



COUNTERTERRORISM YEARBOOK 2022

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Edited by Katja Theodorakis and Gill Savage

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Preface

Justin Bassi

Executive Director, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Navigating Australia's overall security environment is an increasingly challenging task. Less than five years ago, ISIS still occupied its 'caliphate' in Iraq and Syria, and terrorism was the clear top priority for Australian intelligence and security agencies. Threats that were referred to as 'emerging', such as foreign interference, information operation campaigns and cyberattacks—much of which is being fuelled by strategic competition and disruption by a number of authoritarian states across the world—and also climate change are no longer peripheral but current and tier 1 priorities. What's more, security and policy officials are required to manage those threats simultaneously, not consecutively. For the first time, in 2022, ASIO's annual threat assessment judged foreign interference and espionage as the top security challenge to Australia. This year has also seen major geopolitical events, including Russia's war on Ukraine and China's continuing coercive operations and aggression, occupy a significant space in our national discourse; they have global implications not just for national defence strategies but for food and energy security, the cost of living and social cohesion.

After being assessed as 'probable' since September 2014, given ASIO recently noted that its overall CT caseload is moderating, it is conceivable that the National Terrorism Threat Level could drop to 'possible' in the future. It's vital, however, to understand that, while terrorism is no longer assessed by ASIO to be our top security threat, it hasn't disappeared and in fact continues to be one of the predominant security concerns for Australia and the region.

Australia's terrorism challenge, while reduced from ISIS's peak of 2014–2017, is now more multifaceted, with the rise of a suite of onshore extremisms adding to, rather than replacing, international Islamist terrorism. In his annual threat assessment, ASIO's Director-General warned of lone-actor terrorism and the decreasing age at which individuals in Australia are becoming radicalised. The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns fuelled radicalisation based on a raft of ideologies and issue-based grievances, adding volatility to the extremism scene. During this time, Australia

saw a rise in anti-vaccine, anti-lockdown and anti-government sentiment.

Beyond our borders, it remains the case that Australians are at risk of being affected by terrorism in our near region. Governments, policymakers and intelligence analysts will need to maintain an awareness of the implications of the Taliban's control of Afghanistan following the US withdrawal, including in relation to the risks of ungoverned spaces being used by terrorist groups and the rekindling of extremist links into Southeast Asia. The return of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to Kabul, where he was killed by a US operation, emphasises that our work in countering terrorism and violent extremism abroad is not complete. Post-withdrawal, much of the work by countries such as Australia to monitor and prevent the spread of extremism and terrorism from Afghanistan will have to be done from outside that country's borders.

It will be important for Australia and its partners to recognise the tenacious nature of terrorism and terror groups. While ISIS has fallen from the heights of its 'caliphate', it's worth remembering that it grew from the seeds planted by al-Qaeda just as fast as it fell. Until it sprang into the chaos of Iraq and Syria in 2013, its origin story in Al Qaeda in Iraq and successor organisations had ebbed away in many people's thinking. Ungoverned spaces throughout the Middle East and Afghanistan still offer opportunities for terror organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS to regroup and plan future operations. The growth and spread of al-Qaeda and ISIS terrorism in Africa over the past few years have been unprecedented. It remains that transnational extremism and terrorism in far-flung places will affect our interests and citizens globally, regionally and at home. Countless victims attest to that. So, even if the current terrorism threat level were to be reduced from 'probable' to 'possible', it's incumbent on us to continue prioritising both counterterrorism and the ongoing strengthening of our national resilience against all forms of extremism.

These continuing challenges and the rise of other security priorities mean that ASP's 6th edition of the *Counterterrorism yearbook*

remains a vital resource for maintaining and raising awareness of the threats associated with terrorism and violent extremism.

The *Counterterrorism yearbook 2022* unpacks the current global terrorism threat landscape, spanning the ideological and religious spectrums, from jihadism to nationalist and racist violent extremism. The authors analyse how those different forms of terrorism affect Australia and the global community and offer practical policy solutions for the Australian Government.

The 2022 yearbook is presented in three parts. The first provides a snapshot of the global context, including trends abroad and within our region. The second looks at challenges closer to home, such as the impact of Covid-19 on radicalisation, and takes a strategic look at pre-crime policing. The third part explores wider policy considerations, including those related to strategic competition, democracy and multiculturalism.

A dominant theme emerging from this year's edition of the *Counterterrorism yearbook* is that security is a shared responsibility, requiring a broad whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach that extends beyond the remit of security agencies. The role of security agencies in identifying and preventing threats is as vital as ever, but there's a crucial need to simultaneously focus on national resilience as a means of withstanding challenges such as economic crises, pandemics, foreign interference, online disinformation and cyberattacks. Strengthened national resilience will help ensure that social cohesion is maintained even in challenging times and that those who would do us harm are unable to leverage crises and threats to create societal division or to radicalise individuals and groups to violent extremism and terrorism.

Throughout its history, ASPI's *Counterterrorism yearbook* has offered insights into the dynamic threat posed by terrorism both in Australia and abroad and informed public debate and policy interventions. The aim is for you, as the reader, to be moved by the chapters even if you disagree. The yearbook offers increased awareness, discourse and debate on a topic that used to dominate security studies, policies, laws and operations, but that hasn't gone away despite now sharing the threat landscape with the aggressive actions of rogue states interfering with the territorial integrity of sovereign states, authoritarian governments asserting themselves, and actors such as cybercriminals. Security strategists should continue identifying the trends and not allow ungoverned spaces overseas or unregulated spaces on the internet to go unnoticed and be used to spread propaganda and extremism that results in social division, violence and terrorism. Governments, the private sector and civil society all have a role to play in this endeavour.

I commend the authors and ASPI staff for their research contributions to the *Counterterrorism yearbook 2022*, and for their vital commitment to counterterrorism strategy and policymaking.

Introduction

The road from 9/11

Katja Theodorakis

In history's zigzag, the question of what the future holds remains open. That fact offers some hope. What will happen in the next 20 years? How will Sept. 11, 2041, look? What will we have learned from mistakes?¹

Yet another commemoration of the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon has passed, accompanied by the first anniversary of the withdrawal from Afghanistan—intended to mark the end of ‘forever wars’—alongside the 20th anniversary of the Bali bombings. While the renewed proclamation of an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan might not, so far, be identified as a direct threat to Australia's national security, the loss of Afghanistan to the Taliban, and its wider strategic and humanitarian consequences, is a serious, long-term challenge to Australia's interests. Overall, the jihadists' appeal and agenda haven't lost momentum; *jihadi* organisations, networks and individuals will continue to plan for violence against ‘the West’—by inspiring or directing attacks that threaten the security of Australia and our allies and partners.

With two decades of the global war on terror behind us, we're at an opportune time for some deeper thinking about where we're at in the counterterrorism (CT) journey. While the official terrorism threat level remains at ‘Probable’, earlier in 2022 the Director-General of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), Mike Burgess, identified the terrorism and extremism threats that we're facing as ‘significant and constantly evolving.’²

Working from the premise that terrorism is defined by what it opposes, capturing the full nature of threats is crucial for an effective, strategic response.

In response to 9/11, a comprehensive CT architecture was put in place to deal with the threat at hand—jihadism—domestically, as well as through international engagement. Terrorism is distinguished from other forms of violence or crime by reference to an ideological, sociopolitical cause. It's driven by the intention to overturn or harm the course of an established order—nationally or internationally. But the international as well as the domestic terrorism and extremism

landscapes continue to change in response to external events and drivers. As the international environment adapts, if we continue our efforts with the same underlying logic as before and don't adapt the CT script ourselves, we'll miss the more diffused nature of the extremist forces, including the anti-democratic forces, at work globally and in our societies.

The *Counterterrorism yearbook* has been ASPI's annual flagship CT publication since 2017. Showcasing contributions by renowned subject-matter experts from across the world, the yearbooks provide topic-specific analysis of the year's terrorism developments. Examining questions relating to strategy, policy, legislation or operations, they seek to inform policy discourse on terrorism and extremism, scanning the horizon for the challenges ahead. In keeping with ASPI's mission to take the debate beyond current parameters, orthodoxies and policy settings, the 2022 edition equally seeks to add nuanced understandings and policy-relevant insights to existing debates through an expanded focus—in line with the reorientation of ASPI's CT program in response to a changed landscape.

Previous *CT yearbooks* have focused on queries about the tactical innovation, organisational variations and changes in the *modus operandi* of terror groups, so it's timely to now focus on the premises and foundational concepts of terrorism and extremism and how to counter such challenges today and into a future so vastly differently to the context and environment in 2001. A rigorous approach to CT as a security practice will always be needed, even as terrorist activity, and its immediate relevance in relation to other geostrategic or national security threats, peaks and dips. But research indicates that short-term operational and tactical planning can dominate policy and security/risk management at the expense of future scenario planning.

The 2022 yearbook therefore zooms out to the wider strategic horizon. For most of the past two decades, terrorism and extremism were largely seen as an external issue brought to Australia by foreign problems. Even when talking about ‘homegrown jihadists’, extremist ideological

motivations were generally ascribed to global terrorist sources in faraway places.

Yet, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on extremism has resulted in new and old dynamics coalescing. Pointing to an ‘unprecedented shift’, Burgess also warned of a nationwide escalation in militant extremist behaviour:

As a nation, we need to reflect on why some teenagers are hanging Nazi flags and portraits of the Christchurch killer on their bedroom walls, and why others are sharing beheading videos. And just as importantly, we must reflect on what we can do about it.³

The shift is that, 21 years from 9/11, we can’t continue to rely on the conceptual comfort of a ‘single enemy’ whose extremism is rooted in a difference from our way of life. The need for a finer grained picture of this landscape goes beyond security calculations to enable forward-looking, policy-relevant debates on how to address new threats to democratic integrity and social cohesion.

We’re witnessing the proliferation of hate speech, hate crimes and politically motivated violence internationally beyond misappropriated religious causes and focused on issue-specific grievances. It’s notable that the assessments of ASIO’s Director-General in recent years have emphasised that ASIO’s ‘attention and resourcing is increasingly being directed towards threats to Australia’s way of life’.⁴ Widening the scope from safety to include societal wellbeing is an important marker for comprehending the full nature of threats: terrorism and extremist violence go beyond body counts. This means paying attention to how anti-democracy narratives, conspiracy myths and disinformation are strategically instrumentalised and amplified by extremist groups and state actors through media and social networking sites. Our goals must be more clearly defined and, at the same time, require an even broader, whole-of-nation and whole-of-government approach.

Since its inception in 2015, ASPI’s CT Policy Centre has been contributing to Australia’s development of robust CT approaches and partnerships, informing public and policy debates. From mid-2021—alongside ongoing research, commentary and dialogue on the ‘classic’ CT and CVE topics related to jihadism—the program has also been focusing increasing attention on other (violent) contestations of democracy and society. This entails overlapping forms of ideological extremisms, such as anti-government and conspiracy extremism, militant patriot / sovereign-citizen movements, as well as other anti-pluralist discourse, gender-based hate and novel expressions of anti-Semitism, including how these developments are affected by evolving information and propaganda dynamics in a changing strategic environment.

Understanding the impact of extremism and approaches to counter it on democracy and the rules-based international order is fundamental to a comprehensive, long-term national security and foreign

policy strategy. ASPI’s reoriented program for terrorism, extremism and democratic resilience hence advocates an approach that views countering terrorism and extremism as enduring political and societal challenges. If we define ‘resilience’ as the ability to withstand extremist ideas, including through a commitment to Australian democracy and identity, we need to allow for the contestability of ideas. As the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, Bret Walker SC, noted in his annual report for 2011:

Like war, counter-terrorism could involve too high a price ... Ultimately, it will not be the CT Laws that deter and prevent terrorism, if that outcome is realistic at all, but much broader and deeper elements and dynamics of Australian and international society ...⁵

As the world, including the nature of security threats, changes and we necessarily ask whether and how we must change, we should look to history but not be bound by it. That goes for modern-day challenges such as cyber threats as well as our approach to counter terrorism and extremism which should adapt as needed to protect our lives and way of life. This is the approach taken in the 2022 *CT yearbook*.

Notes

- 1 Erin Grace, ‘Terrorism on 9/11, terrorism in the present day’, Omaha World Herald, 11 September 2021, [online](#).
- 2 Mike Burgess, *Director-General’s annual threat assessment 2022*, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, Australian Government, 9 February 2022, [online](#).
- 3 Burgess, *Director-General’s annual threat assessment 2022*.
- 4 Burgess, *Director-General’s annual threat assessment 2022*.
- 5 Bret Walker, Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, *Annual report*, 16 December 2011, Australian Government, 2012, [online](#).

The trouble with seeing monoliths: why we shouldn't conflate Islamism, Salafism and jihadism

Dr Raihan Ismail

The topic of Islam as a source of ‘religious terrorism’ is ... complicated by a plethora of terms used in its Anglophone analysis which can sometimes make it difficult to establish precisely what is under discussion. For example, in reference to Al Qaeda and its associated organizations, Political Islam, Radical Islam, Global Salafi Jihad, Salafi-Jihadism, Jihadism, and Salafism are current as alternatives for ‘Islamism’, while one expert ... uses ‘radical violent takfiri jihadism (RVTJ)’ for what appears to be substantially the same phenomenon.

—from Roger Griffin, *Terrorist’s creed: fanatical violence and the human need for meaning*, 2012¹

History and evolution

Islamism is conventionally understood as an ideological movement that advocates for the entwinement of religion and politics. Islam, according to Islamists, is inherently political. To ensure the survival of the community of Muslim believers, it is imperative that Muslims incorporate Islam into every aspect of governance.

Islamism emerged gradually at around the time the Ottoman caliphate met its end in the 1920s. Muslim scholars and thinkers were concerned about what the caliphate’s decline would mean for the Muslim world, and some sought for it to be restored or revived. Those scholars included the Syrian-born Rashid Rida, who supported the new claim of Abdel Aziz Ibn Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, to be the leader of the international community of believers (*umma*). But the rise of independent Muslim states, as well as deep and multifaceted divisions within the Muslim world, made the vision of a unifying transnational caliphate impossible.

The realisation of the inability to unite all Muslims under collective rule contributed to a construction of a new conception of governance in Muslim societies. Some Muslim thinkers argued that, since it had become impractical to revive the caliphate, Muslims should pursue Islamisation at the nation-state level. The appeal of this approach is that it would ensure the stamping of Islam upon the blank canvas of the governance and political structures of newly established states. This new direction of thinking contained different ideas for how Islam and governance ought to look in practice. One stream of Islamism was the Muslim Brotherhood, formed in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. Al-Banna advocated an anti-colonial agenda and called for the Islamisation of Muslim societies and the establishment of an Islamic state in Egypt.

Islamism was generally less popular than secular nationalism in the aftermath of World War II. When colonial rule or monarchies were overthrown, it tended to be by nationalists, as in Egypt and Iraq. But the Islamist appeal continued to have deep roots

in various Muslim societies through the transnational movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia played an important role in providing refuge and resources to Muslim Brotherhood members to counter their oppression under Egypt’s nationalist ruler, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Several factors contributed to the popularity of Islamist ideals.

First, the failure of Nasser’s nationalist alliance to secure victory against Israel in the 1967 war activated a crisis of faith among Muslims in the region. The defeat was a public embarrassment for secular Arab nationalists.

Second, the inequality exacerbated by uneven development following modernisation efforts in Muslim societies created resentment towards secular nationalist governments. That in turn provided fertile ground for Islamists to appeal to potential supporters by imbuing their political messages with religious appeals to social justice and poverty alleviation. Those narratives were extracted from Islamic theology, history and historiography, rendering religious legitimacy to Islamists that secular nationalists struggled to maintain.

Third, the repressive and authoritarian nature of governments in the Middle East, often secular, allowed Islamists to articulate an alternative: one that promised a ‘just’ and ‘Islamic’ government. Ultimately, the consistent utilisation of religion, and the belief that Islam and politics couldn’t be separated, found support in Muslim societies from the Middle East to South Asia and Southeast Asia. Islamist parties, where they were able to, participated in electoral politics with the aim of implementing Islamic principles by using legitimately won state power.

One contested area of Islamism was the implementation of sharia law. For some Islamists, state-enforced sharia law would be a solution to declining faith and morals in Muslim societies. Many Muslim-majority countries had incorporated sharia law within the family legal system, where its position was largely uncontroversial, but some Islamists preached the extension of sharia to criminal justice and the broader civil law system. This called for a radical change: most Muslim-majority countries had gained independence while inheriting secular legal codes from their former colonial rulers.

So, while Islamist rhetoric called for a revival of Islam, the project was unclear as to what constituted an Islamic state and what aspects of sharia law were to be implemented. Another contested question was the status of non-Muslim minorities. Islamist rhetoric tended to avoid moving beyond assertions of a religious obligation to protect minorities; few practical ways of implementing that obligation were suggested. Those shortcomings allowed non-Islamists to cast doubts over the credibility of Islamists as potential governing parties. Non-Muslim minority groups themselves, who in some countries wielded at least a degree of political influence, often felt more secure in the *status quo*.

Strands of Islamism

Islamism took different shapes and forms.

Mainstream Islamists

Groups such as El-Nahda in Tunisia, which briefly formed government after the 2011 revolution, renounce violence and participate in the political process. The US academic Shadi Hamid describes those groups as *mainstream Islamists*.² Mainstream Islamists, despite having often volatile relations with the state, enduring exile and imprisonment, don't endorse violence to obtain state power.

Scholars debate the nature of mainstream Islamists. Some believe that mainstream Islamists are incapable of evolving and will continue to retain a conservative vision for the state that includes implementing sharia law, restricting women's rights and treating non-Muslim minority groups as second-class citizens. Another school of thought is that mainstream Islamists respond to their political circumstances. Just like other political parties, they stay true to their ideological base, but are willing to transform their political agenda to advance their political fortunes. This involves modifying positions to adapt to social change. One example is the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which evolved to allow women and Christians to run as candidates on the party's ticket.

Some mainstream Islamists are more conservative than others. The most conservative tend to be *salafi* Islamists. *Salafis* promote social conservatism and, in their call for the implementation of sharia law, propagate a more conservative interpretation of sharia, including limiting the rights of minority groups and women. This positions the *salafis* distinctly to the right of their principal rivals in Islamist politics, the Muslim Brotherhood. Groups are also shaped by their leaders. The history of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) has involved episodic lurches from nationalism to Brotherhood-aligned Islamism to fundamentalism, depending upon political fortunes and the results of internal party battles.

Khalil al-Anani, a scholar working on political Islam, makes the observation that political context is crucial when understanding the behaviour of mainstream Islamists. When the state allows political participation, Islamists become more accommodating towards minority groups, women and individual freedoms: doing so is necessary to participate successfully. In cases where the state is extremely authoritarian, mainstream Islamists face internal divisions. Some call for nonviolence and seek to manoeuvre their way through repressive

environments, while others opt for a militant approach. Al-Anani emphasises that groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS are the beneficiaries of extreme authoritarianism, as they're able to articulate marginalisation and grievances in a way that legitimises their actions and mobilises support,³ and even recruit mainstream Islamists disgruntled with the impotence of their own movement.

Another element of context that al-Anani highlights is conflict and civil wars. In those environments, Islamists are left with little choice but to take up arms to ensure their relevance. Al-Anani points to Syrian, Libyan and Yemeni Islamists as examples of Islamists being forced to engage in armed conflict following the collapse of political order.⁴

Non-mainstream Islamists

The second stream of Islamists reject any notion of political participation: they view conventional political processes, especially democracy, as alien to Islam, controlled by Western ideology (whatever that entails) and antithetical to Muslim unity. The only method that seems effective to implement their version of sharia from a position outside power is armed struggle against the enemies of Islam. The conception of 'enemy' often includes Muslims who support the state, as well as mainstream Islamists. Obviously, groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS belong to this stream. Ideology can differ even within this stream of Islamism. Despite originating from the *salafi* movement, ISIS's jurisprudential system is more extreme than al-Qaeda's. Its method of punishment of military enemies is an example. The immolation of a captured Jordanian pilot was rejected by *salafis* in general, including al-Qaeda theologians.

Hybrid Islamists

The third stream consists of groups such as the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah. These groups are hybrid groups with both political and militant wings. They're a product of their sociopolitical environments. Although these groups embrace the political strategy of mainstream Islamists by participating in elections, and, in the case of Hezbollah, forming political alliances including with Christian groups, their core ideology propagates the vision of an Islamic state. In the case of Shia-affiliated Hezbollah, the group speaks of emulating Iranian theocracy and has close relations with the Iranian revolutionary government.

Hybrid groups are pulled in different directions, using both militancy and political processes to attain and maintain power. That makes it difficult

to assess strategic engagement with these groups as they switch between electoral participation and using military might to maintain control. After all, Hezbollah's armed wing is generally perceived to be stronger than the Lebanese Army.

Islam and the state

Scholarly and policy discussions tend to focus on Islamist parties and groups as non-state actors. However, Islamism can also be implemented from a position of state power.⁵ Iran and Turkey are examples of countries governed by Islamists. While Iran's theocracy is securely entrenched, Turkey's long history of secular institutions and constitutionalism presents a challenge for Islamism. As a result, the quasi-Islamist government overtly commits to maintaining the country's secular system, while promoting itself as a leader of the Muslim world and advocating for gradual moves towards religious conservatism domestically.

Anti-Islamist autocrats often seek to counter Islamism by themselves using Islam to build support among citizens at home while expanding their international outreach. In the years following the 2011 'Arab Spring' uprisings, the likes of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have taken a harsh and repressive turn towards Islamists. At the same time, state-endorsed religious narratives began to permeate state media outlets, as the state sought to propagate its role as the preserver of the faith. These states tend to promote what they term 'moderate Islam' as a vague alternative to the appeal of Islamism, which is implicitly characterised as extremist.

State utilisation of Islam is also influenced by the changing circumstances in the region. Saudi Arabia's recent efforts under Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman to muffle its own Wahhabist tradition mark a clear shift from the state's previous history of exporting the tradition to other Muslim countries and supporting Islamism abroad.

Islamism, be it mainstream or non-mainstream, has suffered brand damage due to the counter-narratives of state-endorsed religious institutions, state repression, largely negative international attitudes, the war on terror, and the blurring of the mainstream versus non-mainstream dichotomy by its detractors. But Islam and politics in Muslim-majority countries will remain a potent combination. Islam will continue to be a tool used by governments seeking popular legitimacy, while non-state Islamist actors will continue to mobilise support to offer alternative political platforms. Islamism will not disappear, but its strategies, ideology and actions will continue to change.

Notes

- 1 Roger Griffin, *Terrorist's creed: fanatical violence and the human need for meaning*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 174.
- 2 Shadi Hamid, 'The dilemma of "normalization": can Islamists participate without polarizing politics?', Arab Center, Washington DC, June 2019, [online](#).
- 3 Khalil al-Anani, 'Introduction', in *Islamism and revolution across the Middle East: transformations of ideology and strategy after the Arab Spring*, IB Tauris, London, 2021, 18–20.
- 4 al-Anani, 'Introduction'.
- 5 Peter Mandaville, Shadi Hamid, 'Islam as statecraft: how governments use religion in foreign policy', *Brookings*, November 2018, [online](#).

The big picture: a lens on strategic trends in terrorism

ASPI's former national security editor, Anastasia Kapetas,
in conversation with Levi West, Director of Terrorism Studies
at CSU's Graduate School for Policing and Security

Anastasia Kapetas (AK): What do you see as the key trends in jihadist terrorism across the Indo-Pacific region (taking into consideration also the impact of trends from the Middle East, South Asia or Southeast Asia)?

Levi West (LW): The first significant factor in forecasting anything regarding jihadism is what's happened in Afghanistan. Strategically, and symbolically, I wouldn't describe it as losing. We don't want to call it a victory, so let's call it 'the Taliban retaking power in Afghanistan', which they'll spin as a victory against the US. But it's difficult to quantify the potential significance of that in terms of energising, in an enduring way, the jihadist movement. It's worthwhile remembering here that the modern jihadist movement, at least in its initial al-Qaeda version, has its roots in the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan and the failure, after the defeat of the Soviets, to follow through and provide support to the nascent Afghan Government. That symbolic value will resonate, not just in Afghanistan or South Asia but right across the entire transnational universe of jihadists, from Morocco to Indonesia. The belief that, eventually, it's possible to outlast your opponent will inform the strategic calculation of the jihadist leadership across its various manifestations.

AK: And also those hiding away in Western countries, I assume?

LW: Absolutely. Then the next big factor to shape jihadism going forward is the other half of what that scenario in Afghanistan is: the US and its recalibration of CT and where CT—or what we somewhat derisively refer to as 'the Global War on Terror'—sits in its list of priorities in terms of strategic policy and defence posture. The recalibration towards great-power competition has significant implications for CT, and particularly for offensive CT activity across the world. The desire on the part of the US and its allies to not continue this perpetual, messy, dirty-war-type scenario is entirely understandable, but taking our foot off that forward momentum has implications; it allows for spaces of opportunity to grow. What's been referred to as 'over the horizon' CT is a polite term for a less forward-engaged form of CT, with greatly diminished HUMINT capabilities. The reprioritisation may well be entirely justified, but it's important to acknowledge what that means for CT going forward.

AK: What does 'over the horizon counterterrorism' really mean?

LW: It's mostly a construct, right? Rather than having troops, assets and hands-on capabilities based in Afghanistan, for instance, we remotely deal with or respond to situations that may arise—individual cells or plots or whatever it might be. You're relying on assets that are deployable from beyond the immediate theatre, mostly drones, but the main distinction is that you don't have assets and resources in-country. This means there are delays, and the intelligence you're collecting won't necessarily be as effective or timely as it might otherwise be because you're not running the kinds of assets that you'd maintain

if you were in-country. This has implications for the efficacy of your CT, especially in complex, hostile, offshore environments.

AK: Are there any other noteworthy macro-level events and trends?

LW: There are two other things that are important. One is the enduring symbolic power and impact: while we may have defeated the so-called caliphate, much like with the earlier Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the resonance of its declaration and the (perceived) successes of its brief sustainment and expansion, in terms of the unstitching of the Sykes–Picot agreement and pushing through the border between Syria and Iraq, these events carry much symbolic weight, whose ultimate resonance is difficult to quantify. We do ourselves a disservice if we hold on to metrics that tell us that by 'defeating something', we've undermined its capacity to reverberate throughout a wider movement.

The other one is Africa. As soon as we started pushing hard at Islamic State kinetically, it started shifting its centre of gravity towards Africa—key assets, resources, personnel—particularly North Africa. The French are active in North Africa; it's a key strategic location for them. But it doesn't have the same geopolitical resonance as the Middle East and hence doesn't garner the same kind of prioritisation from international actors.

AK: Are you talking about Mali here, where the French just wound up their antiterrorism operations?

LW: Mali is the almost daily breaking news (now). But rather than what's happening in Mali on a daily basis, I mean the more long-term challenge and that we don't place a great deal of strategic priority on Africa. Certainly not in the way we did in the Middle East, or the way the Americans have done. There's scope there for an operational space for Islamic State actors to grow again, the kind of time and space that they ought to be denied, potentially becoming a safe haven. It's unlikely to have the same strategic implications because it's not the Middle East, it's not proximate to Israel, or to oil reserves, but it nevertheless should be seen as an area of strategic priority. Safe havens enable terrorist organisations to catch their breath and to invest time and resources into planning and training. While there are a variety of countermeasures underway across North Africa, the expansion of jihadist activity comes at the same time as decreased prioritisation of CT more generally.

AK: You've just addressed a question that many people are asking: 'Why should we get involved in what's happening in Africa?'

LW: When thinking about the effects on Europe, the UK and the US, for example, a couple of things spring to my mind: building networks, radicalisation in-country and training terrorist fighters for an actual 9/11-style attack. Additionally, when already unstable states in North Africa start to destabilise further, we have to contend with a refugee problem, a people movement problem.

There's already a significant refugee flow right across the Mediterranean; the roadblock here is the political unwillingness of some in Europe to deal with refugee flows in a sustainable, long-term and humanitarian way. There are plenty of reports of brutal management to keep those boats offshore. While I understand the populist appeal of harsh anti-immigrant positions, the human security implications, as well as implications for minority communities of Moroccans, Algerians etc., that already exist right throughout Europe, present a dilemma. There's also the risk that other international actors, some of whom are already substantially active across the African continent, fill that void. Those other powers, prosecuting their global interests, provide a different version of CT support to African countries, and in the process obtain greater influence in the region.

AK: So, you'd argue it's not sustainable in the long term?

LW: Not unmanageable in the short term but, if flows are going to continue, then there'll come a point at which you can't control it. I think the dilemma with Africa is that we'll only care once that threshold is crossed, at which point it will be too late to care. Obviously, if the situation in any of the North African countries were to devolve into a crisis that resonated sufficiently, then the US and its partners may become more active; but these are problems that I think will be dealt with only if they absolutely have to be, rather than proactively or pre-emptively.

AK: What kinds of groups and networks should we watch in this space, meaning in areas like the Middle East, which have effects across the region, or beyond their own localised area?

LW: At the macro-level, we can divide the jihadist universe into two main components: those who still subscribe to an al-Qaeda version of jihadism, and those who subscribe to Islamic State's version.

AK: Can you explain the key difference between the two?

LW: There's a handful, but two matter the most. In the first instance, it's who qualifies for declarations of *takfir* according to each group. In other words, who's considered 'a non-believer'. Here, the IS view is 'if you're not a member of Islamic State' (therefore, *takfir*), you're a non-believer, and therefore targetable. Al-Qaeda has a 'comparatively' more nuanced perspective on the matter in regard to doctrinal nuances and operational matters/objectives. Al-Qaeda also seems to be increasingly interested in prosecuting what Aaron Zelin has recently referred to as 'political jihad', in reference to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (or HTS), in Syria—a group that has disavowed its global *jihadi* aspirations

and refocused its efforts on resistance against Bashar al-Assad and local governance.

The second one is more strategic. It's about the sorts of methods employed in the declaration of a caliphate, which is kind of a matter of strategic policy. Al-Qaeda is increasingly demonstrating a degree of patience by cultivating circumstances that lead to the caliphate. In contrast, the ISIS approach is to smash, and subsequently (in the aftermath of the 'smash', so to speak) fill the vacuum by establishing your caliphate.

That means that in the Southeast Asian universe, for example, we're talking about existing players and a degree of continuity—variations of the same acronyms, for lack of a better descriptor. We can delineate locations of activity, which I don't expect to change too much: the southern Philippines, little pockets of *jihadi* activism left in Indonesia. The southern Philippines has a peace process in place, but that's with the more established, more mature actors, not so much the IS actors involved in Marawi, for instance. So, in terms of organisational activity, it's a question of a specific variable.

A useful way to think about terrorism in Southeast Asia is as a time-lagged reflection of what happens in the Middle East; when things happen in the Middle East on a large scale, some time later a smaller scale version of those developments manifests in Southeast Asia. Mosul is a good example: Islamic State happens, Mosul happens—the largest urban conflict since the Second World War. And then eventually IS surfaces in Southeast Asia, Marawi happens, almost as the baby brother of Mosul. Terrorists learn some lessons from how urban warfare was deployed in Mosul, leading them to think 'We can do something like this here.' Due to this dynamic, I don't think there's a huge scope for a fundamental change of trajectory.

AK: Another group I was going to ask about are the Rohingya—an extremely vulnerable Islamic population on the move who end up among Bangladeshis, a vulnerable Islamic population themselves. Do you see potential for new movements to spring up in those populations?

LW: Yes, the Rohingya do present a really interesting case, especially in how the topic presented for a period within jihadist propaganda. They're a persecuted Muslim minority, brutally persecuted I might add. Yet, there doesn't appear to have been much movement from within the Rohingya population, either in Bangladesh or in Myanmar, to embrace jihadism in any significant way. I would venture to say, though, that the opportunity is there, but very little evidence to demonstrate that, from the Rohingya side, there's a huge appetite. The situation bears some similarities with that of the Uyghurs in China.

AK: Here, you're talking about groups like the East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)?

LW: ETIM or the Turkistan Islamic Party, whichever version we want to talk about. They barely existed as an entity until the Chinese declared them a terrorist enterprise, as did the US—arguably for geopolitical reasons rather than a reflection of ETIM. And so they went off to Pakistan, increased their capabilities, and left a trajectory through Syria, with significant Uyghur foreign fighter brigades there affiliated with ISIS. These terrorist actors tend to be reasonably rational and strategic, though, at the leadership level. Sending a bunch of your resources back to Xinjiang, with its highly sophisticated, high-tech surveillance apparatus (that's quite brutal at the biometric level) is probably not the most effective use of resources right now, so I don't see much scope for minority community trigger points for violent activity there. Resistance, absolutely. And quite right. But jihadist terrorism, not so much.

AK: Do you see China then becoming more of a target outside of its own territory? Chinese embassies, for example?

LW: That's a really interesting question because, through certain lenses (which I don't necessarily agree with), one of the reasons that America is a target is because it's a global superpower. This view ignores America's legacy as 'the Crusader nation'; the US inherited power from the Brits at the global level, with all the burdens that come with British and Western foreign policy in the Middle East over centuries, starting with the Crusades. So, through a *jihadi* lens, the Americans inherit the legacies of the Crusades while they're still a 'Christian nation' responsible for all the evils that happened in the Middle East: the 'carriers of the cross', in the words of ISIS. The Chinese aren't like that. So, hypothetically, even if the Chinese attained superpower status, they never took Jerusalem. They aren't responsible for the suppression of the Islamic world, at least through the lens of jihadism. They never put troops in the land of the two holy mosques to defend the Saudis from the Iraqis. They also didn't prosecute the Global War on Terror for the past 20 years, with all the excesses associated with that. Their role in the *jihadi* narrative is fundamentally different.

AK: They haven't been in people's faces in that part of the world.

LW: Yes, increased global presence means increased opportunities for targeting. They'll wind up in circumstances, and have, both in Afghanistan and Africa, where they've become a target not necessarily because they're Chinese, but because of their presence, assets or interests in-country. It's easy to forget that part of the reason the West, or at least the US, is the primary target is a result of legacies and histories: of the relationship with Israel and its defence of Jerusalem, by extension. The Chinese don't have that at all. And there's no way to make up a narrative about the Mongol invasions back in the 12th century to try

to argue that the Chinese are the inheritors of the Mongol tradition. On the other hand, jihadists do like to leverage further claims from those events, so perhaps they'll manage to come up with a justifying narrative.

AK: In terms of oppression, wouldn't their pretty severe repression of co-religionists animate jihadist groups in the same way?

LW: Not necessarily. It did in the nineties in Yugoslavia and in Chechnya, and *jihadis* went, in substantial numbers. But there was no surveillance system like what we see now.

Not with the same ease of someone who was hanging out in Afghanistan in the nineties could go, 'Hey, you know what, there's a whole bunch of horrible stuff going on in Bangladesh. We're just going to traipse over there.' In the nineties, you could do that as a jihadist; you could just travel to various hotspots, relatively unimpeded, whereas now you're on a list, someone's paying attention, or at least your data footprint is being monitored. It isn't as simple, certainly not for jihadists of substance, to just move. Both in Burma and Xinjiang, you have reasonably robust countermeasures, not specifically CT, but you're dealing with fairly brutal regimes more than willing to clamp down on whatever they feel they need to. Their operational parameters are fundamentally different from ours.

AK: Is the fact that the Chinese are seen as, at least a little bit, more tolerant of a Taliban government also a factor in play here?

LW: That's a hard question to answer. The Taliban are—don't get me wrong, they're jihadists—but they're more of an insurgent group than they're a terrorist organisation. And they don't have the same global ambitions that 'proper' jihadist terrorist organisations do. This is a really important distinction.

Al-Qaeda seeks global dominance, IS seeks global dominance. The Taliban, on the other hand, want Afghanistan. Their line of reasoning would be, 'If the Chinese Government is happy to buy stuff for us so we can run Afghanistan—or the choice is to not run Afghanistan—then it's irrelevant that they're all *kafirs*. We're happy to deal with them if they enable us to achieve our strategic objectives.'

Whereas this argument would have much less resonance with your average senior leader from al-Qaeda or Islamic State.

AK: Moving on to terrorist financing: is that changing in particular ways?

LW: I hate to be the 'continuity and change' guy, but terrorism financing is much like terrorism itself. Novel stuff came out of Islamic State, but that would be a result of running a state. The tax collection and smuggling oil out of Syria were unique to the structures and circumstances that were in place. There's bits and pieces of digital financial activity—bitcoin-type transactions, or using social media funds etc. But, overwhelmingly, it's still terrorist organisations

engaging in transnational criminal activity to raise funds or solicit donations from sympathetic governments or individual private donors.

AK: Does this also include high-net-worth individuals in sympathetic governments?

LW: In a small number of countries in certain parts of the world, maybe. But that'd only be a minor addition to what terrorist groups make from criminal activity. Criminal activity wins because it's black-market money that remains in the illicit economy and maximises operational security.

AK: Has that criminal activity changed because of the digital environment, or does it still centre around the usual commodities, like drugs and guns?

LW: I haven't seen the jihadist universe diversifying into a white-collar crime strand or into, at least not in a step-change way, cyber-based financing activities. I think it's still mostly 'narcotics first, if you can', and then whatever else can be smuggled. Smuggling and illicit activity dominate the terrorism financing universe.

AK: That's very interesting in the sense that narcotics is a very agrarian form of organised crime, and that's where the initial impetus for these movements comes from. How does this affect recruitment? Do you see similar trends to the past, or has the digital environment changed things?

LW: The digital environment has allowed for substantially more specific recruitment strategies, not necessarily finer grained targeting of individuals, but how it's directed at communities. At some point in the relatively early days of the caliphate, 2015 or 2016, there had been a reasonable influx of Indonesians and Malaysians to Syria. But the overwhelming majority of them didn't speak Arabic, which on the battlefield presents a reasonable problem. This was causing two dilemmas: one in theatre, but the other one back in Indonesia and Malaysia, where people were getting word that no one over there spoke Bahasa, and recruitment enthusiasm started to drop. In response, Islamic State launched what it called the 'Malaysian Archipelago Brigade', where they combined all the Malayan and Indonesian speakers, Bahasa speakers, into a brigade with the two or three guys who spoke some Arabic and Bahasa. They then released a specific propaganda video with the poster boy of Indonesian Islamic State to assuage the concerns back in Indonesia and Malaysia. Along the lines of 'Come over. There's nothing to worry about. We recognise that you've got a unique language.' This shows a level of consideration and highlights how recruitment became a more refined and targeted enterprise.

AK: In terms of the kinds of constant narratives that make up an ideology, the narratives we're seeing used in recruitment, are those changing or just new versions of old narratives?

LW: The jihadist narrative is a rudimentary and straightforward pitch: 'All the non-Muslims are conspiring to kill us; all your brothers and sisters are going to die if you don't come and help us.' For the most part, and I am simplifying things greatly here, the main distinction is between the Islamic State version and the al-Qaeda version. It's important to recognise that, in many of the local manifestations of jihadism, especially where either al-Qaeda or Islamic State has to sort of stitch itself to a pre-existing local grievance, ideology gets shaped from below as well as from the top down. It isn't necessarily a case of dropping Islamic State ideology into, let's say, Marawi. To recognise and accommodate local grievances and local versions of Islam, the ideological narratives will have to be tweaked to suit the particular local ingroup-outgroup dynamics. So, if within the Middle East your primary outgroup target is the local Shia community in Iraq, and in the southern Philippines there's no local Shia community to meet your outgroup profile, you need to adjust that; so you make your narrative a bit more about the Catholic central government in Manila. That'd be another example of a refinement piece.

AK: Is the use of disinformation changing? And by disinformation, I mean the use of a really quite extreme conspiracism that makes up wild stories about the manifold evils of said outgroup; and specifically, the use of horrific stories to radicalise?

LW: That mechanism is as old as it is successful, but I don't think it's necessarily a centrally driven enterprise by the jihadist movement, at least not that I'm aware of. Those kinds of stories—of massacres or rapes or whatever it might be on a large scale—tend to emerge organically (such as through people telling each other on Facebook) and they tend to leverage pre-existing prejudices, too, in the same way that anti-Semitism in the Middle East started from a whole bunch of pre-existing prejudices. And then someone offered a conspiracy theory that reinforced these prejudices and said 'Look, there's actually a much bigger power behind it.' I'd argue that pretty much every extremist ideology in the world is predicated on a conspiracy theory at its core. And you could make an argument that they all have an element of anti-Semitism at their core, too.

AK: To sum up and draw a line underneath these emerging trends we've discussed, you touched briefly on some shifts in great-power posture in the Middle East, South Asia and potentially in Southeast Asia that might affect these kinds of trendlines. One key issue that stood out

was geographical safe havens. And of course, now that the Taliban are back in control in Afghanistan, this presents other opportunities for jihadist groups, also in terms of what sort of resources Western countries are going to bring to bear on the terrorism problem internationally. Is there anything else that you'd want to mention here?

LW: I think the big one to me is the recalibration of the US policy position and declaratory policy position, which includes the quite reasonable deprioritisation of CT. CT runs on a pendulum: a particular attack, or series of attacks, lead to substantial funding, resulting in successful defence against more attacks, then the public decreases its concern for terrorism. And when we deprioritise funding and budgets are stretched, another attack comes along, followed by another round of non-strategically allocated money, in the sense that it's reactive rather than sustained funding. Great-power competition seems to be accepted as more of an eternal part of the international system. Yet, with CT, it's different. We see it as something to grow out of rather than also seeing it as a more or less permanent requirement of government. And we've been engaging in this sort of pendulum swing since the modern history of terrorism began with anarchists in Russia, Europe and the US in the late 1800s and the early 1900s.

I'd argue that we have a view of CT as in a box. Don't get me wrong—our capabilities are phenomenal—but I think that, at the macro-level, CT itself is now vastly more complex and diverse. For 20 years, we did CT against one primary adversary. We're now doing it, domestically at least, against two (if I keep it simple in terms of how I distinguish them) bodies of ideology and sources of motivation: confronting jihadist terrorism, and at the same time the extreme right, and that's without classifying any of the other motivators. Ideology matters, and it shapes and informs targeting decisions, tactics and the communities of interest that are relevant to CT.

There's also a broader challenge that the extreme right presents ideologically. The ideas of the extreme right—of anti-Semitism, of anti-Islamic sentiment, and of anti-immigration, intolerance and xenophobia—present a significant risk to the foundational ideals of liberal democracy, and to the political discourse of liberal democracy.

That means our domestic orientation is now a much more significant priority as well. The anti-government rhetoric, the civil uprisings in the US, ongoing demonstrations, protests, and civil unrest right across the Western world in relation to Covid lockdowns mean more resources are required, in a more general way. But they potentially all have CT elements to them. That means our capacity to focus on just jihadists no longer exists, aside from this formal deprioritisation. So, our reorientation towards domestic agendas is a big part of the challenge going forward for CT.

Defining hate: terrorism, hate crimes and far-right extremism— a perspective from Israel

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Introduction

Saturday 27 October 2018 saw the most lethal terror attack ever perpetrated against the Jewish community of the US. The target was at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and claimed the lives of 11 worshippers and injured six. Prior to carrying out the attack, the terrorist—46-year-old Robert Gregory Bowers, a far-right activist—posted anti-Semitic messages on social media and accused the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society of bringing in ‘invaders’ (a term he used to describe Latin American immigrants) to kill Americans.

In a press conference that took place immediately after the attack, Scott Brady, the US Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, labelled the attack ‘a hate crime’. When asked what the difference was between a hate crime and a terror attack, he responded:

The distinction between a hate crime and domestic terrorism is a hate crime is where an individual is animated by hatred or animus towards a person of certain ethnicity or religious faith, and it becomes domestic terrorism where there is an ideology that that person is also trying to propagate through violence.¹

There are several problems with Brady’s response. First, many terrorists are driven by hatred. That hatred is the by-product of their set of beliefs, extreme ideology, their interpretation of their religious commands, or a bloody history. It’s also the product of internal and international disputes and tensions. The fact that a person perpetrating a brutal attack, such as the Pittsburgh synagogue attack, is driven by burning hatred doesn’t make that terror attack a hate crime. Moreover, Brady’s argument suggesting that the bar for qualifying an attack as an act of domestic terrorism is the existence of an ideological motive, while at the same time defining the attack ‘only’ as a hate crime, is extremely problematic. One may infer from it that Bowers wasn’t acting out of an extreme ideology, whereas the exact opposite is true. Bowers wasn’t a madman who embarked on a killing spree in a synagogue due to an uncontrollable momentary impulse driven by hatred. Bowers was a far-right terrorist who had undergone a process of radicalisation and adopted a racist, anti-Semitic ideology wrapped in xenophobia. He premeditatedly, carefully planned and calculatedly perpetrated the terror attack (against his fabricated enemies).

The Pittsburgh attack and the attitude of law enforcement officials towards it is just the tip of an iceberg. It expresses the confusion and difficulties that nation-states and their different institutional apparatuses—security services, law enforcement agencies, politicians and practitioners—face in identifying and defining the phenomenon of far-right terrorism, distinguishing it from other types of political violence, and consequently formulating specific

strategies and practices in contending with this phenomenon. That confusion can be clearly seen in the FBI’s definitions of international and domestic terrorism and hate crimes. According to the FBI:

- *International terrorism* is ‘violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored)’.²
- *Domestic terrorism* is ‘violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.’³
- A *hate crime* is ‘a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity’; ‘hate crimes are the highest priority of the FBI’s civil rights program’; and ‘hate itself is not a crime—and the FBI is mindful of protecting freedom of speech and other civil liberties.’⁴

Although the FBI doesn’t necessarily distinguish between domestic terrorism and hate crimes by differentiating between violent behaviour that’s motivated by hatred and that which is motivated by ideology, it appears that the FBI is falling into the same trap; it distinguishes a hate crime by the fact that it’s motivated by the offender’s bias against a segment of society, as if many terrorists don’t carry this type of bias when they attack holy sites or certain members of the community. Clear definitions are intended to distinguish between different phenomena. When one definition overlaps with another and can be used to describe two or more phenomena, it has no merit and loses its validity and utility.

In this paper, we claim that the above misunderstandings and confusion in defining and differing between domestic terrorism and hate crimes reflect the Western world’s attitude towards domestic terrorism in general and to far-right terrorism in particular. The type of terrorism that derives from within domestic society itself (and isn’t necessarily imported from abroad, even if amplified or connected to international voices) and in many cases claims to represent the rights of the majority of society and protect it from external threats and invasions, or dangerous internal deviations from society’s common goals, values and interests, creates a difficult dissonance for decision-makers and certain parts of the public; that dissonance is easily solved when the offence is defined as a hate crime and not as (domestic) terrorism.

In this paper, we clarify the need and the challenge in distinguishing between those two phenomena, we offer a working definition of far-right terrorism that will differentiate this phenomenon from other types of terrorism, and we develop a model that will be useful in classifying legitimate and non-legitimate conservative and far-right expressions and behaviours.

The challenge of contending with far-right terrorism

Far-right terrorism isn't a new phenomenon. However, the rise in the number of attacks and their lethality and impact have attested to the severity of the damage it can carry. The UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate report for 2020 asserts that far-right terrorism poses a transnational threat. Per the report, in the past five years, there's been an increase of 320% in the number of far-right attacks, mostly in Western countries.⁵ Similarly, an Anti-Defamation League study has shown that the fatal attacks committed in the US in 2019 were overwhelmingly (90%) linked to far-right movements.⁶ The Center for Strategic and International Studies asserts that attacks and attempted attacks by far-right activists perpetrated in the US since 1994 made up most of the terrorist incidents in the country.⁷ The above information points to the severity of the problem, its intensification in recent years, and its prevalence as a 'glocal' (that is, global as well as local) phenomenon.⁸

David C Rapoport identified four 'waves' of modern terrorism since the later 19th century. According to Rapoport, the emergence of multiple types of terrorism over time has been influenced by political and ideological forces. Rapoport pointed to an 'anarchistic' wave that started in 1870 and was influenced by the French revolutionary ideals of equality and democracy; this lasted until the beginning of World War I. The 'anti-colonial'/nationalistic wave was characteristic of the era between the end of World War I and the 1960s and was typified by desires for national self-determination; the 'left' wave was inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology and lasted until the 1980s; and the 'religious' wave started in 1979 following movements in the Muslim world—specifically, the Iranian revolution and the invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR.⁹

Rapoport's research led many to discuss the next wave of terrorism, among them Vincent A Auger, who proposed deeming far-right terrorism the fifth wave. According to him, far-right terrorism has changed over time, first with regard to its *modus operandi*. In the past, far-right terrorists acted frequently although with low intensity, and their attacks claimed relatively few victims (with the exception of a few notable cases). Moreover, the perpetrators rarely claimed responsibility for the attacks or explained their motives. However, in recent years, we've been witnessing attempts at mass killings in which, in many cases, the attackers posted a manifesto prior to

their attack and ensured that it was recorded and live-streamed or broadcast. Of course, social media and technology have played a significant role in the transformation of far-right terrorism and its expansion to the transnational level. Social media have emboldened far-right perceptions and created a sense of cohesion and a common goal among far-right activists, believers and followers. Moreover, social media platforms have facilitated networking and real-time coordination among far-right members, while eliminating the limitations of time and distance.¹⁰

Scholars use different definitions to define far-right extremism. Those definitions vary in the features they include but, according to Cas Mudde, there's a consensus that right-wing extremism is a *political ideology*. Mudde examined 26 definitions of right-wing extremism and found that they include 58 different features (at least once). Yet, the majority of the definitions he examined refer to five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and the 'strong state' (the rule of law and order to the point of oppression). Mudde therefore suggests three approaches to differentiating between the definitions: the quantitative approach (all features are equally important, and one should focus on the number of features), the qualitative approach (at least one feature is more important than the others), and the mixed approach (the number of features is important and at the same time one, or more, features are more important than the others).¹¹

Roger Griffin, a leading fascism scholar, on the question of whether fascism is a useful concept to understand the illiberal forces manifested in recent political developments, states:

If the aim is to communicate and encourage a sense of alarm about the current state of national/international politics, the rise of nationalism and racism, and the crisis of liberal democracy, then the declaration that the US or Europe are steadily moving towards fascism, or that fascism is on the rise, then the term presses certain highly emotive buttons which derive ultimately from the deep trauma of the war against the Axis Powers. However, it is so overused as term of polemic, abuse and denigration for any form of authoritarianism or racism that much of its offensive and affective impact has been eroded.

If on the other hand the context is a serious, open-minded debate about identifying and evaluating the threats to democracy which tries to progress towards greater understanding, then 'fascism' is only useful if it retains its classificatory ('taxonomic') value as a term for a particular, discrete category of the illiberal right.

Nowadays there is far too much sloppy thinking and semantic slippage between ‘the right’, ‘the radical/far/extreme right’, racism, hard-line conservatism, ‘populism’, religious fundamentalism, and ‘radical right-wing populism’, to the point where such terms end up obfuscating more than they illuminate.¹²

While Mudde’s research laid the foundations for understanding the phenomenon of right-wing extremism, Elisabeth Carter suggested adding two important features: populism and anti-establishment rhetoric. Moreover, Carter argues that Mudde failed to properly distinguish between the definition of the phenomenon and its characteristics. Carter claims that authoritarianism / the strong state, anti-democracy and nationalism are the defining features of right-wing extremism, while xenophobia, racism and populism are only characteristics associated with the concept.¹³

Other researchers distinguish between ‘extreme-right violence’ and ‘extreme-right terrorism’. Bjørge and Ravndal argue that:

... the term ‘extreme-right violence’ covers a broader range of attacks than ‘extreme-right terrorism.’ All violent attacks whose target selection is based on extreme-right beliefs and corresponding enemy categories—immigrants, minorities, political opponents, or governments—qualify as right-wing violence. This could also include vandalism and spontaneous violence. To be considered as terrorism, an attack must be premeditated and intended to instil fear in a wider population to affect a political outcome.¹⁴

The debate over the definition of far-right terrorism can’t be detached from the unresolved debate over the definition of terrorism.¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper, we refer to terrorism as ‘a type of political violence in which a non-state actor makes deliberate use of violence against civilians to achieve political (national, socioeconomic, ideological or religious) ends.’¹⁶ As long as far-right attacks are perpetrated out of extreme ideology—political, religious, ethnic, social or other—they should be regarded as a subcategory of the terrorism phenomenon. The difference between far-right terrorism and other kinds of terrorism lies in the ideological motives at their core. Similarly, according to the new terminology for terrorism and violent extremism adopted in 2021 by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, ‘Ideologically motivated violent extremism denotes support for violence to achieve political outcomes or in response to specific political or social grievances.’¹⁷

However, despite the variety of ideological motives that characterise different types of terrorism, many far-right terrorists (like other terrorists) desire to change the social or political order in their respective countries. The far-right’s *modus operandi* is also similar to that of other types of terrorism in the sense that it’s a strategy meant to achieve political-ideological goals through the sowing of fear and anxiety among the terrorists’ target

group (which is broader than the immediate victims of their attacks).

Roger Griffin, on the question of how to distinguish between populism or other forms of right-wing politics, writes:

... democratic right-wing populism (there are also left-wing populisms challenging the status quo in western societies) can refer to forms of politics which cultivate the nostalgia or longing for a more ethnically, culturally, religiously homogenous and traditional nation-state protected from the impact of mass migration, globalization, membership of the EU or the uncertainties and insecurities of the ‘modern world’ in general, and represented by politicians in touch with the feelings of ‘ordinary people’ and thus able to help liberate them from the shackles of ‘alien’ values, political correctness and foreign competition to the point where the country at least feels ‘great’ again. This form of populism is compatible with democratic processes which it does not seek to overthrow but ‘re-nationalise’ so that the advantages of national citizenship are not ‘squandered’ on ‘aliens’ and cultural diversity and exposure to supranational or superpower economics and politics is minimised.

Once these sentiments are expressed in more overtly racist, xenophobic, Manichean, hate-filled, fanatical, simplistic ways which are conducive to or actively incite xenophobic or political violence and acts of aggression/terrorism against ‘the system’, ‘foreigners’ or ‘enemies of the people’, democratic populism morphs into ‘radical right-wing populism’.

However, only when radical right-wing resentment of the status quo is translated into revolutionary aspirations to bring about a new national order (which may well be conceived as part of an international process of racial or civilisational regeneration) is it legitimate or helpful to talk of fascism.¹⁸

Furthermore, similarly to other types of terrorism, far-right terrorism is mostly random; that is, the personal identity of the victim isn’t relevant to the perpetrator, whereas the collective identity of the victims is a crucial factor (for example, the victims being part of a certain religious, ethnic, gender or minority group). Based on the definition of terrorism presented above and the scholarly debate over the definition of far-right extremism and terrorism, this chapter’s working definition of far-right terrorism is:

The intentional use of violence aimed against civilian targets by a non-state actor in order to promote one or more of the ideological goals of the far right (racist, nationalist ethnic, gender or other).

However, agreeing on a definition for far-right extremism is only the first step in the overall effort to define far-right terrorism and distinguish this phenomenon from far-right hate crimes.

What's the difference between far-right terrorism and hate crimes?

The definition of far-right terrorism

The US Department of Justice defines a hate crime as 'a crime motivated by bias against race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability'.¹⁹ The UK National Police Chiefs' Council states that 'hate crimes are any crimes that are targeted at a person because of hostility or prejudice towards that person's disability, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or transgender identity. This can be committed against a person or property'.²⁰

Yet, over the years, several attempts have been made to make a distinction between different far-right violent actions. Mark Hamm, for example, thinks that far-right violence may be considered a hate crime as well as a terror attack, in accordance with the degree of the perpetrator's effort to achieve social-political goals. For him, a prerequisite for an activity to be regarded as a terrorist act is for it to have had the aim of achieving social-political goals. Such a prerequisite doesn't exist in the case of a hate crime.²¹

Seth Jones et al. argue that 'Right-wing terrorism refers to the use or threat of violence by sub-national or non-state entities whose goals may include racial or ethnic supremacy; opposition to government authority; anger at women, including from the incel ('involuntary celibate') movement; and outrage against certain policies, such as abortion'.²² Jones et al. address far-right terrorism as a wide and far-reaching phenomenon and don't settle for the narrow definition accepted by some US agencies according to which it's 'racially- and ethnically-motivated violent extremism', or 'REMVE'.²³

Analysing hate crime laws in the US, Randy Blazak sees hate crimes as 'a form of terrorism, designed to intimidate large groups of people'.²⁴ And Colleen Mills et al. examine whether hate crimes and terrorism are 'close cousins' or 'distant relatives' and conclude that the former description is the most apt,²⁵ while Alan B Krueger and Jitka Malecková argue that hate crimes can be viewed as close cousins to terrorism because the effect of both is to wreak terror in a greater number of people than those directly affected by the violence.²⁶

Michael German and Emmanuel Mauleón argue that hate crimes include a range of actions, beginning with minor property offences (such as vandalism) and up to the point of mass murder. While hate crimes and terrorism share common denominators, which create an overlap between them, not all hate crimes can be considered terrorism. Hate crimes that include deadly violence can be regarded as terrorism, since both intend to 'frighten, intimidate, and coerce a civilian population'.²⁷ Seth Jones et al. strengthen this argument by saying that hate crimes, much like terror attacks, may involve severe violent action, but, unlike terrorism, those crimes may also comprise non-violent or low-violence events, such as graffiti or verbal abuse.²⁸

The fast-spreading threat of far-right terrorism receives varying degrees of attention and is treated differently in different countries. This is expressed first and foremost by the use of different definitions to describe the same phenomenon—from 'ordinary' criminal offence, through 'hate crime' to 'domestic terrorism'.²⁹ Different classifications may be manifested differently in the countries' jurisdictions and legislation, *inter alia*, due to the political climate in the country at that time.³⁰ These definitional debates and the varying typologies of far-right attacks by different experts, scholars and officials pose a challenge to coordination between a given state's agencies, as well as internationally, as part of the overall effort to contend with far-right terrorism.

As we've mentioned, the challenge of defining far-right terrorism in many ways resembles the debate over the definition of terrorism in general. Indeed, many definitions of terrorism are influenced by the culture, politics and circumstances of those doing the defining. Consequently, attempts to understand terrorism have spawned a vast array of different methodologies, paradigms and branches of knowledge.

Yet, there's a real need to form an internationally accepted operational definition for terrorism in general, and for far-right terrorism. The need for a definition of terrorism, as noted by Alan Greene, varies according to the different fields undertaking the quest. Sociologists and criminologists require a definition to define the parameters of that which they study.³¹ Theirs is, for the most part, a descriptive endeavour. From the legal perspective, however, this isn't merely a descriptive effort but predominantly a prescriptive (and indeed a proscriptive) process. Bridging the gaps among perspectives, disciplines, actors and their diverse and wide-ranging requirements is a very demanding challenge.

Who requires a definition for far-right terrorism?

Legal institutions: Much has been written about the difficulties surrounding a legal definition of terrorism; however, considerably less attention has been devoted to why there's a need to define far-right terrorism in law in the first place. The rise of far-right terrorism all over the world necessitates a legal definition—without it, violent extremists can hide behind the safe walls of free speech, free communication, free expression and so forth. Several different arguments have been put forward as to why a single definition of terrorism is preferable to a multidefinitional approach. The same applies to far-right terrorism. Christian Walter, for example, argues that the need for clarity and certainty is a key justification for a single legal definition of terrorism:

The main reason for slightly different definitions is not a decision on the purpose by the legislator, but rather the adoption of different measures at different times and a corresponding lack of co-ordination. For the purpose of clarity and legal certainty, it would be desirable to adopt as much as possible a single definition of 'terrorism' within any given legal order.³²

Security agencies: Fighting violent extremism, and especially the new waves by far-right groups and individuals, requires international cooperation among security agencies, including police, counterterrorism units, military forces, intelligence services, and more. Due to the international nature of postmodern violent extremism, a common definition for these agencies is a prerequisite for global countermeasures. A terrorist such as Brenton Tarrant can carry out an attack, as he did, in New Zealand, and yet have been seduced and recruited online by overseas actors, and, in turn, may be used as a propaganda tool to recruit others from different countries.

Academia: A wide range of academic disciplines are engaged in the study of terrorism and, recently, the far-right versions of it. Sociologists and criminologists, communication scholars, experts in propaganda, internet researchers, political scientists, counterterrorism specialists, linguists and legal scholars are all involved in the academic study of this phenomenon. They all require an operational definition to frame their research, compare studies, methods and findings, and work together in the global arena.

Big tech: Given the (over)reliance of terrorist actors on social media, big tech has developed algorithms to identify and ban terrorist content from its platforms. However, not all algorithms are based on the same definitions, and therefore many gaps remain between the different platforms.

The media: Almost all cases of violent extremism are reported by the mass media, including online. Moreover, many violent events are media-oriented, attempting to gain recognition, public awareness, and even sympathy and potential recruitment. Yet,

without any common definition, their perpetrators may be labelled in neutral terms (such as 'activists', 'demonstrators', 'sympathisers', 'groups', 'actors', etc.). This is often done as a precautionary measure to avoid libel suits and other actions. Reporters, commentators and editors need the distinctions provided by a working definition.

The public: Finally, the public needs to know who's who, what's legitimate and what isn't, where the red lines between freedom of speech and incitement to violence are drawn, when free speech is being abused, what the potential threats are to personal and national safety, and who should be allowed to promote ideas, visions and calls to action. Without a definition, the term 'far-right terrorism' remains vague, confusing and subject to manipulation and blurred boundaries.

Definitions, classifications and typologies aren't the only obstacles to effective policies to counter far-right terrorism. Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware explain that one difficulty in contending with far-right terrorism (as opposed to Islamic terrorism) lies in the fact that far-right terrorism is perpetrated for the most part by individuals operating on their own and with no (or very few) precursory warnings. Moreover, as far-right organisations tend to be more diffused, it's harder to foil their attacks by hitting their leadership or their financial resources. In addition, Hoffman and Ware assert that contending with far-right terrorism is more challenging as it's homegrown—a domestic threat to the state rather than an external one.³³

Indeed, the far right poses a complex challenge to liberal-democratic countries where it's active since, unlike terrorist groups throughout history that have seen themselves as the representatives of the interests of some minority groups, far-right terrorists see themselves as representing the values of the majority in their countries. Kathleen Deloughery et al. determine that terror attacks are often 'upward crimes'. The perpetrator in these cases belongs to a social status that's lower than that of the victims. On the other hand, hate crimes are 'downward crimes', in which the perpetrator is a member of the majority group in society and targets minorities.³⁴ Such attackers claim to act on behalf of the heart of the political consensus to purportedly 'protect' the values of the country, its national interests and its majority's culture. As such, they see themselves as loyal patriots who are striving to save their homeland from either an internal or an external enemy that's attempting to change the country's 'appropriate' nature and core values. That said, it seems that the core values of liberal democracies, first and foremost freedom of speech and the right to protest, pose a dilemma vis-à-vis the question of where to draw the line on what should be allowed and what should be forbidden in terms of far-right activities and statements. That tension, dubbed the 'democratic dilemma' in countering terrorism, is potent in coping with far-right terrorism, and is especially evident when contending with processes of radicalisation and the prevention of incitement to terrorism.³⁵

‘Fusion of hatreds’

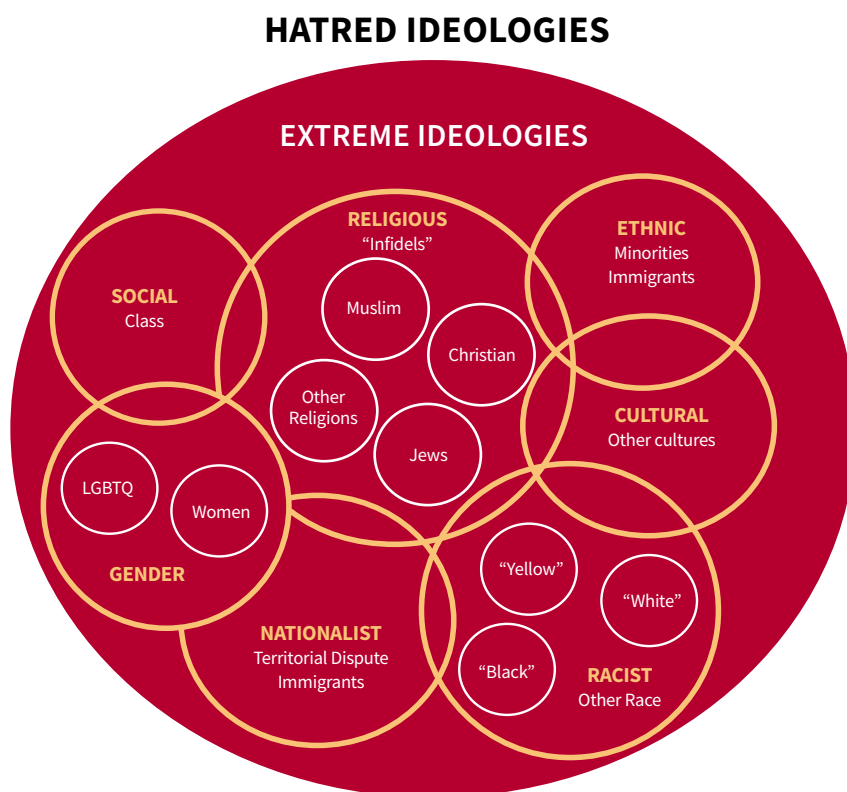
Far-right terrorism is a heterogeneous phenomenon that encompasses different groups, trends, ideologies and political agendas. Such ideological heterogeneity stems from the fact that each group or subgroup wishes to highlight its own ideology and agenda, but all have one common denominator—hatred.³⁶ The hatred at the core of violent far-right activity isn’t unique to this phenomenon, but rather a by-product of almost any extreme ideology. Over the course of history, many terrorists who have acted to promote extreme ideologies, be it Islamist-jihadist, communist, anarchist, etc., had undergone a radicalisation or indoctrination process prior to perpetrating their attacks. That process took place in schools or other educational facilities, in places of worship operated by extreme ideologists and religious clerics and, in recent years, through extreme propaganda disseminated on various online platforms and social media by terrorist organisations and their supporters.

The product of that brainwashing was almost always hatred, and that hatred served as a catalyst for the heinous and cruel acts committed by the terrorists. For example, many terror attacks around the world have been based on hatred towards

‘infidels’—members of the other religions (Jews, Christians, Muslims and others) or even members of the terrorists’ own religion who didn’t share the terrorists’ extreme interpretation of the religion. In other cases, attacks have been carried out by hateful terrorists who perpetrated attacks out of nationalist motivations, targeting members of other nationalities in either separatist or territorial disputes. Other attacks have been motivated by ethnic hatred or against the backdrop of hatred between various classes or castes in society.

Each of those hatreds was an outcome of a belief in some extreme ideology—religious, social, nationalist, cultural, ethnic or political. Similarly to other types of terrorism, far-right terrorism is also driven by various types of hatred: hatred with a racial background—when this or that race (usually whites) defines itself as a superior race and disseminates hatred towards other ‘inferior’ races; hatred with a nationalist or ethnic-cultural background directed at minorities and immigrants of different ethnic, cultural and national origins, and gender-based hatred directed at women, LGBTQ people, or both. The hatred ideologies model in Figure 1 illustrates both the variety of different types of hatred within different extreme ideologies and the overlaps between many of those types of hatred. The model is to be viewed as multidimensional, in which each ideological group may be connected to another group.

Figure 1: Fusion of hatreds model



Source: Professor Boaz Ganor.

The various far-right currents and groups usually rationalise their xenophobia in defensive terms, arguing that there's a need to protect their race, culture, nationality or set of values and beliefs from internal or external threats. This defensive narrative used by far-right terrorists and activists can be seen in the following examples:

- *Anti-Semitism*: On the morning of 27 October 2018, just before his attack on Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue, Robert Bowers posted on the platform Gab: 'HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] likes to bring invaders in that kill people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Scr** your optics, I'm going in.'³⁷
- *Anti-black*: Dylann Roof, who carried out a shooting attack in an African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina, on 17 June 2015, wrote in his manifesto: 'N***** have lower IQs, lower impulse control, and higher testosterone levels in general ... These three things alone are a recipe for violent behavior ...'³⁸
- *Anti-LGBT*: A message published on a far-right Telegram channel on 1 February 2021 stated, in reference to the LGBT community, that 'This is not conservatism. This is self-destruction and degeneracy ...'³⁹
- *Anti-immigrant*: A message published on a far-right Telegram channel on 6 December 2020 read 'Dear White Man, if you haven't noticed yet, your power and influence is dwindling. Your birth rates aren't even at replacement levels and your governments are replacing you with non-whites ... race mixing and importing third world savages at levels that can only be accurately described as an invasion ...'⁴⁰
- *Anti-Muslim*: Anders Breivik, who perpetrated a double attack in Oslo and Utoya in Norway on 22 July 2011, killing 77 victims, explained in his manifesto that his motivation included '... the Islamization of our countries, the fact that violent crime is disproportionately committed by Muslims.'⁴¹
- *Anti-liberal*: Anders Breivik also mentioned in his manifesto the following: 'Will the European conservatives manage to seize power by military force or through a coup d'état before the cultural Marxists and other suicidal liberals manage to sell the peoples of Europe into Muslim slavery?'⁴²
- *Anti-Hispanic*: Patrick Crusius, who in August 2019 carried out a terrorist attack at an El Paso Walmart store in Texas, killing 23 people and injuring 23 others, wrote 'This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas. They are the instigators, not me. I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion.'⁴³

The variety of xenophobic motives that characterise the different far-right currents often generates a phenomenon that can be termed a 'fusion of hatreds'. This process usually relies on a conspiracy theory of some sort; for example, that the Jews control the world and use non-white races to do their bidding and destroy

the white race (as seen in Figure 2, which shows a spider wearing a star of David on its forehead and rising above all other hatreds).⁴⁴

Another example of a fusion of hatreds is the combination of misogyny and racism towards African-Americans, as expressed in a video clip by Elliot Rodger, who committed an attack in California that claimed the lives of six and injured 14 more. Rodger, a member of an incel community, said in his clip, 'How come an ugly, inferior, black guy can get a white girl and I can't?'⁴⁵

It may be that multiple hatreds and a fusion of hatreds help some far-right activists to solve their cognitive dissonance by providing them with 'proper' (conspirative) explanations for their personal failures (at work or school, in society, in their interpersonal relations, etc.) This concept of the fusion of hatreds was also witnessed in the Tree of Life Synagogue attack when the attacker, Robert Bowers, posted about 'HIAS bringing invaders that kill our people', combining anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant hatred motivations.⁴⁶

The fusion of hatreds may also be explained by the radicalisation process, most of which takes place online, and during which far-right activists representing a specific hate ideology vis-à-vis a particular target share their world view with their peers on platforms, boards and social media, inciting one another. This can be witnessed on the Telegram channel 'Western Chauvinist', where readers can be introduced on the same platform or even in the same text to different types of hatred (of blacks, Jews, LGBT people and others). For example, quoting George Lincoln Rockwell in *White power*, one reader posted, 'The Negro race is perfect for the needs of the Jews in fomenting their mutiny. But before the blacks can do the Jews and Marxists any good, they must first be placed in position and conditioned.'⁴⁷ When people driven by a certain extreme world view are exposed to another extreme world view, they may adopt it as well, which explains how the fusion of hatreds evolves.⁴⁸ This blending of extreme world views and hatreds, facilitated by online platforms, may develop into a complex network that enables the union of those views, yet simultaneously preserves their independence and differentiation.⁴⁹ Thus, many online forums can serve, for example, as a haunt for anti-Semites and at the same time welcome incels, homophobes or anti-immigration supporters. A similar process may also take place over chats on gaming platforms while players are engaged in violent video games that serve as virtual simulators for potential attacks.⁵⁰

The fusion-of-hatreds phenomenon may serve as a force multiplier and increase the risk emanating from far-right terrorism due to what Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Madeleine Blackman call 'fringe fluidity', which is the process by which people transition from the embrace of one form of violent extremism to another.⁵¹ Indeed, the convergence of various extreme ideologies presents a major challenge for law enforcement agencies, especially in the US.⁵²

Figure 2: Cartoon illustrating the 'fusion of hatreds'



Source: *New hate and old: the changing face of American white supremacy*, Anti-Defamation League, n.d., [online](#).

Ideologically motivated violent extremists—specifically nationalist and racist violent extremists—remain focused on producing propaganda, radicalising and recruiting others, and preparing for an anticipated societal collapse. They are security-conscious and adapt their security posture to avoid legal action. Nationalist and racist violent extremists are located in all Australian states and territories. Compared with other forms of violent extremism, this threat is more widely dispersed across the country—including in regional and rural areas. The emergence of nationalists and isolationist narratives globally is normalising aspects of ideologically motivated violent extremism and racist and specific-issue violent extremism.⁵³

It seems that the fusion of hatreds is more prevalent among far-right activists than in Islamist-jihadist terrorism; jihadist ideological motives are based on an extremist religious world view that clearly defines the enemy as religious infidels, whereas the far-right's hatred ideologies are more dispersed and may be based on race, ethnic origin, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation and even

political views (liberal or communist). All of those can be mixed together, forming a target for hatred by far-right activists. It may very well be that the explanation for the wide variety of hatreds among far-right activists stems from the fact that far-right elements are active mainly in liberal democracies, the core values of which include diversity, and which embrace the existence and activity of multiple minority groups and subgroups, each of which is a potential target for far-right hatred. The conspiracy theories that support such hatreds are necessary because far-right activists need them to justify and rationalise their extreme world view (unlike radical Muslims, who believe and follow the teachings of a particular cleric and don't necessarily need any additional reasons and justifications for their beliefs and hatred).

Although the fusion-of-hatreds phenomenon is prevalent among far-right activists, many choose to focus on what they perceive as the major threat to themselves, which then overshadows other hatreds. For example, Anders Breivik, who perpetrated the double attack in Norway in protest against the 'Islamization of Europe', stressed that he was not anti-Semitic and even

supported Israel.⁵⁴ Similarly, Brenton Tarrant, the terrorist responsible for the Christchurch, New Zealand, attacks in 2019, mentioned in his manifesto that he was not anti-Semitic, and that, as long as Jews live in their homeland of Israel, he had no problem with them. He also said he was not a homophobe, as long as the gay population was loyal to its race.⁵⁵

Hatred bears major significance as a driving and recruiting force for terrorism in general, and far-right terrorism in particular. However, hatred has an additional, operative, role in the terrorist strategy: the mere existence of the deep hatred that drives terrorists to perpetrate heinous attacks intensifies fear and anxiety among the targeted group and thus contributes to the efficacy of the strategy.

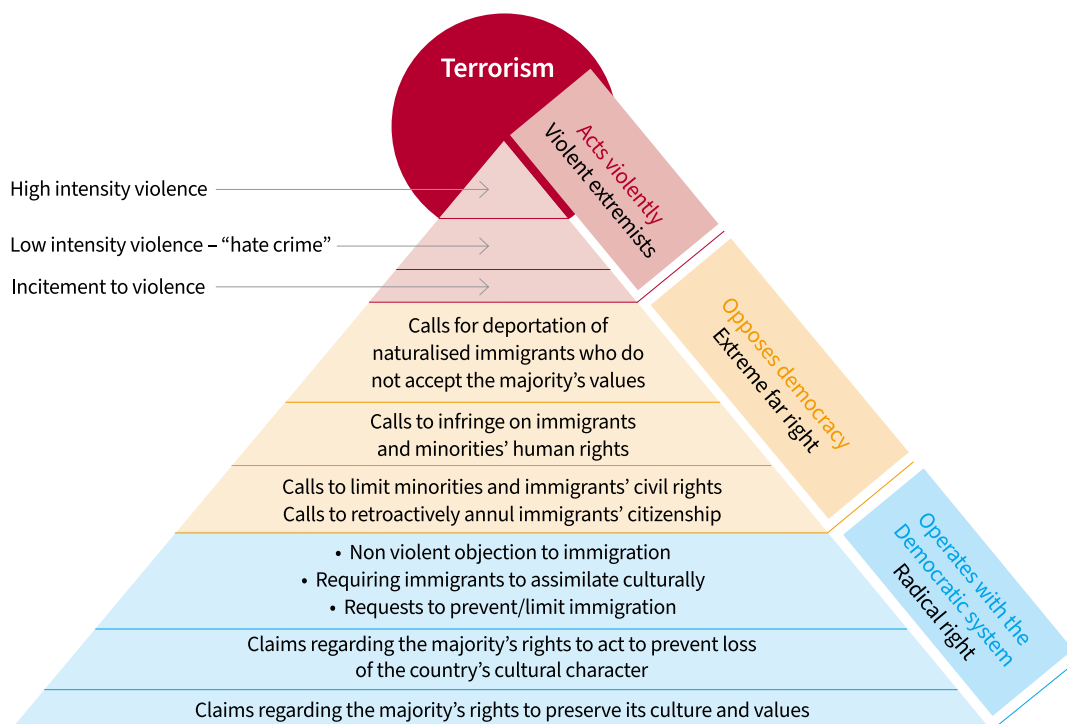
Coming back to the question of whether to define far-right violent activity as hate crimes or as acts of domestic terrorism and in the light of the above discussion on the component of hatred in terror attacks in general and far-right attacks in particular, we can determine that when hatred (which is the by-product of extreme ideology, politics or social or religious views) is manifested in a violent act, that violence is a terror attack for all intents and purposes. The violence may be of high or low intensity. Examples of low-intensity terrorist violence are the vandalism of property or the causing of minor bodily harm (such as slapping or spitting on someone). High-intensity violence entails severe injury, maiming or death. It may also involve significant damage to property or the disruption of a country's governance or way of life.

The difference between a hate crime and a domestic terrorist attack is therefore not the level of hatred the perpetrator feels towards the 'other'; it's also not the ideological motive that drives the perpetrator to action. Rather, the difference lies in the type and scope of the violence that the perpetrator employs—high or low intensity. In other words, *a hate crime is practically a low-intensity terrorist attack*. Addressing far-right terrorist attacks (and certainly the highly violent ones) as hate crimes is therefore wrong and misleading. Moreover, such attitudes are very dangerous because they degrade the severity of the phenomenon of far-right terrorism compared to other types of terrorism.

The far right and liberal democracy (the pyramid of illegitimacy)

Having defined violent action conducted by far-right elements as domestic terrorism perpetrated against an ideological–political background and having determined that hate crimes are in fact low-intensity acts of terrorism, we now need to demarcate the line between legitimate far-right speech and activities (radical as they may be) and illegitimate or illegal activity that might incite or promote terrorism. To determine where to draw such a line, one has to place generic far-right activists' statements, speeches and political arguments, as well

Figure 3: The illegitimacy pyramid model



Source: The authors.

as various actions they take, on a general scale of illegitimacy of what should be unacceptable in a liberal-democratic regime (Figure 3). Within this model, we need to set the bar at which extreme statements or activities become illegitimate, illegal, or both, and accordingly determine their levels of severity.

By the nature of things, in any deep ideological conflict or rift, each political camp wants to brand its adversary as illegitimate, criminal or terrorist. However, it's worth remembering that, in liberal-democratic countries that preserve the values of freedom of speech, thought and protest, strict adherence to religious beliefs or a certain ideological point of view (radical as it may be) is not, in and of itself, illegitimate or illegal.

In the light of the above and in order to demonstrate the challenge that far-right ideology poses to Western liberal democracies, we'll examine various positions typically taken by far-right groups in connection to one central issue—the right of the majority to preserve its culture, national character, ethnicity, religion and values—and how that manifests in their objection to immigration.

As we've mentioned, one may find many ideologies and hatreds at the core of far-right terrorism; however, it seems that immigration policy is a common thread for many of them and their supporters. Jacob Aasland Ravndal, who examined the effect of various motives on far-right terrorist groups in 18 European countries between 1990 and 2015, found that immigration policy was the most common radicalisation factor.⁵⁶ Therefore, through the prism of the illegitimacy pyramid model proposed here, we'll examine the various positions typical of conservative-right thought in general and far-right thought in particular on the subject of immigration and immigrants. We'll preface our discussion by saying that, as long as those positions are within the framework of the right of freedom of speech and liberal-democratic values, those conservative or far-right elements are entitled to voice their opinions, raise them in public discourse, and even take strong protest action.

At the base of the illegitimacy pyramid lies the first level—the legitimate basic level, of a right-wing (conservative or radical) world view. On this level, one may include statements and claims regarding the majority's right to preserve and protect its culture, values and beliefs, or the majority's prerogative to act within the confines of the law to prevent demographic changes in the country as a result of immigration policy. Within this framework, right-wing elements may demand that immigration be limited, selective or completely prohibited. They may even demand that the naturalisation and granting of citizenship to immigrants be conditioned on

immigrants successfully passing certain exams, or on immigrants recognising and adopting the country's values, language and culture. All of those may be considered controversial political opinions; however, in liberal-democratic countries, this kind of discourse is legitimate as long as it isn't accompanied by violence. Citizens or politicians who hold such positions may be considered conservatives or even radicals, but, as mentioned, they're situated within the spectrum of legitimacy in our illegitimacy pyramid model.

The second level of the pyramid is the one that crosses the legitimacy threshold in a liberal-democratic country. It reflects the shift from a conservative (or radical) right-wing world view to an extremist far-right one. The ideological claims outlined above are now augmented with a demand to impose sanctions on a certain group of citizens or a minority, or a demand to change the rules of the democratic system and bring about a regime change (that is, changing the whole political system and not just replacing the government within the current democratic system). A prime example of this can be found in Christchurch attacker Brenton Tarrant's manifesto, which asserted that democracy (which in his opinion was nothing but the 'rule of the mob') wasn't the solution for the white Anglo-American race, and that only force and violence would provide the solution.⁵⁷ Similarly, Anders Breivik, the Norwegian terrorist, asserted in his manifesto that Europe's 'current problems' emanate from the democratic regime that has been prevalent in Europe for the past 50 years. Breivik's suggested alternative political regime stipulates that a parliament is to have an official monitor with a veto right, whose role would be to preserve the country's majority culture.⁵⁸

Such discourse, which is typical of the second level of the pyramid, is perceived, on the face of it, as hurtful towards certain segments of society, and may include a demand to infringe upon immigrants' civil rights by revoking the citizenship of those who refuse to assimilate in their new homeland and accept its culture and values. Alternatively, the demand would be to infringe on minorities' and immigrants' human rights, including the right to personal safety, freedom of thought and speech, freedom of conscience and religion, or the freedom of movement and occupation.

While the second level of the illegitimate pyramid model does reflect the world view of far-right extremists, it doesn't entail incitement to violence or the carrying out of violent activities against groups or minorities in the country. Such activity marks a shift to the third level of the pyramid and includes varying levels of involvement in violent activities and terrorism. This level is the top of the pyramid in the proposed model. It characterises

the activity of the violent extremists among far-right activists and supporters and includes calls to act violently against public officials, minorities and various groups in society—therefore, it incites violence and terrorism. This level also includes actual involvement in violent activity and terror attacks.

As we've mentioned, such terrorist activity may be of low intensity, such as violent protest, sabotage and vandalism, or the causing of minor physical harm to a person, and can therefore be defined as a hate crime; or, it may be of high intensity—a terror attack that may include grave bodily injury, maiming or killing, or that causes significant damage to property or disrupts the governance and way of life in the country by using cold weapons, firearms, cyberattacks and so on.⁵⁹

In summation, the proposed illegitimacy pyramid model reflects, *inter alia*, the distinction made by Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal between extreme-right movements acting to replace democracy and radical-right movements that observe the democratic rules but aim to replace the ruling elite.⁶⁰ The pyramid presents a spectrum of threats and dangers: the higher up you climb, the more significant the threat to liberal democracy. The shift from one level to the next may be slow, but it can also take place quickly, and may therefore be a sign of a dangerous process taking place in society.

Conclusion

The White House National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, published in June 2021, states:

It is critical that we condemn and confront domestic terrorism regardless of the particular ideology that motivates individuals to violence. The definition of 'domestic terrorism' in our law makes no distinction based on political views—left, right, or center—and neither should we. We must disrupt and deter those who use violence to intimidate racial or religious minorities, who have so often been the victims of hateful extremists ...⁶¹

It's indeed crucial to condemn and confront domestic terrorism executed by hateful extremists in the US and in other countries around the world. The threat of domestic terrorism, especially far-right terrorism, is growing globally in its scope and its prevalence in various countries, and in terms of the shift from low-intensity violence to high-intensity violence.⁶² The very serious and escalating phenomenon of far-right terrorism requires close cooperation domestically between law enforcement and the legal and political systems, as well as internationally, especially among Western countries, on the basis of a common definition of the phenomenon.

The lack of a common definition of far-right terrorism, the confusion between domestic terrorism and hate crimes, and the absence of a clear threshold between legitimate right-wing conservative discourse and illegitimate far-right speech and behaviour are a few of the main obstacles to the domestic coordination and international cooperation that will enable synchronised and effective counterterrorism policies. Distinguishing between different violent acts by differentiating between those that are motivated by hatred and those that are motivated by an extreme ideology is not only incorrect, but also counterproductive.

Decision-makers and the public at large, especially within a liberal democracy, must acknowledge that far-right extremism is now a key prevailing subcategory of terrorism and recognise the specific grave threat that this kind of terrorism poses to the country and to liberal-democratic society, by virtue of it being perpetrated by citizens of that very same country who view themselves as patriots and protectors of the majority's culture, values or interests. Those extremists, representing ideologies that are hostile or prejudiced towards a race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation or identity, express those views by perpetrating hate crimes (low-intensity violence) or domestic terrorism (high-intensity violence).

Against this backdrop, it's important to agree on a spectrum of legitimacy of statements and actions taken by far-right activists that clearly determines, on the basis of societal consensus, the 'line in the sand' between what's legitimate and what's illegitimate. Above all, far-right terror attacks should be treated in the same manner as other types of terror attacks.

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Forecasting extremism in Southeast Asia: new wine in old bottles?

Munira Mustaffa

Introduction

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 rekindled fears that its fanatical supporters throughout Southeast Asia may revive their terrorist ambitions.¹ However, policymakers may be overestimating this particular threat due to previous encounters with pro-IS networks. Anxieties about the Taliban may also reflect fears that many Islamists view the Taliban as a formidable force that succeeded in recovering its country to punish heretics and reinstate a traditional patriarchy. In fact, following IS's territorial loss of its 'caliphate' in Syria and Iraq, the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, reinstalling itself as the legitimate ruler over its historical emirate, may also threaten the status and narratives of IS-aligned groups.

IS posed a unique terrorist threat to Southeast Asia by using a 'self-initiated attacks' approach, which was fuelled by the group's vow to expand its caliphate across Asia. In response to the caliphate's demise in its heartlands of Syria and Iraq, observers expected that IS would seek to open a 'second front in Southeast Asia'.² That fear appeared to materialise when pro-IS operatives continued to carry out attacks across Indonesia, despite the caliphate's collapse, and hundreds of Islamist militants led by the Maute Group and backed by foreign fighters invaded and captured Marawi City, Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, in May 2017. While the significance of establishing a territorial hold in Southeast Asia shouldn't be underestimated, alongside the fact that it took until October that year to expel the militants and regain control, the presence of foreign combatants was overstated.³ Many militant organisations in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines appear to be motivated by religious radicalism, even though their affiliations and allegiances vary.

Despite the caliphate's disintegration, pro-IS attacks in Indonesia and the Philippines created the impression that those terrorist organisations' capabilities were increasing. As a consequence, regional security agencies focused hard on neutralising the Islamist threat, while other developing extremist beliefs and groups have received less attention.⁴ This is becoming especially relevant in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and in the light of the fact that, despite distinct alignments, many characteristics of various groups and their ideologies overlap. That fluidity and lack of hard definitional boundaries can have the effect of raising the groups' appeal, possibly underestimating the threat, or tolerating the presence of certain extremisms due to revisionist political whitewashing. It's therefore necessary to re-evaluate existing understandings of extremism to avoid missing important dynamics and nuances, and also to apply a distinct regional focus, in order to avoid overgeneralisations or assumptions that developments in areas where the dominant focus lies also automatically apply in other regions.

Current regional responses to the evolving security landscape

In Southeast Asia, where affiliations and allegiances to extremist organisations can vary greatly, religious extremism seems to be the greatest impetus for militant actions. This may make Southeast Asia appear to be distinct from other jurisdictions, such as Australia, where emerging forms of ideologically motivated extremism—including facets of right-wing extremism—are a growing threat, but that may be changing.

At the height of the IS caliphate, countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines were disproportionately affected by IS networks owing to IS's decentralised approach built around propaganda that led to a so-called 'self-radicalisation' phenomenon and inspired acts of terrorism and the emergence of foreign terrorist fighters. As part of a concerted CT response to that threat, countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines have each developed national action plans for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). However, those plans focus on Islamist ideology and radicalisation rather than on a comprehensive approach based on greater community ties to resolve existing schisms and communal rifts resulting from racial or religious disunity. Governments in the region continue to grapple with implementing and proving the effectiveness of such P/CVE initiatives.

It's important to note that the operators of so-called 'deradicalisation programs' (mainly governments in those countries) haven't satisfactorily demonstrated or explained indicators of their success or conducted studies that can prove the impact of deradicalisation programs on detainees at the individual level.⁵ In Indonesia, the Indonesian National Counter-Terrorism Agency oversees the deradicalisation program, whereas Malaysia's and Singapore's security councils play a crucial role in establishing and implementing such programs with the participation of Islamic religious agencies. In the Philippines, it's the task of both the Bureau of Corrections and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology.⁶ Notably, many community actors and local NGOs working on P/CVE that have been able to forge informal alliances with their governments have been mostly uncritical of those governments and have lacked analytical knowledge or methodological competency, which has negatively affected the results of their studies.⁷ The emphasis on 'religious misconceptions' is one of the main shortcomings of these deradicalisation processes, as illustrated by Malaysia's deradicalisation procedure, which focuses on correcting the convicts' belief systems.⁸

A 2021 Saferworld report on cooperative CT efforts with the Duterte government highlighted pitfalls in UN support for P/CVE approaches:

In the Philippines, as elsewhere, international partners and multilaterals touted the P/CVE agenda as a way to change violent, repressive and ultimately ineffective war on terror approaches into a more principled, comprehensive and effective response. This led to the creation of the Philippine National Action Plan on P/CVE (NAP P/CVE). Ostensibly, it was designed to elicit a new 'whole-of-society' approach to tackling the threat posed by violent groups.

Yet this agenda and action plan did not transform the government's response to violent groups, and instead allowed for further securitisation of development, rights and peace efforts in the country ... the NAP P/CVE has created a perception among civil society that United Nations (UN) funds and agencies have prioritised an external policy framework over the needs and demands of communities across the country.

... it has helped to conceal and maintain the same counterproductive macro-strategy ... exemplified by the Siege of Marawi in 2017, and recent illiberal, repressive steps which target individuals who are perceived to be sympathetic to political opponents and communist rebel groups. By framing security approaches under the global rubric of counter-terrorism and P/CVE, the Duterte government has found a convenient cover to legitimise its pursuit of narrow domestic political priorities. There has been a global rollout, by international donors and multilateral institutions like the UN, of P/CVE policies, plans and project funding to contexts like the Philippines. This has inadvertently added salience to the Duterte government's drive to target elements of society it deems 'enemies of the state'. This is one of several important impacts of the counter-terrorism and P/CVE agenda in the Philippines.⁹

While certain key dynamics were unique to the Philippines under Duterte, the report also found that they're 'part of an observable trend around the world'. Those findings should raise further questions for state, non-state and multinational security/development partners and policymakers.

Because of this lack of evaluation oversight and community accountability, claims of the success of so-called deradicalisation programs in the region remain mostly unsubstantiated, and many former extremists and their families who initially benefited from counter-extremism initiatives were subsequently sidelined by those programs, which should have continued to help them and provide them with financial aid.¹⁰ Concurrently, these nations continue to use lawfare through punitive anti-terrorism legislation, military interventions

and police arrests. As a result, individuals are arbitrarily detained and incarcerated in increasingly overcrowded and understaffed facilities. Because inmates become eligible to apply for parole after serving two-thirds of their sentences, they have little opportunity to engage in meaningful CVE programs.¹¹

Meanwhile, attacks by pro-IS groups in Indonesia and the Philippines create the impression that their capabilities are continuously expanding, despite the caliphate's demise in 2017 and the fact that the last notable IS-related incident was documented in Makassar, Indonesia, in March 2021, with no casualties.¹² Given the current public pushback against their ideology, using the number of attacks per year isn't a reliable approach for gauging the groups' impact or supporting assertions that they're strengthening. In fact, many planned attacks have been thwarted due to lack of popular support for the groups and due to their poor operational capabilities. Notably, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) remains the most lethal and well-organised terrorist organisation in Indonesia and a latent threat to the country, but it hasn't carried out an attack in the past decade because of the instruction by Para Widjayanto (JI's leader from 2008 through 2019) to abstain from using violence.¹³

Assessing Islamist militancy in the region: current capabilities and challenges

The Covid-19 pandemic posed significant operational challenges to the resilience of the region's militant groups, derailing their plans to exploit potential vulnerabilities developed within local governments preoccupied with dealing with the health crisis. Recruiting new members became more difficult as a result of the pandemic's impact on groups' mobility, capacities and access to resources. The pandemic also affected many people's ability to earn any wages. Consequently, some groups found it difficult to get the funds necessary to maintain their militant activities and sustain their momentum. Compared to other groups, those that are well structured and use consistent finance models turn out to be more agile.

Since the onset of the pandemic, law enforcement agencies in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines have observed a decrease in terrorist-related activity.¹⁴ As the pandemic

entailed a variety of limitations on public gatherings and the deployment of additional monitoring measures, one likely reason is that militant groups experienced a decline in both soft targets and permissive spaces to mobilise and execute attacks. For instance, in the case of Indonesia, reductions in prison visits led to a decline in jihadists' interactions with inmates, while restrictions on public spaces resulted in training being curtailed.¹⁵

It could be argued that the pandemic has affected different groups differently, depending on their organisational structure and resources prior to the outbreak. For instance, while the pandemic hampered JI's operations and revenue streams, the group was able to work around the problem by inventing fictional charitable NGOs and orphanages, as well as by placing charity boxes in shops and minimarkets throughout Indonesia in order to solicit donations from the unwitting public to help fund the group's activities.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the pandemic presented the Philippine Government with an unusual advantage—an opportunity to offer militants incentives to disarm and demobilise in exchange for the return of normalcy in their lives.¹⁷ Many militants, including members of the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Maute Group—who were becoming increasingly demoralised as a result of their territorial defeat, leadership decapitations and loss of bases and strongholds as a result of military operations carried out as part of the government's ongoing anti-terrorism campaigns—willingly surrendered their weapons.¹⁸

Compared to Indonesia and the Philippines, Malaysia rarely experiences terrorist attacks. In recent times, the most notable IS-related act in Malaysia was the 2016 Movida Bar grenade attack, which was directed by local IS operative Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi. Due to Wanndy's inexperience and the local pro-IS individuals' poor capabilities and coordination, the assault was neither major nor significant.¹⁹ The threat level in Malaysia remains moderate due to the combination of a movement control order and travel restrictions, which have been eased only recently as Covid-19 became endemic.²⁰ The implementation of the movement control order successfully stifled possible terrorist activities and cross-border movements for the time being. Nevertheless, in contrast to Indonesia and the Philippines, Malaysia has seen an upsurge in its own kind of Islamist fundamentalism in recent decades, as ultraconservative organisations lobby for a stricter interpretation of Islam.²¹ That type of Islamist fundamentalism—which many would consider to be extremist—is gaining increasing mainstream support in Malaysia. It could be argued that it's highly unlikely that another terror attack like the grenade attack at the Movida Bar or even a suicide bombing will occur in the country. This is because the trend towards mainstreaming such ultraconservative ideas, as detrimental as they may be for pluralism, simultaneously reduces the need for insurrectionary fundamentalist violence in favour of institutionalised fundamentalism.

Right-wing and ethno-supremacist extremism: ideologically motivated extremism as an emerging problem

With all of the focus on Islamist militants and their use of the internet for propaganda and recruitment, regional authorities and observers are missing another developing concern in Southeast Asia (particularly in Nusantara²²), which is right-wing extremism.²³ As exponents of ideologically motivated violent extremism, the region's far-right and alt-right movements remain misunderstood and underestimated as a security problem, given that the region has mostly had to deal with left-wing terrorism, communism and militant Islamism as sources of violence.

In the shadow of the 'Global War on Terror', regional authorities have overlooked indicators of ideologically motivated violent extremism in their own backyards, much like their Western counterparts, which have been preoccupied with combating Islamist terrorism.

A Singaporean youth detained in late 2020, who aspired to imitate Brenton Tarrant's 2019 Christchurch assault, was viewed as part of a 'rising new threat' resulting from 'reciprocal radicalisation' without regard for the origins or specific appeal of far-right ideology, which itself has a lengthy history in the region:

The detention of a 16-year-old Singaporean inspired by the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks in New Zealand caught many people by surprise, but this was not the first time such an arrest had been made. In June 2020, a 19-year-old Singaporean man was arrested on suspicion of inciting violence, after posting on his Instagram about a violent and graphic dream of gunning down Muslims with an AR-15 assault rifle. These incidents appeared to signify a sudden increase in Western-style far-right extremism fuelled by anti-Muslim prejudice in this region; but this is misleading. Some Southeast Asian observers only view far right extremism through the prism of their pre-existing focus on radical Islam, approaching it as 'reciprocal radicalisation' and treating fascism—particularly national socialism—as a new phenomenon in the region.²⁴

In the context of maritime Southeast Asia, it's crucial to recognise that online violent extremism in the region isn't a simple dichotomous pitting of Islamists and the far right against one other, but rather a spectrum of ideologies as heterogeneous as the people in the region.²⁵

There are three explanations for that misconception, which may become a security vulnerability if not remedied.

First, it's partly attributable to the Orientalist assumption that these types of ideological reactionary views are a trend unique to the West.²⁶ Second, the actions of extreme-right individuals and groups are mostly confined to the internet in response to political events or current discourse, and, despite their reputation for initiating harassment campaigns via the use of swarming and 'dog-pile' tactics, they aren't seen as a genuine security concern.²⁷ Third, many dangerous attitudes, which are often referred to as 'anti-wokeness', are generally regarded only as 'unpopular' mainstream viewpoints, rather than being recognised as possible red flags for ethno-nationalists whose agenda is to enforce supremacist principles via authoritarian control.²⁸

Since the imposition of state-mandated lockdowns as a Covid response in early 2020, such groups seem to have grown and attracted tacit support, even if the supporters themselves are unaware that they're affiliating with a larger movement.²⁹ For instance, the social and economic fallout that followed the pandemic emboldened hardline groups such as Malaysian Muslim Solidarity, which called for the expulsion of Rohingya refugees from Malaysia.³⁰ Previously, the same group referred to the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia as 'invaders'.³¹ Elsewhere, in Indonesia and the Philippines, there was a proliferation of online hate speech and a revival of anti-Chinese sentiments.³²

The most pervasive and influential online hate groups frequently consist of politically conservative ethno-supremacist nationalist actors who are known to intimidate those who publicly oppose their preferred politicians, candidates or political parties online through coordinated online hate mongering, gaslighting and targeted harassment. One such example is Myanmar's Ma Ba Tha, whose (allegedly blacklisted) Facebook pages and postings advocated for violence against Rohingya.³³ More worryingly, according to the most recent quarterly adversarial threat report from Meta, troll farms with links to the Royal Malaysian Police that specifically seek to harass government detractors online have been identified.³⁴ According to that report, a network of individuals was found to be targeting and silencing Muslim Wahhabis using Facebook's reporting feature by falsely accusing them of being impostor accounts.³⁵

It is thus vital to determine how oppressive ideologies and authoritarian concepts that purport to promote common values may be co-opted and embraced by those with subversive agendas, whether through advocating and planning for direct violent action or through longer term attempts to galvanise a hostile movement in Southeast Asia and abroad.

Social networking platforms have been complicit in three ways.

First, the extensive focus of digital corporations on eliminating content uploaded by Islamist extremists has created a blind spot for hateful or subversive content shared by, for example, far-right groups. Tech companies exert considerable effort to remove Islamist material from their platforms as soon as they detect it, but the same can't be said for their control of violent speech, such as incitement or hate speech, particularly on a regional scale.³⁶

Second, what can be described as a hyperfocus on removing Islamist material at the expense of concern for ideologically motivated, discriminatory and extremist content has resulted in ineffectual monitoring and inadequate regulation of what should be classified as hate speech by social media platforms, regardless of whether hate speech is subject to national legislation. This is especially the case when it comes to non-English and regional content, and has facilitated the propagation of several harmful ideologies, movements and behaviours in the region, such as vitriolic hate speech to encourage violence, partisan messaging to sway voters, discrediting of journalists and media, and individuals and groups promoting historical revisionism to promote ethno-nationalist agendas.³⁷ Myanmar's Ma Ba Tha's anti-Rohingya propaganda is one example of how such groups can leverage social media to legitimise state-sanctioned atrocities.³⁸ Consequently, potent far-right groups have exploited this oversight with glee, especially if they're aligned with authoritarian regimes.³⁹

Third, owing to social media companies' inability to identify subversive hate speech, alt-right groups' self-described Asian fascist online movement of pan-Asian alliances that reject mainstream politics but favour anonymity and evasion have been successful in creating secret channels for clandestine communications and calls to (violent) action or discriminatory targeting of minority groups, people of non-mainstream sexual orientation and others.⁴⁰

The expansion of real-life conflict into Nusantara's digital realities

The Taliban's return to power prompted a social media frenzy among ultraconservative Muslims and Islamist radicals across Southeast Asia.⁴¹ Both groups see the Taliban as a great religious movement that has successfully reclaimed its nation in order to abolish liberal principles,

restore natural law and punish heretics, with the overarching aim of returning its homeland to a more traditional and patriarchal order. Consequently, many observers saw this as a key signal for a rise in extremism in the region. However, assumptions that the return of the Taliban would deepen Islamist militancy in the area are proving incorrect.

It has to be kept in mind that events in Afghanistan have negligible influence on Southeast Asian populations. This is because, regardless of the symbolic and inspirational weight of the Taliban victory, extremism in Southeast Asia is no longer ideologically and logistically tied to Afghanistan, as it once was. Instead, it's fuelled mainly by local grievances and grassroots insurgencies, such as was the case in Marawi, where the appeal of IS's ideology and propaganda provided a convenient explanation for the violence, rather than looking directly to the underlying sociopolitical motivators and socio-economic conditions that have historically shaped the violent milieu in Mindanao.⁴² Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, an Indonesian pro-IS group that's carried out a number of deadly terrorist acts, even downplayed the significance of the Taliban for employing what it believed to be Western tactics such as diplomacy and negotiations to build a nation rather than a caliphate.⁴³

While many Indonesians oppose the Taliban's return, the same can't be said of Malaysians. There's grave concern that religious fundamentalists in the country may use democratic political processes, legitimate conservative institutions and subversive online messaging to attain or at least promote the Taliban's style of government.⁴⁴ Due to its perceived ethno-nationalist authenticity, this sort of extremism is overlooked and underappreciated. This is another example showing why we should re-evaluate the current definition of extremism.

Concurrently, due to the current rise of what's been described by some as a cottage industry of burgeoning right-wing extremism 'research', various analysts have hypothesised about the mobilisation of foreign warriors to Ukraine for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict of 2022. Several observations can be made regarding the comparisons between Ukraine and the self-proclaimed territorial caliphate of IS in Iraq and Syria, particularly with regard to suggestions that motivated individuals from Southeast Asian Muslim communities might also participate in the conflict to defend Muslims in Ukraine as a form of jihad.⁴⁵ Numerous factors, however, make that scenario very unlikely.

First, jihadists' engagement in conflicts is largely motivated by what they view as an explicitly religious call to action, such as 'fighting for Islam', which involves the defence of what they view as a symbolically sacrosanct territory. Ukraine isn't widely recognised as an Islamic nation deserving support, despite the pleading of Ukraine's mufti. The majority of Islamists in Malaysia and Indonesia are pro-Russia and support President Vladimir Putin's actions against Ukraine.

As a corollary of the 'Global War on Terror' that followed the 9/11 attacks, especially the US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003 and the disastrous withdrawal of the US and coalition partners from Afghanistan, which profoundly affected the Afghan people, the perception that Western powers can interfere with other nations without repercussions for themselves has deepened.⁴⁶ Although Russia joined the US-led coalition in Operation Enduring Freedom against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, a number of propaganda actions have contributed towards Putin rehabilitating Russia's reputation in the Muslim world.

Russia's stated opposition to military action in Iraq and its projected 'soft' approach through humanitarian assistance accompanying its support of Bashar al-Assad's self-declared war against terrorism in Syria built Russian capital in Turkey and Pakistan and cultivated Chechen support in Chechnya.⁴⁷ This is how Moscow benefits from political tensions between the global North and South. As a result, at least before its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has been seen as the favourable alternative 'superpower', and Putin as an advocate of Islam and Muslims. Since Russia isn't embroiled in territorial conflict within the region, as China is in the South China Sea, Russia isn't currently seen as a threat by many of the regional powers.

Unheeded, however, is the fact that reactionaries in the region are already using the Ukraine conflict to advance hypernationalist and populist arguments ('might makes right') while simultaneously undermining the sovereignty of smaller nations. This authoritarian mindset exists in a number of local-level political dynamics, which are often dominated by strongman personalities or political legacies demanding respect and gratitude. 'Might makes right' is a detrimental concept that's been propagated in an effort to discourage dissent from the *status quo*. In fact, the resonance of those narratives foreshadows a potentially more dire outcome: that the Russo-Ukrainian conflict could be exploited to reinforce the pernicious belief that resistance to authority must be crushed via the weaponisation of the law in order to preserve power and control over the populace. As one analyst has put it, 'the specific justification that Putin has employed for his action—a unilateral and nationalistic interpretation of Ukraine as a fake nation and an integral part of historic Russia—creates a more specific and worrying precedent.'⁴⁸

Local far-right activists have demonstrated that their knowledge of global events has informed their ideology, thereby rationalising grievances at the local level. As a result, they're likely to become more emboldened in their supremacist campaign for legalised discrimination and uncompromising social control based on ethno-nationalist or other exclusionary ideologies that reject autonomy and personal freedom.

Conclusions and recommendations

Individuals and local groups, regardless of whether they're militant Islamists or ideologically motivated violent extremists of the far right or alt-right, are unified by common grievances rather than being entirely propelled by the vision of a global caliphate, an association with the Taliban, or the need to travel to Ukraine as foreign fighters. In order to combat terrorism and political violence, it's therefore more practical to diminish their internal social networks by tackling issues such as growing socio-economic disparities and rising social alienation. However, to do that, governments in the region must be prepared to engage in an open dialogue with vulnerable communities and be transparent in their CT strategy if they're to effectively address social concerns.⁴⁹

While extremists still pose a threat in Southeast Asia, the collapse of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria, the re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine shouldn't be seen as catalysts that increase the likelihood of ideologically or religiously motivated violence in Southeast Asia, leading to new waves of terrorist attacks. The regional linkages between groups are, at most, aspirational and ideational, and based on a range of common or overlapping beliefs. Yet, the actual management and execution of operations remain local. Although JI revered the Taliban's victory and was inspired by it, the group not only lacks the capabilities to replicate its success, but also chooses to refrain from using force.⁵⁰

Many extremist groups in Southeast Asia have learned to play a long game, abandoning violence as their dominant strategy and instead affiliating themselves with respectable ultraconservative institutions, which enables them to abuse and undermine democratic processes in order to accomplish their goals. In addition, bad actors have grown more effective at using misinformation techniques to make radical views look more politically acceptable. This is the most significant threat that's being overlooked. In addition, it's essential to recognise that extremism in the region might not have been fully understood, it might not be solely about advancing a religious agenda political order, and its goal might have always been ethnonationalist supremacy, using religion as a tool or vehicle.

In countering terrorism and extremism on the ground as well as online, three challenges must be acknowledged.

First, regional policymakers must acknowledge the damaging and divisive nature of reactionary speech, materials and actions, and the impact of refusing to normalise discord. At the same

time, it's worth noting that it will be challenging for government officials to successfully combat hate speech and reactionaries while upholding a duty of care, protecting human rights, and not prioritising the self-preservation of the government of the day. In the case of Malaysia, the establishment of troll farms linked to the Royal Malaysian Police has undermined public confidence in the government.⁵¹

Second, the public must be empowered at the grassroots level to identify harmful messaging while having the freedom to challenge the *status quo* without repercussions.

Third, social media firms must be proactive and diligent in their targeting of hate speech, but without bolstering support for government stakeholders acting in bad faith. Important lessons can be drawn from the 2017 Rohingya genocide, in which Facebook was found to be complicit in enabling Burmese groups and individuals to spread Facebook messages inciting hatred and violence against the Rohingya in the weeks preceding the horrific 'clearing operations' led by the Myanmar Army.⁵²

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Rise of the contrarians: a new wave of extremism?

Katja Theodorakis

Introduction

The proliferation of anti-democratic ideas and violence constitutes a new landmark in the evolving terrorism/extremism landscape. Under the guise of democratic dissent, anti-government protests are becoming a vehicle for increasing polarisation and extremist activism as a prolonged ‘state of exception’ allows for the frustrations and anger of citizens to be steered towards the interests of the far-right. This includes the strategic instrumentalisation of conspiracist and anti-democracy narratives, made possible by the easy flow of transnational digital networks and amplified by adverse state actors. Particular concerns are that ‘ordinary citizens’ may instigate and commit violent acts in the belief that they’re acting in the ‘defence of democracy’.¹

These evolving dynamics invite us to examine existing theories and practices, raising important questions about root causes and escalation mechanisms, as well as the nature and extent of the threat emanating from them. Due to the similar challenges Germany and Australia face as liberal democracies, manifested in increasing linkages between protest movements, they lend themselves to a comparative perspective.

While Germany’s historical experience with the radicalisation of domestic politics from within is unique, its recent experiences make it an illustrative case study for how the Covid-19 crisis has affected existing extremism dynamics and galvanised anti-democratic forces across the ideological spectrum. Nationwide anti-lockdown rallies since March 2020 provided a platform for various forms of anti-government activism to turn into extremism as existing and emerging trends converged: the QAnon ideology found its largest following outside the US in Germany, blending with existing conspiracy myths and esoteric practices, many of them anti-Semitic in nature.²

Tracing the trajectory of an increasing acceptance of extremist ideas and associated rejection of the existing political system can be instructive for other democratic countries facing similar challenges.³ This comes against the backdrop of Australian terrorism researchers long calling for a better understanding of, and in many cases even the recognition of, security challenges and harms to democracy emerging from the extremist spectrum.

Waves are a popular conceptual tool in terrorism research used as a lens to capture the nature and evolution of ideas and movements. A classic of the terrorism literature, Rapoport’s ‘four waves of modern terrorism’, for example, categorises terror phenomena/groups as pertaining to distinct and successive historical periods, each marked by shared characteristics in their ideology (doctrines/theology), organisation/operational mode and strategy/tactics.⁴ Some experts query whether recent developments point to the formation of a new, fifth wave of anti-system, anti-globalist resistance, driven by networked communication technologies; or alternatively, whether we’re seeing a new iteration of a

right-wing extremist wave. Others have suggested that the current threat landscape is better captured by an understanding of co-existing, overlapping phenomena or ‘strains’ rather than neatly delineated, separate, consecutive waves.⁵

For a nuanced understanding of the landscape, a critical engagement with existing and emerging concepts, definitions and theories is needed. This entails a recognition that seemingly new iterations of extremism—manifested in attacks or events many didn’t see coming (such as the US Capitol siege) or groups that appear to spring up out of nowhere—might not be so new after all but have been simmering all along under the surface.

Using Germany as a case study, this chapter hence seeks to provide a broad framework of inquiry to be used for subsequent research endeavours, seminars and publications.

A perfect storm? Angry citizens and the far right meet QAnon

In August 2020, when a group of anti-government protesters pushed through police barriers onto the steps of the historic Reichstag building in Berlin, the seat of the German Parliament, a symbolic threshold was reached. Under the iconic inscription ‘to the German People’, about 300–400 figures could be seen waving the red, black and white flags of the historic German Empire, the ‘Second Reich’, while chanting ‘Resistance’ and ‘We are the people’.

The flags are insignia of Germany’s revisionist radical right, the so-called *Reichsbürger* and *Selbstverwalter*: a spectrum of ‘sovereign citizen’ and identitarian movements that denies the legitimacy and sovereignty of the post-1945 Federal Republic.⁶

They had specifically organised for a historic ‘storm of the Reichstag’ under the hashtag #SturmaufBerlin and broken away from the main ‘corona-demo’ of about 38,000 protesters: an otherwise eclectic mix of anti-vaxxers, New Age esoterics, Hare Krishna disciples, and anti-capitalist and eco-activist youth.

Marching to the Russian and US embassies as an enactment of a historic peace treaty, theirs was a deliberate ‘propaganda-of-the-deed’ performance: visual dominance of a symbolically charged site was meant to give the appearance of historical inevitability and ideological continuity in a revolt against ‘illegitimate, morally corrupt elites’.

The spectacle, a culmination of month-long anti-government mobilisations, caused widespread shock and condemnation among citizens, journalists and politicians alike. Predominantly, the term ‘storm of the Reichstag’ was used to discuss the unprecedented

incident; some cautioned that its use legitimised the far right's narrative, while others argued that the incident constituted nothing less than a 'storming' and that the historical term was needed as a wake-up call.⁷ Debates ensued about whether the radicalising potential of the growing protest movement had been underestimated despite warnings by some experts and politicians.

Until then, the protests were commonly portrayed under the broad umbrella of citizen dissent, due to the rallies' overall 'peace, love and harmony' optics; much was made of the quirkiness of tinfoil-hatted protesters, their bizarre agendas and their seemingly contradictory alliances. The so-called storm hence called into question the protest movement as an ideologically disconnected, reactionary coalition of various anti-establishment currents and 'alternative truther' groupings that lacked a common identity and agenda. It was recognised that far-right extremists were attempting to instrumentalise the citizen protests for greater visibility, publicity and long-term strategic gains.⁸

The president of the *Bundesverfassungsschutz* (BfV; the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution—Germany's domestic security agency) noted at a subsequent threat briefing:

[R]ight-wing extremists and Reichsbürger succeeded in occupying a resonant space, creating powerful images and thus exploiting the heterogeneous protest events ... we are observing closely whether the right-wing amalgamation takes on an even larger dimension and whether these actors are becoming capable of connecting with each other.⁹

And, indeed, since August 2020, protests have been marked by increasing hostility, aggression and violence, especially amid tightening restrictions in response to a second, third and now fourth wave of the pandemic. In 2021, the BfV introduced a new category of anti-government extremism and placed the 'Querdenker' citizen protest movement under formal observation for the 'legitimization of anti-democratic activity'. In September 2021, a 19-year-old working at a petrol station was shot and killed when he questioned why a customer was refusing to wear a face mask. A Twitter account linked to the killer, who followed several prominent German far-right politicians and publicists, revealed 'a dislike for immigrants, climate activists and the government'.¹⁰

While initially the agenda of the Querdenker (meaning 'lateral, contrarian thinkers') was issue-oriented, according to a BfV spokesperson, the movement had developed 'an increasing, fundamental hostility towards the state'.¹¹ This constitutes formal recognition of a violence-oriented anti-democracy movement at 'the centre of society', accompanied by an

increasing proliferation of anti-Semitic conspiracy myths; these were found to act as radicalisation force multipliers and ideological glue for disparate movements across the ideological spectrum.

The emergence of anti-government extremism in Germany occurred against the background of a notable rise in politically motivated violence in the years preceding the pandemic. At the release of the government's annual security report in July 2020, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer identified rising far-right extremism as Germany's largest security concern, following a 10% increase in recorded crimes by far-right extremists in 2019. And the president of the BfV declared far-right extremism and terrorism as 'the biggest danger for democracy'; he placed factions within the Alternative for Germany, an elected opposition party in the Bundestag, under official surveillance for constituting 'part of the breeding ground of far-right extremism' in 2019.¹²

An equally disconcerting report released by the BfV in October 2020 documents the extent of far-right infiltration of the security services, military and law enforcement: in 2019, Germany's military intelligence agency had already revealed that it was investigating more than 500 cases of suspected right-wing extremism within the Bundeswehr—a 30% increase from the previous year, the figures for which had been seen by analysts as underestimations.¹³

The terrorist campaign by the National Socialist Underground (NSU), which remained undetected for over a decade, reflects this. Involving 10 victims, 43 attempted killings, three bomb attacks and 15 armed robberies between 2000 and 2007, it constitutes a particularly dark point in German postwar history:

It took years for the German authorities to even recognise (or acknowledge) that these violent incidents constituted a campaign of terrorist violence, and the events created one of the most significant crises of German law enforcement and intelligence agencies since the Second World War. Indeed, the NSU and its actions were characterised as 'our September 11' by the German Federal Prosecutor General.¹⁴

A focus on individual cases and perpetrators is said to have covered up the extent of the problem, including its deeper roots in society and institutions. This is connected to what's considered permissible in public and political discourse.

The ongoing burden of its unique history had led Germany to openly recognise, as the first European nation, the need for a democracy 'capable of defending itself against anti-democratic actors who use the democratic process in order to subvert it'.¹⁵ As the postwar

German republic came into being in 1949, nationalism and most of its overt cultural expressions were forbidden as an acceptable communitarian identity and form of self-reference. But, instead of transcending the past, that approach to Germany's troubled legacy stifled necessary debates and created a conflicted political context.

Analyses show that the refugee crisis of 2015–16 was a crucial catalyst for pent-up ethno-nationalist sentiments. The anti-immigration street movement 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident' (PEGIDA), which emerged from the eastern German city of Dresden in 2014, propelled the change.¹⁶ Its driving ideas flowed into the Alternative for Germany, thereby giving it procedural democratic legitimacy as a conduit between the state, its institutions and far-right views and activism. Progressive politicians would receive death threats, and so-called 'enemy lists' were circulated regularly in extremist far-right and neo-Nazi networks.¹⁷

After years of accusations of 'being blind in the right eye', it finally took a string of far-right terror incidents and discovered plots—the Halle and Hanau attacks as well as the assassination of pro-immigration politician Walter Lübcke by a neo-Nazi—for the German Government to recognise the systemic nature of the threat and address it with more immediate action.

Considering the dangers emanating from the growing social acceptance of discourses that, although not explicitly violent, contravene principles of universal human dignity, policy efforts are centred around a comprehensive 89-point program addressing 'all forms of hostility towards specific groups'. It was developed following extensive consultations with migrant communities and victims of terrorism calling for more civic education regarding (racist) discrimination, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.¹⁸

With an allocated budget of more than €1 billion over the period from 2021 to 2024, the policy plan builds on a range of preceding smaller initiatives. Alongside 'hard' security upgrades and reforms (such as dedicated far-right capabilities/units within the Joint Counterterrorism Centre), of note are initiatives aimed at 'society at large'. The biggest one, Live Democracy!, was supported by a €150.5 million budget in 2021 and based on 'strategies to encourage the public to value a diverse and equitable society'. Some political groupings, also within parliament, had even called for a specific ministry for societal cohesion, anti-discrimination, integration and migration.¹⁹ Moreover, after much political debate, a probe into the proliferation of extremist elements, their supporting ideas and tolerance thereof has also been actioned across governmental and civil society institutions.

While the burden of Germany's historical legacy certainly added a special urgency, such a response at the systemic level shouldn't be dismissed as relevant only to the German context; it's instructive to consider what measures and competencies result from putting

a more holistic understanding of the root causes of different forms of extremism into practice alongside hard CT measures.

A remark by the Premier of the eastern German state of Saxony, Michael Kretschmer, at the unveiling of a memorial to the victims of the NSU cell, is noteworthy:

We've experienced in the last years and months how thoughts become words, and words become actions.²⁰

What determines a turn to violence does not come down only to individual trajectories, in interaction with structural variables, but a much wider enabling environment. The latter also includes what's normalised in societal and political-institutional discourse and hence made permissible.

Waves online and offline, across the fringes and the middle?

Accepting the premise of fluidity as a new hallmark, this chapter sets out to demonstrate the utility of fresh lenses as the Covid-19 crisis became a catalyst or accelerant for illiberal narratives and identities.

An examination of Germany's experience with the pandemic shows that extremist ideas and the willingness to act on them aren't restricted to the so-called fringes of society anymore.²¹ As the pandemic is forcing democratic societies to renegotiate the relationship between individual freedoms and social responsibilities, the boundaries of the new extremism are more fluid too.

Anti-government discourse and narratives intended to undermine Western democracies aren't easily recognised.

The 'new right' and its 'metapolitical' strategy play an important but often underestimated role in this regard. Encompassing a spectrum of informally aligned, loose networks of individuals, groups and organisations, what unites them are common anti-democratic, militant visions. Pursued through a range of (outwardly non-violent) strategies, their political project is nevertheless inherently misanthropically fascist. The language driving extremism is often coded, and mobilisation is occurring through subcultural settings without any detectable illegal activities, even with legislation such as Germany's that criminalises hate speech and Holocaust denial.

This makes it even more difficult to determine the risk posed to society, as thresholds can be subjective when it comes to non-criminal indicators for radicalisation. When it comes to assessing the risk from members of chat groups who dabble in and throw around white-nationalist, even neo-Nazi,

slurs against, for example, LGBTQI+ and other minority communities, empirical research is crucial. A state prosecutor noted, in the light of recent developments:

We regularly see antisemitic postings and animations with gas chambers, cut-off heads of politicians being put into ovens. We see classic Nazi propaganda. But we also see conspiracy theories that have a pseudo-scientific veneer and, in this way, deny the Holocaust ... It's getting even bigger. I think we're going to see serious problems ...²²

While online extremist rhetoric in chat groups is often graphic in its depictions of violence, offline group meetings and members don't automatically confirm online appearances and statements. There are strong empirical indicators that people say things online that they don't mean and that they express outrage they don't actually feel, at least not as a world view that they're prepared to act on.

Manifestations of these difficult-to-assess dynamics can also be observed at Australian 'freedom rallies' and in related Telegram groups filled with tens of thousands of 'concerned citizens': increasingly extremist conspiracy myths, anti-democratic, exclusionary narratives, intolerance of difference of opinion, or what constitutes 'truth'.

This is further complicated by the differing standards of what's considered acceptable speech by key actors in the online space—such as what constitute 'contraventions' of a social media platform's terms of service, as opposed to governments' legislative approaches to hate speech.

The German experience hence confirms that recalibrating analytical capabilities and threat metrics, increasing detection capabilities and strengthening the mechanisms for content moderation/removal are one thing. But it's not enough.

Recent research based on field work points to extreme online rhetoric allowing individuals to create a tough 'Rambo' persona they don't possess in the real world. It allows those charmed by extremist views (such as teenagers experiencing isolation or those on the autism spectrum and prone to black-and-white views) to believe that they're 'doing something' for a cause, yet without engaging in violence.

This isn't to argue that groups across this spectrum aren't harmful to minorities, democracy and social coherence. Their presence can motivate certain individuals to use violence. However, paying greater attention to identifying that, and why most members don't become violent, is one way of then making it easier

to identify those who do. A recent study from New Zealand, for example, concluded that in many cases the 'path to radicalism deflated'. The researchers suggested that such 'deflating' participation in a group could in fact divert possibly violent extremists away from more dangerous behaviour, such as that which culminated in the Christchurch terror attack.

Conclusion: a new agenda for inquiry?

When it comes to understanding how previously taboo or unimaginable ideas gain momentum in the real world, as opposed to only rhetoric in chat rooms, there's another instructive take on 'waves'. In 1967, a high-school student in Palo Alto, California, asked in class how the Nazis could have been so appealing to the general population that there was no popular resistance against the Holocaust. The question inspired his teacher to bring to life a simulated movement, to demonstrate the seductive appeal and universal sociological dynamics underpinning fascist movements.

Titled 'The third wave', the experiment showed how relatively easy it is to create a cohesive following by instilling sentiments of power, belonging and identity based on reverence of authority, exclusion and collective effervescence.²³ Even though students were appalled and bewildered when they first learned about Third Reich fascist principles in an abstract lesson, they got swept up by the intoxicating momentum of an exclusionary movement that would have ultimately resulted in the normalisation of repression and violence. This way, 'The third wave' illustrates the deceptive allure of 'righteous' zeal, reflecting the findings of the Milgram experiment: people tend to obey orders that contravene prevailing ethical norms if the source of the authority is regarded as legitimate and morally right.

In 1981, the wave was popularised as a young adult novel that formed part of the classroom curriculum in more than 32 countries, including Israel and Germany. It was also adapted for the screen multiple times: a 2008 version is set in modern-day Germany and framed for contemporary relevance:

How could we be led astray today? How could fascism work? Would it be possible today? Could that kind of thing happen again, here and now, at a normal German school?²⁴

It was in this lethal conjuncture of empowering radical precedent and widespread suppressed desire that the most devastating dynamics of a 'wave' seem to lie.²⁵

More recent adaptations, such as a Netflix miniseries, fictionalise the experiment in other topical contexts, bringing its lesson even closer to the heart of current democratic dilemmas and contestations, such as when an initially idealistic quest to save the environment turns into an ideologically extreme movement:

In their left-wing quest to save the environment, eschew discrimination, and mitigate capitalism, they become their own enemy as they resort to equal or more violent acts of destruction.²⁶

As the original creator of the experiment stated:

It was in this lethal conjuncture of empowering radical precedent and widespread suppressed desire that the most devastating dynamics of a 'wave' seem to lie ... I think you look to the political scene today—internationally, not just in the United States—and you see ... a simple answer offered by a religion or candidate to solve our problems ...²⁷

Fundamental to understanding these dynamics is also the idea that the appeal of radical thought patterns and group dynamics may be less culturally particular and more universal than we think. This invites us to focus on the dynamic nature of the landscape before us. There's fluidity between ideologies and a blurring of boundaries between traditional left-right markers as well as between the so-called mainstream and the fringes; movements take precedence over organisational structures, including the transnational networks, local nodes and ideas that propel them.

A forward-looking agenda for inquiry could include questions such as:

- What evolving narratives, themes and subcultural expressions can we observe across the spectrum of extremist/terrorist groups?
- What's the significance of cross-ideological coalitions and loose alliances in regard to mobilisation?
- Are ideological fusions manifesting in tangible changes, such as new groups forming out of coalescing anti-establishment currents?
- Can we observe a noticeable shift towards a post-organisational paradigm—beyond hitherto known organisational structures/operational modes and established indicators?
- Do we need a more differentiated understanding of the relationship between 'online' and 'offline' spaces that draws a connection between online activity and real-world harms?

The question mark at the end of this chapter's 'a new wave of extremism?' subtitle is hence intended as a reminder of the need for critical engagement and analytical clarity, ensuring that our mental models, coupled with political will, are fit for the task at hand.

More than tending to theoretical and conceptual considerations, such an interrogatory lens is aimed at addressing policy-related problems and questions. Its premise is that new frameworks for analysing and understanding the threats to society

are needed to improve strategic-policy discourse and decision-making. As ASIO's Director-General said in his 2021 annual threat assessment:

... to counter the evolving threat environment, thinking outside the box is needed.²⁸

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Forecasting jihadist terrorism in the Sahel

Dr Muhammad Dan Suleiman

Context

The Sahel region of Africa is an arc-like landmass lying to the immediate south of the Sahara Desert, stretching east–west across the breadth of the African continent and comprising all or parts of some 10 countries. The region has experienced over a decade of jihadist terrorism since 2010. During that period, there have been as many CT campaigns as there have been jihadist groups.

In this chapter, I assess the past and present of the threat as of 2022, while attempting to forecast what the future may hold.

The state of the threat

Over the years, jihadist terrorist groups have transformed in at least three ways: splits and alliances; allegiances to global projects such as ISIS and al-Qaeda; and strengthening their reach. Thus, scores of jihadist groups operate in the Sahel. They include the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), the ‘Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims’ (abbreviated as JNIM from its original Arabic name), Ansar ul-Islam, the al-Qaeda-affiliated ‘People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad’ (the Arabic abbreviation is JAS), which was led by Abubakar Shekau until his killing in May 2021, Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA), and Ansaru. The last two are the outcomes of splits in Boko Haram in 2016 and 2012, respectively. Both JAS and ISWA claim to be the original Boko Haram. JNIM, which is considered to be the Sahel battalion of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), came from a merger of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in March 2017. These groups compete and cooperate, and continue to consolidate their presence.

There have been numerous CT campaigns against these groups, including the UN’s Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the French-led operations Serval (2013) and Barkhane (2014), the G5 Sahel Task Force (2017) led by five regional countries, the European-led Takuba Task Force (2021) and the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) led by the Lake Chad Basin countries and Benin. In 2017, Ghana hosted representatives from several West African countries, leading to the Accra Initiative—a security mechanism to address the threat of terrorism in the wider region. Major foreign military presence in the Sahel comes from countries such as France, the US and Germany. Those campaigns and actors have achieved some modest CT successes. For instance, the MNJTF and other campaigns have succeeded in retaking territory and unsettling Boko Haram, after the group had once controlled territory the size of Belgium. Nigeria has also improved since 2020, as terrorism deaths in the country fell by 51% in 2021, after three years of successive

increases.¹ The killing of Shekau, and the killing of ISGS leader Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi by French troops, are other notable CT successes.

However, CT campaigns haven’t prevented militant groups in the Sahel from strengthening their grip on the Sahel region and beyond, thereby overshadowing the above successes. IS and al-Qaeda have established firmer footholds in the region. At the local level, enabling socio-economic and political conditions and abuse by security forces and state agencies are historically embedded and persist, and give fuel to the presence of militant groups.

Jihadist groups have attracted new actors and drawn in clandestine and criminal activities such as human, drugs and arms trafficking, and employed increasingly desperate tactics. They’re changing their approach from bombing missions to hostage-taking, highway ambushes and random attacks on military bases and villages. They’re increasingly expanding their reach and carrying out deadlier attacks. The Sahel is now home to the fastest growing terrorist groups in the world, including JNIM, and the most lethal group, ISWA. ISWA is responsible for on average 15.2 deaths per attack in Niger.² Three of the 10 countries most affected by terrorism in 2021 were Sahel countries (Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso), while 10 (50%) of the 20 deadliest attacks of 2021 occurred in the region.³ In 2021, terrorist activity in the Sahel region was one of four conflicts to watch in Africa, per the International Crisis Group. The threat is also strengthening southward towards littoral West African countries, while MINUSMA has had more attacks on its personnel than any other UN peacekeeping operation.

In terms of human costs, the African Union noted in 2019 that West Africa experienced the highest number of terrorist attacks (42%) and terrorist deaths (92%) compared to any other part of Africa. Despite the fall in terrorism deaths in Nigeria, Boko Haram (and factions) is one of the four terrorist groups globally responsible for most deaths in 2019.⁴ Burkina Faso saw a 590% increase in terrorism deaths, with a rise from 86 to 593 in 2019. The usual costs in the form of refugees and displaced persons, food insecurity and health crises persist amid Covid-19.

From these facts and figures, it’s safe to assert that jihadist terrorism in the Sahel is winning against CT efforts, and that paints a disturbing picture of the years ahead. Worse, there are no immediate reasons to believe that the situation will improve soon, especially in the context of sub-Saharan Africa taking over from the Middle East and North Africa as the epicentre of global terrorism, with a 48% share of global terrorism deaths in 2021.⁵ The costs of terrorism in the Sahel could continue to increase, depending on the urgency with which CT efforts reorient in both intent and action in response to the unrelenting threat.

Trends and outlook

Jihadist groups thrive on promising a future 'state' without a concrete vision of what that will entail. Telling where the jihadist 'caravan' is heading is thus difficult. However, it's also true that the Sahel has a unique set of conditions that advantages jihadist militancy there over other types of insurrection. The region is the heartland of black Africa's Islam where a homogeneous Muslim demography provides a favourable geography and resonant ideology. Jihadist groups have exploited this to penetrate communities, recruit and fester. The enablers of jihadism in the subregion consist of adverse socio-economic, political, psychocultural, ideological and geographical conditions. The persistence of those conditions means that, in the short term at least, the threat of jihadist terrorism will continue to get worse, threatening the entirety of West Africa. The long-term trajectory of the threat will be shaped by the degree to which immediate and remote enablers are present in a country and allowed to persist to provide motivation, capability, justification and opportunity for jihadism. Table 1 categorises countries in Western African based on their experience with jihadist terrorism since 2010.

Table 1 does hide a lot of nuance and variance, but it provides some insights into the wave of jihadist terrorism across Western Africa. Nine of the 18 countries in the region (50%), including Mauritania, Chad and Cameroon, have an active jihadist presence or are under intense jihadist threat, three more (17%) have experienced attacks, and four (22%) may do so soon. That means 67% of West African countries have been affected directly by jihadist terrorism, with a possibility of an increase to 89%. For example, Burkina Faso until 2016/2017 could have been in Category 2 but is now in Category 1, whereas

until March 2016, when AQIM and al-Mourabitoun attacked the Grand-Bassam Resort near Abidjan, Côte D'Ivoire was in Category 3. The same can be said of Benin before 2019/2020, and Togo.

Figure 4 is an infographic of active militant Islamist groups in Africa provided by the Washington-based Africa Center for Strategic Studies. A close look shows that Category 3 countries could soon move up to Category 2 or, worse, 1. The eastern (Mauritania and Senegal) and northern (Guinea and Ghana) parts of these countries are experiencing increasing risk levels. As more and more attacks occur in southern Burkina Faso, it's possible that Ghana may soon move up the risk gauge from Category 3 to Category 2.

Figure 4 shows that, first, while groups in North Africa are 'disappearing', more are appearing in the Sahel. Second, while jihadist groups were more dispersed in 2017, a clustering of groups is perceivable from 2017 to 2021. That clustering may be the result of increasing competition for territory by jihadist groups, but it may also be due to an increased number of new or splintered groups. Both the expansion and the clustering are accompanied by a southward journey and consolidation of jihadist presence.

Jihadism is likely to continue its expansion southwards towards littoral states. As ISWA penetrates further into Niger and carries out more attacks there, JNIM increasingly overshadows ISGS while pushing the latter further into southwestern Niger. The country could be the next hotbed of militant activity, and that could have knock-on effects on political instability, such as making a military coup more likely. The withdrawal of French troops and their European allies may provide more room for jihadists in the country. The possibility of a westward journey into eastern Mauritania and Senegal is also real.

Table 1: Experiences with jihadist terrorism in Western Africa

Categories	Experience with jihadist terrorism	Corresponding countries
Category 1	Have experienced or are experiencing full-blown insurrection or spillover	Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Burkina Faso
Category 2	Have experienced terrorist attack/s	Côte D'Ivoire, Benin, Togo
Category 3	Share borders with Category 1 countries, and on high alert for any future attacks	Ghana, Senegal, Guinea, Mauritania
Category 4	Largely concerned over regional insecurity and economic and political impact of the threat	Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, Cabo Verde

Source: Compilation by the author.

Figure 4A: Groups, April 2017

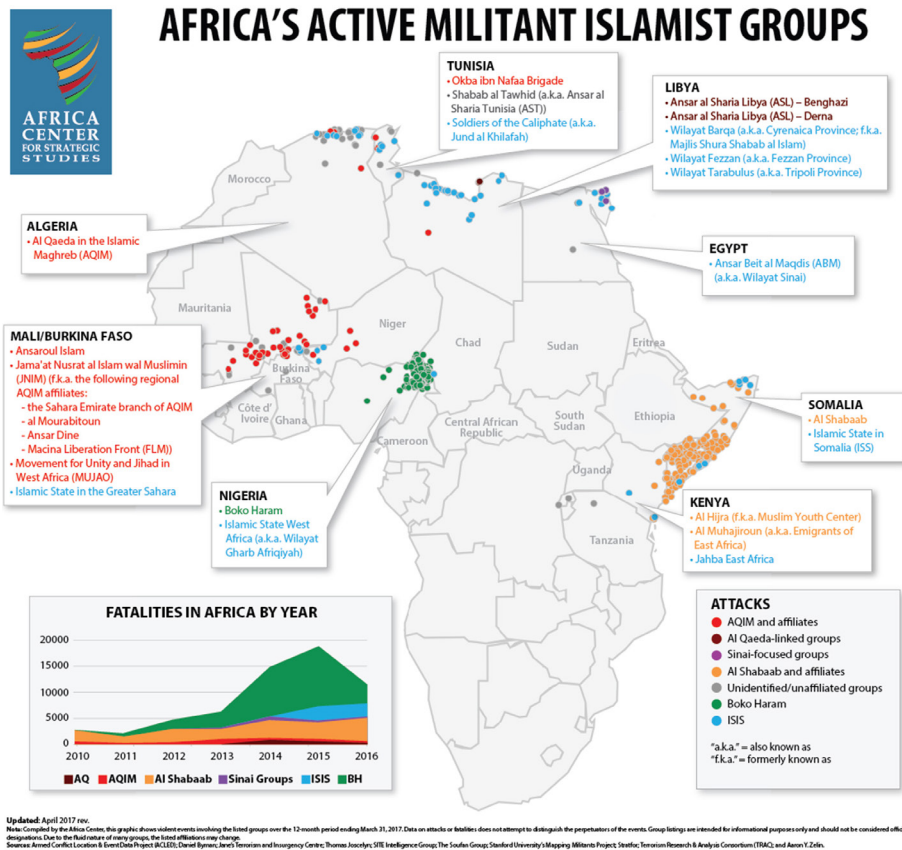


Figure 4B: Groups, April 2018

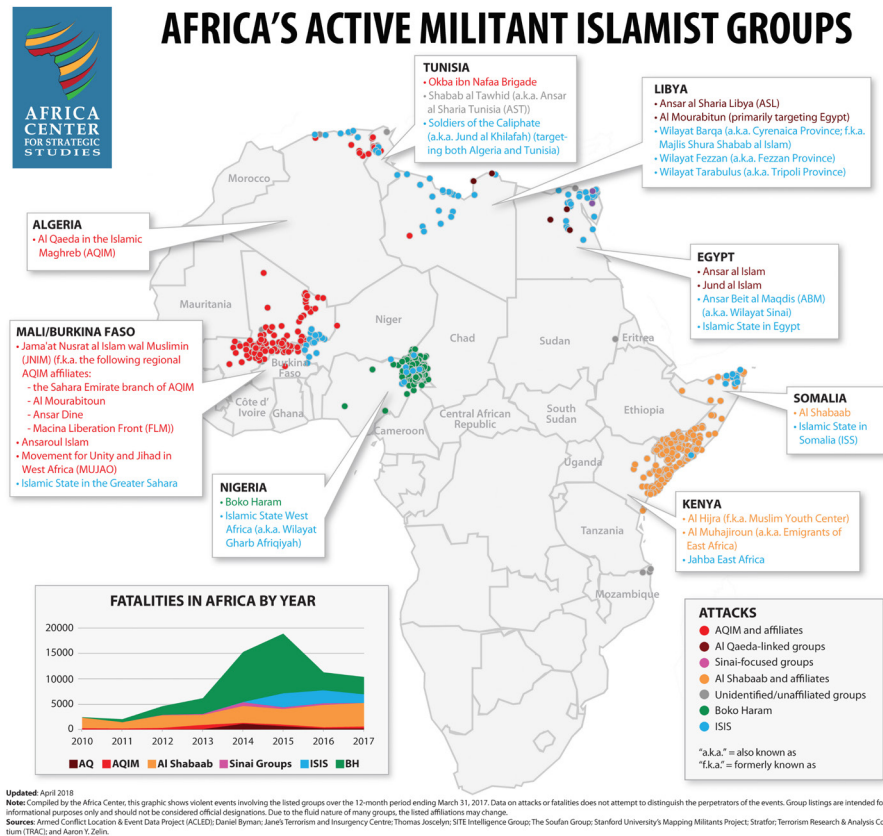


Figure 4C: Groups, January 2019

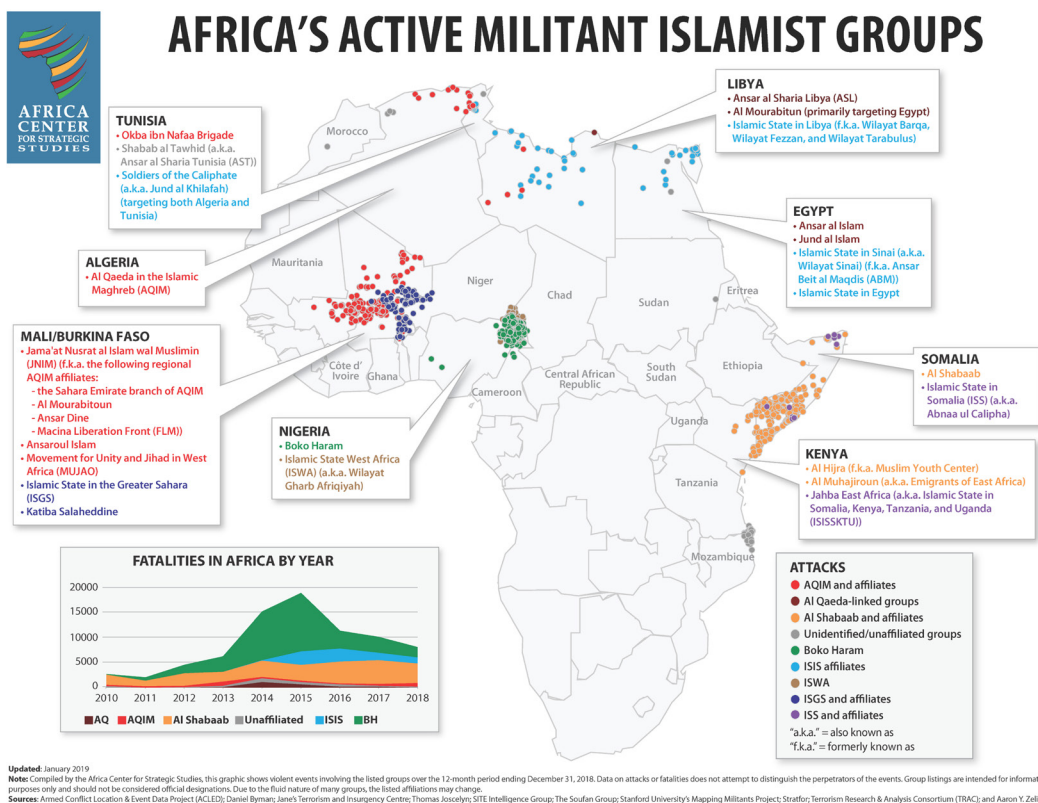


Figure 4D: Groups, January 2020

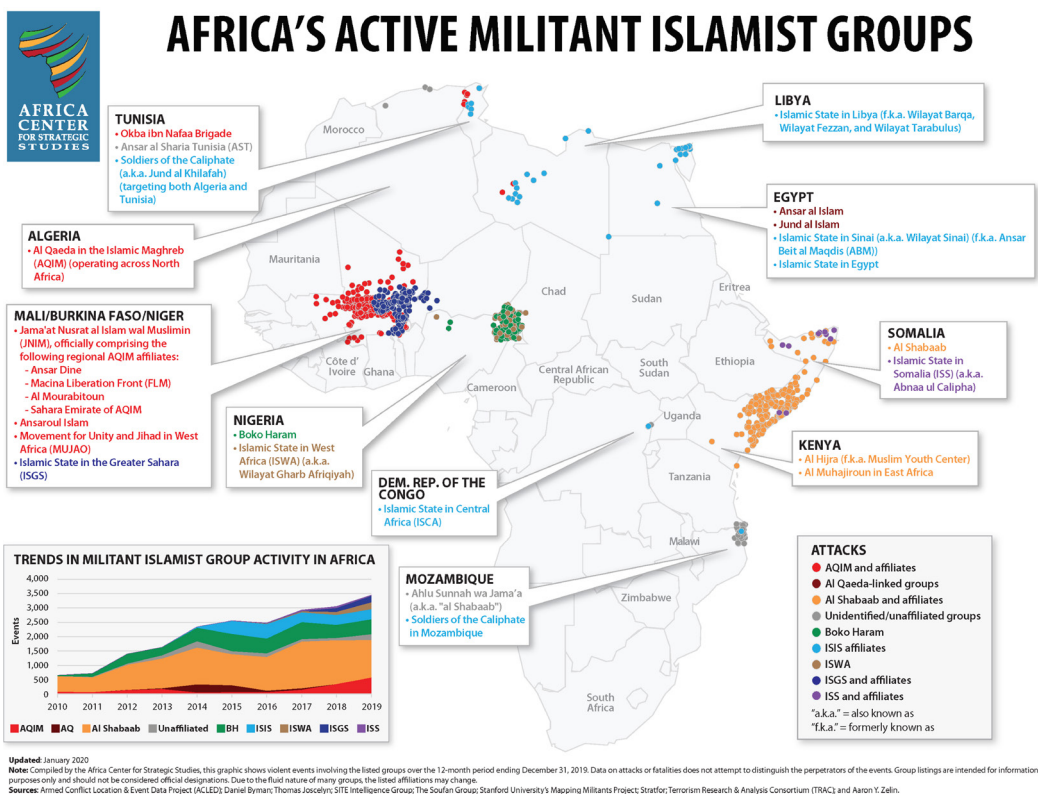


Figure 4E: Groups, February 2021

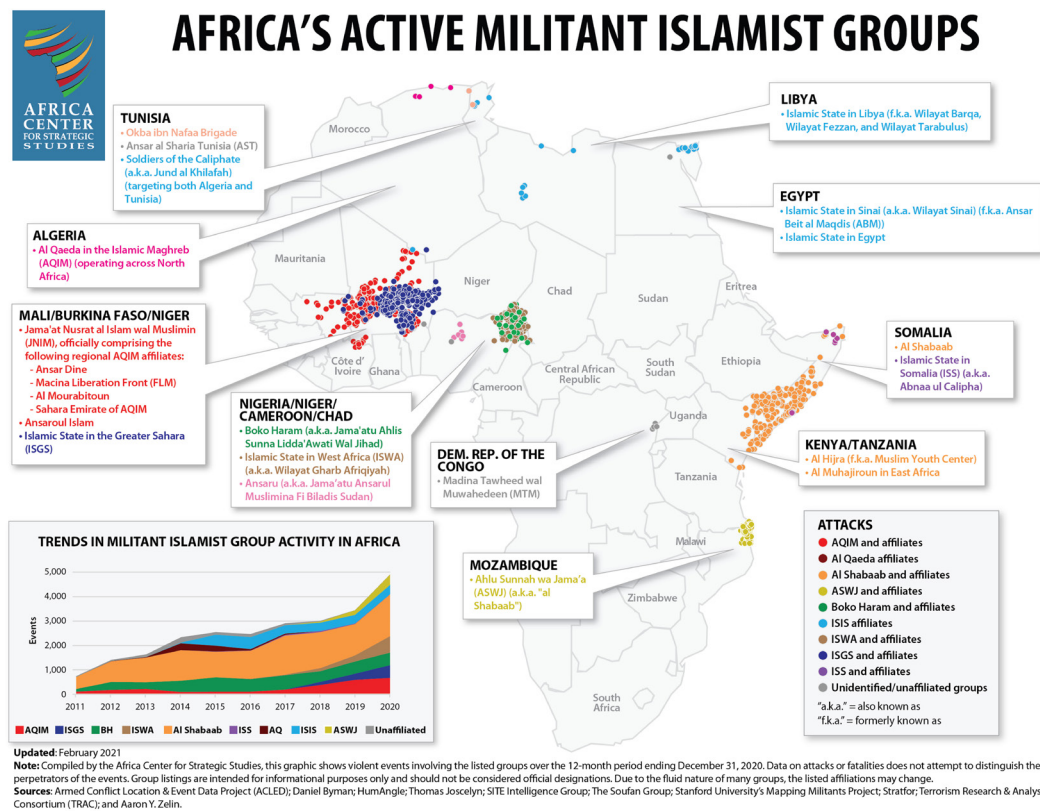
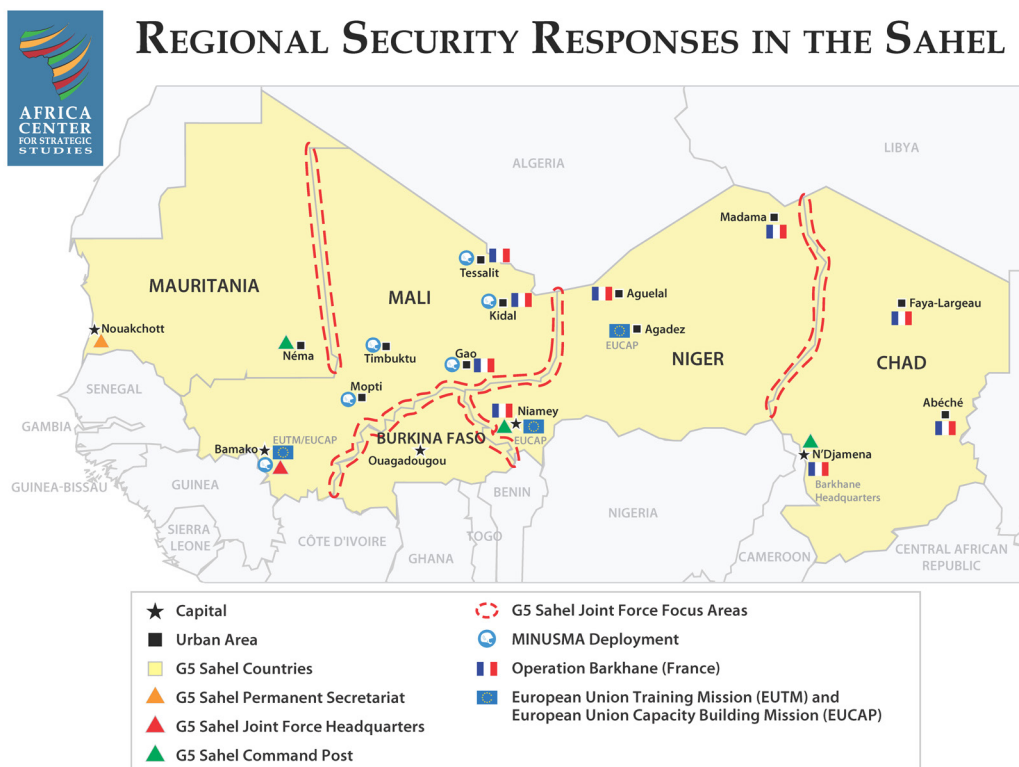


Figure 4F: Regional security responses in the Sahel, March 2019



Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *African militant Islamist groups set record for violent activity*, 21 July 2020, [online](https://www.africacenter.org/article/african-militant-islamist-groups-set-record-for-violent-activity).

Apart from any future CT success, that expansion may also be slowed by encountering different human and physical-geographical dynamics in those other regions. For instance, whereas clandestine jihadist presence as far south as the edge of the savanna belt is possible, jihadists' activity, if any, is likely to be limited to random attacks in more forested regions further south.

Nevertheless, from the examples of Mali and Burkina Faso, jihadist groups emerge or thrive in a vacuum of political instability. The groups could take advantage of recent coups in the subregion: there have been least six of them since 2012, the most recent in Burkina Faso (24 January 2022). Similarly, conflicts that could be considered non-jihadist—such as the Ambazonia conflicts in Cameroon and the Casamance conflict in Senegal—shouldn't be excluded from risk assessments of jihadist militancy in the region. Rebel groups won't hesitate to have strange bedfellows if doing so serves their tactical, operational and rhetorical needs. These conflict nodes could create favourable conditions for jihadist groups to sprout and grow in unlikely places.

Foreign combatants travelling from nearby African countries to join jihadist groups in the subregion are another ominous sign. The territorial defeat of IS in 2019 led to the return of thousands of fighters into Africa, per the African Union, and that provided a deadly reinforcement to militancy in the Sahel. African combatants returning from Category 1 countries in the future could similarly have adverse impacts in other countries, and jihadist cells may mushroom in other West

African countries in the future, or current ones will continue to consolidate their power by widening their networks and recruitment bases. Less-governed cyberspace, and the lack of effective mechanisms to regulate cash flows across borders, could fast-track this process. As armed criminal gangs begin to forge links with jihadist militants, other types of crime and cyber fraud could be critical income-generating measures for jihadist groups.

The Sahel is where sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East converge. Generally, the Middle East brings global ideological currency, while the Sahel brings enabling local conditions. Since West Africa doesn't have Islamist theological relevance at the level of the Levant, the likelihood of a *hijrah* (migration) of foreign fighters and Muslims to the subregion out of 'obligation' is less, even in the event of the declaration of another caliphate. However, it's real: if jihadists continue to come under international pressure in other places, they might move out of desperation.

We can also expect groups in West Africa to benefit from wider continental solidarity, as jihadists' presence on the continent widens into the Rift Valley region, for example. That's why, despite differences in tactics, ideology and location, the possibility, no matter how remote, of jihadist nodal points expanding or coalescing into one regional grand project shouldn't be dismissed. Figure 5 shows the route used by 13 Senegalese nationals across the breadth of the Sahel, according to the Institute for Security Studies, to join AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram in

Figure 5: Route taken by Senegalese extremists in West Africa



Source: Adja Khadidiatou Faye, *West Africa must confront its foreign terrorist fighters*, Institute for Security Studies, 2 August 2019, [online](#).

the Lake Chad Basin area, and illustrates the potential for a transregional project in the future.

Of course, any future scenario planning can't ignore how climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic will worsen insecurity. Commitments to addressing those issues alongside fighting terrorism mean immense pressure on national budgets and increased spending by foreign governments and corporations, including Australia's, to protect their interests in the region. As foreign nationals and installations remain key targets for terrorist groups, the presence of Western NGOs in the region presents jihadist groups with likely targets.

Some CT blind spots

Jihadist terrorism in Western Africa may be contained in the coming years, but, based on current CT thinking and practice, the threat isn't very likely to be neutralised, prevented and removed in the short or medium term.

The evidence that jihadist groups are the outcome of long processes and political omissions and commissions hasn't influenced current thinking, which is still dominated by a linear and event-based understanding of what causes jihadist groups to emerge, and where. Jihadist groups are fluid in terms of the territories they occupy, their affiliations and ideology, and they cooperate for strategic and tactical reasons. Yet, there's a tendency to see them as being in geographical and ideological silos.

Some jihadist groups have captured, controlled and governed territories across borders. In those cases, the groups aren't interested in taking over the state: they aspire to obliterate it altogether and establish a distant alternative, based on a global vision of the *umma* (global Islamic nation). They could also quickly change tactics and goals. From car bombings and suicide attacks, they could move to more conventional military methods such as capturing military bases and establishing state structures to control territory for the long term. While this challenges the traditional idea of considering areas of jihadist presence as 'ungoverned' rather than contested, CT continues to be rigid, versus nimble and agile jihadist terrorist groups.

Current thinking tends to see jihadist groups in the Sahel as fundamentally different from non-jihadist militant groups. Indeed, Africa's security terrain has seen significant changes since the end of the Cold War. However, the underlying drivers of violence by militant groups other than jihadists during the Cold War are still active. Seeing the drivers of jihadist violence as originating from, or particular to, the Middle East and North Africa deflects attention away from decades-old local socio-economic and political grievances. That said, the equally popular tendency to treat global Islamist ideology as performing a mere instrumental function to empower local grievances might not be an entirely accurate conclusion either.

One manifestation of rigid CT is an overreliance on a hard-power, military-fire-fighting approach. A resort to military action may be necessary, but not enough. A territorial defeat of jihadist groups solely through military means can create further problems. As the dispersal of IS away from its pre-2019 epicentre in Iraq and Syria shows, jihadists usually move away from areas of intense military challenge and regroup when and where possible. Military operations also alienate local communities and increase mistrust of state authorities and their partners. Indeed, some local communities perceive military operations as pretexts for securing Western strategic locations and interests. Cases of abuse and human rights violations by foreign soldiers fuel that perception and derail community trust. Even softer interventions such as security training and 'assistance' by Western countries don't always help, as they sometimes fuel corruption. Additionally, it's possible for a state to shield jihadist groups or encourage terrorism, rather than counter it, for financial or political gains. Many of these dimensions of terrorism and CT remain in the blind spots of current CT thinking.

Recommendations

The challenge ahead requires a CT architecture that aims at immediate threat prevention, containment, neutralisation and removal, and at the same time addresses drivers and root causes. Instead of a location-specific understanding of jihadism, the need for prevention requires a 'whole region' assessment of terrorism, as Table 1 portrays, and an 'all-of-government' approach to counter-extremism. This rightfully implicates adverse socio-economic and political conditions of unemployment, corruption, inequality and illiteracy as major causes of political violence. Such proactive measures reduce the CT deficits that we see in the Sahel.

To achieve a more holistic CT architecture, policy must reorient in both intent and action in ways that avoid counterproductive practices. CT must also consider all available options—from those that align with current thinking and interests, to those that challenge them. There's a rich history of using conciliation, dialogue, amnesty, rehabilitation and building resilience as conflict-resolution methods. CT should tap into those options.

Also, understanding the 'making' of any security threat is crucial to its unmaking. The make-up and manifestation of jihadist terrorism must be understood in phases. This way, containing or neutralising the threat at one phase wouldn't be mistaken for complete threat removal. Leaders and commanders of jihadist groups shouldn't be subjected to the same CT intervention as foot soldiers and perceived sympathisers. CT efforts must be disaggregated commensurate with the dynamics of each group: while current CT thinking sees jihadist militant groups as the same, some are more similar than others.

The prevailing view that jihadist groups are political aberrations should be reconsidered. Indeed, in the context of the long history of conflicts in Africa, the 'normalisation' of the threat is necessary. It legitimises options that otherwise would hardly be considered eligible for CT, such as accepting former jihadist militants into existing government arrangements. Admittedly, that will require the widest stretch of current political and ideological imaginations, and is contingent on the right context in terms of a thorough demobilisation and peacebuilding strategy. But not considering it, at least in the face of the persisting threat, may suggest hypocrisy to local audiences and fuel distrust, since past African non-jihadist rebels and terrorists, such as Charles Taylor of Liberia, have been allowed that option for the purposes of conflict resolution. A genuine commitment to security, with pragmatic concessions, is crucial in commanding trust and goodwill from locals and from moderate and disaffected jihadists. In other words, CT actors should acknowledge that terrorism must not only be countered; it must be *seen* to be countered.

International missions led and owned by African countries and bodies have higher chances of success. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone are concrete examples. Under the 'African solutions to African problems' commitment of the African Union, CT campaigns by and for Africans must be supported. They'll have more legitimacy and will challenge the anti-West and anti-imperialism narratives of jihadist groups.

Securing strategic interests and fighting terrorism aren't mutually exclusive. The inauguration of the West Africa Mining Security Conference (WAMS) in Accra, Ghana, in May 2019 is one example of safeguarding strategic interests while working for security. At WAMS 2019, the Australian Government donated \$75,000 for CT training.⁶ Investing in 'counterterrorism from below', by supporting local indigenous peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches could also address insecurity and protect interests. This grants civilians a greater role in CT. Another example is supporting youth- and Muslim-led civil society organisations (CSOs) and Muslim researchers with counter-radicalisation, counter-extremism and CT funding and training.

In addition, one way of responding to jihadist ideology may be to invest in a motivated force of Islamic scholars who consider a commitment to fighting terrorism as a religious obligation. Thus, apart from supporting Muslim-led CSOs, CT efforts could also consider raising an ideological counterforce of self-professed Salafist and neo-Salafist scholars, since many jihadist

groups claim to be within that same ideological bracket as those scholars. This approach has its problems, especially in the context of secular state arrangements. It may also fuel the tendency of jihadist groups who engage in the practice of *takfir* (declaring some Muslims to be apostates). Worse, it may stigmatise Muslim communities. However, if cautiously planned and deployed as a necessary preventive measure, there's no reason to mark the approach as implausible.

Notes

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The far right, anti-Semitism and Covid-19 conspiracies in Victoria: a community perspective

Colin Rubenstein

This contribution is an edited excerpt from a submission to the Inquiry into Extremism in Victoria.¹

In Victoria, far-right activity is overwhelmingly characterised by intimidation, threats and harassment in the form of phone calls and letters, graffiti and vandalism, and noxious remarks and gestures, including the Nazi salute. Recently, neo-Nazi Thomas Sewell, currently out on bail after being arrested last year, organised a celebration of Adolf Hitler's birthday at The Hof Downtown German Beer Hall in Melbourne, replete with Nazi salutes.

Opposition to public health measures related to Covid-19, from lockdowns to mask and vaccine mandates, has potentially created space for far-right actors to recruit and radicalise outside of their immediate milieu based on shared attitudes and a shared conspiratorial world view. The best illustration of this phenomenon in Victoria is the case of Harrison McLean, a young IT programmer and key organiser of anti-lockdown protests, who wrote in extremist Telegram chat groups about his goal of slowly introducing Covid-19 conspiracy theorists and other anti-government individuals participating in the protests to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. McLean has denied he's a white supremacist, and it's claimed he pushed back against some neo-Nazi ideas and individuals in his chat groups, although he said his goal is to:

Build a big tent movement from the libertarian right to nationalists to populists to independents to moderates and even some leftwing people all supporting freedom. It's about building one unified group that can embrace a wide range of political stances [and] to expand the Overton Window to some elements of movement that are currently more fringe ... I would prefer for them [the Proud Boys] to be less fringe in the context of having their views be more acceptable ... but not in a way that involves any sort of violence, just the rhetoric and discourse.

McLean is not the only far-right extremist to infiltrate the anti-lockdown protests. Others, including neo-Nazi Kenneth Panten and extremist Kate Callan, have also attempted to use the protests as a vehicle for recruitment and radicalisation. Additionally, extremist protesters calling for violence like Imre Pelyva have been arrested, while the addresses of members of the state Labor caucus in the past parliament were shared via encrypted messaging apps. Recruitment and messaging by the far right is often conducted via the encrypted Telegram messaging app, *inter alia*, as well as special-purpose far-right social media sites, as mainstream sites such as Facebook and Twitter crack down on conspiracy theories and racism. However, the cross-pollination of conspiracy theories and anti-government talking points even on mainstream social media sites does enable the far right to infiltrate more mainstream groups and promote their hateful ideologies to sympathetic conspiracy theorists and others across the political spectrum.

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent public health measures and related conspiracy theories have created space for the far right to create popular fronts with populist, libertarian and left-wing groups and individuals. As the Victoria Police noted in its submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia:

Online commentary on Covid-19 has provided a recruiting tool for right-wing extremist groups, linking those interested in alternative wellness, anti-vaccination and anti-authority conspiracy theories with white supremacist ideologies.²

How useful is a focus on the 'far right'?

Today, there's often significant cross-fertilisation in terms of tactics and ideas between what seem to be very different forms of ideology. For instance, scholars have documented how some neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups have openly looked to Islamist terror organisations, such as Islamic State, 'as a model and inspiration' for their own efforts. An exclusive focus on the far right would miss these important linkages and cross-fertilisation. This was also noted by the Victoria Police in its submission to the Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia:

... individuals and groups who adhere to [Right-wing extremist] ideologies have diverse and multifaceted ideological views. It is not a cohesive cohort...

[This] presented a challenge in effectively tasking and investigating these individuals as they do not fit neatly into pre-existing tasking and coordination frameworks.³

The US-based Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has also objected to the use of the term 'far right' because 'some people use the term "far right" to also incorporate some aspects of mainstream conservatism ... the term is more vague than extreme right or radical right and thus is not preferred.' The ADL notes that even its preferred term, 'extreme right', which is 'used to describe right-wing political, social and religious movements that exist outside of and are more radical than mainstream conservatism', is something of an oversimplification that can hide some nuances. The ADL notes that the 'extreme right' actually '[c]onsists primarily of two large, slightly overlapping spheres. In one sphere is the white supremacist movement, including its various submovements, such as neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, and the alt right, among others. In the other sphere are anti-government extremist movements such as the militia movement and sovereign citizens.'

Moreover, 'also in the extreme right are several "single-issue" movements, which each tend to be the extreme wing of a more mainstream conservative

movement; these include anti-abortion extremists, anti-immigrant extremists, anti-Muslim extremists, and anti-public lands extremists, among others.' Since these categories are so nebulous and the individuals and groups involved so fractious, it's difficult to discuss a single specific threat they pose to Victoria's security or social cohesion, as the answer is likely to vary depending on which elements of the 'extreme right' are being referred to.

As a result of process, the very use of the term 'far right' to describe the threat has become less useful as a descriptor of the threat as this coalition of neo-Nazis, conspiracy theorists, populists, libertarians and leftists has coalesced, leading Victoria Police to warn in its submission that it was ill-prepared to deal with these 'conflating ideologies', which have 'presented a challenge in effectively tasking and investigating these individuals as they do not fit neatly into pre-existing tasking and coordination frameworks'.

The far right, Covid-19 conspiracies and the Jewish community in Victoria

Unfortunately, the Overton window has shifted during Covid-19, as once fringe positions and conspiracy theories are adopted by politicians and media personalities and there's an increase in Holocaust distortion, in which symbols such as the yellow star forced on the Jews by the Nazis are used by anti-lockdown protesters and Hitler and Nazi comparisons are increasingly and inappropriately used to describe government officials and policies. Anti-lockdown protests in Melbourne have also included anti-Semitic signs, while dozens of anti-lockdown social media groups have been found to promote anti-Semitism and neo-Nazi views. BitChute, a video-sharing platform known as a haven for conspiracy theorists and the far right, featured videos of the Melbourne protests with comments such as 'Jew jab kills' and 'nobody worthwhile is taking the Jew jab', while graffiti reading 'no Jew jab for Oz' was found along a protest route. According to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry's 2021 *Antisemitism in Australia* report, between 1 October 2020 and 30 September 2021, 160 of the 447 anti-Semitic incidents occurred in Victoria, the majority of which involved graffiti, threatening calls, emails and leaflets, or abuse and harassment.⁴ Importantly, not all of those incidents were necessarily far right in origin.

On 8 May 2022, it was reported that a man made a Nazi salute at a mother and her toddler in Caulfield.

Extremism and the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism

An important development in protecting the Victorian Jewish community against extremist violence was the announcement by Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews on 11 May that the state will adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism.⁵ The Victorian announcement follows a similar announcement from the federal government regarding the IHRA definition last year in a move also supported by the federal opposition. The Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) views the definition—adopted by at least 32 countries, the European Union and numerous local governments and institutions around the world—as an essential tool for identifying and responding to the anti-Semitism so widespread in extremist circles, and thus helping to protect the local Jewish community from it.

AIJAC is grateful to the Victorian Government and Opposition—which also called for the adoption of the IHRA definition—for the decision but urges that adoption must be only the first step in a process to implement the definition by operationalising it across government and indeed beyond. The purpose of adoption is to facilitate such uses as its employment by law enforcement to train police to understand when a crime may have an anti-Semitic motive; use by human rights tribunals and appeal bodies in their work; employment by universities and schools to identify and intervene against anti-Semitism; and for social media companies to better moderate anti-Semitism on their platforms by consulting the definition, among many other possible uses of the definition.

AIJAC urges the Victorian Government and parliament to follow up the adoption of the IHRA definition with a detailed strategy to implement the definition's operationalisation across government. AIJAC calls the attention of both the committee and the government to the European Union's *Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism*,⁶ which AIJAC views as the single best resource for implementing the decision to adopt the definition, and thus obtaining the full benefits of doing so.

Recommendations

To combat the threat of the far right in Victoria, AIJAC recommends that the Victorian Government:

- fully implements its expansion of anti-vilification measures, including the Hakenkreuz ban, announced in May 2022, and moves to outlaw the Nazi salute
- expands efforts to keep abreast of new racist codewords and gestures used by the far right and other conspiracy theorists in order to ban their public use under anti-vilification measures
- implements the recommendations it supported as part of the 2021 Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections
- follows up its important positive step of adopting the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism on 11 May with efforts to implement the definition across government bodies
- moves towards a more comprehensive counterextremism policy based on the concept of 'ideologically motivated violent extremism' (IMVE) rather than compartmentalising the far right as distinct and separate from other forms of ideological extremism
- continues to liaise with local multicultural community organisations to monitor the extent and type of IMVE activity
- seeks to learn lessons from the inquiry into the Christchurch massacre and increases counterterrorism funding and attention towards addressing extremism; this includes monitoring extremist individuals and groups, and ongoing funding towards the security of vulnerable communities
- advocates to the Australian Government to list Thomas Sewell's National Socialist Network, which is based primarily in Victoria, and any related groups, as a terrorist organisation under Division 102 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995*
- continues to develop the countering violent extremism programs in Victoria, including the Network for Intervention and Tailored Engagement program and Community Integration Support Program
- explores both persuasive and regulatory strategies to make social media platforms more transparent and accountable for damages caused by dangerous misinformation and hate content posted by users.

Notes

- 1 Colin Rubenstein, Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, 15 June 2022, [online](#).
- 2 Victoria Police, submission to Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia, 17 February 2021, [online](#).
- 3 Victoria Police, submission to PJCIS Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia.
- 4 Julie Nathan, *Report on antisemitism in Australia, 1 October 2020 – 30 September 2021*, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, 2021, [online](#).
- 5 'What is antisemitism? Non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism', International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016, [online](#).
- 6 Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, *Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism*, European Commission, 2021.

Teen radicalisation in Australia: PVE as a critical instrument in Australia's CT toolbox

Jasmine Latimore and Gill Savage

Introduction

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation to violent extremism (VE). In addition to possessing significant age-related developmental characteristics that make them more impressionable, they're also subject to environmental factors that exacerbate those vulnerabilities.¹ The younger generations are spending unprecedented amounts of time online, where they're exposed to radical propaganda and violent extremists who hope to groom them to adopt radical ideologies. This occurs in the absence of adult supervision or effective cyber-governance solutions.

We're yet to completely understand the downstream effects of the community-wide Covid-19 lockdowns, which disrupted education, forced physical isolation from peers, and prompted teens to spend inordinate amounts of time online. That occurred simultaneously with the coalescence of ideologically based narratives and issue-based grievances, forming new dominant online narratives. This combination of increased time online and the proliferation of grievances requires governments and their agencies to at least consider whether the years ahead could see radical ideology run rife among Australian teens, or at the very least increase.

It's important to establish at the outset that there's a difference between radicalisation, VE and terrorism, just as there's a difference between countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE). To better position security agencies for involvement in the later, more extreme stages of radicalisation, non-security government agencies in Australia need to play a more active role in *preventing* the use of violence by youth.

The radicalisation of teenagers is a growing and deeply concerning trend in Australia; in the period from 2014 to 2018—which saw ISIL rise and spread online propaganda—over 10% of domestic terrorism convictions were attributed to individuals aged 18 or younger.² According to ASIO, adolescents have exhibited an alarming willingness to occupy prominent positions in violent extremist groups, to radicalise other teens, and to plan and conduct attacks.³ The Director-General of ASIO noted:

Where once minors tended to be on the fringe of extremist groups, we are now seeing teenagers in leadership positions directing adults, and willing to undertake violent action themselves.⁴

According to ASIO's 2022 annual threat assessment, the percentage of minors involved in the agency's new CT investigations grew from around 2%–3% a few years ago to around 15% in 2021. By late 2021, minors, on average, had been represented in over half of ASIO's 10 highest priority CT investigations each week.⁵ ASIO also observed that the age of radicalised minors is decreasing, and that teenagers as young as 13 are embracing VE.⁶

Teen radicalisation isn't isolated to a single country or ideological cause; the trend unfolding in Australia is reflective of a much broader global phenomenon in which adolescents, a particularly vulnerable demographic, are subject to radicalisation by extremists across the spectrum, from religious ideologues to outrage-fuelled complainants. ISIL was particularly successful in its efforts to radicalise teenagers in Western countries, using messaging apps and social media. Many of those who were radicalised were prompted to carry out violent extremist attacks in their home countries and abroad. For example, in the period from September 2014 to December 2016, Australia was the target of 24% of teen/pre-teen violent extremist plots (or alleged plots) inspired or directed by IS within the West.⁷

Despite the observed growth in teenagers being radicalised over the past decade, it's a relatively unexplored subject in Australia and abroad.⁸ This chapter provides an overview of the issue and is offered as a practical resource for policymakers working within this space. Thus, this chapter:

- identifies the major teen-specific risk factors associated with the radicalisation process
- outlines the Australian Government's domestic work in PVE, which is necessarily not limited to security agencies but involves the whole of government and society
- provides recommendations for an improved national PVE policy in the future.

First, delineating 'VE' from 'radicalisation' and 'terrorism' is crucial before a discussion on adolescent radicalisation to VE can begin, due to important social, political and legal distinctions between the terms. This is particularly true in the Australian context, in which the term 'terrorism' carries significant legal imputations beyond associated social stigma and political implications (see box).⁹

Key distinctions: VE, terrorism, CVE and PVE

According to the Australian Government resource *Living safe together*, radicalisation is a process whereby a person's thinking and behaviour move from what's considered conventional in society to take on a more extreme or radical nature. Such extremism doesn't always culminate in physical violence. When radical beliefs promote terror or violence as a legitimate method of achieving ideological, political or social change, we move into the realm of VE.¹⁰

VE has no universally accepted definition. However, *Safeguarding our community together: Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy* (2022) defines VE as:

a willingness to use unlawful violence, or support the use of violence by others, to promote a political, ideological or religious goal. It includes terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence and some forms of communal violence, such as racially motivated violence.¹¹

Terrorism, on the other hand, is defined by the *Criminal Code Act 1995* as:

an act, or a threat to commit an act, that:

- causes death or serious harm, or endangers a person, causes serious damage to property, causes a serious risk to the health or safety of the public, or seriously interferes with critical infrastructure; and
- is done to advance a political, religious or ideological cause; and
- is done with the intention to coerce or influence by intimidation the government or public (including a section of the public) of any country or of a part of a country.¹²

CVE describes '[a]ctivities and associated processes that seek to divert individuals at risk of becoming violent extremists and ... that rehabilitate and/or reintegrate violent extremists'.¹³

PVE is often conflated with *CVE*, but *PVE* describes a more holistic, strategic agenda that moves beyond a securitisation lens. It incorporates developmental solutions to prevent *VE* by addressing the underlying drivers of radicalisation. 'This involves depriving [VE] of its breeding ground by enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to resist it'.¹⁴

Teen-specific drivers

There's no single reason why one might succumb to *VE*, but there are individual, group and environmental circumstances that converge to make one more susceptible.¹⁵ While sharing many of the risk factors associated with adult radicalisation, teenagers are also subject to specific age-related conditions and developmental characteristics that make them more vulnerable compared to the adult population. It should be noted, however, that the presence of risk factors doesn't necessarily mean that an individual will radicalise; individuals

possessing the same risk factors may react to *VE* content and/or recruitment strategies very differently. Therefore, those drivers shouldn't be used as guaranteed predictors of radicalisation; rather, they're presented as a means of informing possible targets for *PVE* policy intervention within this age group.

Developmental vulnerabilities

Not only do teenagers represent one of the demographics most at risk of radicalisation, but they're also particularly complex in terms of the developmental vulnerabilities that facilitate their progression towards *VE*.¹⁶

Normal adolescent developmental processes, such as cognitive and personality development, immaturity of judgement, limitations in critical and consequential thinking, ongoing formulation of a sense of self and identity, and susceptibility to the influence of peers or charismatic leaders, results in young people being more readily accepting of extremist groups' propaganda and narratives and vulnerable to radicalisation.¹⁷

Peer relationships, identity and social dislocation

Peer influences and online and offline personal relationships have a significant impact on the formation of an adolescent's belief system, so they play a key role in the radicalisation process.¹⁸ Notions of personal identity and the search for belonging within peer groups, communities and the wider society, while normal, also create important vulnerabilities to radicalisation.¹⁹ This is particularly true in the context of adolescents, among whom the ability to identify with a group is an important developmental milestone, making those who don't 'fit in' or who are marginalised or discriminated against particularly vulnerable.²⁰ For some, the struggle to fit in involves feeling disconnected from their family, who may originate from Australia or abroad. Involvement in an extremist group may provide 'outcast' youth with a sense of engagement and belonging in the absence of alternative options among their family, peers and the wider community.²¹

The *Mission Australia youth survey report* (2021) presented an alarming statistic concerning young Australians' sense of belonging: 24.9% of 15–19-year-olds reported feeling lonely all or most of the time in the four weeks before the survey.²² The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated this risk factor; feelings of social connectedness among Australians aged 13–17 years fell from 70% in April 2020 to 42% in July/August 2020.²³

Socio-economic standing and social status

Poor educational achievement, absence of meaningful employment, dependency on the social environment, and a perceived or real lack of opportunities for personal/professional development or improving one's position on the social ladder are all considered risk factors associated with radicalisation.²⁴ Worryingly, those risk factors appear to be prevalent among young Australians.

'Unemployment and limited job opportunities' and 'poor educational outcomes' were identified as major threats to the wellbeing and livelihoods of children and young people in Australia by 33% and 24% of Australian teenagers, respectively.²⁵ Corresponding to those issues were strong feelings of negativity regarding the future (16%) and teens experiencing barriers to achieving their study or work goals (46.6%). A very small minority of Australian teenagers reported having no confidence in being able to achieve their study or work goals (2.5%) and feeling that they had no choices available to them after secondary education (0.8%).²⁶ Moreover, the *Australian Youth Barometer* found that 2.6% of survey respondents (aged 14–24 years) reported feeling a strong lack of belonging to their educational organisations—a setting where crucial social relationships are formed.²⁷ While those percentages are relatively low, they still represent many thousands of Australian youth, resulting in the likelihood that some may head down a pathway to violence in the future.

While the *Australian Youth Barometer* survey postulates that the widespread online delivery of education during Australian Covid-19 lockdowns had no negative impact upon the quality of learning,²⁸ the *Mission Australia youth survey report* presented data to the contrary, stating that 62.3% of 15–19-year-olds felt that Covid-19 had had a negative impact upon their education and 24.3% upon their financial security.²⁹ We're yet to understand the longer term effects of Covid-19 on the futures of Australia's adolescents, but we should expect that disruptions to their education and long periods of unemployment will negatively affect their long-term employment and financial prospects, as well as their mental health and wellbeing.³⁰

Online activity

While exposure to extremist messaging online, alone, isn't enough to radicalise or push one towards VE, the internet and social media occupy a significant space in the lives of most teenagers in Australia and so, unsurprisingly, they play a key role in facilitating radicalisation and mobilisation to VE.³¹ According to the *Mission Australia youth survey report*, 35.7% of 15–19-year-old Australians spend nine hours or more on screens per day,³² increasing the likelihood that they'll be exposed to radical material online. Reducing time spent online isn't a viable solution; thus, the concern is about the quality of the content.

Social media act as platforms for the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, as well as extremist propaganda across the ideological spectrum. The proliferation of extremist propaganda online and the number of online platforms hosting extremist content has amplified the reach of VE messaging globally, aiding the process of self-actualised radicalisation. The internet is also a space where teens can encounter violent extremists who have employed sophisticated online recruitment campaigns that appeal to the teen-specific drivers of radicalisation and selectively present facts that reinforce and exploit those vulnerabilities.³³

Online exposure to radical material is particularly potent when it coincides with other, real-life, risk factors.³⁴

Political exclusion

Teenagers represent a cohort that's particularly underrepresented politically despite being contributing members of society and exposed to political messaging via social media. The lack of political representation among young Australians poses an issue because '[e]xtremism appeals less to citizens who can advocate for their interests and believe their appeals might be heeded.'³⁵ Political exclusion can fuel grievances, result in a perceived and real lack of voice in government decision-making, and in some cases may lead to an abandonment of democratic processes in favour of VE out of frustration.

According to the *UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador report*, 64% of Australians aged 13–17 years felt that they were rarely or never consulted or given any opportunity to participate in important government-related issues that affected them. A further 61% said the same regarding issues affecting them in their local communities. Despite the fact that young Australians indicated a keen interest in politics, the survey cohort demonstrated a level of frustration that 'their perspectives and insights were so often overlooked by decision-makers' due to their age.³⁶ Those statistics were supported by the *Mission Australia youth survey report*, which indicated that, although Australian teens demonstrated a strong civic awareness and concern about a range of issues, only 9.3% of the surveyed cohort of 15–19-year-olds participated in a political group/activity.³⁷ Of course, that doesn't necessarily translate into widespread dissatisfaction among Australia's adolescents; however, it's a potential contributing factor for those most at risk of radicalisation.

Solutions and Australia's PVE efforts

In failing to address the underlying factors that contribute to the radicalisation of teenagers, law enforcement is forever on the back foot, constrained to intervening only once an individual is considered a threat. PVE offers an opportunity to build social cohesion and engagement, offering an option for

intervention before one is even at risk of radicalising. While Australia has adopted several CVE programs over the years that incorporate elements of PVE in their objectives, no official PVE strategy addressing teen radicalisation exists. In the absence of such a strategy, we must look to alternative strategies and initiatives to judge Australia's efforts in this space and use our understanding of the drivers of teen radicalisation to identify legitimate targets for policy intervention.

Development and community resilience

Security responses are a vital component of CT but, alone, aren't sufficient to address the underlying conditions that breed VE and drive teenagers towards radicalisation.³⁸ Therefore, a developmental approach that bolsters community cohesion and resilience is critical to building an effective PVE strategy.³⁹ This appears to be well understood in Australia. As Australia's 2010 *Counter-Terrorism White Paper* suggests, the necessity for a developmentally focused PVE approach has been accepted for at least a decade:

By reducing disadvantage, addressing real or perceived grievances and encouraging full participation in Australia's social and economic life, government policies can help to mitigate any marginalisation and radicalisation that may otherwise occur within the Australian community.⁴⁰

Preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism 2022–26 (the title clearly showing that there's a difference between policy that prevents and policy that counters terrorism and VE) postulates that 'we must focus more effort on reducing the conditions that enable [VE] to flourish and thrive.'⁴¹

There's been a concerted effort in Australia to supplement law-enforcement, security and intelligence agencies' approaches with developmental interventions, much of it occurring at the state or territory level.⁴² We can look to NSW as a good example:

The NSW Countering Violent Extremism Program—was allocated \$47 million in 2015 for a range of CVE activities, including the COMPACT Program which aims to build community *resilience* by providing funding for engagement with young people on a local level through schools and community centres.⁴³

Examples of national efforts include the following:

- The CVE Centre was established in 2010 with the purpose of strengthening Australia's resilience to radicalisation by improving diversity and social participation, providing targeted work

with vulnerable communities, and addressing terrorist propaganda online, all of which are enacted by social policy agencies.⁴⁴

- The Building Community Resilience—Youth Mentoring Grants Program (a 2010 pilot grant project) was designed to support activities to help young people disengage from radical ideologies and encourage their positive engagement in the community.⁴⁵ A total of \$1.1 million was awarded to projects under the program.⁴⁶
- As a component of a larger \$630 million CT package announced under the Abbott government, \$13.4 million was directed towards community engagement programs that worked on preventing young Australians from becoming involved in VE.⁴⁷
- The Strong and Resilient Communities—Inclusive Communities Grants scheme is a \$63 million program to help support vulnerable people through community-driven solutions that build self-reliance and empowerment. Teenagers who are, or are at risk of becoming, disengaged, marginalised, or having a lack of engagement with education are one of the four target groups for this initiative.⁴⁸
- The Morrison government also invested \$11.1 million to support social cohesion programs such as the Together for Humanity program, which educates students, teachers and parents about diversity to establish better intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging among Australian youth.⁴⁹

Stakeholders, problem solvers

'[I]t is time to stop thinking of youth as a problem to be solved and start thinking of youth as the problem solvers!'⁵⁰

The safety of Australians is paramount, but the oversecritisation of at-risk teenagers poses the danger of further alienating an already vulnerable population, and also fails to consider them as an asset worth harnessing. This notion is widely supported in CT literature and strategies, including the UN's *Recommendations of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*.⁵¹

A more holistic, multidimensional approach to CT would engage with teenagers as key stakeholders, taking into consideration the value of their participation in policymaking as a preventive option, at both the individual and the societal levels.⁵² Importantly, such an approach recognises that we should be engaging with such vulnerable individuals and cohorts well before the threat reaches the security-agency phase. The aim should be to prevent radicalisation or to deradicalise before a security agency needs to intervene. This is both better policy and a wiser use of security agencies' resources.

Adolescents should be encouraged to engage in positive social and community activities, including active participation in democratic processes. The facilitation of teens' involvement in politics provides enfranchisement, offers an alternative, democratic outlet for them to address grievances that might otherwise be expressed through VE, enables them to actively consult on PVE policies that directly affect their generation, and works to counter feelings of political exclusion.⁵³

Examples of Australia's engagement in this area include the following:

- Multicultural NSW's *The Point Magazine* is a youth-focused, federal-government-funded magazine covering news and current affairs relating to VE and its local impacts in Australia. The intention of the publication is to provide opportunities for empowerment and engagement for local communities to raise and address issues relating to VE.⁵⁴
- In December 2020, the Morrison government announced the Youth Advocacy Support Grants Scheme, which delivered \$900,000 in funding to a variety of organisations working in youth advocacy, including the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.⁵⁵
- In 2021, after a Youth Taskforce consultation, the government launched Australia's Youth Policy Framework, which aims to improve political representation for young Australians. This includes supporting young people in practical ways that reflect their priorities and supporting them to be engaged and active citizens.⁵⁶
- The Australian Government has also taken steps to demonstrate that it 'is committed to ensuring young people develop the knowledge, skills and capabilities to be successful in education, work and life' through the establishment in May 2022 of the Office for Youth, which will listen to young people and their advocates, improve and harmonise policy across government, and develop a strategy to meaningfully engage with young people.⁵⁷

Education and media and information literacy

While the overwhelming majority of people in Australia reject [VE], they may not have the tools and information to challenge it.⁵⁸

Formal and informal educational initiatives are a useful resource for governments and worth harnessing. Not only do educators occupy a powerful role in building a sense of belonging in educational settings, but they offer the potential to teach teenagers core skills that will enable them to both better succeed in the future and to avoid susceptibility to radicalisation. Australia's efforts in this space haven't always been successful, as past interventions have lacked a comprehensive approach and have often been piecemeal and short term.⁵⁹

Australia's *Counter-Terrorism Strategy* (2022) outlines Australia's intention to extend the nation's strategic

communications to combat radical content online, to contest extremist narratives, and to counter extremism by strengthening digital literacy among young Australians.⁶⁰ *Preventing violent extremism and radicalisation in Australia* notes that 'Developing and promoting online critical thinking skills, especially among young users, can play a vital role in combating problematic online behaviour.'⁶¹

In both the presence and absence of censorship and content-control options, primary prevention programs that 'pre-bunk' (pre-emptively warn and expose individuals to weakened doses of misinformation) and educate the public in media and information literacy (MIL) offer an effective alternative. MIL presents a viable and long-term solution to reduce the appeal of VE by empowering citizens with critical thinking capabilities so they may better challenge concepts when engaging with extremist content online and offline. Examples of Australian education programs targeting VE include the following:

- The *Living Safer Together* website (which replaced the *Resilient Communities* website) provides information and resources to inform the public about radicalisation and VE, and how to identify and address radicalisation and VE when they're encountered.
- The ThinkUKnow program, which is led by the Australian Federal Police in partnership with state and territory police, Microsoft Australia, Datacom and the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, is an educational program for students, parents and teachers aimed at tackling online child exploitation.⁶² Operational agencies have indicated that a similar resource for combating online radicalisation is being developed.

Governing online spaces

Mainstream platforms are now grappling with their role in the creation of extremist online milieus and their contribution to the changing nature of extremism and its organisational structure.⁶³

Despite their efforts in stemming the flow and reach of violent extremist content online on their platforms, social media companies still face significant challenges in this space.⁶⁴ It's extremely difficult to determine an adequate level of intervention without overcensoring or indiscriminately blocking content, intruding on individuals' privacy, or infringing on personal freedoms, including freedom of expression, freedom of information and freedom of association.⁶⁵

Government initiatives in this space have included the following:

- The Combating Terrorist Propaganda in Australia initiative was announced in 2015 alongside an \$18 million investment to combat online terrorist propaganda. The initiative included the establishment of social media monitoring and analysis to better understand how online extremist narratives were affecting Australians.⁶⁶

- The e-Safety Commissioner (which was established in 2015 as an independent regulator and educator for online safety) also facilitates consultation with young people via its Safety by Design project.⁶⁷
- In 2015, the Turnbull government announced a \$5 million investment in PVE. Some \$4 million of that investment was allocated to the NSW Government's Step Together helpline, which is an online early-intervention resource and prevention-focused alternative to the National Security Hotline. The other \$1 million in funding was allotted to the e-Safety Commissioner to prevent the radicalisation of young Australians.⁶⁸
- The Taskforce to Combat Terrorist and Extreme Violent Material Online was established after the Christchurch mosque attack (see box). Its purpose was to provide the government with advice on effective measures to combat the proliferation of VE content online.⁶⁹
- The *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth).⁷⁰

The Christchurch Call

The Christchurch Call, established in the aftermath of the Christchurch mosque attack, is an example of a collaborative approach to tackling VE and terrorist content online.⁷¹ It operates via a system of voluntary commitments aimed at preventing the abuse of online spaces while promoting a free, open and secure internet by:

- building a global multistakeholder 'Call Community' that currently comprises more than 120 governments, civil society organisations and online service providers, including social media companies
- implementing policies and incident protocols to combat VE and terrorist content online, including live-streamed content
- supporting the establishment of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which is an NGO focused on multisectoral collaboration and information sharing to counter VE and terrorist activity online.

Future initiatives for the Christchurch Call include:

- expanding the Call Community to include more online service providers
- enhancing understanding regarding algorithmic systems and how they might be exploited for VE and terrorism

- ensuring that the forum is equipped to deal with emerging technologies that may pose new security challenges
- engaging with children and young people to ensure that their voices are reflected in the Christchurch Call's work.⁷²

Recommendations

The teen-specific drivers outlined in this chapter provide a comprehensive guide to the areas needing focus to effectively limit the potential for VE among Australia's adolescents. Yet, those drivers also highlight gaps in Australia's current PVE programs, including the need for greater upstream focus on, for example, teenagers' wellbeing, employment skills, job opportunities and engagement in political discourse. These whole-of-nation challenges require whole-of-nation responses and go beyond the remit of security agencies and policing.

While targeted CVE programs are important, they need to be informed by a comprehensive national youth strategy that's currently absent in Australia's policy framework. This should involve security agencies being consulted, but not leading. Improvements to existing programs are needed and possible.

In developing a more comprehensive PVE strategy for Australia, the following factors need to be considered:

- Governments, communities and the private sector should formally recognise that security agencies are a last resort and not the first cog in this wheel.
- PVE should be aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and address areas including social equality, poverty, economic growth, providing meaningful and decent employment opportunities, and improving education outcomes and equity for young Australians.
- The first overarching principle of DFAT's development approach to CT is that any engagement should do no harm.⁷³ This basic principle should be incorporated into Australia's domestic PVE efforts and should prompt a more sensitive and selective approach to engagement with Australia's teenagers.
- Future PVE programs need to incorporate a teen-specific tailored approach that achieves more sensitive and targeted intervention to address the risk factors, including teen-specific developmental factors associated with their radicalisation.

- Teenagers need to be considered as key stakeholders and active participants in the decision-making process regarding PVE policies that directly affect them. The Australian Government should actively promote the civic engagement of young Australians and instigate forums where teenagers can engage in an open dialogue to air grievances and formally contribute to VE problem solving and policymaking. The UN's Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme is a leading example of such initiatives.
- Educational interventions need to be long term, scalable and flexible enough to be able to target local vulnerabilities. They should move beyond merely spreading counter/alternative narratives and should build teens' capacity to challenge extremist narratives on their own using MIL skills. MIL training would enable teenagers to analyse the validity of sources and the information being presented to them so that they can better recognise misinformation, disinformation and radical propaganda when they encounter it. Educational interventions should also be underpinned by teaching the values of peace, tolerance and respect for human dignity and diversity, and should encourage intercultural and interreligious dialogue.
- Partnerships between governments, communities, social media companies and other private enterprises may help to develop innovative responses to teen radicalisation, to build an internet that promotes democratic values, and to aid national communication strategies that target and challenge VE content online. Big tech – academic partnerships could also help fill gaps in the literature examining the role that social media play in the radicalisation of teenagers in Australia.
- The government should establish a coordination mechanism to identify youth who are heading down a violent and/or terrorist path (not just radicalising) in order to ensure that security agencies are advised in a timely manner.

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Precrime policing and the extremism versus violent extremism conundrum: an examination of policing's most significant strategic counterterrorism challenges

Dr John Coyne

Introduction

In 2011, Ahamed Aathil Mohamed Samsudeen, a Sri Lankan born member of the Tamil minority community, arrived in New Zealand (NZ) on a student visa.¹ He later applied for refugee status in NZ on the grounds that Sri Lankan authorities had persecuted him and his father.²

By 2016, Samsudeen's support of Islamic State (IS) had resulted in him becoming a person of national security interest in NZ. He was known to multiple NZ agencies and on a terror watchlist. In 2020, NZ prosecutors accused him of plotting a 'lone wolf' terror attack using knives. At the time, the judge ruled that planning a terror attack wasn't in itself an offence under existing NZ laws. Samsudeen was subsequently convicted and sentenced to one year of supervision for the lesser offence of possessing IS propaganda.³

In September 2021, Samsudeen was under 24/7 monitoring and surveillance due to growing concerns about his ideology.⁴ He had become a top target on NZ's terror watchlist. That month, while being surveilled by police, he walked into an Auckland supermarket and proceeded to stab six members of the public in a frenzied attack.⁵ Within 60 seconds of the attack, NZ police officers entered the supermarket and shot Samsudeen dead.

This single case study illustrates three of policing's most significant strategic CT challenges:

- First, as CT intelligence and surveillance capabilities continue to mature, especially in Western liberal democracies, police must focus their efforts on identifying potential terrorists, often well before they're planning attacks.
- Second, legislative changes are increasingly pushing police to enforce laws that focus on extremism, not necessarily violent extremism.
- Third, the cost and complexity of monitoring priority CT targets increases as the number of potential terrorist offenders grows across the spectrum.

It is, of course, easy to view these issues through an operational lens as matters of resources or legislation. However, to do so doesn't engage with the strategic complexity of their drivers. In this chapter, I seek to examine each of those strategic challenges and provide applied policy recommendations for governments to respond to them proactively.

The precrime challenge

Twenty years after 9/11, police, often in partnership with intelligence agencies and international partners, have become adept at disrupting terror plots. There can be little doubt that both CT legislation and intelligence gathering have matured despite the arrival of new terrorism motivations. In no small part, the zero tolerance for police and intelligence failure among the general public and governments has underpinned that maturation.

The combined impact of the increasing frequency of cases of online radicalisation and the use of lone-actor tactics often results in rapid changes in the threat of violence posed by a radicalised individual. Lone-actor attack tactics require far less capability than highly coordinated cell-based attacks. Furthermore, lone actors seem less reliant on identifying an apparent security vulnerability to exploit in order to conduct an attack. The often shortened journey to radicalisation experienced by some can result in rapid changes in an individual's intent to undertake an act of violence. Even the most mature intelligence systems are often unable to identify such changes in such short periods, especially when they often don't result in any visible change in the external behaviour of targets.

The collective impact of these factors forces many law enforcement agencies to consider monitoring a more significant number of targets who hold extremist ideals but aren't necessarily showing intent to undertake violent acts. The police and intelligence agencies have found themselves responsible for a careful risk-managed balancing act. Police try to collect sufficient evidence that an offender is planning an attack while also reducing the likelihood of a successful attack. Samsudeen's case illustrates how risky this approach can be.

Legislators, not just in NZ, have moved to criminalise the act of preparing to undertake violent attacks or materially support violent extremism to address some of this challenge. However, such legislation isn't without risk. While, in many cases, far right and Islamist beliefs (as examples) are indeed offensive to many, without the violent component, they don't necessarily translate to the holders of those beliefs being involved in terrorism or being a direct threat to domestic or national security. In the Australian case, the increase in referrals of right-wing extremism cases to the AFP and ASIO have increased the caseload of those agencies. However, most of the CT target workload of the agencies remains Islamist-inspired individuals.

Government policies' increasingly focusing police and intelligence efforts on earlier and earlier disruption could well be counterproductive to overall CT policy. Early disruption of extremists is increasingly muddying the distinction between extremism and violent extremism. While there's a clear link between those phenomena, not all extremists become terrorists, and law enforcement should arguably focus on countering terrorism, not extremist thinking. Governments' use of police to counter extremist narratives and ideologies could in itself be used by extremist propagandists who present those efforts as examples of harassment. Policing extremist belief systems also runs the risk of effectively positioning intelligence, police agencies and courts as quasi-thought-censors.

The big policy question here is whether the early disruption of potential radicalisation ought not to be a policing responsibility. Instead, police should be left to disrupt planned or potential threats, while intelligence agencies should be referring intelligence on at-risk

individuals to some new form of non-security entity for management, where they don't meet an agreed violent threat threshold.

The challenge of CT target list management

The media have long used official CT target list numbers to quantify terrorist threats, especially in Australia. In some cases, mainstream media's presentation of target lists as evidence of CT success, community safety, or both, is resulting in the inaccurate conceptualisation of the terrorist threat by the general public. In contrast, many governments have used such lists for a variety of purposes. For police and intelligence agencies, the lists are a critical tool in prioritising resource allocation, based on risk, targets for investigation, disruption and management. They've also provided the agencies with a tangible way of communicating to government the workload involved in managing the lists. Finally, maintaining such lists provides government, police and intelligence with a tangible artefact to promote public confidence in the management of the terror threat.

Because of the limited success of CVE programs and the substantial threat to lives from terrorism, targets are rarely removed from national terror watchlists. Therefore, police and intelligence agencies manage targets in perpetuity.

Managing the targets is challenging. Generally, the physical surveillance of a single target for 24 hours takes three teams of four personnel each, so the management of a target list with 200 names for a single day takes at least 2,400 people. Of course, authorities also use electronic surveillance devices to monitor targets. However, those devices also rely upon human management and result in a delayed response should a human intervention of a target be required. In 2019–20, ASIO had just 1,980⁶ ongoing employees and the AFP 6,695.⁷

Of course, this is a rudimentary examination, but the numbers still speak to the immense challenge of managing a continuously growing target list. Surveillance in this context isn't simply an operational resource issue but a long-term policy challenge. The Samsudeen attack illustrates how things can still 'go wrong' when a target is under intense surveillance. Arguably, without allocating additional resourcing to police, governments should avoid the temptation of further criminalising extremism, versus a justified focus on violent extremism.

To manage national CT target lists, further thought needs to be given to moving the responsibility for post-sentence management of convicted terrorists. The answer here isn't just about longer, or indeed indefinite, sentences for convicted terrorists. There's a balance to be achieved between the rights of the individual and the broader community. There also seems to be little chance of managing a national target list when convicted terrorists' names are added again at the conclusion of their custodial sentences.

Careful consideration must also be given to ensuring the public's continued trust in judicial systems. There's certainly room for a more nuanced public discourse on the expectations for Australia's police in preventing attacks. This discourse doesn't need to detract from promoting the overall successes of police and intelligence agencies in disrupting terror plots, but it needs to acknowledge that the current model of increasing targets, followed by increased funding and expansion of legislated powers, isn't sustainable and has unintended consequences, such as pushing extremists to become violent.

The dilemma about powers

The complex challenge of lone-actor terror threats, a much more diverse threat, and a focus on disrupting plots well before planning has commenced makes collecting information in an evidentiary form to prosecute in courts increasingly difficult. To date, the response in many jurisdictions has been the introduction of new legislation, but it seems there are limits. For example, the simplest way of making an airport safe from terrorism is to keep all people and cargo away and ground all flights. That approach is unacceptable, but everything short of it involves a compromise. Arguably, legislators could eventually reach a point at which new legislative approaches aren't viable for a larger percentage of people.

A binary ideological argument between the need for safety and civil rights mires much public discourse on police powers. On one side, there's an argument about the individual's right to safety and the government's responsibility to provide such security. On the other, it's argued, is the right to privacy. This debate, while robust, hasn't led to more than cursory consideration of when the introduction of new powers unintentionally negatively affects community safety and security. Policy decisions underpinned by the fear of terrorism often divide communities.

The global responses to Covid-19 have done little to dampen concerns here. The adoption of extraordinary police powers in many jurisdictions had unprecedented impacts on individuals' rights, albeit for good reasons. In some jurisdictions, this has illustrated how such approaches can have unintended impacts on public trust in government institutions and arguably at times undermine the rule of law.

The extremism versus violent extremism conundrum

Today's terror threat demonstrates a clear pattern of dispersal and diffusion of actors and groups beyond the more straightforward categories of the past 20 years. Moreover, old focuses remain relevant, albeit changed. At the same time, there's a greater call for police to focus not just on violent extremism but on extremism per se. However, as I've contended in this chapter, that might well be a mistake. Extremism remains a broader challenge for cohesive societies. The securitisation of this problem, either by police or by intelligence agencies, would be viewed by many as an overreach. Similarly, legislation against some causes could well serve only to make them more attractive or, even worse, provide the kind of evidence used by extremists to legitimise violence.

Most members of Western liberal democracies find the belief systems of *Salafi*-jihadists and right-wing extremists to be vile and baseless. In stark contrast, many believe that the belief system that underpins radical environmental groups is attractive and based on science. For starters, climate change is genuine.

Everyday Australians seem to agree that governments must act to limit further climate change, and tentative efforts by authorities in both Australia and the UK to frame climate action groups as extremists have failed miserably.

Political debates on terrorism and extremism that draw comparisons between violent right-wing extremism and *Salafi*-jihadism are empirically valid: they share sociological radicalisation mechanisms common to extremist movements with universalising aims, are characterised by a transnationally networked orientation, and have anti-Zionism and anti-liberalism as overlapping ideological features.

However, those qualitative similarities shouldn't be translated into political logics of equivalence.

It's clear that asserting some ideological or moral connection between, say, IS, Aryan Strikeforce and Extinction Rebellion is ludicrous. The seemingly logical argument that 'they're just as bad' in terms of ideological fanaticism doesn't add up. Not only does it fail to resonate with what's now a widely accepted

social and political movement, and is factually incorrect, but the implications of establishing moral equivalence could be detrimental to democracy and liberal integrity.

Terrorism in Australian federal law is defined as an act or threat undertaken to coerce or influence the public or any government by intimidation to advance a political, religious or ideological cause.

Conduct falls under this definition if it causes death or serious harm to or endangers a person; causes serious property damage; poses a serious risk to the health or safety of the public; or seriously interferes with, disrupts or destroys critical infrastructure, such as a telecommunications or electricity network.

Protests are exempt from this definition if they aren't intended to cause death, endanger a person's life, or create a serious risk to public health or safety.

In October 2019, more than 300 climate activists clashed with Victorian police at a mining conference. Several officers were injured, and more than 50 protesters were arrested. As one protester said, 'We will be here all day, and we are willing to fight for what we believe in.' The violent protests did appear to be acts of intimidation focused on forcing the government to change its course.

In March 2021, a group of climate protesters posed as dead bodies on a Melbourne CBD intersection. As one protester said, 'Until people listen, I am afraid we will have to keep doing this.' Another said that they wanted to 'force action'. While the ends might be noble, it does appear that the means used focused on coercing the Australian Government to advance an ideological cause.

In April, seven climate activists used hammers and chisels to break windows at Barclays' London headquarters. They said they were protesting the bank's 'continued investments in activities that directly contribute to the climate and ecological emergency'. Again, it could be argued that the protesters were trying to influence the bank's decision-making through this act and the possibility of similar acts in the future.

On 4 August 2021, approximately 50 climate protesters blocked one of Canberra's major thoroughfares during peak hour at 5 pm. The aim of this action was clearly to influence the Australian Government. Arguably, the activity disrupted Canberra's transport infrastructure, although there's no evidence of any intent to cause harm.

On 10 August, protesters in Canberra targeted Parliament House and then Prime Minister Scott Morrison's parliamentary home in Canberra with red spray paint and flares. Others set fire to a pram outside the parliament. One protester said, 'When our government takes no action, it is up to people like us to call this to the attention of everyone. Time is running out.' It seems clear that such activists will continue to undertake this type of action if the Australian Government doesn't change direction.

Of course, those examples fall well short of the legal definition of terrorist acts. Nevertheless, they do reveal a few potential problems if police and intelligence agencies are going to start playing in the extremism versus violent extremism space. First, a growing number of Australians are dissatisfied with the nation's progress on addressing climate change. Second, they feel that traditional ways of engaging with political processes, including elections, aren't having the impacts that they desire. Third, it seems that, in Australian society, the use of more radical steps, although well short of terrorism, to force social and political change is being normalised.

While a revolutionary change in the Australian political landscape addressing climate change is theoretically possible, it hardly seems likely in the foreseeable future. In the interim, any use of narratives that paint climate activists as extremists is likely to fail. Any government counternarratives arguing that the interpretation of the ideology or the cause is wrong are factually incorrect.

Governments can ill afford to ignore these developments or approach them in a heavy-handed manner. It's time for genuine public discourse on this issue before the situation deteriorates and further affects social cohesion.

There can be no doubt that police, intelligence and security agencies have a role in identifying extremist issues. However, the policy levers for dealing with and managing this social cohesion risk lie with a broader whole-of-government effort. The free flow of intelligence to and from police to that effort will remain critical.

What ought one to do?

While law enforcement's role in CT varies significantly between jurisdictions, the September 2021 attack in NZ gives rise to several observations in regard to emerging challenges and their policy implications.

Observations

- Even close surveillance doesn't mitigate the potential for a terror target to undertake either a planned or an unplanned attack.
- Law enforcement is increasingly disrupting potential terror plots earlier and earlier in their development. Therefore, collecting information in an evidentiary form to prove an individual's (or individuals') intent beyond a reasonable doubt is getting harder.

- There's increasing greying of the line in policy circles between law enforcement's role in policing violent extremism and dealing with extremist belief systems.
- National target lists continue to grow, often accelerated with a broader range of terror threats. Current models of increasing resources and legislation might no longer be as effective in dealing with this challenge.

Policy implications

There are no easy operational, strategic or policy answers to law enforcement's current and emerging CT challenges.

- The reality of the challenge of CT target management must shape public expectations of safety. This kind of understanding must be a by-product of enhanced and more sophisticated public policy discourse. A public-facing statement on the size and operation of Australia's current CT watchlist would be a good start. Of course, it would have to carefully consider operational security.
- Perhaps the more important requirement is for the role of policing in CT to be more clearly defined. There's been a habit in several jurisdictions, including Australia and the UK, for scope creeps in law enforcement agencies' CT roles. In part, this has been because police presented as the readiest capability for governments. And operational necessity has demanded closer relationships between police and intelligence and security agencies. However, there ought to be greater consideration given to not just what 'could' law enforcement do in the CT space to include what they should do. At the very least, any attempt to expand policing's focus to the management of extremism instead of violent extremism ought to be carefully nuanced. Effective, efficient, transparent and just policing is critical to social cohesion and domestic security. However, that isn't by itself justification for police involvement in social cohesion and countering extremism.

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The case for banning Nazi symbols

Kristy Milligan

Introduction

Australia is facing increased far-right extremist activity, bolstered by transnational influences and increased social activism in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess indicated in 2020 that investigations into this type of ideological extremism now account for 40% of the onshore priority CT caseload.¹ In 2021, in response to increasing instances of far-right extremism, the Victorian Government, closely followed by the NSW Government, proposed laws banning the public display of the Nazi symbol commonly referred to as the 'Nazi swastika'.² From here, where appropriate, this symbol will be referred to as the Hakenkreuz.

The proposed legislation would have two purposes. Beyond its functional role as a tool for law-enforcement agencies, it would serve a wider declaratory purpose: officially banning symbols representing a declared commitment to hate and violence and signalling a red line for those in society who value them.

Runes and symbols such as the swastika have been associated with Nordic, Germanic and other Indo-European cultures for centuries before their appropriation by Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party (Figure 6). The proposed legislation does not prohibit the display of the swastika in such religious and cultural contexts.

The Hakenkreuz and other Nazi propaganda insignias have been banned in 12 countries, including Germany, France, Austria, Russia, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and Ukraine.³

This chapter examines the benefits of criminalising Nazi and far-right extremist symbols in Australia from the perspective of law enforcement, based on a case

study of the National Socialist Network (NSN) and the limitations currently faced by law enforcement. I argue that the criminalisation of such extremist symbols would be a vital tool for Australian law enforcement, which would be equipped with the appropriate powers to prosecute and prevent violence and threats to democracy associated with these ideologies.

An important consideration when examining the benefits or shortfalls of enacting legislation is the overarching normative purpose of the law as well as the functional aspect of its application by law-enforcement or other relevant agencies. An examination of the most current Australian extremist incidents highlights a lack of clarity about specific roles within 'law enforcement' as a broader entity, as distinct from frontline police, who are expected to be 'jacks of all trades'. Within the law-enforcement community, most focus is given to the specialist units that go on to lead intensive investigations into the activities of these extremist actors, their associates and their wider networks.

Neo-Nazism in Australia and the legislative gap

The activities of the NSN in the Grampians National Park in January 2021 resulted in renewed calls for the criminalisation of the display of Nazi symbols after police deemed that no offences had been committed. This was despite the Halls Gap community and visitors to the national park witnessing a group of approximately 20 members marching through the town, harassing the community. Witnesses reported hearing the neo-Nazi chanting 'White power' and 'Heil Hitler' as they performed the Hitler salute.⁴ Images were released showing balaclava-clad males;

Figure 6: Before Nazi appropriation, the swastika was widely adopted in the West as a symbol of luck and fortune



Source: 'Why did Hitler choose the swastika, and how did a Sanskrit symbol become a Nazi emblem?', *History Extra*, BBC, June 2020, [online](https://www.bbc.com/history/extra/article/2020/06/why-hitler-swastika).

some were bare chested, while others wore black uniforms depicting the 'White Pride' symbol as they posed in front of a burning cross against the scenic backdrop of the Grampians.⁵

The NSN's actions in the Grampians weren't deemed illegal. The reason was a lack of legislation criminalising the display of the Hakenkreuz, the Hitler salute and 'white pride' symbols, or the chanting of Nazi slogans. Victoria Police concluded that no criminal offences had been committed; yet, despite no visible action being taken at the scene, the NSN's activities would have undeniably been investigated closely by CT units. Police attending the scene in Halls Gap could have used Victoria's *Summary Offences Act 1966*, section 17 of which specifies 'offensive' acts as being obscene, threatening, insulting, abusive words and/or behaviours committed in a public place. While the attending police could have used the Summary Offences Act, that Act is at the lowest end of the spectrum of legal options, making the actions essentially mere 'street' offences. This is similar to NSW's *Summary Offences Act 1988*, which allows police to issue \$500 on-the-spot fines for offensive conduct/language.⁶

On the opposing end of legislative options, Australian anti-terror laws under section 80 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* make it illegal to intentionally incite or urge individuals or groups to use force or violence.⁷ The application of this offence would need to meet a greater threshold of criminality, and would need proof of direct incitement of activities regarded as terrorism. This disconnect between street-level offences and anti-terror laws demonstrates the legislative gap associated with Nazi and extremist symbols that should be rejected across all levels of a liberal democratic society. Victorian Senator Lidia Thorpe said in the Australian Parliament:

The far-right are a threat to everybody in the country. They represent hate. They represent violence. And they don't want to unite this country. They're not part of this country's identity and nor should they be.⁸

The need for more suitable powers to be made available to law enforcement is evidenced not only by the Grampians incident. There were 31 instances of the Nazi flag being displayed in NSW between 2018 and 2020 (23 of them in 2019), but no police charges resulted.⁹

Nine incidents involving Hakenkreuz or the display of the Nazi flag were identified in 2021, plus an additional two involving NSN members wearing the 'White Pride' logo and graffiti displaying 'HITLER' spanning a large area of a carpark wall.¹⁰ Three occurred in January 2022 alone. The incidents between January 2021 and January 2022 included but weren't limited to

symbols painted on an MP's office and a police station and featured on a face mask at a civil protest, on the forehead of a pedestrian, and on merchandise and memorabilia.

The criminalisation of the Nazi flag and symbols is critical to empower law-enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute individuals flying Nazi flags or symbols displayed in public places, to seize those items and to limit the production, importation and dissemination of Nazi paraphernalia. The ban would also prevent tattoo artists from legally using designs incorporating the Hakenkreuz and other symbols encompassed within specific state legislation. Similarly, curtailing the sale of Nazi antiques and merchandise would further address specific incidents recorded in Australia during the past five years.

Figure 7: A billboard by a Melbourne theatre company, promoting a play about Holocaust victim Anne Frank, was defaced with a Hakenkreuz in 2019



Note: According to *SBS News*, theatre company Peridot said it received support from the local community after posting about the incident, with the performance subsequently selling out: 'The despicable vandalism just underlines the fact that stories such as Anne Frank's still need telling.'

Source: A Dinham and E Young, 'Billboard promoting Anne Frank play defaced with swastika in Melbourne', *SBS News*, 12 August 2019, [online](#).

Intelligence collection in the online environment is another critical aspect of law enforcement to reduce the phenomenon of Nazi symbols, insignias and slogans being used in satirical discourse or as benign humorous memes. The online presence of individuals with extremist ideologies and their use of extremist symbols are critical in the indoctrination and recruitment of far-right extremists and the expansion of their movement.¹¹

The strategic display and use of symbols have been key tools of almost every terrorist, extremist or revolutionary group throughout the ages. The symbols perform multiple roles, such as projecting power through visual dominance, instilling fear in victim groups and creating an

‘in-group’ identity for members and potential recruits. Another use of a symbol as a powerful propaganda tool was demonstrated when the Islamic State flag was displayed in NSW on 305 occasions between 2015 and 2021.¹² Calls for police to have the power to arrest and detain people carrying those flags were previously made by the NSW shadow minister for police and counterterrorism,¹³ indicating that this is an ongoing limitation faced by police.

The actions of the NSN in the Grampians exemplify the instrumental use and impact of visual symbols of propaganda in the age of social media. While the proscription of terror groups has been described by ASIO’s Mike Burgess as a useful tool, he also highlighted limitations in relation to groups such as the NSN.¹⁴ Unlike the UK’s Sonnenkrieg Division and The Base, which were the first far-right groups to be proscribed as terrorist organisations by Australia in 2021, the NSN isn’t an official branch of a transnational organisation. As a locally grown and organised group, it’s said to have better legal understanding and capability to re-form or establish splinter groups in order to bypass the criminal ramifications of proscription.¹⁵

The Base, the logo of which contains three *Wolfs Haken* or *Wolfsangel* runes, draws attention to the contemporary use of Nazi insignias.¹⁶ The Sonnenkrieg Division (the UK division of the US’s Atomwaffen Division) also has significant propaganda material encompassing various appropriated Nazi symbols, including the *Sonnenrad* and the *Hakenkreuz*. The Base, which has a network of advocates and an expansive online presence transnationally, has been implicated in acts of violence. US members of The Base have been charged with firearms offences, conspiracy to threaten and intimidate minority groups, and planning an attack on a gun rally.¹⁷ FBI investigations revealed plans for mass-murder attacks in 2019 designed to ignite a racial war and the creation of a white ethno-state.¹⁸

The NSN’s propaganda also draws on Nazi symbols, slogans and gestures through its own web page outlining the group’s ideology and organisational goals, alongside a heavy online presence on the encrypted channels Telegram and Element.¹⁹ Yet, unlike violence by more established militant groups such as The Base, the NSN’s violence has so far manifested only in relatively minor attacks against individuals, including a deliberate act of self-promotion recording an attack on a security guard by the NSN’s then leader. Nevertheless, its online activity among the wider transnational far-right extremist community resonates among like-minded individuals via codes and digital imagery appealing to their ideological beliefs. The role of digital transnational networks in aiding the spread of ideology across geographical and organisational boundaries hence requires the continued evaluation of legislative tools.

Criminalising Nazi symbols: the German example²⁰

Writing in *Foreign Policy*, Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian reviewed international attempts to ban Nazi symbols:

A number of countries outlawed Nazi symbols right after World War II—Germany, Austria, Italy, and many Eastern European countries ... A wide number of other countries have provisions against Holocaust denial, and even more have provisions against incitement to racial hatred.

Germany has a much more active stance in combating extremism than the United States. The country ‘empowers itself to take steps to limit speech and groups that are seen to be a threat to democracy, even if more of a potential threat than an immediate threat.’ The prohibition applies not just to Nazi symbols but also to ‘symbols of all parties and groups deemed a threat to the constitution,’ according to Thomas Greven, a professor of political science at Freie Universität Berlin, including the German Communist Party and the Islamic State.²¹

It’s useful to look to other nations’ legislation for examples that can be adapted to local circumstances. Given the history of far-right movements across Europe, examples can be found in the legislation of many European nations, such as the UK.²² The experiences of Germany regarding the banning of specific far-right/Nazi symbols is especially instructive due to Germany’s longstanding engagement in necessary legal, societal and political debates in this area.

The end of World War II in 1945 led to Allied forces banning the *Hakenkreuz*, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and the Nazi Party in Germany.²³ This ‘denazification’ of Nazi symbols in Germany was codified through the 1949 German Constitution, which included the criminalisation not only of Nazi material but also the associated incitement of hatred (*Volksverhetzung*).²⁴

Regardless of the particularity of Germany’s trajectory, Australia should carefully consider the nuances that were developed over time in Germany’s legislative approach. The increased visibility of far-right activity in Germany from the 1990s drew policymakers’ attention to the particular need for laws banning political parties on grounds of unconstitutional activity based on the revival or invocation of national socialist aims, symbols recognisable as being associated with national socialism or any association therewith.²⁵ Importantly, the ban on symbols aims to avert what’s described as ‘social habituation’, meaning an overall desensitisation of society to the hatred represented by Nazi symbols and their inherent potential for incitement.²⁶

Sections 86 and 86a of Germany's Criminal Code (*Strafgesetzbuch*) outline the banned symbols, signs and propaganda material associated with former Nazi organisations.²⁷ The scope of the German legislation prohibiting Nazi insignias excludes material that falls under a so-called 'social adequacy clause'.²⁸ This refers to the use of insignias without any intent to express or promote extremist ideologies, meaning that German law allows the depiction of such symbols for the purpose of 'art or science, research or teaching'—such as, for example, in artworks, in films, books, historical documentary material about the Nazi era, in stamp collections or for satire (figures 3 and 4).

Figure 8: The Quentin Tarantino film *Inglourious Basterds* was exempt from Germany's ban on displaying the Hakenkreuz



Source: 'Germany's confusing rules on swastikas and Nazi symbols', *Deutsche Welle*, 14 August 2018, [online](#).

Figure 9: In the German version of *Wolfenstein II: the new colossus*, Hitler was depicted with his moustache removed, and the Hakenkreuz was replaced by another symbol in the Nazi flag.



Source: 'Wolfenstein: Youngblood—Nazi images shown in first for Germany', *BBC News*, 27 June 2019, [online](#).

Despite efforts to address specific 'reasonable exclusions' within the social adequacy clause, there's debate about whether the contextual or reasonable application of these laws was successful.²⁹ For example, computer games were a grey area. The 'Wolfenstein debate'—about a series of computer games originating in the early 1980s in which players battle against Nazi forces in an alternative universe—illustrates this.

It was argued that—despite the objective of the Wolfenstein game being the destruction of Nazi strongholds—the visual dominance of Nazi symbols in the game could serve the unintended ends of normalising, if not glorifying, Nazism. In 2018, the German Entertainment Software Self-Regulation Body (*Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle*, USK) adapted its stance on the interpretation of the law and declared that certain video games that 'critically look at current affairs' could fall under section 86a's exception for artistic, educational and journalistic works—with 'decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis'.³⁰ The USK further added that especially a game clearly opposed to national socialist ideals—in which Nazi soldiers are to be killed by the player to rid the world of evil—could qualify.³¹

Similarly, a small company producing anti-fascist merchandise with designs depicting a crossed-out Hakenkreuz enclosed in a circle, or boots smashing Hakenkreuz, was fined by a district court, which deemed the company to be distributing material containing Nazi symbols, despite the images clearly condemning the symbols (Figure 10).

The lower court in the southern German city of Stuttgart fined the mail-order retailer €3,600 for 'selling unconstitutional symbols', finding that their circulation would contribute to their normalisation under the 'social habituation clause'.³² The decision was strongly criticised, including by state lawmakers who argued that the vendor's merchandise should be seen as 'a useful support to the democratic ethos'.

Figure 10: The crossed-out Hakenkreuz is a popular symbol among 'antifa' (anti-Nazi) activists in Germany and across Europe



Source: 'German goes to trial for selling anti-Nazi symbols', *Deutsche Welle*, 27 September 2006, [online](#).

In 2007, the German Federal Court of Justice overturned the district court's ruling with the argument that images with a clear anti-Nazi message wouldn't constitute a criminal offence under Germany's 'swastika legislation':

[T]he Court is convinced of the fact that members of extreme-right organisations would never make use of items that make a mockery of their 'holy' symbols ... however for the symbols to be legal, the anti-Nazi meaning has to be immediately apparent.

The legal precedent was a 1973 Federal Court ruling that set out that it was legal to produce swastikas for the purposes of protesting against Nazism, provided they were sufficiently altered.³³ The Federal Court of Justice hence found that the young entrepreneur, who had declared left-wing sympathies and visible left-wing company branding, had committed no crime in selling the items because they 'clearly and unambiguously' carried an anti-Nazi message. The then German Justice Minister added that it was necessary to recognise 'satirical, artistic' uses of such symbols as a means of democratic protest and highlighted the importance of understanding the context for the application of the law to curb the influence of anti-democratic, unconstitutional organisations.³⁴

These examples demonstrate the need for discretion and a flexible approach while handling such matters. The purpose of discretion is the application of penalties in line with the intent or purpose of the particular law.

One example of the possible complexities is the sale of historic Nazi memorabilia in a public forum—which has the potential for items to be sold to individuals with extremist beliefs. At the same time, such memorabilia may have significant importance as family heirlooms, in a context that involves no intention of promoting extremist activities. The discretion applied to these issues relies upon the intent of the possession or display of the symbols, and the context in which the items have been identified.³⁵

Another example demonstrating the importance of discretion and the correct application of the intent of the law is in the case of individuals with right-wing extremist symbols tattooed on their bodies, especially in the case of more ambiguous pagan symbols or runes with other historical meanings.

One view is that tattoos are permanent images from one particular point in time that couldn't necessarily have been foreseen as becoming illegal in the future. The person with the tattoo may or may not have held or continue to hold extremist beliefs, but the context in which the symbols are displayed will be critical to both the perception of police and the necessity of such laws. The legislative power to prevent tattoo artists from continuing to tattoo images containing these symbols is important here. With a need for discretion in mind, should legislators or police be empowered to have symbols such as tattoos removed from an individual's body? The deliberate display of such symbols on a person's body in a public setting, with the intent to

express extremist beliefs, is also a context in which police could apply their powers in relation to upholding the intent of this legislation.

These examples show that the contextual understanding and correct interpretation of symbols are critical if laws are enacted to ban them. The criminalisation of the Hakenkreuz and other explicit Nazi symbols would enable law-enforcement agencies to prosecute individuals or groups producing or displaying propaganda materials clearly associated with a violent ideological agenda, promoting such an agenda, or both. As the German examples illustrate, exemptions under such proposed laws can include the use of the symbols for historical, educational or religious practices. Hindu communities in Australia, for example, have expressed their concern over the banning of the swastika, as it remains an important element of their religion (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Swastikas are drawn in coloured sand during Diwali celebrations



Source: Miles Russell, 'Why did Hitler choose the swastika, and how did a Sanskrit symbol become a Nazi emblem?', *History Extra*, BBC, 1 June 2020, [online](#).

Exemptions include symbols being used for genuine religious purposes, which are similar to other existing exemptions for the public custody of knives that allow those of the Sikh faith to carry a religious knife or dagger known as a *kirpan*. The arms of the Hakenkreuz rotate clockwise and the symbol is angled at 45 degrees, which is unlike the traditional vertical and horizontal orientation of those used in religion. The rotation (clockwise/anticlockwise), orientation and variations to the swastika through the addition of dots, repetition of patterns and variations to the angle or thickness of the arms, may all change the meaning of the symbol and the evidence needed for discretion by law enforcement.

Proposed legislation

In October 2021, NSW became the second Australian state to consider criminalising the display of any Nazi symbol, defined as 'a symbol of, or associated, with the National Socialist German

Workers' Party, the Third Reich or neo-Nazism'.³⁶ The Crimes Amendment (Display of Nazi Symbols) Bill 2021 imposes penalties of up to 12 months imprisonment and fines of up to \$11,000 for individuals, or \$55,000 for corporations. At the time of writing, the Bill is awaiting a second reading debate in the Legislative Council.

Victoria's Minister for Cultural Affairs has stated that 'Nazi symbols glorify one of the most hateful ideologies in human history. We must confront hate, prevent it, and give it no space to grow'.³⁷ Victoria's Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections is proposing the banning of public displays of symbols relating to the Nazi ideology.³⁸

The Hakenkreuz remains the most powerful symbol associated with Nazi ideology, but a plethora of other insignias have been co-opted as logos or elements of propaganda by extremist groups in Australia and overseas.

The Australian responsible for the 2019 Christchurch terror attack adorned his tactical gear, his weapons and the cover of his manifesto with symbols including the *Sonnenrad* (Black Sun) and runes that have been co-opted to represent white-supremacist ideology. For example, the *Totenkopf* symbol, which is also known as the death's head or skull and crossbones, adorned the uniform of the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS) Death's Head Division, which was Hitler's elite guard during the Nazi era. This symbol has been used by the Australian neo-Nazi group Antipodean Resistance in conjunction with the Hakenkreuz against a blue and white striped flag.

The *Sonnenrad* was notably also shared on Twitter by prominent celebrity chef and vocal anti-vaxxer Pete Evans, who later apologised 'to anyone who misinterpreted' the post, claiming he 'didn't know what it stood for', despite evidence to the contrary (Figure 12).³⁹

Criminalisation of the Hakenkreuz and Nazi symbols in other jurisdictions demonstrates that the application of such laws can be complex and requires consideration of context as well as informed and reasonable discretion:

Matthias Jahn, a professor of criminal law at Goethe University in Frankfurt, [said] that the concept of balance was key to understanding the German view on the role of freedom of speech in a democracy. 'It's not a question of "no freedom for the enemies of freedom" like some 200 years ago' Jahn said, referring to the radical ideology that led to the reign of terror during the French Revolution. 'It's all a question of balancing in a democratic society'.⁴⁰

Figure 12: Twitter post by Pete Evans



Source: N McElroy, 'Pete Evans's book pulled from Big W, Dymocks after he shared symbol associated with neo-Nazis and the Christchurch attacks', *ABC News*, 17 November 2020, [online](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-17/pete-evans-book-pulled-from-big-w-dymocks/12345678).

Another instance highlighting the complexity and need for balance is a controversy reported by *The Guardian* regarding the content of a CT guide that was distributed during anti-extremism briefings for medical staff and teachers by British police in 2020, as part of the early intervention PREVENT program.⁴¹ The booklet, originally issued in 2019, contained a visual guide for police officers and staff involved in PREVENT initiatives 'to help them identify and understand the range of organisations practitioners might come across' (Figure 13).⁴² The mention and visual representation of initiatives such as Greenpeace, PETA and other nonviolent groups next to *proscribed* violent neo-Nazi groups—with only a general explainer on the second page about the 'scope of the product' stating that many listed groups weren't considered a CT interest—caused outrage and resulted in Counter Terrorism Policing issuing a clarifying statement on its home page.

To calm things down, a spokesperson for Counter Terrorism Policing stated:

[Our] focus is absolutely not on lawful protest or legitimate causes taken up by activists across the country.

So why are Extinction Rebellion (XR) and other legitimate protest groups even mentioned in Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) documents in the first place? Does this mean that we consider those groups, and the people who support them, to be extremists who pose a threat to national security?
























Figure 13: Right-wing signs and symbols

Right Wing Signs & Symbols Aid
June 2019























OFFICIAL
Please refer to the Signs and Symbols Guidance Document for further details, including the scope of this product

COUNTER TERRORISM POLICING

Symbols Commonly Associated with White Supremacy

 White Pride World Wide	 Swastika	 Triskele / 777	 Totenkopf / Deaths Head	 SS Runes	 Celtic Cross	 Odin's Rune	 Iron Eagle and Iron Cross	 Iron Eagle and Swastika
 Elhaz Rune / Tree of Life	 Imperial German Flag	 Thor's Hammer	 White Pride World Wide	 Iron Cross with Swastika	 Nazi SA Symbol	 Crucified Skinhead	 Norse Valknut ("Slain Warriors")	 Hammerskins
 Blood Drop KKK	 Black Sun (Schwarze Sonne)	 Wolf's Hook	 Aryan Nations (Sword & Wolf's Hook)	 White Power	*Please note that not all of the symbols noted within this document are of counter terrorism interest, and should be viewed in context; Some religious, historical and mythological symbols have been adopted by groups of CTPNOC interest. For example, many of the Pagan symbols displayed will be regularly worn by law abiding members of the Pagan community.			

Tattoos

 Blut und Ehre (Blood and Honour)	 Ian Stuart Donaldson / ISD	 Ian Stuart Donaldson	 14 Words²	 Hitler / Various Nazi	 Skrewdriver
 Crossed Grenades (Dirlewanger Brigade)	 Eagle & SS	 R.A.C Rock Against Communism	 Erwin Rommel	 No Remorse B&H Band	 Iron Eagle
 Meine Ehre Heisst Treue (My Honour is Loyalty)	 Swastika	 Thors Hammer with 14/88	 Swastika, Ian Stuart Donaldson	 Nazi Party symbol - Parteiaudler	 Zyklon B
 Viking Imagery*	 Spiderweb (Denotes prison time served)*	 Aegishjalmur (Protection in Battle)*	 Ukrainian Tryzub (Nationalist)		

Source: Birmingham Police and Schools Panels, UK, June 2019, [online](#).

The simple answer is, no. We don't consider those groups to be extremist, we do not consider them to be a threat to national security. Nor do we consider membership or affiliation to XR or other environmental groups to be reason for a Prevent referral.

CTP creates a range of guidance and documents for use across the whole of policing, not just by Counter Terrorism officers or Prevent practitioners. We produce these documents to help frontline officers and other colleagues make informed decisions—including protecting crowded places at times of protest. The 'Signs and Symbols' document which has become the subject of a Guardian article today was produced to help police and close partners identify and understand signs and symbols they may encounter in their day-to-day working lives, so they know the difference between the symbols for the many groups they might come across.

We need our CT officers, front line police colleagues and partners to be able to understand what organisations people may be affiliated with, and what their aims and activities—lawful or otherwise—are.

But the guidance document in question explicitly states that many of the groups included are not of counter terrorism interest, and that membership of them does not indicate criminality of any kind. To suggest anything else is both unhelpful and misleading.⁴³

Moreover, the Ukrainian *tryzub* trident—the country's official emblem—was also listed in the guide as a tattoo under the heading 'Symbols commonly associated with white supremacy'. As *The Guardian* reported, after being alerted by social media users, the Ukrainian Embassy in London demanded an official apology. The apology, issued via an official statement on the British Embassy in Ukraine's Twitter page,⁴⁴ recognised 'the Trident as a major element of the state emblem of Ukraine, which has constitutional, historical, and cultural significance for the people of Ukraine', and reiterated that the document clearly stated 'that many of the symbols contained therein are of no interest in the fight against terrorism'.⁴⁵

It has to be kept in mind however, that before becoming modern Ukraine's official national emblem, the 'trident'—going back to the period where Ukrainian anti-Soviet resistance found expression through white nationalism and was aligned with Nazi Germany—has also been appropriated by Ukrainian far-right groups, such as the hyper-nationalist Svoboda party or the Azhov battalion/Regime with avowed white supremacist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and homophobic views.

During the 2019 presidential election campaign, anti-Semitic statements and vandalism were publicly used against Zelenskyi and other candidates to defame them. Svoboda's antisemitism is said to be rooted in the party's understanding of the nation as a 'blood-spiritual community' where 'the concept of nation should include its ethnic makeup: a nation is a blood community'.⁴⁶

The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, BfV), which is the country's main domestic security organisation, issued visual guides and brochures that clearly depict (and distinguish) which symbols and insignias are prohibited by law and which aren't banned, explaining the context. Indicative of Germany's highly federated structure, the guides are published both by the federal office and by its 16 state branches in order to reflect the nuances and variations in legislation from state to state. Entries for symbols include, for example:

- depictions of the symbol, including a depiction of how it's most frequently used or known, as well as additional depictions of variants
- common and alternative names
- a description of the symbol's use as a hate symbol and other possible (historical or cultural) uses/depictions of similar symbols not considered to be hate symbols
- a description of the symbol's origin, including its original/varying historical and cultural meanings.

Introducing the English edition of its federal guide, *Right-wing extremism: symbols, signs and banned organisations*, the BfV states:

Individuals who do not belong to the scene often have difficulty in judging whether a certain piece of clothing and the symbols depicted on it are not only an expression of the wearer's ideas but whether also a statutory offence is constituted. Symbols will be described that fall within the scope of sections 86 and 86a of the Criminal Code as well as clothes and badges the use of which does not constitute a statutory offence but which nonetheless clearly indicate the wearer's right-wing extremist views.

Many right-wing extremists regard the fact that people remain silent and look away as approval and therefore feel challenged to direct further and often serious attacks against socially underprivileged and minority groups. Hence, in order to effectively counter right-wing extremism, the people's attention and commitment is required. To this end, information and background knowledge are imperative.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The urgency of banning symbols may seem more immediate in places such as the US and some European nations with more actively violent and co-ordinated far-right extremist organisations. However, if we fail to implement appropriate strategies, the risk of greater proliferation of violence-oriented ideologies will increase. Drawing a line in the sand regarding the ethical societal standards by which we choose to live in a liberal democratic society is critical.

Law enforcement and policymakers face the extremely challenging task of balancing societal expectations, protecting religious rights and preserving the freedom of speech in our liberal democratic society. While many other symbols used by extremist groups aren't as clear-cut, there's no ambiguity about the meaning and intent behind symbols such as the Hakenkreuz or *Totenkopf*.

Specifically, the criminalisation of unambiguous Nazi symbols in Australia would equip frontline officers with powers to seize materials or detain individuals who publicly display those symbols of hate. The enactment of such laws is critical for law enforcement to effectively manage existing and emerging risks associated with extremist activity. The wider law-enforcement community would benefit from the proposed laws, enabling it to collect intelligence and conduct investigations into the production, importation or use of these symbols both in public and in online forums. International bans have made a strong social statement of community values and society's condemnation of racist and violent rhetoric to reduce right-wing extremist activity and anti-Semitic rhetoric associated with the Nazi ideology. Australian law enforcement requires laws that provide appropriate penalties for offences committed by individuals or groups who use these co-opted symbols to spread hate and fear in our community.

The use of these symbols by the NSN, Antipodean Resistance and the Christchurch terrorist all demonstrate the need for Australia to develop appropriate legislative tools, which can be adapted based on the experience and best practice of other Western democracies that have had such laws for decades. A reasoned, clearly defined and compassionate legislative response would provide a strong statement of our nation's values, impede the dissemination of extremist ideology, and protect those for whom variations or traditional iterations of these symbols might have a legitimate purpose.

Glossary

This glossary is intended to demonstrate some of the symbolism used by the general white-supremacist / neo-Nazi movement. This should be considered only as a small sample of the variety of language and symbols used to depict racist ideology by the wider movement and shouldn't be considered an exhaustive or complete summary. Several of the symbols depicted in this glossary have uses outside white supremacist sentiment.

The use of numerical codes among white supremacists is common. Letters of the alphabet are depicted as numbers based upon their order (for example, A = 1, B = 2 C = 3 etc.), which are used to denote words or phrases of significance or gang names.

9%: 9% is a numerical symbol used by white-supremacist groups to depict the percentage of the world's population that's white. It's often shown inside a diamond shape of some sort.⁴⁸

14: The number 14 is a white-supremacist numerical code short for the '14 words slogan'; 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children'. The slogan was coined by David Lane, a member of the white-supremacist group The Order.⁴⁹

18: The number 18 is a white supremacist numerical code meaning 'Adolf Hitler'.⁵⁰

23/16: The numbers 26 and 16 are used in conjunction by white supremacists as a numerical code for 'white power'.⁵¹

88: The number 88 is a white-supremacist numerical code meaning 'Heil Hitler'. The numerical codes '88' and '14' are often used together in a variety of forms, including 1488, 14/88, 14-88 or 8814.⁵² The number 88 is used as a hand signal to identify membership of the white-supremacist movement.⁵³

100%: 100% is a numerical shorthand symbol for '100% white' among white supremacists. There's some nuance in the percentages depicted (for example, 123%, which can be decoded to '100% W'). Iterations of gang membership are also found to be denoted in the percentage used (for example, 112% refers to '100% Aryan Brotherhood').⁵⁴



Aryan Fist / White Power Fist: The Aryan Fist is a white supremacist symbol used to represent white power. The symbol was adopted from the 'black power' fist popular among black nationalists during the 1960s and 1970s; however, by the 1980s, the symbol had been appropriated by white supremacists.⁵⁵



Arrow Cross / Cross Star: The Arrow Cross symbol is commonly used by the neo-Nazi / white-supremacist movement, either as is or as a component of a logo depicting their specific hate group. This symbol originated from the fascist Hungarian Arrow Cross Party during the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁶

Burning cross/Hakenkreuz: The burning cross is a hate symbol, a tool of racial intimidation and a ritual of solidarity popularised by the US white-supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan.⁵⁷ The burning Hakenkreuz is a hate symbol derived from the Ku Klux Klan's practice of burning crosses.⁵⁸



Celtic Cross: The Celtic Cross symbol, which consists of a square cross interlocking with a circle, is one of the most common white-supremacist symbols and is used by a wide range of white-supremacist groups across the spectrum.⁵⁹

Hitler salute / Nazi salute: The Hitler salute is a hand sign that originated during Adolf Hitler's rise in Germany during the 1930s. The salute was a ritual of the cult of Hitler and was often used as a greeting or as a quasi-religious way of paying homage to the Führer.⁶⁰ Since World War II, white supremacists and neo-Nazis have adopted the salute, making it one of the world's most common white-supremacist symbols.⁶¹



Iron Cross: The Iron Cross symbol was originally used by the German military as a medal. However, the Nazi movement appropriated the symbol with a superimposed Hakenkreuz in the centre. Since then, white supremacists and neo-Nazi groups have continued to use the symbol.⁶²



Nazi Eagle: The Nazi Eagle was originally developed by the Nazi Party, loosely based on what was then the German coat of arms but with the eagle clutching a Hakenkreuz. After World War II, neo-Nazis and white supremacists have used the symbol, with variations, replacing the Hakenkreuz with alternative hate symbols.⁶³



Nazi Party flag: The Nazi Party flag is one of the most potent hate symbols worldwide. It was used as the flag of the Nazi Party from 1920, and later as the flag of Germany under Nazi rule in 1933. Since then, white supremacists and neo-Nazis have used the flag, with variations, as a symbol of hate.⁶⁴

Runes: Nazi Germany appropriated several ancient Nordic runes (such as the Life rune, Jera rune, Othala rune and the Tyr rune) and used them to express white Aryan genealogy, among other sentiments. Such symbols have been picked up by white supremacists and neo-Nazis today.

Spider-web tattoo: A spider-web tattoo is a skinhead badge of honour, indicating that the wearer has committed murder in the name of the skinhead movement.⁶⁵



Sonnenrad / Sunwheel / Black Sun: The Sonnenrad symbol was originally a Norse depiction of the sun but was appropriated by Nazi Germany. It's since been used by white-supremacist groups worldwide, sometimes with variations to the inner circle.⁶⁶



SS Bolts / Cracker Bolts / Lightning Bolts: The SS Bolts symbol was used by the Nazi SS. After World War II, the symbol was adopted by white supremacists, sometimes with variations to the shape, and is used as a hand symbol depicting a single lightning bolt.⁶⁷



Sturmabteilung / SA: The *Sturmabteilung* symbol was used by Hitler's 'brownshirt' paramilitary units. It was adopted by neo-Nazis when more notorious Nazi symbols were banned and has since become a common white-supremacist symbol.⁶⁸



Hakenkreuz: The swastika is an ancient symbol used in many cultures through history. However, it was adopted by Hitler in the 1920s to represent the superiority of 'white-blooded' Aryans. The symbol has since been used as a symbol of hate by white supremacists and has become perhaps the most notorious such symbol.⁶⁹



Totenkopf / Death's Head: The *Totenkopf* was a symbol adopted by the SS. It's since been used by white supremacists as a hate symbol.⁷⁰



Triskele: The Triskele (three-bladed swastika) symbol was adopted by the Nazis and became popular among white-supremacist groups after World War II. The 'three sevens' interlocking version of the triskele is most commonly associated with white supremacy, but other variations of the symbol can also be found in use among white-supremacist groups.⁷¹



Valknot / Knot of the slain: The *Valknot* symbol is used by white supremacists to depict a willingness to sacrifice one's life in battle. It's derived from an old Norse symbol associated with the afterlife and the Norse god Odin.⁷²

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What strategic competition means for counterterrorism

Dr Andrew Zammit

In response to the rise of China and the resurgence of a geopolitically assertive Russia, the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America unequivocally declared that ‘strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.’¹ More recently, the US’s 2021 *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* similarly deprioritised CT efforts in favour of meeting threats posed by state actors.² The framing reflects how strategic competition and CT are commonly understood: as two separate issues, with the former emerging to supersede the latter.

It’s true that strategic competition and CT are distinct issues requiring different responses, and that strategic competition has evolved into the pre-eminent security challenge. However, there’s nonetheless noteworthy overlap between those two areas, which deserves further scrutiny. While several recent pieces have argued that CT efforts can be complementary to, or can even advance, a state’s efforts to compete with its strategic rivals, this paper instead focuses on a different aspect of their relationship: how strategic competition can pose a number of CT problems.³

The question of what strategic competition means for CT hasn’t been directly addressed in Australian Government announcements or political debate. A rare exception is DFAT’s recent CT strategy document, *Preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism 2022–26*, which notes that ‘societal changes over the last 20 years including the ... rise in great power competition ... must be factored in our CT priorities and approach.’⁴ Otherwise, documents such as the 2020 Defence Strategic Update acknowledge the persistence of terrorism but treat it as an inherently separate concern from strategic competition, while *Australia’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2022* doesn’t mention strategic competition.⁵

This lack of sustained attention isn’t unique to Australia, as international commentary on strategic competition similarly tends to focus on the implications for high-end conventional warfare, and potentially nuclear warfare. Much commentary also examines how strategic competition may be waged through means short of outright warfare, such as grey-zone activities. However, the impact on terrorism and CT is rarely discussed in a detailed or dedicated manner.

Several US-based analysts have produced valuable work on the relationship between strategic competition and CT. They’ve tended to argue that CT efforts can be advantageous for relationship-building in strategic competition and that CT tools can be adapted to strategic competition by giving special operations forces a central role in combating grey-zone activities.⁶ Some have argued that policymakers shouldn’t divert too many resources from CT to strategic competition, given the potential threat from Islamic State affiliates in Africa or the potential resurgence of al-Qaeda following the Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan.⁷ Others have argued that terrorism should be deprioritised and treated as just one of many irregular threats that exist alongside

strategic competition, such as insurgents, drug cartels and militias.⁸ However, few accounts examine the specific dilemmas that strategic competition raises for CT beyond the challenges of threat prioritisation and resource constraints.⁹

In this chapter, I outline five ways that strategic competition can influence terrorist threats and pose new CT challenges. First, international CT cooperation is itself increasingly becoming an arena for competition. Second, foreign-orchestrated disinformation can exacerbate terrorist threats and complicate responses to terrorist attacks. Third, strategic competition can contribute to the narratives that domestic extremists use to mobilise supporters. Fourth, when strategic competition is waged through proxy warfare, it can escalate civil wars that provide new opportunities for transnational violent extremist movements and foreign-fighter mobilisations. Fifth, strategic competition can prompt states to increase sponsorship of terrorism or directly engage in terrorism-like actions.

Competition over counterterrorism cooperation

CT requires international cooperation. Terrorist threats are often transnational, so responses commonly involve cross-border cooperation. As DFAT’s *Preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism 2022–26* paper notes, in an ‘interdependent world, our multilateral, regional and bilateral partnerships have proven critical to achieving Australia’s security and counter-terrorism objectives.’¹⁰

For Australia, that cooperation includes longstanding intelligence liaison arrangements and the police-to-police CT relationships that expanded across Southeast Asia after the October 2002 Bali bombings, such as the establishment of the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation.¹¹ The ADF’s ‘building partner capacity’ missions, to train, advise and assist foreign military forces, similarly play a part in Australia’s international CT efforts.¹² They include the ADF’s activities to help defeat Islamic State by supporting the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service through Operation Okra, and supporting other partner forces through Operation Augury in the Philippines and elsewhere.¹³

Much of the international cooperation against terrorism after 9/11 was led by the US and its allies, which appeared to wield a post-Cold War patronage monopoly over public goods such as financial aid and security assistance. By the 2010s, China and Russia had established themselves as alternative patrons following a quest to shatter what was perceived as a Western monopoly.¹⁴ One consequence is that CT cooperation can become an arena for competition in itself.

The commander of US Special Operations Command Africa has noted that the US is now competing with China and Russia over the establishment of CT relationships in African countries.¹⁵ In the Indo-Pacific region, that competition is apparent in China's reported efforts to serve as an alternative CT partner for countries such as the Philippines.¹⁶

Given the high stakes, it's to be expected that competition over CT relationships could increase and become sharper, such as by including disinformation efforts. Allegations from April 2022, that the Russian private military company Wagner Group staged a false-flag operation to frame French forces for committing a massacre in Mali, provide an illustrative example.¹⁷ The French Army alleged that a mass grave using real bodies was staged 'in an apparent attempt to frame French forces and discredit Paris's counterterrorism operation in the region'.¹⁸ Competition waged through disinformation can also affect CT in other ways.

The impact of foreign-orchestrated disinformation on domestic terrorism

States engaged in strategic competition may perpetrate organised disinformation campaigns to undermine their rivals by promoting 'false or intentionally misleading information that aims to achieve an economic or political goal'.¹⁹ Disinformation has long been a tool of statecraft, particularly during the Cold War, but, as technological developments over past decades (the spread of digital communications and more recently the growth of social media) have reshaped how information is produced and shared, disinformation has correspondingly changed.²⁰

The online environment has enabled many different countries to engage in new forms of disinformation campaigns through online efforts perpetrated through 'troll factories', bots and other means.²¹ During the Cold War, the Soviet Union's disinformation campaigns were often highly sophisticated, cultivating plausible-sounding stories to fool professional journalists. In contrast, many modern disinformation campaigns may instead promote multiple contradictory stories with little concern for their plausibility. For example, Russia's current approach has been described as the 'firehose of falsehood' model, in which the aim isn't to persuade anyone of one specific version of events but to 'dismiss the critic, distort the fact, distract from the main issue, and dismay the audience'.²²

Russia promoted many different theories to deflect blame for the tragedy of MH17, when a civilian airliner was shot down by Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine in 2014 (killing 289 people, including 38 Australians), without concern that those theories often contradicted one another.²³

In a CT context, such disinformation campaigns could complicate responses to terrorist attacks by confusing the public through false claims and conspiracy theories about who perpetrated an attack or what their motivations were, and by discrediting the measures needed in response.²⁴ Moreover, it's been argued by experts such as former EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove that the prevalence of disinformation in the context of a transformed information environment has influenced the development of domestic terrorism, most prominently in the US but also elsewhere. The 'QAnon' and 'Pizzagate' conspiracy theories, which have been promoted in part by state-backed disinformation campaigns, have been named as playing a role in multiple violent incidents inside the US.²⁵ In 2019, the FBI identified fringe conspiracy theories as a domestic terrorist threat.²⁶

The importance of disinformation for such attacks shouldn't be exaggerated; terrorism has many complex causes. Nor does this mean that the motivating beliefs behind those terrorist attacks can simply be attributed to foreign-orchestrated disinformation campaigns, as those beliefs have domestic roots in US politics. Disinformation campaigns succeed best when parts of the targeted society form a receptive audience, willing to accept false claims and conspiracy theories about their fellow citizens, so that external actors can 'exploit a toxic combination of massively connected communities and an overall climate of severe political division and mistrust'.²⁷ Nonetheless, emerging research highlights the risk that foreign-orchestrated disinformation can contribute to domestic terrorism by enhancing political polarisation in the target society.²⁸

Strategic competition's contribution to domestic extremist narratives

Even without disinformation campaigns, international competition can have a tumultuous impact on the domestic politics of the states involved by placing further strain on social tensions and political divisions. Cold War examples are countless, such as the US experiences of McCarthyism in the early 1950s and widespread

political turmoil over the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. Domestic turmoil has CT implications because terrorism is, by definition, a political phenomenon. Terrorism often breaks out in highly polarised political environments, at the violent fringes of broader movements representing deep discontent.²⁹

When governments portray a rival in uncompromising terms during times of tension, and then invariably compromise with that rival in particular circumstances, that can provoke domestic backlashes that are exploited by demagogues and extremists. Historically, the Arab–Israeli conflict has provided visceral examples of those dynamics. When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made a peace deal with Israel in 1979, it provoked a domestic backlash exploited by Islamist extremists who perpetrated his assassination in 1981.³⁰ When Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin began a peace deal with the Palestinians in 1993, it similarly provoked a domestic backlash exploited by Zionist extremists who perpetrated his assassination in 1995.³¹

Those are extreme examples, from a situation of outright conflict rather than competition, but less extreme versions of those dynamics could develop inside Western countries. It's already evident that strategic competition risks contributing to the narratives that domestic extremists use to mobilise supporters, as seen by Australian far-right extremists promoting portrayals of the Victorian Premier as a Chinese Government puppet.³²

Strategic competition waged through proxy warfare

Strategic competition is often waged through proxy warfare, in which a state supports participants in a civil war to undermine the interests of rival states.³³ Such intervention often escalates civil wars, making them last longer, and even the expectation of potential external support can increase the likelihood of a civil war starting.³⁴

Proxy warfare was common during the Cold War, particularly in Southeast Asia and later Southern Africa and Central America. That changed in the 1990s, as the great powers then proved more willing to cooperate to resolve conflicts rather than to exploit civil wars to compete against each other. However, cooperative international efforts at conflict resolution have declined since the early 2000s, and the number of civil wars has increased dramatically.³⁵ Competing powers are again commonly supporting opposing sides in civil wars, in what's been termed '21st century proxy warfare' or 'information age proxy warfare'.³⁶

Proxy wars can reshape terrorist threats by creating space for violent extremist movements that may have more ambitious and global agendas than the states involved. The Syrian civil war, which was

escalated by the involvement of regional and global powers, resulted in a foreign-fighter mobilisation that bolstered the global jihadist movement by providing new opportunities for al-Qaeda and contributing to the rise of Islamic State.³⁷ Similarly, the Yemeni civil war, in part a proxy war involving Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran, empowered Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, while the Ukrainian civil war, which began in 2014 and partly functioned as a proxy war between Russia and the West, has attracted participation from transnational far-right extremists.

Strategic competition heightens the risk of new proxy wars developing. They could include new proxy wars between the US and Russia or between smaller powers such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran. There's also the potential for China and the US to engage in proxy wars against each other, as happened during the Cold War.³⁸ Any such new conflict could have a transformative impact on terrorist threats in the years and decades ahead. Future civil wars that are escalated, or at times initiated, by the involvement of outside powers engaged in strategic competition could similarly prompt new foreign-fighter mobilisations and the rise of new transnational violent extremist movements.

Strategic competition waged through terrorism and terrorism-like actions

Another risk is that strategic competition might increase not only the likelihood of states supporting opposing sides in a civil war and thereby indirectly creating opportunities for violent extremist movements, but also the likelihood of states sponsoring terrorism themselves. The US intelligence community recently concluded that Russia provided 'indirect' support to far-right extremists in Western countries.³⁹ A new era of strategic competition raises the risk that confrontation between major powers could move beyond such 'indirect' support and see a return to Cold War levels of state-sponsored terrorism.

If that were to occur, it would pose a greatly different CT challenge than during the 'War on Terror' years. International coalitions would be harder to muster, and consensus at the UN would be near impossible. Moreover, state-supported terrorists are far more able to evade financial sanctions, extradition attempts and military assaults. Safe havens inside the territory of hostile states can't be attacked through air strikes or special forces raids without the risk of provoking wider conflict.⁴⁰ Consequently, many post-9/11 measures could become redundant. That said, this externally imposed restraint could also have beneficial consequences, given that military action against terrorist threats often proves counterproductive.⁴¹

There's also the risk of more frequent acts of transnational violence carried out by state actors, including assassination attempts against dissidents, such as the Russian chemical attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury in 2018. While that required a response from the UK's CT authorities, such state-perpetrated actions are often not described as terrorism.⁴² Other examples include North Korea's assassination of Kim Jong-un's half-brother in Malaysia in 2017, Saudi Arabia's assassination of dissident Jamal Khashoggi in a consulate in Turkey in 2018, and Iran's multiple assassinations (and attempted assassinations) of dissidents in the Netherlands.⁴³ Those assassinations are examples of coercive statecraft that can resemble terrorism even though debates continue over whether they should be described as terrorism.⁴⁴ Therefore, heightened strategic competition poses the risk not only of increased state sponsorship of terrorism, but also of states directly engaging in attacks that might not always be understood as terrorism but might have similar consequences in terms of their political impact and the threat to public safety. As the Salisbury incident shows, such incidents may also require the involvement of CT authorities.

Policy implications

As this chapter has outlined, strategic competition and CT are two closely related issues, even though they tend to be represented as entirely separate concerns in government statements, political debate and much analytical commentary. However, while strategic competition and CT are closely related, it doesn't follow that the relationship between the two is synergistic. It shouldn't be assumed that what's good for CT is automatically good for strategic competition, or vice versa. Sometimes that will be the case, such as when CT cooperation with a prospective ally helps to reduce a rival's influence. At other times, the logic of strategic competition and the logic of CT may be at odds.

The matter of proxy warfare makes this particularly stark. As Dominic Tierney notes, in 'the counter-terrorism paradigm, instability abroad is an inherent problem because it spurs violent extremism ... [I]n the great-power rivalry paradigm, instability abroad may be threatening or it could be potentially useful, depending on its impact on the global strategic competition.'⁴⁵ This will likely be a point for debate between experts from different areas, but it may often be the case that staying out of proxy wars, despite the risk of ceding advantage to a rival, will have longer term security benefits.

Therefore, the context-dependent nature of the interaction between strategic competition and CT doesn't lend itself to specific policy proscriptions. It does, however, show the need for sustained attention to, and awareness of, those dynamics.

Political leaders need to be aware that portraying international rivals in existentially threatening terms and portraying domestic political opponents as enablers of the foreign enemy risk empowering domestic extremism.

Policymakers focused on crafting the best ways to compete with rivals in a seemingly zero-sum contest need to be aware of whether their proposed policies could have harmful consequences for CT.

And CT authorities need to be consistently aware of how international rivalries waged through covert violence, disinformation campaigns and indirect involvement in distant conflicts can have profound impacts on the terrorist threat at home.

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Public trust in democratic government: a key element of CVE

Dr Teagan Westendorf

After two decades of CT policy, do Australians feel safer?

In the 20 years since the 9/11 terror attacks in the US, Australia has passed a significant number of federal laws intended to ensure the safety of Australian citizens by giving intelligence and policing agencies increased powers to mitigate, among other things, the threat of violent extremist attacks in Australia. Those laws have largely come in two waves: immediately after 9/11 and after ISIL's rise in 2014.

There are a range of possible, interacting variables affecting the evidence of and relationship between trends in citizen trust in government and increases in security legislation expanding government powers. On the one hand, the reason for each specific power and piece of legislation has been articulated and debated in the parliament and in media coverage. At the same time, concerns about the erosion of civil liberties have featured steadily as new security Bills have been passed since 2001,¹ and many of the new powers have raised concerns in civil society² about how to ensure the necessary balance between democratic liberties and security.³

Most recently passed were:

- the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Bill 2018⁴
- the Surveillance Legislation Amendment (Identify and Disrupt) Bill 2021⁵
- the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (International Production Orders) Bill 2020.⁶

The resulting Acts were all greeted with concerns regarding the democratic balance between security and civil liberties, voiced by federal MPs, civil society, industry and academia.

That doesn't necessarily indicate a problem. Fervent debate on issues is an indicator of a healthy, functioning democracy and can result in changes to legislation. And the security laws Australia has passed have been a response to a genuine increase in violent extremist threats, due to a range of factors from the growth in international resonance of extremist movements to the development of new technologies exploited by them to inspire, organise, resource and mobilise.⁷

The perceived imminence of threats can also factor into how citizens interpret government power, given that perceptions of government overreach are often more prevalent in communities after time has passed since a major security threat or incident has occurred.⁸

The challenges for Australian law to be adaptable to new scenarios resulting from the changing nature of threats and the fast pace of technological innovation and cyber-enabled threats is probably also a contributing factor to the frequency of new security Bills. That said, the trend of more and more laws being

passed stands out internationally,⁹ as Australia has produced significantly more laws of this nature than comparable Western nations.¹⁰

However, Australia was starting from a low base. When the 9/11 attacks occurred, Australia had no laws at the national level that addressed terrorism.¹¹ In the first decade following 9/11, 50 new statutes were passed by federal parliament, with wide scope, and with a sense of permanency unlike the similarly 'exceptional' wartime security statutes passed during World Wars I and II.¹² In the second decade, another 42 were passed.¹³ Altogether, they make up more than 5,000 pages of 'powers, rules and offences'.¹⁴ Not all the Acts were new: several were updates to existing legislation after operational use of the laws by security agencies in response to terrorist acts and plans revealed practical limitations (such as control orders).

Over those two decades, there have been varying reports by media and pollsters as to whether Australians trust their governments more or less after two decades of increased security powers, and whether we're safer at the expense of some civil liberties. Many legal practitioners and academics have voiced the same concern, backed by peer-reviewed research and reasoning.¹⁵

Those two factors—trust in government and increased legislation—have come visibly to a head in 2020 to 2022 during the ongoing Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions and protests against the sense of freedoms being impinged upon unnecessarily. A range of activist groups have coalesced repeatedly to protest perceived government overreach in the public health strategies to contain the virus and the policing strategies to contain that protest movement. The high level of vaccine take-up and compliance with restrictions suggests that fierce anti-government sentiment isn't shared by the majority of Australians, and the Scanlon Foundation's polling supports that reading.¹⁶ However, the significant numbers and diversity of people and ideologies who participated in protests does suggest that anti-government sentiment is achieving greater resonance with a wider audience. This has created opportunities for exploitation by violent extremist groups by aligning legitimate grievances with their respective ideologies.

There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the grievances that became apparent during Covid-19 have anything to do with security legislation. It's important not to conflate anti-government sentiment with ideologically motivated violent extremism. That confusion has been reflected and arguably exacerbated by some media reporting on Covid-era protests and can have the unintended and undesired effect of being complementary marketing and communications for extremist groups. However, given the specifically 'accelerationist'¹⁷ quality of many violent extremist groups in Australia and abroad,¹⁸ a decline in general citizens' trust in government could contribute to the conditions in which at-risk people are more likely to radicalise.

In addition, the role of government in countering such issue-based grievances is harder when one factor is the very idea that the government has become authoritarian and unrepresentative.

The reports from ASIO's most recent threat assessments show that ideologically motivated violent extremism is increasing, having grown from around 33% of ASIO's 'priority onshore counter terrorism caseload' in early 2020, to around 40% in March 2021,¹⁹ to nearly 50% by May 2021.²⁰ The February 2022 assessment reported a decline in the number of ideologically motivated active cases, but it remains a significant caseload, and the incidence of minors being radicalised, and from younger ages, has increased.²¹

The momentum of this threat makes mitigating it from both ends of the radicalisation journey imperative; that is, from the pointy end, with a police response, and from the 'beginning', with a preventive approach through building community resilience to those ideologies.²²

Declining trust in government should hence be taken seriously and examined as a contributing, or at least correlating, factor to the increase in extremism. While it's difficult to verify as a direct cause, an argument can be made that it's contributing to the conditions in which these grievances can achieve greater resonance within a wider audience.

Radicalisation to any brand of violent extremism is a complex and highly variable experience. But international research into prevention (preventing violent extremism, or PVE) and counter-engagement (countering violent extremism, or CVE) strategies suggests that community conditions determine people's collective resilience or vulnerability to violent extremist ideologies; and this is a key factor affecting the likelihood of individuals progressing along a radicalisation pathway.²³

Has trust in government declined over the past 20 years?

There does not seem to be a correlation between security legislation (and CT laws specifically) and declining trust in government. Instead, the evidence suggests that rises and falls in anti-government sentiment stem from parts of a population who commonly feel politically unrepresented. When fuelled by disinformation and division, those individuals can be more easily exploited by conspiracist and extremist groups.

As we saw in the 6 January 2021 riots at the US Capitol, anti-government extremism poses a threat not only to citizens' and politicians' safety but to our democratic institutions and processes.

My research sought to gauge how significant a vulnerability mistrust in federal government is to terrorist threats today.

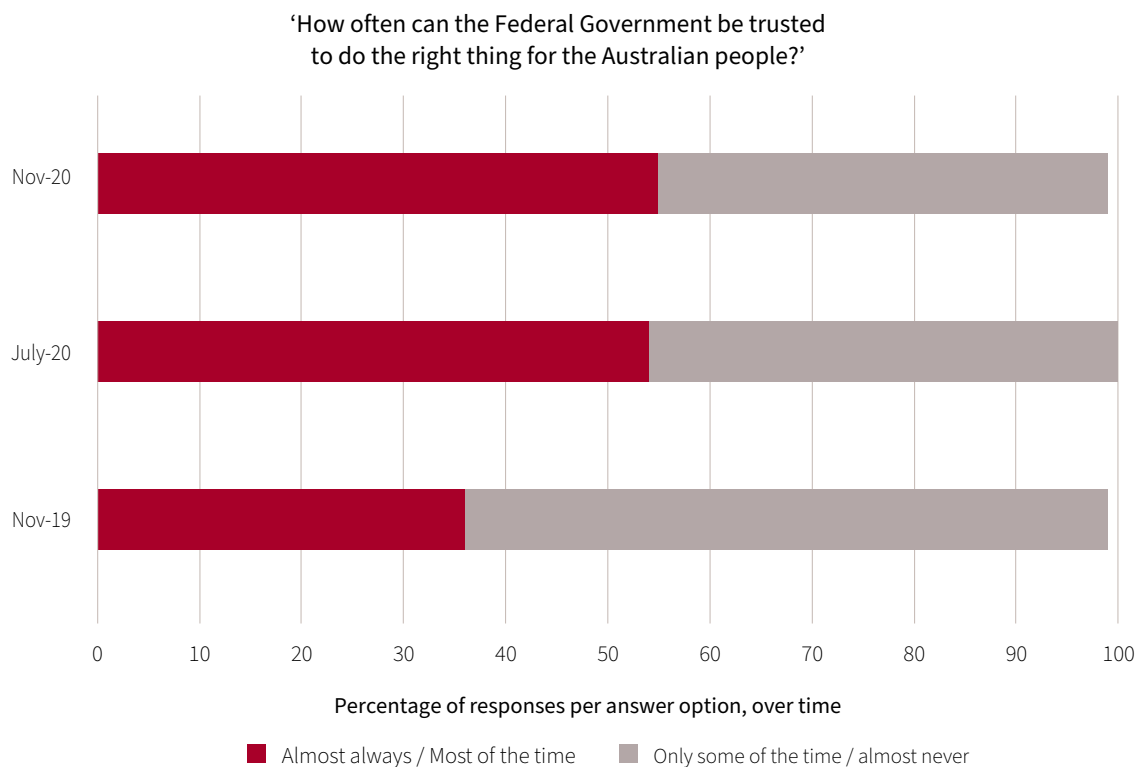
I used four up-to-date, reputable polling data sources that are based on representative samples and used transparent methodologies in order to map Australian citizens' trust in federal government and 'democracy' (that is, democratic processes, institutions and elected representatives) over the two decades. During that time, Australian security and foreign policy has been significantly characterised by CT strategy. I examined the correlation between federal legislative responses to the global terror threat and how safe Australians feel from perceived overreach of state power.

My data sources were as follows:

- The Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion (MSC) project has been polling annually since 2007. It measures, among other things, trust in the federal government: 'How often do you think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people?'²⁴
- The Australian National University's Australian Election Study (AES) project has been polling at each federal election since 1987 and measures, among other things, 'satisfaction with democracy' and 'trust in government'.²⁵
- The Lowy Institute Poll 2021 measured whether 'democracy is preferable to any other kind of government'.²⁶ In order to prefer democracy, a person would need to feel either currently represented or as though it's possible for their views to be represented in government via a future election. Based on this reasoning, I included this metric to indicate trust in the established democratic system of government in Australia.
- The Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) 2018 research report, *Trust and democracy in Australia*, measures 'satisfaction in democracy' and citizens' 'trust in key institutions and social leaders'.²⁷

Polling by the Scanlon Foundation in 2020²⁸ suggests that trust in the federal government increased among the mainstream population during the Covid-19 pandemic, while a smaller cohort remains distrustful (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Change in trust in the federal government from 2019 to 2020



Source: This graph uses data from the web-page summary version of Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Australian Multicultural Foundation and Monash University, 2021, [online](#).

News media outlets broadcast this short-term increase with a certainty that misrepresented its significance in terms of the size, stability and evidenced causes for the increase.²⁹ This graph shows that, while trust did increase significantly during the pandemic, it moved the dial from a point of marked distrust of 63% in 2019 (combining the two negative answers), so that, even after the Covid-19 era improvement, distrust remained significantly represented in late 2020 at 44% (combining the two negative answers).

Given the severity of that pre-pandemic rate, seeing whether this increased trust is maintained after the ‘emergency’ period of the public health crisis is necessary to determine whether it’s a temporary reaction of a fearful population reassured during the crisis by government action, or a genuine reversal of the consistent pre-pandemic decline.

It’s also of note that, even at the higher rate of 2020, younger Australians (aged < 34 years) and those experiencing more financial stress remained significantly less trusting than older cohorts and wealthier cohorts. They also had the highest rate of saying that the system of government doesn’t ‘work fine as is’ and ‘needs major change’.³⁰ Yet there was no significant variation between the levels of education

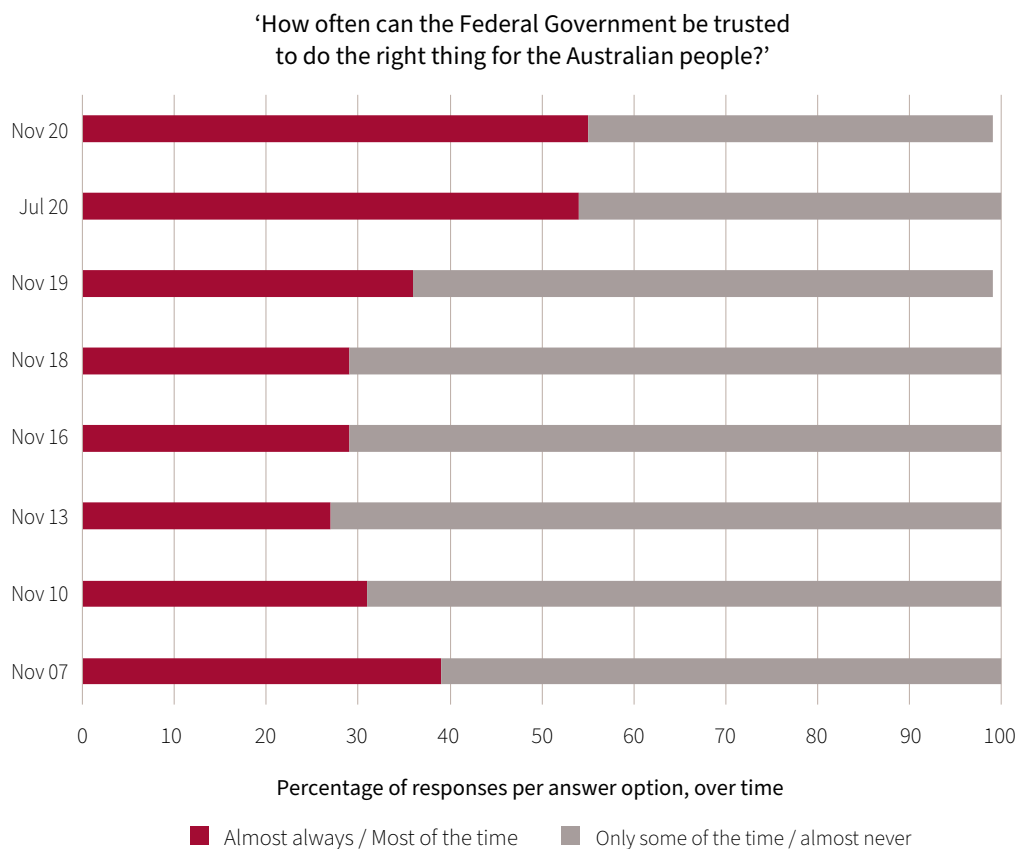
achieved, suggesting that, while socio-economic factors and perceptions of equity affect that trust, it can’t be explained by a simple argument of social mobility and wealth.³¹

The ‘bigger picture’ of the data is a harsher story again

Let’s zoom out for some more context and see what trust was like in the past decade according to this source, and then factor in other data sources to corroborate this trend (Figure 15).

In the Scanlon Foundation’s report, the data since 2007 is accurately described as showing a ‘collapse’ in trust from 48% in 2009 down to 26% by 2012.³² That low rate remained steady throughout the decade until the pandemic hit. It’s indicative of a general, long-term decrease in trust in government. Looking at longer term, pre-2007 data and another three sources corroborates that argument. These four sources together provide

Figure 15: Change in trust in the federal government from 2007 to 2020



Source: This graph uses data from the web-page summary version of Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Australian Multicultural Foundation and Monash University, 2021, [online](#).

a more detailed picture of a general increase in trust in the early 2000s, followed by a consistent decline from 2007, until the Covid-19 pandemic brought an increase (Figure 16).³³ One could extrapolate that government intervention following major incidents, whether terrorism after 9/11 and the Bali bombings, or ISIL's rise, or the Covid-19 pandemic, resulted in temporary increases in trust in government. Those temporary increases did not last. But, again, there isn't sufficient evidence to suggest that the reduced trust related directly to security policies and laws, rather than to other factors, such as the economic impacts of the pandemic and governments' public health responses.

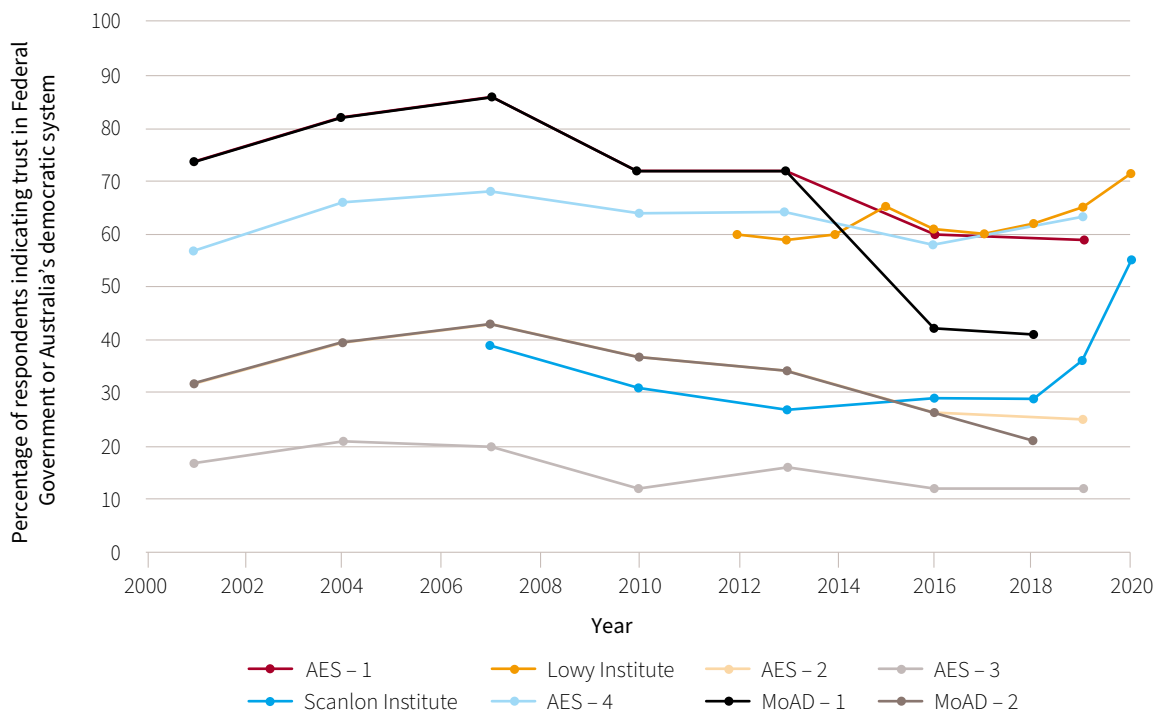
This graph shows a consistent increase in trust for the six years after 2001, and an explicit turning point in 2007 in all indicators to trend downwards to 2010. From 2010 to 2013, that trend stabilised somewhat, before trust decreased again in 2014 until 2019. When the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020, trust increased on three of the eight indicators. This upward trend is consistent with the evidenced phenomenon mentioned above

of trust in government commonly increasing temporarily during and immediately after significant security threats are experienced by a community.

While the data shows a 2020 uptick, the longer term trend suggests that it's perhaps too much to see it as an enduring or meaningful increase in terms of characterising the relationship between Australians and our federal government and democratic processes.

Furthermore, insufficient post-Covid-19 time has passed (in fact, we aren't yet in a post-Covid time) to garner even early indications of whether this is a genuine, stable reversal of the 13-year-long decline since trust collapsed to critically low levels in 2007 or a temporary variance in an otherwise stable downward trend. The latter option could quite possibly be due to the historically evidenced phenomenon mentioned above, in which the way particular communities or segments of society perceive governments' use of power (either as undemocratic overreach at the cost of civil liberties, or appropriate, democratic governance to protect citizens), is largely determined by how

Figure 16: Trust in the federal government and democracy from 2001 to 2020



Notes: This graph maps the fluctuating rates (in percentages) of eight measures/indicators of trust in Australia's federal government, which were each measured through reliable, reputable public polls with transparent, documented methodologies that demonstrate a representative sample. The polls used questions to assess trust in the federal government, federal democratic processes, institutions and elected representatives. The polls are detailed under the second subheading of this paper, and citations are included here: Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Australian Multicultural Foundation and Monash University, 2021, 48, [online](#); Sarah Cameron, Ian McAllister, *Trends in Australian political opinion: results from the Australian Election Study 1987–2019*, College of Arts & Social Sciences, Australian National University, December 2019, 96, [online](#); Natasha Kassam, *Lowy Institute Poll 2021: Australia at home*, Lowy Institute, 23 June 2021, [online](#); Gerry Stoker, Mark Evans, Max Halupka, *Trust and democracy in Australia: democratic decline and renewal*, report no. 1, Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House, University of Canberra, Institute for Governance & Policy Analysis, December 2018, [online](#). The specific data used to generate figures 16 and 17 is listed in the appendix to this paper.

much time has passed since a major security threat/event occurred.³⁴ For example, a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic could make people feel less safe and, therefore, happier to be 'protected' by more security powers.

This suggests that democratic governments will always face swings in how much they are trusted depending on a range of factors, with a downward trajectory the longer a government is in power. On the other hand, the institutions that outlast individual governments, such as ASIO, don't suffer swings but instead maintain a high level of trust. To date, this feature distinguishes the Australian system from the US systems: Americans are divided not only in relation to governments but also to their institutions. With the rise of issue-based grievances beyond the ideological, Australia will need to work hard to ensure that this feature of national resilience—trust in institutions such as the Australian Electoral Commission and ASIO—remains cohesive and not divided.

How does citizens' trust in government map against the increase in national security laws over the CT era?

When a substantial increase in security legislation that's intended to protect citizens' individual wellbeing and way of life in a democracy is accompanied by a downward trend in trust in the federal government and democracy, it's a correlation worthy of analysis. The evidence, however, does not suggest a direct causal relationship between these two variables, given the mathematical truth that 'correlation is not causation'. Yet, a public that trusts its government and system of government to protect public interests must be able to trust that its government's security legislation, first,

Figure 17: Average trust in the federal government and democracy from 2001 to 2019, compared to increase in the number of federal CT laws passed since the 9/11 terror attacks



Note: This graph uses the data from the eight polls in Figure 16 to calculate an average of polled public trust in the federal government from 2001 to 2019. It doesn't include the 2020 data, as the text has established that there's insufficient data after the easing of Australia's Covid-19 measures to evidence whether the increase in trust polled in 2020 is a stable, continuing trend or an example of the historical phenomenon of trust in government increasing temporarily during a security crisis. This is because the increase is supported by only three indicators over a three-year period. In contrast, the poll-evidenced downward trend in trust since 2007 is supported by a larger dataset (all eight indicators over a 13-year period).

doesn't cost too much in terms of civil liberties and, second, can be implemented in practice by law-enforcement and intelligence agencies to counter evolving iterations of threats.

This challenging balance has two implications for CVE policy today.

First, the idea that Covid-19 and associated public health lockdowns have been a contributing factor or even the primary cause for the ASIO-reported increase in extremism is a tunnel-vision perspective on the problem. It risks preventing research and policy solutions that respond to the range of factors and grievances driving radicalisation in communities and individuals. Covid-19 isn't evidenced as a cause, but it's probably a catalyst for a network of problems that pre-date it, as may be true for other phenomena, such as the widely recognised increase in mental health problems over the course of the pandemic.³⁵

Second, despite the difficulty in assessing direct causality, the relationship between public trust and security legislation is important to consider because it indicates how healthy a population feels the democratic balance is between security

and liberty. The Scanlon and Lowy polls both measured the value of this balance to Australians before and during the pandemic.³⁶

The Scanlon poll found that preference for a non-democratic government was decreasing overall from an already low rate both before and during Covid-19.³⁷ But, when respondents were asked whether non-democratic governance during Covid-19 (that is, in an exceptional circumstance) was a good idea, agreement increased significantly.³⁸ That may change as polling allows respondents to make some comparative assessment of a large authoritarian state's (China's) handling of Covid through extensive lockdowns and security measures, but without the best vaccines—in comparison with Australia over 2022.

The Lowy poll corroborated this increasing preference for democracy, polling a 17-year high in November 2020. But, in contrast to the Scanlon poll results, the appetite for a non-democratic government in exceptional circumstances fell from 22% to 16%.³⁹ It's possible that the wording of the two questions, or those they were grouped with, affected this outcome, or that insufficient time and data are yet accessible to verify one

or the other finding. But the key implication for this discussion is that Australians are keenly aware of and feel strongly about the balance between their safety and their freedom, which their governments are equally responsible for maintaining.

Conclusion and recommendations

Violent extremist groups and anti-government ideologies growing in Australia today have some common features:

- They identify the democratic government that protects and maintains citizens' civil liberties as, alternatively, the primary threat to those liberties.
- They promise an alternative and better future in which a range of grievances are addressed,⁴⁰ to be achieved by some version of 'overthrowing' the established government.
- They've been further fuelled by the pain and frustration resulting from Covid-19 lockdowns and the greater socio-economic disparities in society that the lockdowns have caused.

This is where low trust in government, democratic institutions and processes can contribute to the enabling conditions (that is, the 'conceptual environment' or a commonly accepted 'truth' in a community) in which communities have lower resilience to the ideologies and logics of violent extremist groups. Conditions are distinct from causes, while both play a role in enabling radicalisation.

Recommendation 1: The federal government should clearly express the need for both responsive policing (CT) and preventive, community resilience-building and counter-engagement (CVE) strategies to reverse the current trend of violent extremist groups and ideologies (right-wing extremism, in particular) growing in resonance.

A predominantly CT response to this threat risks fuelling the resonance of anti-government discourse employed by violent extremist groups through seemingly 'evidencing' and 'legitimising' their accelerationist claims.

CVE policy seeks to build individual and community resilience by identifying common vulnerabilities and building safety nets. For example, designing, funding and implementing digital literacy programs in educational institutions would give people the skills to better identify misinformation online. This isn't to say that every person who interacts with misinformation will otherwise believe it, or even that, of those who do believe it, all will radicalise and become violent. Rather, it reduces the likelihood of them being convinced of a violent extremist conspiracy theory such as 'QAnon' on social media. Being better at verifying information read in social or alternative news media contributes

to greater overall community resilience and should be seen as part of the necessary civic toolkit for citizens in a democracy. If a community has a higher rate of resilience, that means that the radicalisation trajectory towards violence of at-risk individuals is more likely to be interrupted, as the pull of violent extremism's animating ideas can be mitigated by the prevalence of non-violent-extremist logics.

Recommendation 2: Federal strategies and policies on CT, CVE and building resilience should identify trust in government as a fundamental component. While public trust isn't a sole contributing factor, it can certainly be abused as a critical vulnerability to amplify violent extremist advocacy and messaging.

Public trust in government similarly acts as a safety net, but it requires a much broader perspective and effort to have a felt impact. In terms of resilience to the increasingly pervasive accelerationist themes underpinning much anti-government, violent extremist discourse, an overall atmosphere of greater trust in government would make communities less vulnerable to arguments by violent extremists who justify their call to action as legitimate resistance to 'authoritarian' government powers.

Recommendation 3: As part of this trust component, so vital for national resilience even in the face of crises, governments should ensure that institutional trust (for example, trust in the independence of media, election processes and security agencies) is separated from party-political trust. This will help ensure the long-term trend in Australia in which swings in governments' popularity don't degrade the ongoing high level of trust in the institutions that are the bedrock of our society.

Research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development identifies a 'government's values, such as high levels of integrity, fairness and openness of institutions' as key ingredients for public trust; for trust in democratic institutions and processes, it's a government's 'responsiveness and reliability in delivering public services and anticipating new needs'.⁴¹

The federal government and parliament (in its role of examining, debating and proposing amendments to proposed laws) need to recognise citizens' trust as a fundamental variable to be tangibly articulated in policy measures. Especially when it comes to building enduring resilience to anti-government, accelerationist, violent extremist ideologies, diligently investing in rebuilding general citizens' trust is a key pillar of an effective CVE strategy.

Appendix

The data used to generate figures 16 and 17 and sources is listed on the following page.

These sets of eight measures/indicators from four sources have been collated with measures of a general rate of 'trust' in the federal government per year, and thereby illustrate a general trend over 20 years. This 'trust' is for government to act in the interests of Australian citizens and to be democratically representative. Given that this data includes eight sets of percentage values, which all measure this type of trust but don't together add to a single whole (100%), the trends for each set in combination show a trend over this 20-year period and corroborate one another in terms of validity. This shows the direction and momentum of the trend in trust over that time. The data was correct as of the time of writing in February 2022.

Notes

- 1 Parliament of Australia, 'Proposals to further strengthen Australia's counter-terrorism laws 2005', 6 October 2005, [online](#).
- 2 There are many publications to this effect. Some key examples from prominent universities are George Williams, 'A decade of Australian anti-terror laws', *Melbourne University Law Review*, 2011, 38, [online](#); Michael Head, 'ASIO, secrecy and lack of accountability', *Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law*, 2004, 11(4), [online](#); Michael Head, "'Counter-terrorism' laws: a threat to political freedom, civil liberties and constitutional rights", *Melbourne University Law Review*, 2002, 34, [online](#); Rebecca Ananian-Welsh, George Williams, 'The new terrorisms: the normalisation and spread of anti-terror laws in Australia', *Melbourne University Law Review*, 2014, 38, [online](#).
- 3 Williams, 'A decade of Australian anti-terror laws'.
- 4 Passed 6 December 2018, [online](#).
- 5 Passed 25 August 2021, [online](#).
- 6 Passed 24 June 2021, [online](#).
- 7 ASIO Director-General Dennis Richardson, while testifying before the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee in 2002, said 'We should be in no doubt that the effects of 11 September are long term; 11 September wasn't a blip on the security landscape which will simply fade gradually into history. It has changed the security environment, and those changes will be with us for some years.' Evidence to Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee, Inquiry into the Security Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill 2002 and Related Bills, *Official Committee Hansard*, Australian Parliament, 19 April 2002, 237 (Dennis Richardson, Director-General, ASIO).
- 8 Adam I Klein, 'The cyclical politics of counterterrorism', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 40, 4 June 2017, [online](#).
- 9 Kent Roach, *The 9/11 effect: Comparative counter-terrorism*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, [online](#).
- 10 Ananian-Welsh & Williams, 'The new terrorisms: the normalisation and spread of anti-terror laws in Australia'; Keiran Hardy, Rebecca Ananian-Welsh, Nicola McGaritty, *Open Democracy Dossier: Secrecy and power in Australia's national security state*, GetUp!, September 2021, [online](#).
- 11 Hardy et al., *Open Democracy Dossier: Secrecy and power in Australia's national security state*.
- 12 Williams, 'A decade of Australian anti-terror laws'.
- 13 See footnote 1 and Appendix 1 in Hardy et al., *Open Democracy Dossier: Secrecy and power in Australia's national security state*; Williams, 'A decade of Australian anti-terror laws'.
- 14 Hardy et al., *Open Democracy Dossier: Secrecy and power in Australia's national security state*.
- 15 See endnote 2.
- 16 The 2020 Scanlon Foundation poll found that '90% of respondents in the five mainland states indicated that government-imposed lockdown restrictions were "definitely required" or "probably required"; and that just '5% of respondents were strongly opposed to government handling of the COVID-19 crisis.' While those percentages may have changed by the time the protest movement gained increased momentum and resonance in 2021 (after another year of lockdowns), this is a good indicator of the ratio between those perspectives. Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Australian Multicultural Foundation and Monash University, 2021, [online](#).
- 17 With regard to violent extremism, 'accelerationist' refers to ideologies that contend that there's 'no political solution' to their grievances that they can possibly achieve within the existing system of government, meaning that they disengage from mainstream politics and its mechanisms. They consequently advocate for violent means to bring about societal collapse to make way for a new system in which their goals can be or are achieved. For more details, see Matthew Kriner, Meghan Conroy, Yasmine Ashwal, *Understanding accelerationist narratives: 'There is no political solution'*, Global Network on Extremism & Technology, 2 September 2021, [online](#).
- 18 Alex Mann, Kevin Nguyen, 'The Base tapes', *ABC News*, 26 March 2021, [online](#); Amanda Taub, Katrin Bennhold, 'From doomsday preppers to doomsday plotters', *New York Times*, 7 June 2021, [online](#).
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- 24 Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, 48. The data used in this report combines responses of 'most of the time' and 'almost always' because they are both positive responses indicating a high rate of trust.

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- 30 Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, 55.
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- 33 Polling is the best available option to gauge population opinions, but the accuracy of a single poll has limitations, given that there are uncontrollable variables even with the most sound methodologies. For example, the AES selects respondents randomly from the electoral roll to ensure that the test sample has representation from across Australia geographically, socio-economically, and for various other key identity characteristics. That said, it's not possible to validate whether certain people are more likely to accept or be available when invited to participate, and whether people who are more likely to accept are more likely to have particular opinions. This is why I've considered polls from four reputable sources, asking questions to gauge trust in Australia's democratic government.
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- 35 The interlinked factors driving the global rise in right-wing extremist terrorism, particularly in the US, the EU and the UK (which Australia's incidence is inherently linked to) illustrate this. Weiyi Cai, Simone Landon, 'Attacks by white extremists are growing. So are their connections', *New York Times*, 3 April 2019, [online](#).
- 36 By asking about appetite for 'a strong leader that does not have to bother with parliament and elections' (Scanlon, 3) and whether 'democracy is preferable to any other kind of government' and 'in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable' (Lowy).
- 37 To the question about 'a strong leader that does not have to bother with parliament and elections', agreement went from 25% (2018) to 22% (2019) to 21% in both July and November 2020; that is, even after significant Covid-19 lockdowns and associated protests. Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, 55.
- 38 Agreement increased by 17 (July 2020) and 11 (November 2020) percentage points to 38% and 33%, respectively. Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: the Scanlon Foundation surveys 2020*, 55.
- 39 Kassam, *Lowy Institute Poll 2021: Australia at home*.
- 40 Daniel Koehler provides a useful analysis of how violent extremist ideologies become socially functional, often despite problematic logics, by having three key components or 'internal mechanisms': a problem definition, a method/solution, and a vision for an alternative future. Daniel Koehler, Director of GIRDS, presentation in International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) 'Live briefing on deradicalisation and disengagement recording', ICCT, 30 June 2021, [online](#).
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The dilemma of multiculturalism and its exploitation by extremists: insights from the Swedish experience

A conversation with Gabriel Sjöblom-Fodor,
annotated and edited by Katja Theodorakis

Katja Theodorakis (KT): You identify ‘feelings of societal rootlessness and a lack of belonging’ as a recurring theme in radicalisation journeys in the Swedish context. This void was then being filled by what purported to be a new, radically different version of Islam than what was previously known. Could you elaborate on this please?

Gabriel Sjöblom-Fodor (GSF): Many Muslim communities [in Sweden and other European countries] suffer from a type of societal identity confusion regarding themselves, their faith and their place in society: how do you live as a devout minority and articulate your faith in a sometimes deeply secular post-Christian Europe that often views your faith with scepticism and as a mere superstition?

One manifestation of this lived reality of tensions and dilemmas is the enmeshment of religious and cultural practices, where some groups or communities may zealously defend purely cultural habits (from their land of origin) as if they were fundamental religious tenets. This is especially problematic when it comes to practices such as arranged or forced (sometimes underage) marriages, female genital mutilation etc.

And this is especially problematic for some Muslim groups who have theological limits to full secular assimilation and hence grapple with profound dilemmas: Should you conform, find a middle ground or act as opposition to the *status quo*? What’s your proper place in society? An assimilated, but still only tolerated minority, or segregated withdrawal to preserve your faith and cultural heritage? How do you deal with the tension between liberal ideals and sometimes illiberal policies regarding your group?

Even when they’re willing to assimilate, there’s a prevalent belief amongst, especially, youth that Swedish society is ‘closed’, where chances of success are limited. Even if you got a university degree, you would still face discrimination, simply by virtue of being a Muslim or immigrant, so the attitude can be ‘Don’t bother with it.’² This has led to some identifying more strongly with their faith, friendship networks, local immigrant areas, religious ideologies, or sometimes criminal gangs.

KT: Your research details how ‘antipathic attitudes in Swedish society towards Islamic religious expressions on both macro- and micro-levels’ were exploited by ISIS recruiters.³ Could you give some detail on what had gone on in Sweden previously for those narratives to resonate with youth?

GSF: This goes back to the fact that Sweden is one of the most secular, liberal countries in Europe, where the preferred type of religious freedom is what I call ‘negative religious freedom’: it’s freedom from religious expressions that’s favoured in the public sphere, rather than including different faiths into secular society on an equal footing. Historically, the church [as an institution] used to be very powerful in Sweden; it occupied a prominent place in public life. Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, modernising movements curbed

the power of the church—what’s seen as one of the foundational myths of modern Sweden. They broke the monopoly of the church and pushed Christianity back into the private sphere from the public sphere. Sweden had been a culturally, ethnically, religiously homogeneous country until about 40 years ago. There were maybe some regional differences, like in Germany, between various parts, but basically still the same culture from north to south.

So when Muslim immigrants began to settle in Sweden and brought with them religious and cultural practices from their countries of origin, this was seen as a social and political assertiveness of sorts—a challenge against the prevailing order of society. This caused friction, along the lines of ‘We managed to get rid of these medieval, superstitious ideas. Now these people are bringing them back into our society.’ And, with time, it became seen as a threat against the secular foundations of the modern state, that if you if you leave a space for these beliefs and practices, it legitimises them, and they’re going to grow and undermine the liberal order of society.

Unfortunately, there’s been a mentality that we need to marginalise religious and cultural expressions. So, over the past 10 years, we had debates emerge about the freedom of religious expression in the public sphere—about the hijab, religious schools, separated bath times in bath houses for men and women, prayer times at work. This is similar to debates occurring in France, for example.⁴ And a dominant discourse, especially propagated through media, was that we can’t allow religious manifestations—that prayer shouldn’t be allowed at work, no public celebration of various religious holidays etc.—because to make provision for them, allow them to be part of Swedish society, would be ‘backtracking on our liberal successes’.

It creates friction, especially within the young generation. Often, for immigrant groups that are especially marginalised, the media might be their only link to mainstream society: what they see on TV, social media or the radio is what they take for the attitude of all of society, when it might not be representative. Yet, when they hear even just certain politicians continuously saying ‘We’ll ban your religious practices’, they think it’s all of society against them. This creates a siege mentality.

KT: I can imagine that, after 9/11, it was mostly Islam that was seen as a ‘backwards other’. But was the almost fundamentalist adherence to secularism that you describe also directed against other faiths, such as very traditional, pious Christian movements?

GSF: Yes, there are some very prominent, conservative Pentecostal churches in Nordic countries. But the difference is that they’re otherwise firmly rooted in the culture of the country. They can deal with pushback [such as proposed bans on certain practices as part of public life] because they know how to navigate the system.

Muslim communities often haven't had the same resources: they don't know society well enough to be able to navigate those tensions. So, when they experience similar opposition, it causes more distress and shock: 'Why are they doing this to us?'

And especially when you come from cultures where Islam is the dominant religion, you don't have any experience or cultural toolkit for facing the challenges inherent in being a minority.

KT: Particularly fascinating in your research was mention of a certain community of charismatic leaders whose appeal wasn't so much at the doctrinal level but came through their passionate calls for what you call 'religious activism', 'with a focus on contemporary political issues, such as the war in Syria/Iraq, other global or domestic injustices, the suffering of Muslims or the perceived ungodliness of contemporary societies.' Could you tell us more? I'm also thinking of how the rise of citizen-journalism changed our mediated reality—from a hierarchy where only certain news organisations or state media had the means to document events to smartphones allowing for the official narrative to be widely contested.

GSF: The visibility of the Syrian conflict played a very large role in this activism, because you could see videos and images on Facebook, on Twitter, on TikTok, you could see war scenes, families being bombed and people getting tortured. You could just pick up your phone and see. One of my interview subjects, who has been an imam for a long time, noted that there was much more engagement for the Syrian conflict than for the Tigrinya conflict in Ethiopia, for example. And that it was because in Ethiopia, they couldn't film what was going on because they didn't have smartphones.

So, when these scenes of horror and war and torture became accessible, when war became mainstream, so to speak, *jihadi* groups were able to capitalise on this. Muslims being killed by the secular Baathist regime in Syria raised questions and caused anxiety in, especially, Muslim youth here. Many young people started asking themselves and others what was going on: 'What should our attitudes to this be? What can or should we do?' And, as the conflict and its horrors wore on, 'How can we try to stop this? How can peace come?' became an everyday subject of conversation.

Militant Islamist and *jihadi* groups saw this as a divine gift of sorts: finally, all Muslims are awakening to the collective injustice against them. Before, many maybe sympathised but only very few talked about it; now everyone is talking about it. So *jihadi* groups activated on a grassroots level to participate in these debates, online and in real life. They'd inject the latest videos out of Syria and Iraq, of someone being tortured, for example. And

they'd say, 'Oh, you want to do something about these atrocities? We have the solution. We know what you can do.' They entered these spaces deliberately, to shape and steer the social and political narratives developing within the Muslim community at the time and offer their 'solutions'. For this end, they initiated social activities like football or barbecues; they hired a room in a local community centre, got takeaway food and invited the local youth to socialise. As they ate together and everyone was having a good time, they'd start talking about Syria: 'What's going on down there? What can we do about it?' They would show films or footage from down there, with all the violence, and play the lectures of Anwar al-Awlaki, followed by a 'You know you want to do something about this' call to action.

The influence of amateur videos of Assad's atrocities is also documented in interviews with ISIS defectors, returnees and detainees as part of an empirical study by Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg.⁵ Some note a shift in levels of religious observance as a push and pull factor influencing decisions to travel to Syria; it also found that far more interviewees reported being motivated by sadness and an urge to provide humanitarian aid to the Syrians than by anger. For example, 30-year-old German Abu Munir recounts:

In the Syrian war, we see it on television and in videos on YouTube. I am Kurdish; we are whole family against crime and injustices. I see the crimes and the women crying, you know these videos; I wanted to help people ... I changed my life in Germany. I have a beard and I go to *masjid*; people in Germany, they don't like me before because I have black hair and brown eyes. Now it's more ... Two reasons, German people don't want me, and Syrian people want help.

KT: How have these developments affected Muslim communities in Sweden? What have they done to counter the influence of IS?

GSF: Most communities would try to address the issue in some way or another from within their own theological interpretations. The communities where I conducted field work realised the urgency of the situation and quickly responded with their own counter-campaigns, both in real life and online, publicly as well as privately, preaching and lecturing against the new *jihadi* ideology, trying to expose it as deviant, theologically unsound and in direct opposition to classical Islamic scholarship.

The communities' ability to engage IS propagandists and their claims to be 'true believers' came from their own theological canon, which served as an important barrier against this influence. The fact that many community leaders had grown up in these environments themselves was key—having built up trust and credibility for years, as opposed to outsiders coming in, was a determining factor in their success.⁶

Unfortunately, in some communities, especially in vulnerable areas, choices were made not to confront IS ideology despite an awareness of it making inroads.

This is because existential struggles were unfolding not only against the threat from IS, alongside friction with wider society, but also within communities, about the very nature of their faith itself. An intense rivalry between Islamists, *jihadis*, *Salafis*, traditionalists, modernists and ordinary Muslim believers was playing out as different groups clashed over how to reinterpret their faith in the face of a new reality that their historical experiences didn't prepare them for.

Some were afraid that emboldened IS supporters would try to attack imams or community figures who openly voiced opposition to IS; others felt they needed to give IS the ideological 'benefit of the doubt'. Some communities also felt distrust towards the authorities, who weren't properly equipped to deal with the situation.⁷

Moreover, IS-inspired terror attacks across Europe seem to have brought longstanding anxieties and concerns about Muslims to the surface in many Western European countries. This includes views of Muslims as an entitled minority with an opposing value system, who take from society far more than they contribute. Here, sticking points and prejudices revolve around the rate of 'Muslim' crime or cultural practices perceived as problematic, such as requesting religious exemptions, alongside a supposed rhetoric of 'demand' from certain Islamic leaders and community representatives.

Many devout Muslims who perceive their faith to be under attack react by clinging harder to their beliefs or values, resulting in further segregation. Some parents are also afraid of the social services, and therefore shy away from their values and beliefs, or even avoid disciplining their children; in some cases, this reticence comes after warnings by school staff and others that they'd be reported to social services if they continued their beliefs and customs. This is also cited as part of the reason why some try to send their children 'back home' on 'fostering trips', for children (or adolescents) to live with extended family or at local institutions.

This opens the door for political Islamists and *jihadis* to capitalise on these sentiments. Since the rise of political Islamism—as a reaction to colonialism—the West has been conceptualised in the Islamist imagination as a hostile, subversive force out to disgrace Muslims and harm the Muslim faith.⁸ Western governments have—often unbeknownst to themselves—acted according to the *jihadi* playbook by inadvertently confirming their

narratives: a current example is insensitive rhetoric or blunt measures as a response to public and political frustration with religious or cultural conduct perceived as 'too different' from Swedish values. *Jihadis* use this as 'proof' to rally for action against the perceived aggressor: messages like 'The West is evil, hates you and wants to destroy your faith' resonate when they seem backed by tangible manifestations. Especially when they lead to Islamophobia or even hate crimes, it starts a vicious cycle.

Also, the Muslim community here appears to be affected by higher levels of mental health issues like PTSD resulting from traumatisation from abroad. Depression and anxiety disorders are said to go untreated to a much greater extent than what's common in the general population. These then manifest through obsessive-compulsive religious behaviours, typically surrounding acts of worship—an area where many feel they can't be understood and correctly treated by secular psychologists; yet many imams are equally not equipped.

This way, mental health issues become risk factors as individuals with PTSD or other mental health challenges 'snap' and, in the face of perceived or real discrimination, decide to act on their anger.

KT: When it comes to support from the authorities, what types of interventions were conducted, and on what basis? Was the problem set treated predominantly as a security and law enforcement issue, or equally looked at in terms of social cohesion?

GSF: It's well known that responding only with stricter laws, surveillance and the securitisation of Muslim communities is counterproductive. Outside actors can't really go in and meddle in the communities. So, it's important to acknowledge this is no easy challenge for Western politicians and policymakers. Sadly, actions, however well meaning, sometimes take the shape of an elephant in a porcelain shop when those devising them aren't cognisant of the sensitivities and complexities on the ground.

Solutions that predominantly focus on providing material incentives in response to socio-economic push factors, as suggested by some politicians and policymakers, aren't sufficient. Research shows that faith is often a key variable—it creates meaning and helps in coping with problematic circumstances.⁹ Believing Muslims, who are the prime target audience of both *jihadis* and secular statutory policies, have a deeply theocentric world view, and it would be ill-advised to create a rift from this. Jihadism is a political as well as religious ideology that attaches the vision of a perfect political order to divine, eternal principles, heaven or hell. So when your counternarrative neglects or negates this, when the policy solution offers the sole prospect of material wellbeing, without room for spiritual or emotional debates, it's highly problematic because it won't reach through to those brought up in a religious household, who may have a deep-rooted attachment to their

faith. As a result, such strategies likely enforce what they intend to counteract: alienation from mainstream society.

On the other hand, the promotion of more value-based policies also led to only limited successes. This has to do with the problems that arise when the promotion of Swedish values becomes enshrined in policies: they then come with inherent expectations of conformity. This way, the idea to recreate Muslim communities in ‘our own image’ doesn’t work. Not all are prepared to conform to dominant sociocultural norms and may instead withdraw further into alternative social orders, thereby slowly creating ‘parallel societies’ where Muslim parents, for example, withdraw their children from communal schools to homeschool them, or the kids themselves drop out.

During my six years of field work, so many members of the Muslim community have told me that they want to be a part of society, yet society isn’t allowing them in as Muslims. When they attempt to integrate as Muslims, they’re confronted with questions like ‘What’s your belief on gender equality? What’s your belief on religious freedom? What’s your belief on this and that?’ And if you don’t answer according to mainstream ideas, you don’t get the job, you don’t get the house. You’re not allowed to partake when you don’t conform. So society here has basically put up a barrier that says ‘If you don’t have the correct values, the Swedish values, you’re not allowed to participate.’ Consequently, certain types of measures typically simply force the issues underground, rather than addressing them. And this creates marginalisation; it creates alienation. The city of Stockholm, particularly, is perceived as unfriendly and unwelcoming, which influences segregation/isolationist patterns.¹⁰ Ultimately, it can lead to enclaves.

KT: I’d argue that IS has managed to rebrand Islam as a mobilising, deviant identity on steroids—the Rambo version of classic jihad. Do you see much evidence of what’s been described as the crime–terror nexus? Are criminal backgrounds notably present, or even prevalent, among Swedish jihadists as a result?

GSF: Over the last couple of years, Sweden stands out as one of the countries with the highest rate of gang-related violence and shootings in the world. Its roots are in a series of disparate conflicts between rival gangs that emerged from 2010 onward in those same marginalised areas: they’re mostly made up of young people from immigrant Muslim backgrounds. It led to an arms race of sorts between those gangs.¹¹ The result is a significant pool of illegal weapons now in circulation in these areas. One interviewee told me about guns and other weaponry being stashed in cars, which are re-parked every other day to

avoid detection, making them easily accessible for those with local insider knowledge.

An individual coming from such circumstances who has acquired violent ‘street capital’ and knows how to obtain illegal arms is an even greater danger when radicalised. And the slip into extremism is almost impossible to predict, unless those close to him or her have recognised the signs. As such, the gang culture in Sweden represents one of the most serious challenges for the coming decade, both in fighting crime and as a potentially fertile soil for *jihadi* radicalisation. Jihadism and crime also overlap where *jihadi* ideologues find Western adherents who condone and even encourage crime as a part of ‘jihad’ resistance to society. Gang environments also provide fertile soil for *jihadis* to hide in; moreover, the increasingly sophisticated extrajudicial structures of gangs could also be copied by *jihadis* with ties to those gangs and replicated in their own environments.¹²

Clandestine networks are very dangerous, in that they’re notoriously hard to detect and monitor. To use European examples, it’s easy for an individual with harmful intent, or already wanted by authorities, to hide in areas like Molenbeek in Belgium, the banlieues of Paris, or southern Järva in Sweden. Their tactics include moving from address to address (sometimes taking advantage of traditional hospitality), gathering in private homes or renting facilities through an officially unconnected third party—these are nearly impossible to monitor. According to two sources interviewed for my analysis, in some clandestine networks, members typically don’t display any outward Islamic manifestations (no beards or niqabs, praying or fasting etc.), they don’t attend any known mosques but rather gather for their activities in private homes, and don’t welcome outsiders (they typically renounce mainstream imams and congregations, also to avoid being spotted).¹³ If traditional communities can no longer fulfil a gatekeeper role, this could become a substantive threat in the coming years.

KT: Your field work specifically highlights concerns from imams who fear they’re losing influence, for a number of reasons. I’m reminded of reports about traditional religious leaders now being seen as out of touch by youth who get their advice and answers from ‘Sheikh Google’ instead. Could you please elaborate on these dynamics, how they affect communities’ ability to deal with future challenges?

GSF: Religious authorities have an important role as community shepherds and are very often turned to for guidance, advice or as negotiators in social, personal, family and community affairs, and many turn to them before, or instead of, the authorities. This typically leads them to detect

indications of (or be asked to resolve) problematic trends and potential threats. Their longstanding experiences and work serving their communities have awarded them unique trust. They also play another equally important role as a bridge to wider society. They're able to provide civic orientation assistance and engage with groups that otherwise would have very little contact with wider society and help in introducing them to society. This places them in a unique position that shouldn't be neglected. Outside actors should offer not only economic, but also moral, support to them.

The problem is that, in reality, the entire burden of prevention falls on the communities. This is a result of communal services being neglected or withdrawn from certain areas.

To many politicians or policymakers, the work of such communities represents a serious conundrum. While holding beliefs that are regarded as controversial and undesirable in many liberal democracies (such as a theocentric worldview, traditional gender norms, conservative faith practices, belief in the validity of religious-based laws etc.), these communities work on the front lines with tangible results in the struggle against violent extremism and have the trust of many vulnerable Muslims that the authorities don't have. It appears the dilemma for politicians and policymakers is the fear that state-sanctioned interactions and support of such communities would legitimise and normalise their beliefs. Some authorities have tried to keep very conservative groups at bay in the struggle against violent extremism, instead picking communities as partners that are seen as more 'acceptable' in the eyes of society. But communities chosen out of political considerations lack credibility, and initiatives end up producing very little results, in spite of considerable sums of funding allocated to them.¹⁴

Additionally, community leaders interviewed during my field work have raised concerns regarding ongoing trends of decentralisation in Muslim communities. This includes the decline of the traditional influence of imams and religious community leaders (who are often seen as out of touch), which leads to people drifting away from such traditional community structures and increasingly turning to external influences like online preachers and other local, obscure, self-styled imams. This conflict then plays out primarily in the shadows, in which they debate, argue and contest over often premodern and medieval theological interpretations that form the core of doctrinal disputes between violent and non-violent interpretations.

It could lead to secretive splinter communities—a very concerning trend, as they tend to build their own networks rather than relying on society or established Muslim communities for work opportunities, funding, housing and other forms of support. As such, you could live a day-to-day life without any connection to

majority society or the Muslim community. This may create a sense of 'semi-autonomy' and result in clandestine networks with extremist behaviour as overzealous adherents feel they aren't accountable to statutory actors.

There needs to be a deeper understanding of these processes on the side of statutory bodies as a foundation for more tactical responses.

KT: To conclude, I want to highlight a point from a 2021 research paper you wrote with Dr Anne Speckhard. You note that 'suspicion towards and discomfort with conservative norms and values, and those who adhere to such, denying followers of such values equal opportunity in society has real consequences.'¹⁵ Is there a danger that the label 'extremism' becomes an easy catch-all for religious beliefs or practices that a deeply secular, individualistic and rationally oriented society is uncomfortable and at odds with?

GSF: The concept of 'extremism' and what it constitutes must be more closely defined; it risks being applied bluntly or without reserve. At the same time, try to empower the moderate groups by changing the perception of what is extremism. We've seen this in some instances where even mainstream Sunni Islamic religious stances have been labelled as extremist, thus stigmatising large number of otherwise law-abiding Muslim citizens.¹⁶ Right now in Sweden, if you want to pray at work, it's considered extremist. Declaring certain cultural practices of a mainstream religion as extremism is unhelpful. Even if it seems backwards and medieval to the majority, branding so much of what mainstream Muslims believe as 'extremism' marginalises large parts of the Muslim communities. Instead, empower moderate communities that teach inculturation.

KT: You mean, cultural dialogue or intercultural understanding?

GSF: Inculturation: it's a theological term that borrows insights from anthropology.¹⁷ The meaning of 'moderate' here entails religious interpretations that advocate living in harmony with surrounding society, rather than at odds with it—striving to be an integrated partner who can contribute to the common good, even based on conservative beliefs.

KT: Should the state then have a role in determining which interpretations of Islam are 'valid' and in line with those constitutionally enshrined principles and rights? Or what can and should be done to equip and support communities to address the problem more sustainably?

GSF: Moderate imams and other religious authorities need to be free to do their work and constructively engage their communities without overt interference from statutory bodies. Due to the nature of jihadism as a religious-based ideology, it's primarily the responsibility of religious communities to tackle it,

and authorities may have to let contestations over religious interpretations ‘play out’. One important thing to keep in mind is that you can’t illegalise or marginalise away phenomena that society doesn’t approve of. The ‘maximum social pressure’ or ‘muscular liberalism’ strategies favoured by some in the Nordic countries create more problems than they solve, by forcing the issues into the shadows.

What shouldn’t be tolerated, however, are hate speech, incitement or subversive behaviours. This is also why it’s important to support those forces within the community who have the credibility and ability to teach proper modes of engagement (how to be polite about disagreements with surrounding society), rather than giving in to Islamist/jihadist agitation.

It isn’t the job of authorities to determine which religious interpretations are valid or not, or go after eradicating pietistic practices, as long as adherents fulfil their civic responsibilities and are law-abiding citizens. Society should be able to accommodate respectful differences in the name of democracy and freedom of expression. I would say the main thing is to stop trying to shape community affairs, enforce values on communities, or to try to prescribe what imams should preach in an attempt to recreate communities according to some idealised vision of a secular, culturally homogeneous society.

Identity problems, along with rootlessness and a sense of disorientation, will continue to haunt immigrant generations born in Sweden. The other ongoing issue is that of urban environments themselves, and that especially the city of Stockholm is perceived as unfriendly and unwelcoming, which has an effect on segregation/isolationist patterns.

There’s a need to reassess how these issues are handled by the bodies tasked with them. This is going to take strong political and social will that will need to be both informed and inclusive. Otherwise, the burden to produce functional ‘micro-solutions’ will continue to be placed almost entirely on local actors such as the religious communities that I’ve described, alongside the individual initiative of those social workers, teachers, parents, police and trusted individuals with intimate knowledge of the particular area or issue. It’s crucial that social services interventions and other government support measures are applied early, before the radicalisation process gets out of hand, and that this closely involves the affected families in an inclusive manner.

The urgent need to develop holistic and realistic approaches to the challenges of evolving jihadism dynamics is one of the top policy concerns over the next decade.

The rise of the far right, alongside ambivalent, insensitive rhetoric, even from the centre right and centre left in some European countries, is a source of great concern for the coming years. It’s very important to understand that political measures targeting specific minorities or communities risk further social stigma and antipathy. It may be tempting for politicians and policymakers to overlook complex concerns for the sake of universal top-down solutions that, on the surface, seem to provide security and stability, in addition to letting the minority ‘know its place’; however, this is very problematic in the light of concrete radicalisation issues, as well as democratically.

The struggle against Islamist extremism has, in some cases, become indistinguishable from a wider ideological activism against conservative Islam itself, which is rooted in specific Nordic liberal and secular humanist thought. This strategy ends up as one of alienation and decreases credibility and, with that, the ability to reach out to target audiences. Counterextremism work should be concerned only with trends that, at their core, present a challenge to pluralism.

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Notes

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Rethinking bioterrorism in an evolving post-pandemic threat landscape: a case for a strategy with a capital ‘S’

Jasmine Latimore

Introduction

Bioterrorism can be loosely described as the use of biological weapons (BW) in an act of terrorism. Although motivated by the same ideological variables as 'traditional' terrorism, bioterrorism uses BWs as the vehicle to cause mass casualties, societal disruption and terror.¹ Interpol, for example, defines bioterrorism as 'the intentional release of biological agents or toxins for the purpose of harming or killing humans, animals or plants with the intent to intimidate or coerce a government or civilian population to further political or social objectives'.²

Although rudimentary forms of BWs have existed for centuries,³ advances in the biotechnology industry have caused the BW threat to evolve faster than the policies and regulatory frameworks implemented to hinder their proliferation.⁴ BW-producing capabilities are becoming increasingly available to radicalised groups or individuals, and the ease with which more complex BWs can be engineered raises a significant security concern amid an evolving terrorist threat.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also altered the bioterrorism threat landscape. The global health crisis illustrated how infectious disease can inflict damage upon the global world order and revealed vulnerabilities in both national and international preparedness and response capabilities:

The global shock caused by the pandemic has shattered humanity's false sense of safety from infectious diseases. It has also exposed hitherto unknown problems and areas neglected in the proliferation naturally to be expected in a globalising world, and shown the need to control and combat bioterrorist threats.⁵

After situating bioterrorism within the context of the pandemic and a changing threat environment, this analysis will make the case for a measured reassessment of bioterrorism as only one facet of a wider array of biothreats facing the nation. An examination of bioterrorism from this angle highlights the importance of understanding the interaction between threat perception, risk calculation and the ensuing policy response, offering insights for a future in which bioterrorism could prevail as a concern to human security. Ultimately, this paper recommends a reassessment of the bioterrorist threat amid the changing threat landscape, with the goal of approaching counter-bioterrorism in a measured and holistic manner, guiding a reorientation so that we may be adequately prepared in the future.

BWs: weapons of mass destruction and 'disruption'

Biological weapons disseminate disease-causing organisms to harm or kill human, animal, or plant populations.⁶ These disease-causing organisms include: bacteria, viruses, fungi, prions, rickettsiae, toxins derived from animals, plants or microorganisms, and similar substances that have been produced synthetically.

BWs are distinct from chemical weapons; they're defined as disease-causing organisms or toxins that have been weaponised with the intent to cause disease or death in human, animal or plant populations.⁷ Classified as weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), BWs are a serious threat to human security because of their capacity to cause disease and death on a colossal scale for a fraction of the cost of other WMDs:⁸

The counter BW world is small compared to the nuclear world. Of 'NBC' [nuclear, biological, chemical], the 'B' is always the smallest portfolio of the three files, and it always has the smallest community and the smallest amount of resources to address the threat. I wonder whether the pandemic may ... create a more robust community and hopefully get the resources that are needed—and not just from a pandemic threat potential, but also the recognition that biology has the ability to topple governments and to create instability in entire global systems. While we've seen what Mother Nature can do, we certainly need to do everything we can to make sure that a man-made pandemic is prevented to the maximum extent possible.⁹

'Human security' is a relatively modern concept that delineates an expansion of what's considered a security threat and how such threats are managed. According to UN General Assembly resolution 66/290, 'human security is an approach to ... identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of [humans]'.¹⁰ Thus, bioterrorism, as a significant threat to human security, demands a 'people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented response[s]'.¹¹

BWs are also perfect weapons of mass *disruption*. A bioterrorist attack employing a pathogen with even minor clinical detriment to human health has the power to deliver an immediate, yet long-lasting, 'fear cost' to the public.¹² Beyond their potential to spread illness, death and terror, BWs also have the capacity to shock economies and affect our very way of life. We need to look only as far as the Sars-CoV-2 virus to witness the potential for an infectious disease to wreak havoc upon the global world order, far beyond the cost to human health and lives.

Offering strategic advantages distinct from both conventional weapons and other WMDs, BWs are a diverse and highly attractive class of weaponry for terrorism. A high level of tactical control can be achieved by selecting, synthesising or genetically engineering pathogens with qualities favourable to the desired outcome, with different incubation periods, transmissibility, pathogenicity and resistance to therapeutic intervention. BWs, unlike alternative weapon types, target living organisms while leaving vital non-living infrastructure intact. They have a lag effect that allows for the extensive spread of disease before an attack is detected or a response is mounted and are the only weapon type that can self-perpetuate, causing continued harm regardless of the amount of initial bacteriological agent used.¹³ They have the potential to cause true global disruption regardless of the size or location of the initial attack.

In addition to being able to cause illness, death and psychogenic symptoms in human populations, BWs can be used to damage agricultural production, disturbing food availability and economic growth as a result. Agrobioterrorism is particularly concerning to Australia as an island nation that reaps the benefits of an agricultural sector largely free from introduced pests and diseases, and as an economy intrinsically linked to agricultural production.¹⁴ As John Coyne and Paul Barnes have highlighted:

[A]n area of increased importance for Australia is the convergence of the threat of the use of chemical or biological materials (as weapons) by criminals or terrorists and the natural occurrence of diseases in agricultural settings. Each risk vector is important in and of itself, but their combination creates a suite of wicked problems that logically require enhanced collaboration among agencies—private and public—along with new and different levels of attention to detail.¹⁵

BWs are theoretically rather easy to obtain, which presents a major challenge in counter-bioterrorism strategy. Harmful pathogens are naturally occurring and can be isolated with the right skill set and equipment. Alternatively, biological agents can be stolen from research facilities, illicitly purchased, or obtained from rogue nations that refuse to adhere to the international norms that vilify BW development and use.¹⁶ The industrial infrastructure required to turn pathogens into weapons is cheap and 'dual-use' in nature, meaning that equipment and materials used for peaceful research can be easily misappropriated for malevolent applications by disgruntled scientists or by terrorist organisations with the right tacit knowledge. Moreover,

legitimate research published on the internet can inadvertently provide violent extremists with BW blueprints, allowing 'DIY' biologists and motivated amateurs access to everything they need to build a BW at home:

While the advance of technology creates benefits that we can all enjoy, it also creates emergent security issues that cannot be known in advance ... we need to do the hard work on anticipating and mitigating the risks ... in a world of techno-strategic dynamism that is fuelling an acceleration of technological change and adaptation.¹⁷

BWs are also easier and cheaper to develop than other WMDs.¹⁸ Their nickname—'the poor man's atom bomb'—alludes to the equalising effect that BWs provide against more powerful and well-resourced targets. The ratio between potential harm caused to resources expended makes them a favourable weapon of choice for terrorists as asymmetric adversaries.¹⁹

Bioterrorism: a unique threat, a brief history

Despite the allure and theoretical ease of BW procurement, very few bioterrorism ambitions have reached fruition, even among prominent and well-resourced violent extremist groups such as Aum Shinrikyo and al-Qaeda.²⁰

The Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo attempted bioterrorist strikes on at least eight occasions in the early to mid-1990s, yet ultimately failed to weaponise the highly deadly *Bacillus anthracis* and *Clostridium botulinum* pathogens.²¹ Its inability to source strains of bacteria capable of causing toxic effects in humans and its failed dissemination mechanisms highlight some of the hurdles would-be bioterrorists face in BW procurement and delivery.²² Al-Qaeda's BW program faced similar challenges, indicating that, while gaining access to dangerous pathogens is quite achievable, being able to convert raw bacteria into a form that can be used as a weapon isn't so simple.²³

The successful 1984 bioterror attack by the Rajneeshee cult in the US is the perfect illustration of how one can circumvent the logistical challenges associated with more advanced BW ambitions. By opting for a rudimentary BW, featuring a crude delivery system (a 'slurry' of the non-lethal and non-contagious *Salmonella typhimurium* bacterium), the small-scale Rajneeshee bioterror attack resulted in 751 cases of food poisoning and catalysed fear and

economic disruption in the local community of Dalles, Oregon, proving that even non-lethal and primitive acts of bioterrorism are a security risk.²⁴

Conversely, the 2001 American anthrax attack raises the concern of lone-wolf terrorism and the dual-use conundrum. Dr Bruce Ivins was a highly educated scientist conducting biodefence research at the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases. Ivins's access to research-grade anthrax and technical expertise enabled him to bypass the challenges faced by Aum and al-Qaeda and ultimately conduct an attack causing five deaths and 17 illnesses and putting an additional 10,000 people at risk.²⁵ The ensuing cost to the US Government reached over US\$320 million, and worldwide media attention spurred global anxiety, particularly as the attack took place shortly after the 2001 Twin Towers attack.²⁶

In 2014, ISIS posted a video urging its followers to poison Westerners through food or water, in addition to using vehicles as weapons. Countries such as Germany, France, Britain, Turkey and Indonesia took steps to prepare for such atrocities. In March 2018, the UK intelligence community expressed mounting concerns that ISIS affiliates were planning to produce and use ricin and anthrax in the UK, targeting food and water supplies. Recent police raids in Cologne, Germany, have also uncovered evidence of a plot to acquire and manufacture ricin with a clear intent to cause harm in a terror-related attack.

In October 2019, a plot targeting a police station in West Java featured an explosive device laced with the biotoxin abrin. Although intervention by the Indonesian police hindered the intended suicide attack devised by the Islamic State-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah terrorist cell, the mere existence of the biologically enhanced conventional weapon raises several concerns. The biotoxin-laced bomb, developed not with the intent of bioterrorism, but as a means of increasing the lethality of a conventional weapon, in effect would have produced a local, non-contagious, chemical weapon-like impact.²⁷ This alludes to a future in which we witness not only a convergence between the chemical and BW threats, but an emergence of 'low-effort bioterrorism', in which easily obtainable organically derived poisons are favoured over the highly infectious, 'apocalyptic' agents policymakers typically associate with bioterrorism.²⁸

Counterterrorism strategies must adapt to the range of traditional and emerging threats from a multiplicity of international and domestic adversaries.

— B Hoffman, C Clarke, 'The next American terrorist: the growing irrelevance of organizational structure for US domestic terrorism', 2020²⁹

The successes and failures of terrorist BW programs in the past can offer us key insights into the bioterrorist threat today and help us identify weaknesses within Australia's current counter-bioterrorism strategy. This brief history demonstrates that bioterrorism

is a unique security threat with a great degree of variability. The difficulties associated with advanced BW production imply that terrorist organisations are more likely to successfully build and deploy rudimentary, low-effort BWs,³⁰ while advanced BWs are expected to originate from an expert-turned-terrorist.

Intent to conduct a bioterrorist attack exists among prominent and well-resourced terrorist groups, several of which have displayed a high degree of creativity while skirting roadblocks against BW development. Rather than adopting a 'low-risk, high-consequence' approach driven by assessments of potential aftermaths, we need to take a more proactive stance.

The Covid-19 pandemic provides an urgent opportunity for Australia to re-engage in a sober analysis of the bioterrorist threat and assess whether we need a dedicated counter-bioterrorism strategy, or an overarching plan capable of addressing emerging trends and the diffuse nature of the full complement of biothreats (man-made and intentional, naturally emerging/re-emerging, and accidentally released).³¹ To that end, it's important to realise that the Covid-19 pandemic may have provided both inspiration and strategic intelligence for future bioterrorists hoping to engineer a pandemic.

Emerging concerns: the threat landscape and Covid-19

Australia's national terrorism threat level is 'Probable' (as of June 2022), reflecting the ongoing security risk presented by violent extremism.³² Intelligence assessments by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation have determined that individuals and extremist groups have both the intent and the capability to mount a terrorist attack in Australia.³³

In the decades since 9/11, the nature of the terrorist threat has changed as global trends have shifted towards what's called a 'post-organisational paradigm in terrorism'.³⁴ Terrorism appears to be progressively motivated by ideologies that can't be easily delineated on a spectrum of left-to-right or designated to a particular organisation. Attacks against government and political figures have typically been carried out by individuals and groups with no formal affiliation to established terrorist organisations, indicating an increased likelihood of more autonomous, less hierarchically organised terrorism.³⁵

In recent years terrorism and violent extremism across the ideological spectrum has been marked by a 'post-organisational' trend. Membership of and support for particular groups has become more ambiguous, with online activity facilitating the growth of more fluid transnational movements. Attacks are committed by individuals with

no, or very loose, connection to specific organisations, and violent extremists instead draw on a shared culture and ideology ... Despite the fracturing and franchising of violent extremist movements and the proliferation of decentralised online extremist spaces, responses to terrorist content online are still hampered by rigid organisational conceptions of the challenge.³⁶

The sharing of instructional materials that contain guidance on operational aspects of terrorist activity, such as instructions for weapons manufacture and the perpetration of attacks, are a key concern here. This is especially the case when it comes to the wider diffusion and organisationally agnostic appeal of practical guides for building bombs and selecting targets, such as al-Qaeda's step-by-step guides, which may be used by a wider audience now.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also sparked a renewed global concern about bioterrorism.³⁷ James Giordano, executive director of the Institute for Biodefense Research and a professor of neurology at Georgetown University in Washington DC, called Covid 'a wake-up call': 'What COVID really brought into the light is the lack of preparedness for a biological threat, whether it's naturally occurring or man-made, or some combination of both.'³⁸ This raises important questions about Australia's approach to the bioterrorism threat and our level of preparedness for a wider range of bio-events.

Not only did the pandemic serve as a reminder of the vulnerability of humans to biological agents like the Sars-CoV-2 virus and provide future bioterrorists with the inspiration to conduct a bioterrorist attack, but it also provided significant strategic intelligence. By watching the pandemic unfold in real time, violent extremists were able to obtain key insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the global public health system, allowing them to observe how different nations responded to the public health crisis, measure their performance, and ascertain which is an ideal target.³⁹

Australia has plenty to learn from the US biodefence strategy, especially in terms of promoting the significance of biosecurity threats to an often complacent public. For Australia, any effort to develop such a national strategy ought to start with a much broader interpretation of the threat.⁴⁰

The US, for example, was ranked as the most pandemic-prepared nation in the world by the 2019 Global Health Security Index,⁴¹ but, in the event, it performed far below expectations. Poor public messaging, failure to implement nationwide lockdown and public hygiene measures, coupled with low vaccine compliance,

caused the virus to severely damage what's considered to be an advanced, well-resourced nation. This sends a message to prospective 'BW yielders' that the US has exploitable vulnerabilities that could make it a prime target for a BW attack.⁴² Australian policymakers should similarly look to the Covid-19 pandemic for insight and consider the public health crisis as an opportunity for a strategic reorientation that improves Australia's resilience to all biothreats, including bioterrorism.

Whether naturally occurring or malignantly introduced, an infectious disease outbreak anywhere in the world poses a threat to human security and our national interests.

Covid-19 not only revealed how biological agents can threaten human security, economic prosperity and personal freedoms, but also exposed the true interdependence of global health and food supply and general 'prosperity'. Therefore, there's an imperative for Australia to re-examine its existing bioterrorism strategy amid the changing threat landscape using a measured approach that acknowledges the intrinsically global nature of bioterrorism amid evolving threat arenas.⁴³

Threat analysis and risk mitigation: mapping the bioterrorist threat

With regard to potential threats posed by an individual bad actor, a group ... all the way through to state actors ... there's no easy answer to these threats. Long-term, time-on-target analysis and collection needs to be done in order to really understand them better.⁴⁴

Threat analysis plays a critical role in risk mitigation.⁴⁵ It is imperative that a comprehensive and systematic threat analysis is performed to accurately gauge risk before a strategic approach is adopted. Perceptions regarding the bioterrorist threat have changed over the past two decades, and substantial paradigm shifts in the way the threat is approached have coincided with major events.

The 2001 American anthrax attack initiated a notable surge in resources for biodefence and counter-bioterrorism across the globe, in a shift away from the state-centred biowarfare concern that had dominated previous decades. With the advent of swine flu in 2009, the focus shifted again. Policymakers began to adopt a dogma that addressed the entire continuum of biothreats.⁴⁶

Covid-19 has produced a similar re-emergence of bioterrorism discourse.

In the case of bioterrorism, threat assessments have tended to either under- or overestimate the threat. Overestimation of the risk tends to paint a picture of the worst-case, apocalyptic scenario. While that approach is useful in garnering resources and policy responses, it also acts to strengthen terrorists' interest in BWs, exacerbates the BW 'fear factor', and ultimately leads to policies that fail to address the nuances inherent to bioterrorism.

On the other hand, some look at the historically poor success rate in bioterrorism and deem the threat negligible due to the roadblocks would-be bioterrorists must face in BW procurement. Such assessments fail to acknowledge how emerging technologies incrementally close the gap between ambition and acquisition and, hence, undermine measured policy intervention. Those underestimations also neglect to acknowledge that bioterrorist attacks have indeed occurred in the past, demonstrating that bioterrorism is not an idyllic yet unobtainable fantasy but an evolving threat requiring re-examination.

With the advent of Covid-19, biothreats are again on the immediate political agenda. This provides us with an opportunity to engage with the bioterrorist threat with a fresh sense of the risks posed by biothreats and the current weaknesses within our biodefence, biosecurity and biosafety policies as well as our public health systems. Rather than moving on from the pandemic without considering the implications of the next bio-event, we should perform a threat assessment now so that we may adjust our policy response proportionately to the true threat.

Conclusion

[S]trategies are pieces of paper that sit on bookshelves until they are actually funded and turned into programs that can operationalize these implementation plans. My concern is that we slide back into a period of neglect where these critical elements that Mother Nature is warning us about, and that intelligence is warning about, will not be addressed.⁴⁷

Although counter-bioterrorism engagement has waxed and waned over the past two decades, bioterrorism has been an enduring security concern even before the Global War on Terror.

Bioterrorist plots, regardless of their success, provide us with key insights into the diffuse nature of bioterrorism and help us to better understand how emerging technologies and the evolving threat landscape interact with the intent to conduct a bioterrorist attack. The Covid-19 pandemic has played a key role in altering this threat landscape in recent years by providing future bioterrorists with strategic intelligence and inspiration.

Rather than relying upon another sobering event to prompt policy intervention, a measured reanalysis of the bioterrorist threat should be conducted now so that an appropriate policy response can be mounted. Investigation into Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2022 has revealed that there's no clearly defined counter-bioterrorism plan associated with it. When bioterrorism is subsumed under a general counterterrorism approach, that may aid deterrence and response capacities, but does it adequately address the intricacies associated with bioterrorism? The nation has adopted what appears to be a 'low-risk, high-consequence' approach:

[I]t is important to understand the vulnerabilities, interdependencies and gaps that must be addressed locally, and how strategy can be translated into practice through a clear, action-orientated plan.⁴⁸

This should raise questions about our level of awareness regarding evolving biosecurity threats, and what that means for our preparedness for a future in which bioterrorism, in possibly new iterations and interlinking with other elements of the threat landscape, poses a growing risk to both national and international security.

This moment in time offers the opportunity to strengthen our policy response to a security concern that can only be expected to grow in an increasingly globalised and technologically advanced world. This analysis has made the case for a sober reassessment of the risk posed by bioterrorism, highlighting the need for a strategic reorientation that not only approaches the issue in a measured manner but considers the bioterrorism aspect in line with the wider range of biothreats facing our nation. We need a strategy with a capital S—one that is capable of responding to the true nature of the threat, in all its breadth.

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Conclusion

Beyond the sandpit—terrorism, extremism and resilience in an age of strategic competition

Katja Theodorakis

Preparing for an unknown and intrinsically uncertain future requires a special logic and skill set. It requires imagination and creativity; out-of-the-box thinking.¹

The analysis of events and issues presented in this volume was driven by a desire for strategic, not old, CT thinking. If we want a CT and counter-extremism approach that integrates with and complements a long-term national security policy framework, we need to move the discussion beyond ‘what we did in the sandpit’. Responsive policymaking—especially at a time of heightened strategic competition—requires ongoing recognition of the dilemmas and complexities inherent in countering terrorism and extremism. As one chapter in this volume shows, trust in government is a key variable. Our approaches and policy measures must also be built on a clearer distinction between security and societal outcomes, while understanding the interplay between the two. We have to be cognisant of lessons from the 6 January US Capitol attack, as well as understand the various experiences in Canada, New Zealand and Australia of ‘freedom convoys’ converging on national parliaments. Overall, those events show that efforts to counter extremism and build national resilience can’t focus only on the known extremist fringe. As threats evolve, we need the ability to continue identifying those individuals who are ‘vulnerable’ or communities that are ‘at risk’ and to strengthen people’s capacity to withstand the appeal of society-wide anti-democratic grievances.

Just as the Australian context is evolving, the chapters from Southeast Asia and Africa show the importance of fresh lenses when trying to assess developments in other regions. And the chapter on Islamism shows how we reduce understanding when we conflate Islamism, Salafism and jihadism.

In a world of heightened strategic competition, countering terrorism and extremism requires going beyond what we’ve been used to seeing and doing. In the decade to come, this will require an even greater willingness to keep reorienting our view as often as needed. We simply can’t afford to coast along on accepted wisdom.

How do we do this?

If we believe Lewis Carroll, thinking six impossible things before breakfast can do wonders for the imagination, instil fresh ideas and even induce a sense of hope. At least that’s what the Queen of Hearts posits to level-headed, realist Alice in an oft-quoted conversation from *Through the looking glass*:

‘There’s no use trying,’ [Alice said] ‘One can’t believe impossible things.’

‘I dare say you haven’t had much practice,’ said the queen. ‘When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.’²

For a think tank dedicated to injecting fresh strategic thinking into government and policymaking, Wonderland breakfast rounds believing in ‘impossible things’ for half an hour won’t quite cut it. But we can help decision-makers expand their thinking, including by posing challenging questions to smart people around the world—which is what this project set out to do.

A 2018 article in the *Harvard Business Review* attributed a ‘surprising power’ to questions, claiming that their transformative potential brings ‘wonder and curiosity: we pose and respond to queries in the belief that the magic of a conversation will produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts’.³ Interestingly, the article was part of a special ‘The New World of Risk’ edition, which also featured a piece by Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State during the height of the global war on terror. Written with Amy Zegart from the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford, the article pointed to a world that requires a much broader understanding of risk:

[T]oday’s landscape is much more crowded and uncertain—filled with rising states, declining states, failed states, rogue states, and nonstate actors like terrorist groups and cybercriminals.⁴

Rice and Zegart detailed how more volatile geopolitics, more vulnerable supply chains and the destabilising potential of technology act as the key drivers of a more

dispersed threat landscape. The soberingly realist assessment nevertheless ended with the upbeat note to business leaders that ‘just because you don’t know exactly where political risk will come from, that doesn’t mean you can’t prepare for it.’

Optimism is somewhat more difficult when it comes to the business of national security. While it may be commonly assumed that ‘the holy grail of counterterrorism is prediction’, threat scenarios and risk and probabilities calculations remain a problematic part of terrorism analysis.⁵ That’s why even the more careful concept of ‘prevention’ is fraught with difficulty, as several chapters in this volume explore.

As one commentator has noted about assessing the terrorism risks stemming from Afghanistan:

The risks ... are not simply anchored in what the counterterrorism community can discern about today’s Taliban-led Afghanistan, but about what it cannot see or predict.⁶

Even when a longer term perspective on how to mitigate future threats is adopted, there’s a danger of basing preparedness calculations on what we already know—on past and present trends. Even Lewis Carroll tried to overcome this quandary through playing with the idea of forwards memory: ‘It’s dreadfully confusing!’ said Alice, ‘but there’s one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways...’ ‘It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,’ replied the Queen.⁷

Moving away from fiction, we can find equal inspiration in the hard reality of war. US Air Force fighter pilot and military strategist Colonel John R Boyd is known in military circles for the creation of the observe–orient–decide–act (OODA) loop. Beyond its predominant tactical application, the OODA loop can also serve as a useful anchoring point for the kind of strategic thinking and analytical agility required for successfully navigating an ever-changing world. Boyd tells us the only way to avoid being overwhelmed by complexity and the ever-shifting forces of nature is to overcome an all-too-common disjuncture between our mental image and reality. For that end, we have to constantly reshape our mental models amid a ‘continuous whirl of reorientation, mismatches, analysis and synthesis’.⁸ This means we need to remain attuned to constantly changing circumstances, amid imperfect information. It also involves not being constrained by existing patterns so that important breaks can be discerned.

Asking some good questions and looking ahead won’t magically land us in a Wonderland of revelation, victory and solutions—but aiming for ‘a whole greater than the sum of its parts’ seems like an excellent start as we leave the post-9/11 era, with its sandpit wars, in the past. As we

go further forward on this zigzagging road, we need to continue asking questions and remain open to taking new directions. The various contributions to this volume are testament to the power of observational agility. Adapting to changed times means aligning a range of security priorities and other national objectives so they complement rather than conflict with each other. An effective approach will recognise the need to adopt new strategic parameters for new strategic circumstances, ensuring that the right questions are driving our analysis and policymaking.

Notes

- 1 Math Noortmann, Juliette Koning, Joost Vervoor, Ingrid Hoofd, ‘Imaginative scenario planning for security and law enforcement organisations: a report on practicing with uncertain security futures’, Crest Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, September 2019, [online](#).
- 2 Lewis Carroll, *Through the looking-glass, and what Alice found there*, 1871, Project Gutenberg, [online](#).
- 3 Alison Wood Brooks, Leslie K John, ‘The surprising power of questions’, *Harvard Business Review*, May–June 2018, [online](#).
- 4 Condoleezza Rice, Amy Zegart, ‘Managing 21st-century political risk’, *Harvard Business Review*, May–June 2018, [online](#).
- 5 Alex Schmid, *Handbook of terrorism prevention and preparedness*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, July 2021, 14, [online](#).
- 6 Joshua T White, *Order from chaos: nonstate threats in the Taliban’s Afghanistan*, Brookings, 1 February 2022, [online](#).
- 7 Carroll, *Through the looking-glass, and what Alice found there*.
- 8 Grant T Hammond, ‘Introduction’, *A discourse on winning and losing*, Air University Press, 2018, [online](#).

About the authors



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Katja Theodorakis is Head of the Counterterrorism, CVE and Resilience Program at ASPI. She has an extensive background in extremism and terrorism research and academic, policy-relevant and international experience. As a founding member of the Future Operations Research Group and co-founder of the associated Women in Future Operations platform at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy, Katja focused on insurgent/extremist propaganda and its strategic use in information operations. At the Australian National University, she has researched and taught on Middle East politics, Islam and international terrorism at the postgraduate and undergraduate levels.

Before joining ASPI, she was Senior Program Coordinator for Research and Analysis (Foreign/Security Policy) at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Australia Office, with a portfolio spanning the fields of terrorism/extremism, European security matters, cybersecurity and wider strategic relations in the Indo-Pacific. Her work was aimed at strategic outreach to the national security community in Australia and Germany/Europe. She holds a first-class honours degree in International Development from the Australian National University, was the recipient of several scholarships, including an Australian Government Research (PhD) Scholarship, and has been awarded the 2016 ANU Media and Outreach Award as Emerging Media Talent for her commendable media output and performance as a young researcher.



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Gillian Savage is a Senior Fellow with ASPI's Northern Australia Strategic Policy Centre and Deputy Director of Professional Development. She is a former senior executive in the Australian Public Service whose diverse career spans developing strategy and policy in the national security, border protection, defence and wider government environments. Through her public-sector roles, she developed and implemented biometrics for border control, enhanced air passenger analysis, and drove digital transformation and secure ICT infrastructure.

Gill has a strong interest in gendered and family violence and its relationship with extremism and disenfranchised sectors of the community. She is an Executive Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand School of Government and a Fellow with the Australian Risk Policy Institute, and holds a Master of Business Administration in International Business.



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Dr Colin Rubenstein AM was a senior lecturer in politics specialising in Middle East and public policy areas at Monash University from 1975 to 1998. Since January 1999, he has been the full-time Executive Director of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), where he has been Editorial Chairman since 1982. AIJAC is the Australian Jewish community's leading public affairs organisation, which publishes the *Australia/Israel Review* and contributes to informed discussion about the Middle East and implications for Australia and Asia. From 2000 to 2006, Colin was a member of the Australian Government's Council for Multicultural Australia and was a member of the board of the National Library from 2001 to 2006. In 2003, he was awarded a Centenary Medal and in 2006 was appointed as a member of the Order of Australia in recognition of his service to the community through his executive roles with a range of Jewish organisations, and in the advancement and promotion of multiculturalism and to the academic discipline of political science. He has an MA from the University of Melbourne and a PhD from Columbia University, New York.



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Gabriel Sjöblom-Fodor

Gabriel Sjöblom-Fodor is a researcher who specialises in the study of religious community work in the countering of violent extremism and extremist narratives, and how that work affects national security. His focus is on deradicalisation and the prevention of violence using theological and psychological counselling, as well as the specific politico-religious and social roots of modern violent extremism. His work is informed by interviewing religious leaders and actors who witnessed close-up the call to violent extremism during the rise and peak of the ISIS 'caliphate' and who were able to witness those processes at first hand and engage with radicalised individuals, recruiters and foreign terrorist fighters. A particular strength of Gabriel's work is its ability to shed light on how various phenomena and processes are lived and experienced at the grassroots level among affected populations, communities or groups. At the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, Gabriel is working on the issues of EU repatriations, research into violent extremism and prevention and interventions to disrupt terrorist recruitment and delegitimise terrorist groups.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AES	Australian Election Study
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AIJAC	Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
BfV	<i>Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz / Bundesverfassungsschutz</i> (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution) (Germany)
BW	biological weapon
CSO	civil society organisation
CSU	Charles Sturt University
CT	counterterrorism
CVE	countering violent extremism
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ETIM	East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FTF	foreign terrorist fighter
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
HUMINT	human intelligence
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
IMVE	ideologically motivated violent extremism
IS	Islamic State
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISWA	Islamic State in West Africa
IT	information technology
JAS	‘People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad’
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
JNIM	‘Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims’
MIL	media and information literacy

MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Taskforce
MoAD	Museum of Australian Democracy
MSC project	Mapping Social Cohesion project
NGO	non-government organisation
NSN	National Socialist Network
NSU	National Socialist Underground
NZ	New Zealand
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P/CVE	preventing/countering violent extremism
PETA	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
PVE	preventing violent extremism
SS	Schutzstaffel
UN	United Nations
USK	<i>Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle</i> (Entertainment Software Self-Regulation Body) (Germany)
VE	violent extremism
WAMS	West Africa Mining Security Conference
WMD	weapon of mass destruction

