transnational approaches to addressing extremist content and violent extremism are noteworthy.

Governments have also taken action to expand their domestic CT toolboxes in response to RWE violence that takes place at home or abroad. Those steps are promising for several reasons. First, governments showing attention and responsiveness to RWE is important. Second, they appear to indicate that governments *do* see RWE violence occurring elsewhere as linked to issues at home, reflecting an implied recognition of some transnational dimensions to the challenge. Third, they reckon with the online dimension of RWE. Australia passed legislation to crack down on violent videos depicting terrorist attacks, murder, attempted murder, torture, rape or kidnapping in social media.[73] In announcing initiatives to address violent extremist and terrorist content online, Canada's Minister of Public Safety referenced the Christchurch Call to Action.[74] Canada also introduced plans to curb online hate speech and to make it a crime.[75]

Tech companies, social media platforms and other online forums have also shown greater appetite for considering the types of spaces and conversations that they host. Steps to deplatform have taken place after incidents of RWE violence in the US.[76] For example, since Rodger's attack in 2014, Reddit has taken steps to regulate content and to dislodge certain groups and content types from Reddit—including banning the incel subreddit and taking down other subreddits dedicated to Nazi, racist and white supremacist groups and to doxing and harassment.[77] In the wake of the Capitol riot, far-right social media sites such as Parler found themselves denied web hosting services and smartphone app store services by big tech companies, including Amazon, Apple and Google.[78] Twitter permanently suspended Donald Trump's account, citing the risk of further incitement of violence.[79] Facebook sought to impose an indefinite ban on Trump, which several months later was revised to a suspension for two years, with reinstatement possible 'if the risk to public safety has receded', in a decision that wasn't without criticism by both Trump and civil rights and tech watchdog groups.[80] These steps taken by technology and social media companies are valuable not only because they begin to recognise that some speech is undesirable, hateful and dangerous, but that audience reach matters too.

The current political moment may be conducive to further action and coordination in countering RWE. Governments and technology companies appear to be expressing greater appetite for action and regulation. Public pressure, too, may be mounting. The public may be both more demanding of government action and responsiveness, and more willing partners. Moreover, reinvigorated action may also be more necessary and urgent as part of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic response hasn't been spared from information manipulation, conspiracies and public demonstrations that seek to undercut the legitimacy of democratic governments and interactions with ideologically motivated violent extremism. For example, ASIO warned that Covid-19 restrictions 'are being exploited by extreme right-wing narratives' and that the pandemic has 'reinforced an extreme right-wing belief in the

inevitability of societal collapse and a "race war".'[81] Covid-19 conspiracy forums also post links to white supremacist forums promoting violent extremism and blaming China and Chinese people for the virus,[82] and Asian diaspora communities have sounded the alarm on rising harassment and hate crimes.[83] Therefore, governments may wish to consider that healthy and robust recovery from the pandemic isn't just about public health or economic recovery, but will benefit from attention to information environments, public political discourse and democratic resilience.

Governments would do well to meet the moment. Governments *can* securitise the RWE problem and narrowly scope their solutions, but they should not. Approaches to RWE should value nuance and responsiveness to not only the violence but the broader challenges and harms that are both inputs to and outputs of RWE. Approaches should reckon with online and transnational dimensions of the RWE challenge and recognise the overlapping and complementary agendas that can help push progress and resilience on multiple fronts. Approaches should engage multiple, diverse stakeholders. *Using broader lenses and partnering with a wider array of players and stakeholders will allow governments to more effectively leverage tools to counter RWE. More importantly, doing so helps governments contribute to a larger core mission: representing inclusive and resilient democracies.*

Recommendations

This report's review of challenges and recommendations include both domestic and international dimensions for improving Australia's approach because the two spheres inform each other. The challenges and recommendations are summarised here.

Summary of challenges and frictions

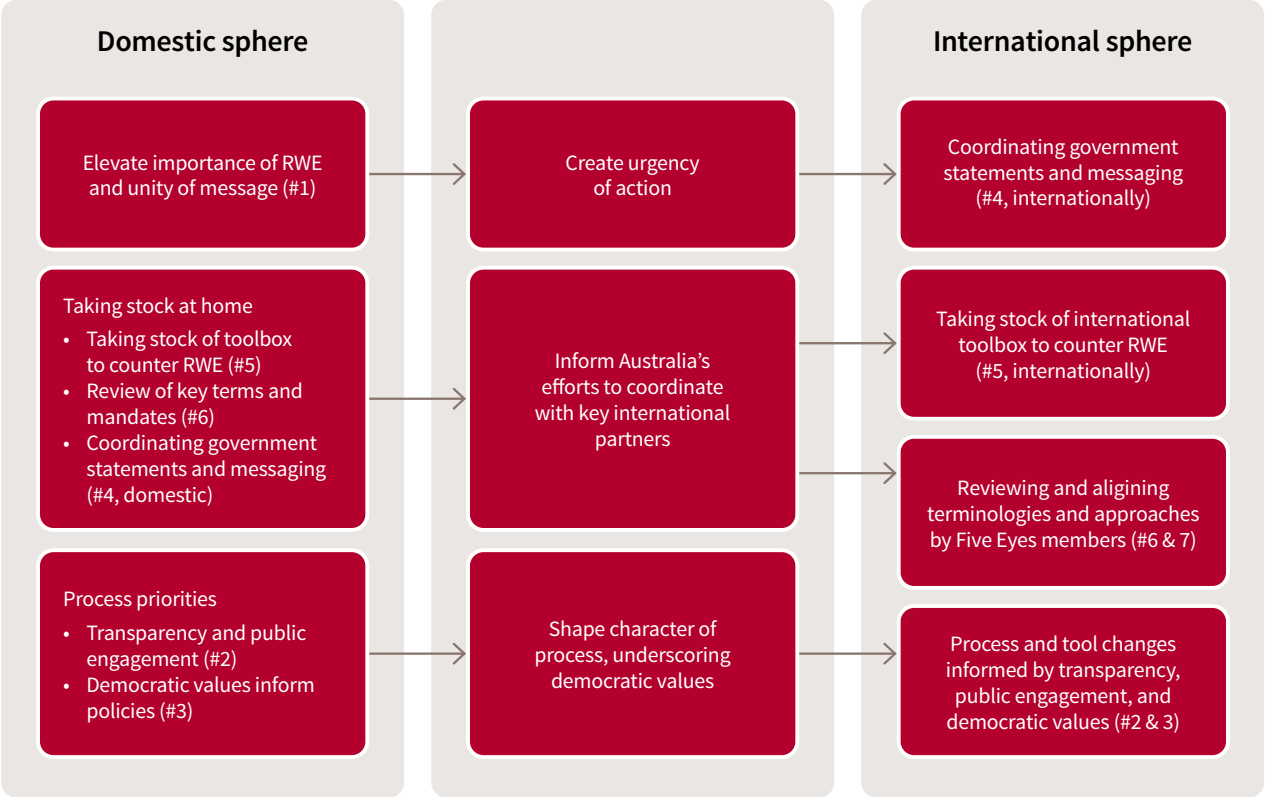
Domestic (primarily)		
1.	Acknowledging the problem: reluctance to acknowledge and dedicate resources	
		Absolute size of the RWE threat
		Relative size of the RWE threat
		Who is in the room—diversity and recognition issues
		Who is in the room—vigilance about RWE within security agencies
2.	Defining the problem	
		What are harms, and when are they concerning?
		Framing the threat
		Recognising complementary efforts
3.	Approach to the problem	
		Balancing rights, values and interests
		Political concerns and public engagement
4.	Tools to address the problem: fit for purpose?	
		Legislation on harms and hatred (offline and online)
		Charges and punishments for different kinds of violent extremism
Domestic and international		
5.	Terminology	
		Terms used among departments and countries
		How the problem is defined and housed, affecting how we act
6.	Adapting existing CT arrangements	
		More explicit thinking about how current CT tools and models of cooperation do or do not apply to RWE, identifying gaps and determining changes sought
		Better visibility into each country's priorities, capacities and risk profiles as they relate to the threat of RWE violence
7.	Coordinating among stakeholders	
		Reducing internal divisions and gaps that allow RWE to flourish
		International coordination to pressure actors, push change and create more cohesive norms

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Australian government: action	Purpose: domestic	Purpose: international	Relevant challenges
Recommendation set 1: Messaging and policy change process				
1. Elevate importance of countering RWE	Take up issue and augment resources	Increase attention and resources to issue	Increase attention and resources	1, 2
2. Transparency and public engagement in policy change	Public communications and process	Reaffirm process legitimacy	Reaffirm democratic process and legitimacy, especially in the light of illiberal regimes and challenges	3
3. Democratic values should inform policies	Public communications and process	Reaffirm process legitimacy and democratic governance	Reaffirm democratic process and legitimacy, especially in the light of illiberal regimes and challenges	3
4. Coordinate government statements and messaging	Coordinate messaging within key agencies and leaders	Clarify government position and priorities; counter perceptions of permissiveness towards RWE	Coordinate messaging with other government leaders and agencies	3, 7
Recommendation set 2: Government toolboxes and terminologies				
5. Take stock of toolbox to counter RWE	Conduct revision (e.g. by working group)	Clarify and assess propriety of existing tools and gaps	Engage in discussion with Five Eyes about revisions	4
6. Review key terms and mandates	Conduct review	Clarify and assess existing terms, tools and gaps	Outline for international engagement; inform coordination of shared efforts	5, 6
7. Align terminologies and approaches by Five Eyes	Conduct review	Clarify key parties' positions and interests	Outline for international engagement; inform efforts to align	5, 6

One way to conceptualise the iterative process and steps is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Sample process



Just as the challenge at hand has domestic and international dimensions, so too do the recommendations. The work done in the domestic sphere can feed into and bolster efforts to coordinate with partners internationally. Similarly, work done transnationally can shape and inform the direction of domestic efforts to counter RWE and RWE violence.

Appendix 1: Key terms

Right-wing extremism (RWE) (also the 'radical right' or the 'far right') refers to 'right-wing political, social, and religious movements that exist outside of and are more radical than mainstream conservatism'.[84] It's important to understand that RWE doesn't adhere to a singular political ideology or goal.[85] Rather, it's a 'shifting, complex, and overlapping milieu of individuals, groups, and movements (online and offline) espousing different but related ideologies, often linked by hatred',[86] fear, anger and hostility towards an 'other' or an 'outgroup'.[87] In short, although there are many belief streams underpinning RWE, its characteristics include racism, nationalism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, antidemocratic tendencies, anti-establishment sentiments and misogyny.

Some of those beliefs and expressions are protected speech, and some RWE members defend their actions as such. Further, some countries' legal definitions of hate speech don't uniformly cover online content. RWE groups—especially when connections and radicalisation take place largely online—are typically described as relatively unorganised and disaggregated.[88]

The cases examined in this report focus on the anti-immigrant, racist and misogynistic elements of RWE, not on the antigovernment or militia elements.

Violent extremism 'only occurs when an individual or group believes that violence is a legitimate (and often the only) way through which they can achieve systemic change'.[89] It 'encompasses any violent actions committed to further extremist aims, including vandalism, spontaneous violence, and terrorism'.[90]

Radicalisation refers to 'any process that leads a person to hold extremist beliefs', which 'may or may not lead to overt violence'.[91] Online radicalisation refers to cases in which someone's online activities 'help them to adopt politically or religiously extremist views'.[92]

Terrorism generally refers to the threat or use of violence, often unlawful or criminal, in order to threaten, intimidate or provoke a state of terror against the general public, a group of people or particular people for a political objective.[93] Definitions of terrorism and the applicability of the term can differ based on the territory in which the act was carried out[94] and the origin of the motivating ideology or influences,[95] among other factors. This report refers to RWE violence as 'violence' and not as 'terrorism', because of the variation in how different jurisdictions define terrorism and their readiness to apply terrorism charges; however, many of these incidents and the cases selected can be considered acts of terrorism.

Domestic terrorism is often used as a term in the US context to refer to RWE violence, at least in the public discourse even if not legally defined as terrorism. DHS defines domestic terrorism as an 'act of unlawful violence that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources committed by a group or person based and operating entirely within the US or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign group' and differentiates a domestic terrorist from a homegrown violent extremist 'in that the former isn't inspired by and does not take direction from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power'.[96] Other countries, including New Zealand, appear to differentiate international from domestic terrorism by the location of the attack or the citizenship of the attacker.[97]

Lone offender (also 'lone wolf') refers to a person who is motivated by one or more violent extremist ideologies, operates alone and supports or engages in acts of unlawful violence in furtherance of those ideologies. The motivating ideologies may involve influence from a larger terrorist group or foreign actor, but the individual acting isn't doing so under its direct, individualised instruction.

Incels, or 'involuntary celibates', commune around shared sexual and romantic frustration and a sense of helplessness and sexual doom.[98] They believe that the reason that they're 'involuntarily celibate' is that women are shallow and want to date only conventionally attractive or hypermasculine men.[99] Despite the messaging, for incels, 'it's not just about sex. It's about the women supposedly withholding it.'[100] Incels are part of the 'online male supremacist ecosystem', which consistently denigrates and dehumanises women.[101] Incels grew out of the pick-up artist movement.[102] The sexist attitudes and antifeminist ideologies of the male supremacist and men's rights movements are sometimes described as a 'gateway drug' to the alt-right.[103]

Hate crimes and hate speech are relevant to discussions on the challenges of RWE violence because they're some of the ways in which RWE and other extremist beliefs and motivations are expressed and cause harm. Hate crimes and hate speech are related and 'sit on the same spectrum of behaviours',[104] but they're distinct legal concepts:

- **Hate crime** refers to an existing offence (such as assault) 'accompanied by the motive of hatred against a protected group'.[105] In some jurisdictions, the punishment for the underlying offence is increased when the offence is found to be aggravated by hate.
- **Hate speech** is generally speech that 'expresses hostility towards, or contempt for, people who share a characteristic'.[106] Legislation covering hate speech defines civil penalties, criminal penalties, or both, and specifies what kinds of speech are captured and what characteristics are protected.[107] Most hate speech legislation views hate as being 'primarily relevant, not as the motive for the words spoken' (that is, whether the words are spoken hatefully) 'but as a possible effect of the form of speech' (that is, whether that speech may result in the incitement of hostility or hatred against others).[108] Hate speech laws typically cover spoken words and words or images that are printed, published or posted on the internet.[109]

Appendix 2: Ethics and transparency statement

This report is adapted from a policy analysis exercise (PAE), submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of master in public policy from the John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. This report does not represent the views of the Harvard Kennedy School or of any government or government agency.

I drew almost entirely on publicly available sources. I didn't undertake any activities attempting to infiltrate RWE spaces online or to pose as an RWE adherent. My project relied on secondary sources for information about manifestos and other documents and media to which governments sought to limit public access. To the extent that I heard any of the actors or RWE adherents in their own words, it was through publicly available video recordings, such as clips of police interviews, screenshots and quotes gathered by other researchers.

I did draw on interviews as part of the research. I aimed to conduct interviews with current or former members of public-sector agencies with mandates relevant to issues involving violent extremism, terrorism, hatred and disinformation. Given the sensitive nature of those topics and that many interviewees are *current* employees in relevant public-sector agencies and the need to preserve confidentiality, no interviewees are named in this report, and their personal and professional backgrounds aren't stated. The primary identifying feature listed in this report is their departmental affiliations. The purpose of the PAE and the client organisation were explained to interviewees. All interviews were conducted either over the phone or via Zoom. No audio recordings of the interviews were made. I took notes by hand or by keyboard, and all hard and soft copies of my notes will be destroyed or deleted at the conclusion of the project.

I've assumed that interviewees were being honest and candid. The views of interviewees shouldn't be taken as authoritative or representative of either their departments or of the field, especially given the limited number of interviews conducted. Interviews were especially helpful in identifying challenges and frictions, and in confirming and nuancing the challenges, frictions and criticisms available through public sources.

No organisations gave this report financial support.

Appendix 3: Interviews

Interviewee affiliations:

- Australian Strategic Policy Institute
- Global Affairs Canada (x 2)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Department of Homeland Security.

General interview questions:

- How do you/your organisation think about and approach right-wing extremism?
- What are the key tools?
- What are the key challenges in countering RWE, whether in the context of your day-to-day work or in the government's approach more broadly? What are your major frustrations?
- In terms of either assessing or countering this threat, where do you think we're not directing enough attention?
- If you could have a magic wand and could implement any policy or change, what would it be?
- Are there any notable changes in the approach to RWE, again whether in the context of your agency or government more broadly?
  - How have your / your organisation's views on RWE and violent extremism changed over the past several years?
  - Are there any specific cases that you think have marked/prompted specific changes?
- To what extent does your organisation engage with international partners on this set of issues? Do you think there is a role for international cooperation? What would be most helpful in facilitating such engagement?

Appendix 4: Case studies

The case studies are outlined here, followed by a brief summary table (Table 3).

Case 1: Isla Vista shooting

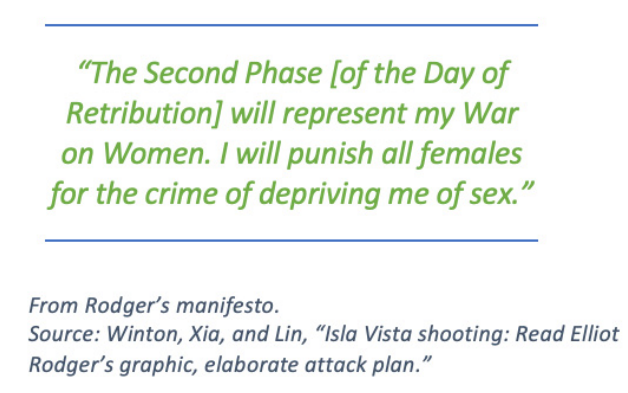
What happened

On 23 May 2014, Elliot Rodger stabbed his housemates and their friend to death. Several hours later, he left his house and drove to a sorority house near the University of California Santa Barbara, which he attempted but failed to enter. He shot female students on the footpath, killing two and severely wounding a third.[110] He continued driving, intentionally striking pedestrians with his car and shooting at pedestrians, shops and restaurants.[111] While still driving, Rodger committed suicide by shooting himself in the head.[112] The vehicle crashed into a parked car, bringing the attack to a stop. The shooting and vehicular attack took around eight minutes, injured 14 people and killed six.[113]

Motivations and inspirations

Rodger is described as an incel and adherent of the 'manosphere'.[114] He called his attacks a 'Day of Retribution' (Figure 4)[115] in his journal and a 137-page autobiography-cum-manifesto, titled 'My twisted world'.[116] In the manifesto, he expressed misogynistic and incel motivations. They included frustrations with his lack of sexual and romantic relationships; anger at being spurned by 'good looking' women; and an intention to launch a 'War on Women' to 'punish all females for the crime of depriving [him] of sex'.[117] He also expressed his dismay at a future 'filled with more loneliness and rejection ahead of me, devoid of sex, love, and enjoyment'.[118] Also present in his manifesto were beliefs rooted in white supremacy; for example, in his views on mixed-race relationships, physical attractiveness and social standing.[119]

Figure 4: From Rodger's manifesto



From Rodger's manifesto.
Source: Winton, Xia, and Lin, "Isla Vista shooting: Read Elliot Rodger's graphic, elaborate attack plan."

Source: Richard Winton, Rosanna Xia, Rong-Gong Lin, 'Isla Vista shooting: read Elliot Rodger's graphic, elaborate attack plan', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 2014, online.

Notably, Rodger would go on to become a 'patron saint' of incels and be referenced by Alek Minassian (Toronto van attack, Case 3), as well as studied by other RWE actors.

Global connections online and transnational legacies

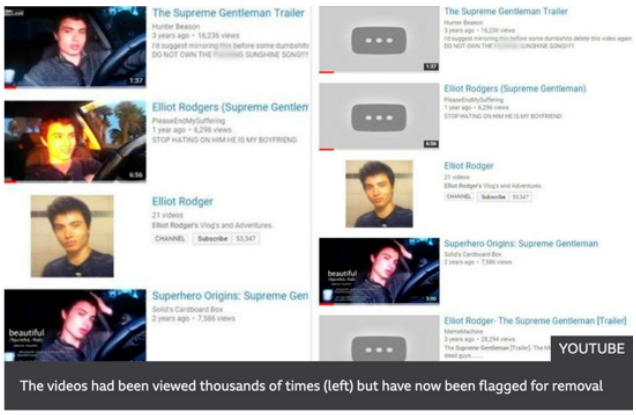
Rodger's online engagement with RWE content primarily revolved around incel, 'red pill' and pick-up artist movements, especially on Reddit.[120] Those forums often had racist and misogynistic content. Rodger used terminology common to those movements in his manifesto and YouTube videos.[121] On an online forum, he expressed his disgust at women and urged other incels to fight back.[122] His internet history also showed some interest in the Third Reich.[123]

Rodger emailed his autobiography-cum-manifesto to 34 people, including his father, on the day of the attack.[124] He uploaded a video explaining his actions (titled 'Retribution') in his car, shortly before beginning his attack.[125] Additionally, he had previously uploaded YouTube videos explaining his incel views but took them down after those videos prompted a report to the police, who conducted a wellness check on him.[126]

Given that he wrote a manifesto and posted YouTube videos, it's plausible that Rodger intended to not only share his beliefs but to influence and inspire future RWE actors. After the attacks, one of the online forums that Rodger had named in his manifesto was taken offline.[127] But before that, some users posted laudatory comments to Rodger's public profile, including calling him a hero.[128] One subreddit took steps to regulate content, including introducing an automated bot to delete any mentions of Rodger, but other incel blogs and forums don't moderate as vigorously.[129]

Rodger has nonetheless gone on to be canonised as a 'patron saint' of online misogynists (Figure 5).[130] His admirers on 4chan and Reddit celebrate the day of his attack as 'Saint Elliot Day'[131] and give him the title of 'Supreme Gentleman'.[132] His image and act have spawned merchandise, tribute songs and tribute videos.[133] Indeed, Rodger would later be referenced as a source of inspiration for Alek Minassian (Case 3).

Figure 5: Tribute videos to Rodger, on YouTube even four years after his attack



Source: 'Elliot Rodger: how misogynist killer became "incel hero"', *BBC News*, 25 April 2018, online.

Case 2: Quebec mosque shooting

What happened

On 29 January 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette entered the Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre and shot worshippers gathered for evening prayers.[134] He was armed with a semi-automatic rifle, which he used to shoot at two men who had exited the mosque. After the rifle jammed, he entered the mosque and continued shooting with a pistol.[135] He killed six people and seriously injured five in under two minutes. He fled the scene in a car, called 911, and surrendered himself to the police.[136] This shooting was 'the first time anyone had been killed in a mosque in Canada

in such circumstances'.[137] In March 2018, Bissonnette pleaded guilty to six counts of first-degree murder and six counts of attempted murder.[138] Key politicians described Bissonnette's actions as a terrorist attack. Bissonnette wasn't handed terrorism-related charges.[139]

Motivations and inspirations

Bissonnette was motivated by anti-Muslim and Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, far-right views. He also held anti-feminist views, which were made known in his social media activity,[140] and he demonstrated an interest in prominent incel actors, including Rodger (Case 1).[141]

Bissonnette told the police that he snapped when he learned of the Canadian Prime Minister's announcement on 28 January 2017 that the government would be allowing more refugees into the country (Figure 6).[142] He reported that he was generally motivated by anxiety about his family becoming victims of a terrorist attack and about terrorist attacks like those in European cities happening in Canada.[143]

Figure 6: The tweet that Bissonnette says caused him to 'snap'.

Bissonnette's online activities indicate an interest in prior RWE actors, beliefs and sympathetic politicians. He was not *only* informed by the politics of his country of citizenship, even though he considered them the final driver for his actions. Rather, he looked towards sources abroad, especially from the US, for policy ideas and ideology, key figures and potential models for action (Table 2).

Table 2: Selected key search terms used by Bissonnette

Selected search terms	Number of times looked up during January 2017
'Shooting' and 'shooter'	150
Dylann Roof (white-supremacist mass shooter)	201
Quebec Islamic Cultural Centre	82
Donald Trump's Twitter feed	Daily
Trump-related posts	819

Sources: Julia Page, 'Quebec City mosque shooter set off by Canada's open stance on refugees', *CBC News*, 13 April 2018, online; Dan Bilefsky, 'Quebec mosque shooter was consumed by refugees, Trump and far right', *New York Times*, 5 May 2018, online.

Bissonnette showed interest in past incidents of RWE violence. For example, he looked up Marc Lépine, a Canadian mass shooter who killed 14 women in 1989 at the École Polytechnique de Montreal[144] and held antifeminist motivations. But he also looked beyond his co-nationals: he was interested in Dylann Roof, a US white supremacist who killed nine in a Charleston, South Carolina, church,[145] and 'preoccupied by Elliot Rodger',[146] a US incel (Case 1). An interest in shooting as a mode of violence can also be seen in Bissonnette's online search activity: he looked up 'shooting' and 'shooter' 150 times in January 2017.[147]

Bissonnette also demonstrated an interest in the politics, policies and beliefs espoused by known extremists and politicians abroad. For example, he browsed websites linked to prominent US RWE figures, such as white nationalist Richard Spencer and the neo-Nazi former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke.[148] Bissonnette also looked to politicians and policies outside of Canada. He was known to be a supporter of France's Marine Le Pen.[149] He also consulted US President Donald Trump's Twitter feed daily and searched for Trump-related posts online 819 times in the month before the attack, paying particular attention to Trump's 'Muslim ban'.[150] In the lead-up to the attack, Bissonnette spent hours online looking up mass shootings, Islam and US immigration policies.[151] His views and beliefs were, therefore, not *only* informed by domestic actors or events, but drew upon a broader ideological and political landscape.

Finally, it's worth examining the nexus of ideas that Bissonnette was interested in. He paid attention to anti-immigrant, white-supremacist *and* misogynist voices. Even though the first two of those ideas may have taken more prominent positions in either spurring him to action or in his characterisation of his act of violence, those strands of RWE beliefs have mutually compatible overlap. Each poses a set of questions and attempts to police who gets to be a full member of the community.

Global connections online and transnational legacies

Bissonnette's web history showed his interest in past incidents of RWE violence and mass shooters, in the ideas espoused by RWE idealogues, and in the politics and policies promoted by politicians abroad.

Bissonnette didn't leave behind a manifesto. His Facebook profile was removed from public view on 30 January, the morning after the attack.[152] Nevertheless, his name, alongside those of other mass murderers and far-right white supremacists, was reportedly written on equipment used by the attacker responsible for the 15 March 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings (Case 4).[153]

Case 3: Toronto van attack

What happened

On 23 April 2018, Alek Minassian drove a white rental van to a 'busy lunchtime thoroughfare'[154] in Toronto and 'began plowing into people indiscriminately'.[155] The 'only reason' Minassian stopped was that a victim's drink splashed on the car's windshield and made it difficult for him to see.[156] Minassian initially refused to surrender and attempted to provoke a 'suicide by cop', but was quickly subdued without any shots being fired.[157] The attack would be likely to constitute Canada's deadliest vehicular assault.[158] Minassian was charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder.[159] He wasn't charged with terrorism. He pleaded not guilty on all counts. Because Minassian had already admitted to planning and carrying out the attacks,[160] 'the only issue at trial' was his state of mind at the time of the attack.[161] In March 2021, he was found guilty of 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder.[162]

Motivations and inspirations

Minassian was motivated by incel beliefs. He told the police that his act was part of the 'incel rebellion', and that his goal was to cause panic and 'to overthrow the "Chads"' and to force 'the Stacys' to reproduce with incels.[163] He described his attack as retribution against society for the years of sexual rejection by women he experienced.[164]

Minassian claimed to take direct inspiration from prior violent RWE actors. He described himself as 'feel[ing] radicalized'[165] by Rodger's 2014 attack and saw his own attack as a tribute of sorts to Rodger.[166] Further, Minassian claimed to have connected online with other incel-motivated violent actors, including Elliot Rodger (case 1) and Chris Harper-Mercer, both of whom were US citizens.[167] Harper-Mercer, like Rodger, committed a mass shooting on a college campus. Minassian's views on his own actions and incel beliefs can be seen in the content he posted online ahead of his attack. His messages used terms and references common in and understood by incel circles.

Global connections online and transnational legacies

Minassian describes himself as being radicalised online, where he engaged with misogynistic content and the 'manosphere'.[168] He was introduced by a friend to online incel forums. Through online messaging boards on 4chan and Reddit, he found community in shared experiences of sexual frustration.[169]

The day before the attack, Minassian posted a message on 4chan stating that there would be a 'beta uprising' the next day and encouraging others to follow.[170] Just before driving the rental van, he posted a Facebook message exclaiming that 'the Incel Rebellion has already begun!', 'We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys!' and 'All hail Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger.'[171]

Figure 7: Minassian post on Facebook, citing referencing incel terms and Rodger (case 1).

Source: David Futrelle, 'Incel terrorism: Alek Minassian, alleged killer of ten in Toronto attack was inspired by Elliot Rodger [updated]', *We Hunted the Mammoth*, 23 April 2018, online.

After the attack, Minassian's Facebook account was suspended. Incel forums have hailed him as 'one of their own'[172] and as a saint—a designation also given to Elliot Rodger.[173]

Case 4: Christchurch mosque attacks

What happened

On the afternoon of 15 March 2019, Brenton Tarrant,[174] an Australian citizen, shot worshippers gathered for Friday prayers at two Christchurch mosques.[175] He was equipped with multiple firearms, large-capacity magazines and rounds of ammunition,[176] among other items. The attacks resulted in 51 deaths and 40 injuries.[177] Throughout the attacks, Tarrant recorded his actions via a GoPro camera.[178] He was driving to a third location to continue his attacks when New Zealand Police pursued and arrested him.[179]

New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern has referred to Tarrant as a 'terrorist' and 'extremist'.[180] He pleaded guilty to 51 charges of murder, 40 charges of attempted murder and one charge of engaging in a terrorist act, and was convicted on all counts.[181] His is the first sentence of life imprisonment without parole to be imposed in New Zealand.[182] He was designated as a terrorist entity under the *Terrorism Suppression Act 2002*, freezing his assets and making it a criminal offence for anyone to participate in or finance his activities.[183]

Motivations and inspirations

Tarrant held anti-immigrant and white-supremacist views. He wrote a manifesto, some of which has been described as 'shitposting' or 'trolling'.[184] Nevertheless, 'the common language of white nationalism is rife throughout' the manifesto.[185] The manifesto is titled 'The Great Replacement'[186] and includes Nazi imagery, makes reference to the

concepts of 'white genocide' and 'ethnic replacement', and reveals anti-immigrant views.[187] Tarrant didn't claim membership of any specific far-right group.

The manifesto also revealed transnational dimensions to his inspirations and goals. For example, Tarrant also expressed hope that his actions would spark attempts at gun control in the US, which he hoped, in turn, would lead to a civil war and an opportunity to destroy the American 'melting pot'.[188] In addition, he expressed 'a sort of allegiance, and ideological sympathy, to several other mass shooters, including Dylann Roof and Anders Breivik', neither of whom are Australian, and said he had 'read the writings of Dylan Roof'.[189]

Global connections online and transnational legacies

Tarrant broadcast his intentions through several online means. Before commencing the attack, he updated his Facebook status with links to file-sharing websites containing copies of his 74-page manifesto.[190] He also sent an email claiming credit for the impending attack and sharing his manifesto. Recipients of the email included the Office of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, media organisations and the Parliamentary Service.[191] The Parliamentary Service alerted New Zealand Police within eight minutes of receiving the email.[192] Finally, he used his GoPro to broadcast to his online audience.[193] He posted an anonymous message to 8chan (an online discussion board) sharing a Facebook link to a live stream of his attack.[194]

The video of the attack and Tarrant's manifesto were reposted and spread across different online platforms,[195] despite efforts by social media companies and the New Zealand Government—including classifying both items as objectionable content within days of the attack, making them illegal to possess and distribute.[196]

Tarrant made at least superficial gestures towards other mass shooters and to linking his own actions to theirs. For example, he wrote the names of other violent extremists, including Bissonnette (Case 2) on his weapons.[197] The attack appears to have inspired other acts of violence, including one by an attacker in El Paso, Texas, in 2019.[198]

Cases: summary

Table 3: summary of cases

Case	Key beliefs motivating actor	Transnational links and inspirations	Targeted group	Mode of attack and weapons	Charges and sentencing
Isla Vista shooting (2014) **US**	Incel (misogynistic violence), primarily. Also white supremacy.	Would go on to become a 'patron saint' of incels, and be referenced by Alek Minassian (Toronto van attack). Posted YouTube videos and manifesto online.[199]	Women, especially conventionally attractive women. 'All women and the men they are attracted to'.[200]	Semi-automatic pistol (1) used throughout shooting. Estimated 55 rounds fired. 548 live rounds of ammunition,[201] two more semi-automatic pistols, and two knives found in the car.[202] Knives (2)—stabbed housemates and another man to death.[203] Car—struck a pedestrian crossing the road.[204]	n.a.

Quebec mosque shooting (2017) **Canada**	Anti-Muslim, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, far-right views. (Also expressed antifeminist views, though less relevant to this attack.)	Looked up Dylann Roof (American white supremacist who killed nine worshippers at a South Carolina church); was 'preoccupied by Elliot Rodger' (incel shooter, Case 1);[205] browsed websites linked to white nationalist Richard Spencer and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke;[206] followed politics of France's Marine Le Pen[207] and the US' Donald Trump—in particular, Trump's 'Muslim ban'.[208]	Muslim worshippers.	Semi-automatic rifle. A pistol.	Act called terrorism by Canadian public leaders, including Prime Minister Trudeau and Quebec Premier Couillard,[209] but Bissonnette wasn't handed a rrorism-related charge.[210] Bissonnette pleaded guilty to six counts of first-degree murder and six counts of attempted murder.[211] Automatic life sentence for first-degree murder. Appeals court adjusted Bissonnette's sentence to 25 years without parole.[212]
Toronto van attack (2018) **Canada**	Incel (misogynistic violence).	Described self as 'feel[ing] radicalized'[213] by Elliot Rodger's 2014 attacks; saw his attack as a tribute of sorts to Rodger.[214] Minassian also claimed to have communicated with two other incels: Elliot Rodger and Chris Harper-Mercer (both US citizens).[215] Posted online, the day before his attack, urging a 'beta uprising'.[216] Hailed by some incels as 'one of their own'[217] and as a 'saint'.[218]	Women. Society writ large (phrased as 'Stacys' and 'Chads', also 'normies'.)[219]	Van (vehicular attack).	Minassian wasn't charged with terrorism. Was charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder.[220] Minassian pleaded not guilty to all counts in November 2020. In March 2021, he was found guilty of 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder.[221]

Christchurch mosque attacks (2019) **New Zealand; actor is an Australian citizen**	White nationalist, white supremacist, anti-immigrant.	Manifesto is heavy with 'shitposting' and 'trolling'.[222] Nevertheless, it expresses 'a sort of allegiance, and ideological sympathy, to several other mass shooters, including Dylann Roof and Anders Breivik', (US and Norwegian citizens, respectively) and said he 'read the writings of Dylan Roof'.[223] Also expressed political aims internationally: he hoped that his actions would spark further attempts at gun control in the US and that this would lead to a civil war and an opportunity to destroy the American 'melting pot'.[224]	Muslim worshippers	Six firearms; two semi-automatic rifles, two other rifles, two shotguns; large-capacity magazines.[225] Wrote words and phrases referencing RWE ideology on the firearms and magazines.[226] Also had, among other items, a scabbard with a bayonet-style knife and four crude incendiary devices.[227] Also used a GoPro camera and an audio speaker.[228]	Life imprisonment without parole.

Notes

1 Emma Elsworthy, 'Albury man, 18, expected to be charged with terrorism offences and had "neo-Nazi" views, police say,'' *ABC News*, 8 December 2020, online; Isaac Kfir, 'The many faces of right-wing extremism', *The Strategist*, 6 September 2019, online.

2 Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), *CSIS public report 2019*, Canadian Government, April 2020, 13.

3 Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), 'Director-General's annual threat assessment', Australian Government, 17 March 2021, online.

4 Department of Homeland Security (DHS), *DHS lexicon terms and definitions*, US Government, 16 October 2017, 183, online; Dale Watson, 'The terrorist threat confronting the United States', testimony, US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 6 February 2002, online.

5 Barbara Perry, Ryan Scrivens, *Right-wing extremism in Canada*, Palgrave Macmillan Springer, New York, Berlin, 2019, 5–6, online.

6 Maura Conway, Ryan Scrivens, Logan Macnair, 'Right-wing extremists' persistent online presence: history and contemporary trends', *ICCT Policy Brief*, October 2019, 4, online; Perry & Scrivens, *Right-wing extremism in Canada*, 5–6, 62–65; CSIS, *CSIS public report 2019*, 15; CSIS, *2018 CSIS public repo*rt, Canadian Government, June 2019, 23; Public Safety Canada, *2018 public report on the terrorist threat to Canada*, Canadian Government, April 2019, 8, 20, 28–29, online; ASIO, *ASIO annual report 2019–20*, Australian Government, 2020, 3, 18; Mike Burgess, 'ASIO Director-General's annual threat assessment', *The Strategist*, 25 February 2020, online; *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019*, 26 November 2020, 108–10, online; DHS, *Homeland threat assessment October 2020*, US Government, 2020, 19, online.

7 Perry & Scrivens, *Right-wing extremism in Canada*, 60–63.

8 Perry & Scrivens, *Right-wing extremism in Canada*, 100, 122–30; *Report of the Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain*, 703–16, 729; Daniel Byman, 'How a new administration might better fight white supremacist violence', *Lawfare*, 17 August 2020, online; Trevor Aaronson, 'Terrorism's double standard', *The Intercept*, 23 March, 2019, online; Trevor Aaronson, 'Violent far-right extremists are rarely prosecuted as terrorists', *The Intercept*, 23 March 2019, online; Max Boot, 'Not all terrorism is treated equally', *Washington Post*, 15 March 2019, online; Tom Vanden Brook, 'Congress demands investigation into white supremacists in the military after Capitol riots', *USA Today*, 14 January 2021, online; Eric Halliday, Rachael Hanna, 'How the federal government investigates and prosecutes domestic terrorism', *Lawfare*, 16 February 2021, online; Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, 'Incels: America's newest domestic terrorism threat', *Lawfare*, 12 January 2020, online; Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, 'The challenges of effective counterterrorism intelligence in the 2020s', *Lawfare*, 21 June 2020, online.

9 Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), 'Member states concerned by the growing and increasingly transnational threat of extreme right-wing terrorism', UN Security Council, April 2020, 4, online.

10 CTED, 'Member states concerned by the growing and increasingly transnational threat of extreme right-wing terrorism', 4.

11 *Report of the Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain*; Perry & Scrivens, *Right-wing extremism in Canada*, 89–139.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
CT	counterterrorism
DHS	Department of Homeland Security (US)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation (US)
GIFCT	Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism
IMVE	ideologically motivated violent extremism
PAE	policy analysis exercise
RWE	right-wing extremism/extremist

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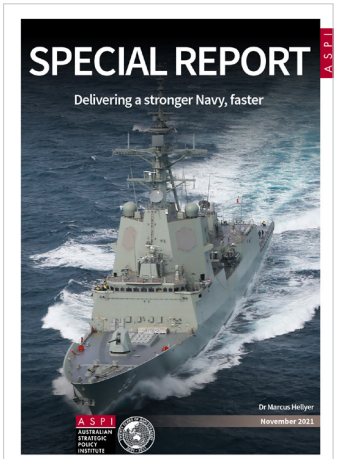

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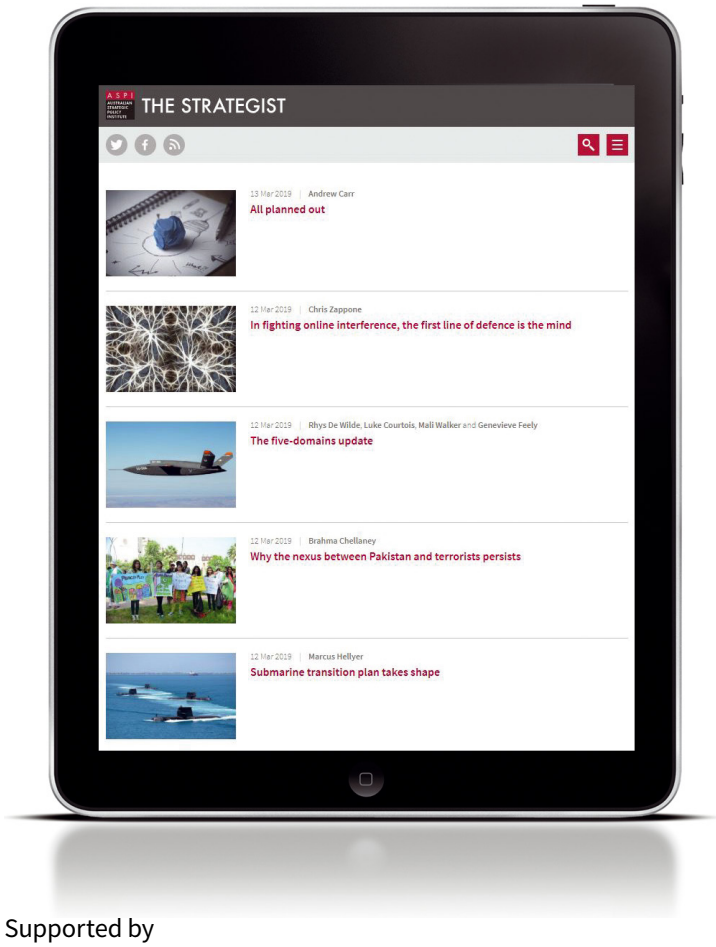

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