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Author(s): Kyler Ong

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Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right

Kyler Ong

Synopsis

Recent acts of terror perpetrated by right-wing extremists in parts of the West have put a spotlight on the growing ideological convergence between previously fringe movements and online subcultures, and more orthodox variations of the extreme right, which is also fomenting violence. Hate and racist attacks during the ongoing COVID-19 lockdown, such as in the US' "Black Lives Matter" protests, as well as February's mass shootings in Hanau, Germany, have further muddled the equation in an already fractionalised extreme right scene. The prosecution of a machete attacker in Toronto, Canada, the first incel adherent charged with terrorism offences, has also re-energised debates on definitional issues relating to extreme right violence. The fluidity and incoherence inherent in the extreme right space, accentuated by followers' predisposition to conspiracy theories and a sense of victimhood, defy its easy categorisation and simultaneously, attempts to develop effective countermeasures.

Introduction

Given the type of extreme right attacks in recent years, right-wing extremism has come to be synonymous, albeit too narrowly, with white supremacists, and more fundamentally, the white genocide conspiracy theory, a central tenet of this movement.¹ Prominent extreme right terrorists such as Anders Breivik

in Oslo, Brenton Tarrant in Christchurch, and more recently, Tobias Rathjen in Hanau, among others, have been fueled by the white genocide theory, which justifies ridding the West of non-white "invaders"² through direct armed action.

The theory propagates that the white race is being replaced by non-whites, a supposed ploy of the Jews, who are regarded as the "puppet-masters",³ in a campaign of "white genocide". Often conflated with the "great replacement" conspiracy theory, both theories taken together espouse the idea that the white race is under threat due to rising feminism and declining birth rates, the growth of mixed-race marriages, as well as the influx of "black" and "brown" people into the West.⁴

With authorities in the West facing growing challenges in addressing the surge in extreme right-related violence in recent years, such attacks continue to defy easy categorisation due to the movement's fractionalised and "leaderless resistance" structure.⁵ Generally, the worldview of right-wing extremists falls into four intertwined buckets: racial supremacy/replacement, anti-government, policy-centred beliefs such as anti-abortion, civil liberties, and pro-gun rights, and misogyny. Lacking a hierarchical organisational structure to provide them with ideological guidance, followers often find themselves navigating the cesspool of extremist ideologies propagated by

¹ "Factsheet: White Genocide Conspiracy Theory," *The Bridge Initiative*, February 3, 2020, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-white-genocide-conspiracy-theory/>.

² The 2019 El Paso shooter, Patrick Crusius, stated in his manifesto that his attack was "a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas". See Simon Romero, Manny Fernandez, and Mariel Padilla, "Massacre at a Crowded Walmart in Texas Leaves 20 Dead," *The New York Times*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/el-paso-shooting.html>.

³ "New Hate and Old: The Changing Face of American White Supremacy," *Center on Extremism, Anti-Defamation League*, p. 14, https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/New-Hate-and-Old-The-Changing-Face-of-American-White-Supremacy_2018_1.pdf.

⁴ "Factsheet: White Genocide Conspiracy Theory."

⁵ "The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, November 7, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-far-right-extremism-united-states>.

likeminded individuals who live and breathe their beliefs online.

This has fostered a culture of culling and cherry-picking ideologies that fit a particular individual's preconceived notions of the world, allowing for multiple permutations that could be used to characterise a right-wing extremist, whose ideology is often underpinned by conspiracy theories. Increasingly, such ideological crossovers have shown up in the profiles of perpetrators involved in recent extreme right-linked violence. They appear to be "mixing and matching ideologies to justify and explain the targets of their animus and give wider context to their violence."⁶

Ideological Confluence

White supremacism is an oft-used blanket term applied to an assortment of groups that ultimately embrace the racist belief that white people are superior to other races (characterised as out-groups) and therefore should be dominant over them. Prominent outfits include the alt-right, and "traditional" white supremacists such as the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, racist religious sects, prison gangs, football hooligans as well as skinheads.⁷

⁶ Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, "The Challenges of Effective Counterterrorism Intelligence in the 2020s," *Lawfare*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/challenges-effective-counterterrorism-intelligence-2020s>.

⁷ The alt-right as a movement took off around 2008 but came into prominence during the 2016 US Presidential Election. Known for their internet imageboard subcultures and more youthful demographics, adherents of this movement reject mainstream conservatism in favor of one that embraces racism or white supremacism. For a full discussion of white supremacism in the United States, see "New Hate and Old: The Changing Face of American White Supremacy."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kyler Ong and Raffaello Pantucci, "From Fringe to Mainstream: The Extreme Rightwing in Europe," *Observer Research Foundation*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/fringe-mainstream-extreme-rightwing-europe-68848/>.

¹⁰ The boogaloo movement has its origins in the weapons and guns section of the extreme right messageboard, 4chan, and dates as far back as 2012. It has since grown in size and, whilst not all of its adherents are white supremacists, some are, making its linkages rather complicated. In general, followers of this movement espouse two fundamental beliefs: the need to overthrow the government through armed action, and an unwavering commitment to gun ownership. See

The 2016 election victory of US President Donald Trump, who ran on a platform of fervent nationalism, and the popular backlash that followed Europe's migrant crisis a year earlier, also contributed to the mainstreaming of the extreme right's xenophobic, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and neo-Nazi sentiments. This has not only served to embolden disparate networks of white supremacists, and more broadly, the alt-right in the United States,⁸ but also contributed to the tainting of mainstream politics in Europe by previously fringe ideologies.⁹

More ominously, some followers of previously disparate networks of violent far-right extremists, including white supremacist and from other fringe movements that espouse anti-government ideologies, such as the accelerationist, boogaloo,¹⁰ and sovereign citizen groupings,¹¹ appear to be coalescing over social media into a "militia-sphere", largely around "shared attitudes toward [doubting] the legitimacy of the pandemic, lockdown orders and the role of law enforcement and other government officials."¹² The "militia-sphere's" messaging, which latches on to QAnon conspiracy theories,¹³ has grown increasingly extreme as

Jane Coaston, "The 'Boogaloo' Movement, Explained," *Vox*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/8/21276911/boogaloo-explained-civil-war-protests>.

¹¹ Sovereign citizens regard themselves as self-governing individuals to whom the law does not apply. The concept of being a 'sovereign citizen' also seems to have originated from an extremist movement in the US. Known as the Sovereign Citizen Movement (SCM), it has roots in the later part of the 1900s and can be traced to groups such as the Christian white supremacist 'Posse Comitatus', which espouses anti-Semitism and believes that the US government is controlled by the "Zionist Occupation Government" (ZOG). ZOG is an invented conspiratorial term subscribed to by the broader far-right extremist movement.

¹² Joel Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," *Network Contagion Research Institute*, p. 2, <https://ncri.io/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-White-Paper-COVID-19-Militia-Sphere-28-May-344pm.pdf>.

¹³ QAnon conspiracy theory purports that there's an alleged "deep state" comprising Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and George Soros, who are plotting a coup d'état against President Donald Trump whilst being simultaneously involved in an international child sex trafficking ring. "The Great Awakening" is hence the moment these elites will be defeated and the truth of the "deep state" will be revealed. For an account of the origin of QAnon, see Adrienne

the COVID-19 pandemic has progressed, to the point of threatening and enacting violent attacks.¹⁴

Adherents share the common belief that governments are led by Jewish “puppet-masters”, who conspire to replace the white race by enabling a mass influx of racially inferior non-whites into their borders. White nationalist elements who embrace the accelerationist ideology, such as those belonging to the boogaloo movement, believe in sowing civil discord by opportunistically exploiting fissures in the system to ignite a “race war”. Their end goal is to facilitate the eventual collapse of the current government and replace it with a white dominant state.¹⁵

Inciting Violence

In June this year, individuals linked to the boogaloo movement attended various highly-charged anti-lockdown and anti-racial rallies, amidst the ongoing pandemic, with the aim of hijacking these protests to raise contentious civil rights issues, sow disorder, as well as incite violence.¹⁶ Others attempted to exploit the nationwide “Black Lives Matter” rallies to attempt violence. Some were subsequently charged with terrorism offences,¹⁷ including for orchestrating ambushes that resulted in the deaths of security and law enforcement officers.¹⁸ Since the onset of COVID-19, the infamous messageboard, 4Chan, a regular haunt of far-right extremists, has also seen a

noticeable spike in boogaloo-related chatter in messageboards catered to violent racial conspiracies.¹⁹ Notable neo-Nazi groups such as The Base and Atomwaffen Division also embrace such accelerationist ideology.

Whilst some boogaloo adherents embrace white supremacist narratives and encourage a “race war”, others concern themselves with opposing specific government policies, a mainstay rhetoric of militia enthusiasts and gun-rights groups.²⁰ Boogaloo-related chatter in various gun-rights and militia enthusiast communities on both Reddit and 4Chan have also surged during the pandemic,²¹ with growing calls for followers to amass arms in anticipation of a second civil war, to protect civil liberties perceived to be increasingly curtailed due to government-imposed lockdowns across the country.

This “militarisation” of the extreme right is being further fortified by anti-government conspiracy theories that have found increasing resonance since the onset of the pandemic. For example, members of the QAnon movement have spread disinformation, which include claims that China, in collusion with members of the US Democratic Party, were weaponising the COVID-19 virus.²² Often, such disinformation has been combined with “seditious themes

LaFrance, “The Prophecies of Q,” *The Atlantic*, June 2020,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>.

¹⁴ Finkelstein et al., “COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere,” p. 2.

¹⁵ Katie Shepherd, “An Officer Was Gunned Down. The Killer Was A ‘Boogaloo Boy’ Using Nearby Peaceful Protests as Cover, Feds Say,” *The Washington Post*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/17/boogaloo-steven-carrillo/>.

¹⁶ Anna Orso and Ellie Rushing, “White Supremacists and Other Extremist Groups Are Using Protests and a Pandemic to Amplify Their Message,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 13, 2020, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/white-supremacist-extremists-reopen-rallies-black-lives-matter-protests-20200613.html>.

¹⁷ Luke Barr, “Boogaloo: The Movement Behind Recent Violent Attacks,” *ABC News*, June 20, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/boogaloo-movement-recent-violent-attacks/story?id=71295536>; Joel Finkelstein et al.

¹⁸ Maura Dolan, Richard Winton and Anita Chabria, “Suspect in Killing of 2 Bay Area Officers Tied to Right-Wing ‘Boogaloo’ Group, Prosecutors Alleged,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 2020,

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-16/suspects-charged-killing-santa-cruz-cop-and-oakland-federal-officer>.

¹⁹ Finkelstein et al., “COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere,” p. 5.

²⁰ Boogaloo Supporters Animated by Lockdown Protests, Recent Incidents,” *Anti-Defamation League blog*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/blog/boogaloo-supporters-animated-by-lockdown-protests-recent-incidents>.

²¹ Joel Finkelstein et al., “COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere,” p. 6.

²² Marc-André Argentino, “QAnon Conspiracy Theories About the Coronavirus Pandemic Are a Public Health Threat,” *The Conversation*, April 9, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/qanon-conspiracy-theories-about-the-coronavirus-pandemic-are-a-public-health-threat-135515>.

that parallel the boogaloo".²³ Indeed, QAnon ideas have gained traction among gun-rights, militia and anti-government groups,²⁴ such as the Three Percenters,²⁵ as well as supporters of sovereign citizenry,²⁶ over the past year.

More recently, QAnon conspiracy theories were prominently featured during various lockdown rallies, as followers took to promoting revolutionary slogans such as WWG1WGA, which expands to "where we go 1 we go all" (also reminiscent of the boogaloo's "all-at-once go" signals) and designed to incite a revolution. There have also been increasing references to a "Q-army", symbolised by members who wear military-style Q-army badges, all in preparation for "The Great Awakening."²⁷

Growing ideological overlaps between these fringe anti-government movements and white supremacists hint at a broader rejection of current governments, alleged to be run by Jews.²⁸ Other anti-government groups such as the sovereign citizens (which reject government authority), and some anti-abortion activists, who also espouse white supremacist ideologies, specifically curate their conspiratorial narratives to also target Jews. In Europe, the recently outlawed group, United German Peoples and Tribes, in Germany, is affiliated with a loose-knit, neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic sovereign citizen movement known as the Citizens of the Reich.²⁹

In December last year, a deadly shooting rampage in a New Jersey kosher market was carried out by a couple who had expressed interest in the anti-Semitic Black Hebrew Israelites movement, that comprises African Americans who believe themselves to be the true descendants of ancient Israelites, and which also include sovereign citizens.³⁰ Almost as a matter of convenience, anti-abortion activists have also framed abortion rights as a "corrupt" Jewish ploy and have dabbled with violence in the past.³¹

White Supremacy and Misogyny

While the threat posed by right-wing extremists, including white supremacists, has largely been the focus of Western counterterrorism agencies, the growth of a misogynistic ideology fueled by "involuntary celibates", or incels, has recently found expression in violent ways. In recent years, incel followers have taken to committing repeated attacks characterised by some experts as terrorism. Adherents of this movement, mostly men, blame their inability to have romantic or sexual relationships on attractive women, and sometimes attractive men, known as "Stacys" and "Chads",³² who they claim have warped standards for physical attractiveness.

The incel ideology is largely propagated online, in the so-called 'manosphere', which experts have described as "a decentralised network of websites, gaming platforms and chatrooms imbued with a heavy sense of

²³ Joel Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," p. 10.

²⁴ Brendan Joel Kelley and Hatewatch Staff, "QAnon Conspiracy Increasingly Popular with Antigovernment Extremists," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, April 23, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/04/23/qanon-conspiracy-increasingly-popular-antigovernment-extremists>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.; Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia*, Volume 1 (ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 758.

²⁷ Joel Finkelstein et al., "COVID-19, Conspiracy and Contagious Sedition. A Case Study on the Militia-Sphere," p. 10.

²⁸ Jill Petzinger, "A Radical Fringe Group Refuses to Admit the German Reich Is Over, and It's Getting Violent," *Quartz*, March 18, 2017, <https://qz.com/929946/a-radical-fringe-group-refuses-to-admit-the-german-reich-is-over-and-theyre-getting-violent/>.

²⁹ Bojan Pancevski, "German Government Moves Against Fringe Far-Right Group," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/german-government-moves-against-fringe-far-right-group-11584635090>.

³⁰ Michael Kunzelman, "New Jersey Attackers Linked to Anti-Semitic Fringe Movement," *The Associated Press*, December 13, 2019, <https://apnews.com/9107f1204a15e4f5f67c8dcc9245f732>.

³¹ Alex DiBranco, "The Long History of the Anti-Abortion Movement's Links to White Supremacists," *The Nation*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/anti-abortion-white-supremacy/>.

³² Colin Clarke and Lilianna Turner, "The Incel Ideology Continues to Build a Strong Following in the Online Manosphere," *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, April 22, 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/04/22/the-incel-ideology-continues-to-build-a-strong-following-in-the-online-manosphere/>.

misogyny and significant overlap to other violent ideologies, including right-wing extremism and white supremacy.”³³

In their online postings, some recent incel attackers have taken to weaving white supremacist ideologies, including racist and anti-Semitic sentiments, into their toxic masculine narratives,³⁴ sometimes to the extent of blaming Jews for “controlling society” and being the cause of “social decay and degeneration”.³⁵ For instance, Elliot Rodger, often regarded as the first incel attacker, who was vehemently against anti-interracial relationships, railed in his manifesto that he could not understand how “an inferior, ugly black boy” could “get a white girl” when he “descended from British aristocracy” and the black boy “from slaves”.³⁶

On other occasions, whilst inceldom was not instrumental in instigating an act of terror, white supremacist attackers such as Philip Manshaus and Stephan Balliet demonstrated incel refrains, even if their motives were clearly racial rather than misogynistic defiance.³⁷ In the recent mass shootings in Hanau, the shooter Tobias Rathjen, demonstrated inherent misogyny, QAnon-esque conspiracy leanings, as well as a twisted interpretation of inceldom, where he

attributed his inability to find a romantic partner partly to alleged state surveillance.³⁸

Is It Terrorism?

Recent violent plots and attacks linked to extreme right attackers have re-energised debates over the lack of a universal definition for terrorism, as well as definite mechanisms to differentiate terrorism from extreme right violence and hate crimes.³⁹ For law enforcement agencies and governments, this has contributed to deviations in prosecutorial charges as well as other multi-jurisdictional challenges. In Europe, for instance, violent right-wing attacks continue to be prosecuted as non-terrorist offences, mainly owing to the challenge for law enforcement in establishing a clear link between the attackers and extreme right-wing terrorist organisations.⁴⁰ Similarly in the US, violent acts committed by white supremacists are often prosecuted as hate crimes or homicides.⁴¹

Such definitional issues were given a fresh impetus following a massage parlour stabbing attack involving an incel follower in Toronto in February. The attack was covered prominently in the media, given that it was the first in the world in which an incel attacker was charged with terrorism offences.⁴² But the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Online chatters on an incel forum demonstrates vehement denial of adherents’ association with the extreme right; ironically, their justifications are inherently anti-semitic and racist, with white supremacist discourse pervasive. See, “Why does media keep pushing the ‘incels are far right extremists’ narrative? INCEL.CO, June 3, 2020, <https://incels.co/threads/why-does-media-keep-pushing-the-incels-are-far-right-extremists-narrative.211635/>; Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, April 2020, p. 573, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459?journalCode=uter20>; Joel Achenbach, “Two Mass Killings a World Apart Share a Common Theme: ‘Ecofascism’,” *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/two-mass-murders-a-world-apart-share-a-common-theme-ecofascism/2019/08/18/0079a676-bec4-11e9-b873-63ace636af08_story.html.

³⁵ Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” p. 573.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 573.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 573-574.

³⁸ Blyth Crawford and Florence Keen, “The Hanau Terrorist Attack: How Race and Conspiracy Theories Are Fueling Global Far-Right Violence,”

CTC Sentinel, March 2020, <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CTC-SENTINEL-032020.pdf>.

³⁹ Victor Asal, Kathleen Deloughery and Ryan King, “Close Cousins or Distance Relatives? The Relationship Between Terrorism and Hate Crime,” *Crime and Delinquency*, October 2012, pp. 663-668. <https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/close-cousins-or-distance-relatives-relationship-between-terrorism-and-hate-crime>.

⁴⁰ Martin Banks, “Europol Voices Concern Over ‘Worrying’ Rise in Violence and Propaganda by Right-Wing Extremists,” *The Parliament Magazine*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/europol-voices-concern-over-‘worrying’-rise-violence-and-propaganda-right-wing>.

⁴¹ Helen Taylor, “Domestic Terrorism and Hate Crimes: Legal Definitions and Media Framing of Mass Shootings in the United States,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, September 2019, p. 231, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/18335330.2019.1667012?journalCode=rpict20>.

⁴² Justin Ling, “Incels Are Radicalized and Dangerous. But Are They Terrorists?” *Foreign Policy*, June 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/02/incels-toronto-attack-terrorism-ideological-violence/>.

In contrast, the 2018 incel vehicle-ramming attack by

sentence also attracted criticism in some quarters, given the degree of uncertainty over whether the attack had been carried out in the name of a political or ideological worldview, generally regarded as an important predicate of terrorism.⁴³

A similar debate arose following the Tennessee Waffle House shooting in 2018, whereby the attacker, targeting mainly Blacks, was discovered to be an adherent of the sovereign citizen movement. Yet, there was little direct evidence to suggest the attack had been carried out to advance the sovereign citizen ideology.⁴⁴ In a broader sense, both cases are reflective of an ongoing debate in the canon of terrorism literature over whether an ideology is a direct cause or merely an amplifying factor in instigating an individual to violence.

Reconceptualising Terrorism

While extreme right violence is not a new phenomenon, recent years have seen an uptick in its frequency and lethality. Ideological convergence, variously termed as fringe fluidity, has also become common place, revealing a “shifting, complex and overlapping milieu of individuals, groups and movements espousing different but related

ideologies, often linked by hatred and racism towards minorities, xenophobia, Islamophobia or anti-Semitism.”⁴⁵

Increasingly, extreme right-linked individuals and groups have grown adept at exploiting social media to widen their echo chambers, and forge ties with international networks abroad,⁴⁶ mainly to mobilise others to violence. Recent episodes of such violence have raised questions about whether a more focused and systemic response is warranted, particularly for emerging groups like the boogaloo, which openly call for violence against the authorities.⁴⁷

As a greater number of lone actors and extreme right groups foray into the violent space, sometimes resorting to terrorism, the polarisation that results from in-and-out-group violence provides a fertile environment for further⁴⁸ ideological convergence in the extreme right. It also contributes not only to greater reciprocal radicalisation and violence between the extreme right and groups espousing broadly opposing ideologies, but also ideological confluence, including with groups from the far-left as well as Islamist extremists.⁴⁹

Alek Minassian, in Toronto, was not charged with terrorism. See “Teenage Boy Charged in Canada’s First Incel Terror Case,” *BBC News*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52733060>.

⁴³ Simon Cottee, “Canada May Host the World’s First Incel Show Trial,” *Foreign Policy*, June 1, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/01/canada-may-host-the-worlds-first-incele-show-trial/>.

⁴⁴ J.M. Berger, “The Difference Between a Killer and a Terrorist,” *The Atlantic*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/the-difference-between-killer-and-terrorist/558998/>.

⁴⁵ “Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism,” *Counterterrorism Committee Executive Directorate, United Nations Security Council*, April 2020, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/2020/04/01/cted-launches-trends-alert-extreme-right-wing-terrorism/>.

⁴⁶ Julia Ebner, “The Far Right Thrives on Global Networks. They Must Be Fought Online and Off,” *The Guardian*, May 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/01/far-right-networks-nationalists-hate-social-media-companies>.

⁴⁷ Criag Timberg, “As Trump Warns of Leftist Violence, A Dangerous Threat Emerges from the Right-Wing Boogaloo Movement,” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 2020,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/06/17/trump-warns-leftist-violence-dangerous-threat-emerges-right-wing-boogaloo-movement/>.

⁴⁸ Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, “The Challenges of Effective Counterterrorism Intelligence in the 2020s.”

⁴⁹ The confluence of far-left concerns over issues concerning the environment and the extreme right on immigration and race has led to the emergence of an ideological strand known as “ecofascism”, which was expressed in the manifesto of the Christchurch and El Paso shooters, premised on the idea, amongst others, that over population (of non-whites) needs to be prevented to save the environment. See Joel Achenbach, “Two Mass Killings a World Apart Share a Common Theme: Ecofascism.” Likewise, ideological convergence between the extreme right and Islamist extremists has long been observed. The recent case of a neo-Nazi US soldier who had consumed propaganda materials from the Islamic State, expressed admiration of al-Qaeda and disclosed information on his unit’s deployment to a purported member of the Islamist terror group is illustrative of how a shared enemy could transcend broader ideological leanings. “US soldier Ethan Melzer accused of planning attack on own unit,” *BBC News*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53145806>.

To prevent radicalisation and tackle hate crimes and violent extremism, a re-conceptualisation of terrorism and the attendant countermeasures is warranted. A recent Real-Time Delphi Study published in April 2020, which seeks to anticipate and identify emerging threat elements that could have potential implications on the future “trajectories in the perception of terrorism”,⁵⁰ highlights several contentious grey areas, including the differentiation between terrorism and hate crime,⁵¹ and provides a nudge that more needs to be resolved.

Further, there also needs to be a renewed commitment from the authorities and social media firms to assiduously ban radical and hate groups and remove extremist content online.⁵² Such operations will have the inevitable effect of pushing extremists’ activities and narratives underground, making them harder to track. To better address this, enhanced monitoring capabilities need to be complemented with a thorough understanding of the nuanced narratives propagated by extremists. This also holds potential for the development of more qualified and targeted counter-narratives that reach beyond the binary worldview of the extremists

Kyler Ong is an Associate Research Fellow with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She can be reached at iskylerong@ntu.edu.sg.

⁵⁰ Ted J. Gordon, Elizabeth Florescu, and Yair Sharan, “Definitions of Terrorism a Real-Time Delphi Study,” April 25, 2020.

⁵¹ In Germany, for instance, expressions of extreme views are illegal but not considered terrorism as long as they do not lead to physical violence. In Canada,

inciting a riot against a particular group of people may be considered hate speech, but not domestic terrorism as long as no physical acts of violence are committed. See *ibid*.

⁵² Julia Ebner, “The Far Right Thrives on Global Networks. They Must Be Fought Online and Off.”