

CTED Trends Alert | April 2020

**MEMBER STATES CONCERNED BY
THE GROWING AND INCREASINGLY
TRANSNATIONAL THREAT OF
EXTREME RIGHT-WING TERRORISM**



CTED

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE

OVERVIEW

The present *Trends Alert* was prepared by CTED in accordance with Security Council resolution 2395 (2017). This reaffirms the essential role of CTED within the United Nations to identify and assess issues, trends and developments relating to the implementation of Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2005) and 2178 (2014), 2396 (2017) and other relevant resolutions.

CTED *Trends Alerts* are designed to increase awareness, both within the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and among United Nations agencies and policymakers, of emerging trends identified through CTED's engagement with Member States on their implementation of the relevant Council resolutions. The Alerts also include relevant evidence-based research conducted by members of the CTED Global Research Network (GRN)¹ and other researchers.

INTRODUCTION

Experts have identified extreme right-wing terrorism - also referred to as far-right or racially and ethnically motivated terrorism - as a unique form of political violence with often fluid boundaries between hate crime and organized terrorism.² It is not a coherent or easily defined movement, but rather a shifting, complex and overlapping milieu of individuals, groups and movements (online and offline) espousing different but related ideologies,³ often linked by hatred and racism toward minorities, xenophobia, islamophobia or anti-Semitism.

Although extreme right-wing terrorism is not a new phenomenon, there has been a recent increase in its frequency and lethality, with some individuals, groups and movements pursuing transnational aims in a national context, drawing on international networks, ideas and personalities⁴ and seeking to mobilize others, often using the Internet. This has led to multiple large-scale terrorist attacks targeting minorities, including in Christchurch, New Zealand (March 2019), El Paso, United States (August 2019), and Halle (October 2019) and Hanau (February 2020) in Germany. Member States have also foiled several attack plots⁵ and face numerous challenges in addressing the surge in this form of terrorist violence.

¹ See also March 2019 [GRN newsletter](#).

² Koehler, Daniel (2016), [Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe. Current Development and Issues for the Future](#). PRISM Journal, Vol. 6, No. 2.

³ Conway, Maura (2019), [Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2018: The year in Review](#), Network of Excellence for Research in Violent Online Political Extremism.

⁴ Byman, Daniel (2019), [Five initial thoughts on the New Zealand terrorist attack](#), The Brookings Institution.

⁵ See [Intelbrief: Far-Right Extremists and White Supremacists Grow More Emboldened](#) (2019).

TRENDS ALERT

CTED has been alerted by Member States to their increasing concern at the **growing and increasingly transnational threat posed by extreme right-wing terrorism**. Ten of the 31 States in which CTED conducted assessment visits on behalf of the CTC in 2018 and 2019 raised this threat as an issue of concern.

Research indicates that there has been a 320 per cent rise in attacks conducted by individuals affiliated with such movements and ideologies over the past five years. Most such attacks have been carried out in Western States. According to the European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019, the number of arrests made in relation to extreme right-wing terrorism more than doubled between 2017 and 2018. There were 22 convictions for extreme-right wing terrorist offences in 2018, compared with 4 convictions in 2017.⁶

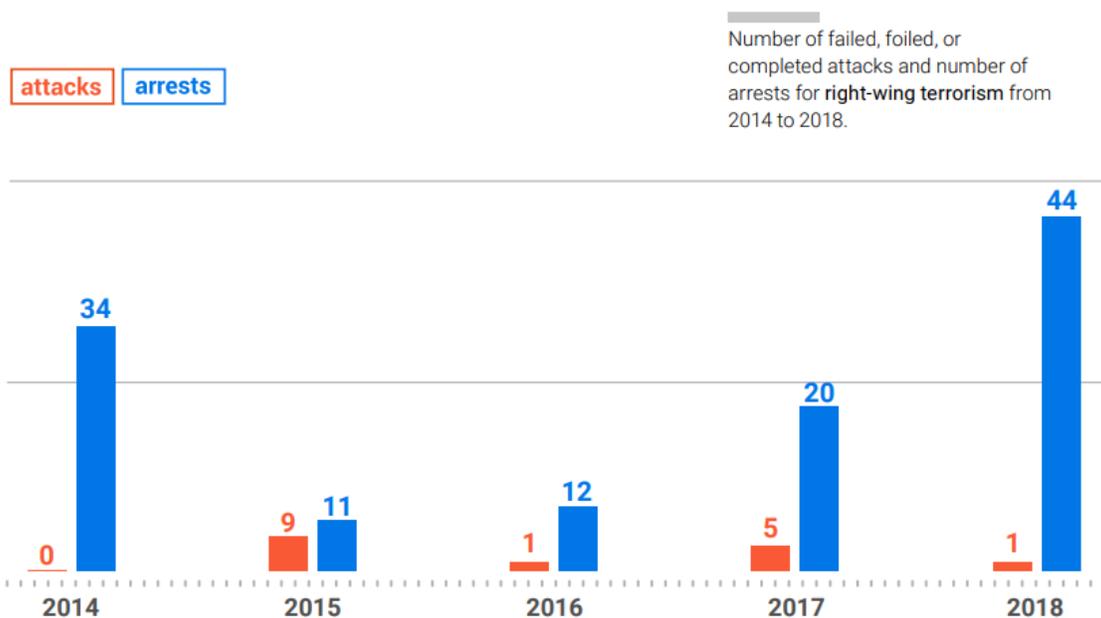


Figure 1: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019.

Although official data indicates that the number of extreme right-wing terrorist incidents is relatively low, research suggests that such incidents have increased in number and severity over the past three years.⁷ For example, in the United States, between 2010 and 2017, this form of terrorism - referred to by the United States Government as “Racially and Ethnically Motivated Terrorism” (REMT) -

⁶ [European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019 \(TE-SAT\)](#) (2019), European Union.

⁷ Koehler, Daniel (2019), [Violence and Terrorism from the Far Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat](#), ICCT, the Hague.

surpassed the number of attacks perpetrated by terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) or Al-Qaida.⁸ Between 2016 and 2017, the number of extreme right-wing terrorist attacks doubled in the United States and increased by 43 per cent in Europe.⁹

As the threat has increased, extreme right-wing terrorist groups and individuals are becoming more transnational. Research has long recognized the potential for extreme right-wing groups to forge strong transnational links and build networks.¹⁰ Recent evidence suggests that there has been a greater exchange of views between like-minded individuals, both online and offline. These connections allow extreme right-wing groups to improve their tactics, develop better counter-intelligence techniques, solidify their violent extremist views and broaden their global networks.¹¹ Extreme right-wing terrorist movements also continue to employ a number of tactics to magnify and amplify their messaging, outreach and recruitment.

Information and communications technologies (ICT)

Extreme right-wing groups have become increasingly sophisticated in their use of the Internet to recruit and radicalize. They use mainstream social media platforms to target new audiences outside the movement, exploiting the appeal of counterculture pushback,¹² and use non-mainstream platforms (e.g., Gab and Voat¹³) for in-group communication and radicalization.

Extreme right-wing terrorists have consistently adapted to new spaces and new tools and have often been “early adopters” of those tools.¹⁴ The perpetrators of some recent terrorist attacks – including in Christchurch, El Paso, Halle and Bærum – announced their plans on 8chan or other, similar online forums and, in some cases, sought to live-stream their attacks on major platforms to maximize publicity and impact.

The Christchurch attacks demonstrated that the exploitation of tech platforms by terrorist actors impacts the entire tech ecosystem. Smaller and large platforms were used in combination to guide users to outbound URLs, and “supporter networks” then re-shared and re-uploaded material across “an increasingly broad and fragmented range of smaller platforms.”¹⁵ Although the current online scene is “perhaps the most difficult the extreme-right has navigated to-date,” [its] online presence persists, with

⁸ Koehler, Daniel (2019), [Violence and Terrorism from the Far Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat](#), ICCT, the Hague.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Clifford, Bob (2012), *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*; and the Soufan Center (2019), [White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement](#).

¹¹ Jones, Seth G. (2019), [The New Zealand Attack and the Global Challenge of Far-Right Extremism](#), Center for Strategic and International Studies.

¹² Davey, Jacob and Julia Ebner (2017), [The Fringe Insurgency: Connectivity, convergence and mainstreaming of the Extreme Right](#), ISD.

¹³ Conway, Maura (2019) [Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2018: The year in Review](#), Network of Excellence for Research in Violent Online Political Extremism.

¹⁴ Conway, Maura, Ryan Scrivens, Logan Macnair (2019), [Right-Wing Extremists' Persistent Online Presence: History and Contemporary Trends](#), ICCT – the Hague.

¹⁵ [Analysis: The New Zealand terrorist attack and the terrorist use of the Internet \(2019\)](#), Tech Against Terrorism.

longstanding websites and forums used alongside new platforms that appear and disappear on a regular basis.¹⁶

Financing

Although there is limited information regarding fundraising by extreme right-wing terrorist actors, research suggests that extreme right-wing groups and individuals actively collaborate online and that financial and operational support for their collaboration is provided across national boundaries.¹⁷ Studies indicate that similarly-minded groups and individuals engage across national boundaries, moving funds to show their support.¹⁸ This financial support plays an important role in supporting and promoting violent extremist literature. Money is often raised to fund a milieu - which may be accessed by those aspiring to carry out more violent acts - via event fees, merchandizing and donations.¹⁹

Gender

Gender influences the ideology and discourse of extreme right-wing groups and impacts how they operate. Extreme right-wing discourse has traditionally focused on the gendering of spaces and hierarchical boundaries based on assumptions about masculinity and femininity. These assumptions are reflected in narratives that emphasize “the survival of the nation,” the subjugation of women, and promotion of their roles as mothers and housewives, particularly in low birth-rate countries.²⁰ These are blended with anti-immigrant conspiracy theories such as “the great replacement.”

This rhetoric is frequently accompanied by violence against women (including incitement of rape) and marked by synergies between misogyny, violent right-wing extremism and terrorism. These synergies allow more obscure misogynist groups - such as incels (involuntary celibates) - to act as a bridge to violent extreme-right wing groups and individuals.²¹ Notions of violent masculinity are also significant, including for targeted propaganda and recruitment strategies towards certain men.²² Violence is seen as a response to fears that white men are losing power in an ever-changing, multicultural landscape,²³ and those fears are exploited in gendered propaganda and recruitment strategies.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Davey, Jacob and Julia Ebner (2017), [The Fringe Insurgency: Connectivity, convergence and mainstreaming of the Extreme Right](#), ISD.

¹⁸ Keatinge, Tom, Florence Keen & Kayla Izenman (2019), [Fundraising for Right-Wing Extremist Movements: how they raise funds and how to counter it](#), RUSI.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mudde, Cas (2007), [Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe](#). Cambridge University Press.

²¹ [When Women are the Enemy: the intersection of misogyny and white supremacy](#) (2018). Anti-Defamation League.

²² Kinnvall, Catarina (2015), [Border and Fear: Insecurity, Gender and the Far Right in Europe](#), Journal of Contemporary European Studies.

²³ Ibid.

Recent research also suggests that, despite the deeply misogynistic ideology of the extreme right, women play an increasingly active role in these movements, including in promoting rhetoric and as active supporters and proponents of their agenda.²⁴

Human rights

Migrants, refugees and members of religious and ethnic minorities are often the targets of extreme right-wing terrorism and face serious human rights violations as a result.²⁵ Despite being the targets of discrimination and violent attacks,²⁶ politicians have also linked immigrants and refugees to increased crime. This sometimes results in security policies that negatively impact those communities while also failing to adequately address the threat of extreme right-wing terrorism.²⁷

AVAILABLE GUIDANCE

Owing to the increasingly transnational nature of extreme-right terrorism, growing efforts are being made to ensure that the response is international in scope and involves Member States, international and regional organizations, and civil society.

The United Nations Security Council has repeatedly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and emphasized that terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, or civilization. It also stated that “***criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.***”²⁸

In its resolution 1624 (2005), the Council calls upon States to “continue international efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations, in an effort to prevent the indiscriminate targeting of different religions and cultures, and to take all measures as may be necessary and appropriate and in accordance with their obligations under international law to counter incitement of terrorist acts motivated by extremism and intolerance [···].”²⁹

²⁴ Mattheis, Asheley A. (2019) [Shieldmaidens of Whiteness: \(Alt\) Maternalism and Women Recruiting for the Far/Alt-Right](#), Journal for Deradicalization.

²⁵ Jafarnia, Niku (2019), [Stop Blaming Immigrants for Right-Wing Extremism](#), *Just Security*.

²⁶ See report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, [A/72/287](#), para. 21.

²⁷ Koehler, Daniel (2016), [Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe, Current Development and Issues for the Future](#). PRISM Journal, Volume 6, Number 2.

²⁸ S/RES/1566 (2004).

²⁹ S/RES/1624 (2005).

In 2019, the United Nations Secretary-General launched the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate speech, in response to the growth in xenophobia, racism, intolerance, violent misogyny, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred around the world. The Strategy is intended to guide the United Nations system in its efforts to address hate speech and enhance United Nations efforts to address its root causes and drivers.³⁰

In late 2019, the European Commission Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) issued a factbook entitled *Far-Right Extremism - A Practical Introduction*, which provides an overview of issues, trends and challenges relating to far-right terrorism in Europe.³¹ RAN also facilitates knowledge exchange among European Union member States through its EXIT Working Group, which develops evidence-based interventions and shares lessons learned from disengagement or re-socialization programmes outside the European Union.³²

Civil society organizations and other non-governmental stakeholders continue to play a critical role in addressing this form of terrorism and violent extremism. Numerous grassroots programmes – including the United States-based non-profit organization *Life After Hate*, the Norwegian non-governmental organization *Voksne for Barn*, the German *EXIT Deutschland* programme, and the global disengagement platform *The Free Radicals Project* – work with individuals seeking to leave extreme right-wing terrorist groups (and their family members and communities) to support disengagement and reintegration.³³

CURRENT APPROACHES

Extreme right-wing terrorism predominantly affects Australasia, Europe and North America. The responses of Member States of these regions have continued to evolve as the threat has increased. Some States have integrated their response to this specific threat into their overall counter-terrorism response, while others have yet to indicate how it will be addressed.

In comparison to other terrorist groups - including ISIL and Al-Qaida - extreme right-wing terrorist groups present relatively distinct organizational structures and patterns of violence,³⁴ which include significant roles for lone actors, who often discover their ideological justifications, tactical inspiration, and social support in online communities.³⁵ This reinforces the need for tailored responses that address these characteristics, including ideological justifications such as “accelerationism” (the desire

³⁰ See [United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#).

³¹ Sterkenburg, Nikki (2019), [Far-Right Extremism – A Practical Introduction](#), The RAN Centre of Excellence.

³² See [RAN EXIT](#) for further information.

³³ See also [Life After Hate](#); [Voksne for Barn](#); [Exit Duetschland](#); [The Free Radicals Project](#).

³⁴ Bjorgo, Tore and Jacob Aasland Ravndal (2019), [Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patters, and Responses](#), ICCT, the Hague.

³⁵ Ibid.

to hasten the collapse of governments and societal structures³⁶ by sowing chaos and creating political tension).³⁷

Although many acts of extreme right-wing terrorism are carried out by individuals, some Member States have designated extreme right-wing groups as terrorist groups. The United Kingdom has listed National Action, Scottish Dawn, Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD) and NS131,³⁸ and Canada recently proscribed Blood & Honour and Combat 18.³⁹ At the end of 2019, the German Government reported that it had identified over 32,000 “right-wing extremists,” including members of “The Wing” and its youth wing, “Young Alternative,” both affiliated with the Alternative for Germany political party (AfD).⁴⁰

Following the Christchurch terrorist attacks, a number of States began targeting the use of the Internet by extreme right-wing terrorist actors. New Zealand publicly criminalized the distribution and possession of the perpetrator’s manifesto and his live-streamed video, and Australia adopted legislation to compel tech companies to remove violent material.

Cross-sector initiatives and protocols have also been developed to prevent terrorist content from going viral on the Internet. These include the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism’s (GIFCT) Content Incident Protocol and hash-sharing consortium, as well as initiatives by Tech Against Terrorism⁴¹ and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol). Two months after the Christchurch attacks, world leaders and tech companies pledged to eliminate online terrorist and violent extremist material, through the Christchurch Call to Action.⁴²

Although this initiative has been commended by many States, some Governments, researchers and human rights institutions have raised concerns about its commitment to remove “terrorist and violent extremist content”, which may be defined in such a way as to unduly restrict human rights⁴³ - including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, privacy, and freedom of religion - and limit the freedoms of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organizations.

Civil society institutions have also been working to address issues relating to the use of the Internet for terrorist and violent-extremist purposes. For example, in 2018, Moonshot CVE and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) partnered with the Gen Next Foundation in using the “Redirect Method”

³⁶ [White Supremacists Embrace “Accelerationism”](#) (2019). Anti Defamation League.

³⁷ Beauchamp, Zack. [Accelerationism: the obscure idea inspiring white supremacist killers around the world](#) (2019). Vox.

³⁸ See [The Five Eyes Designation Lists](#).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ [“Germany: Number of right-wing extremists rose by a third in 2019”](#) (2020), DW news.

⁴¹ Tech Against Terrorism is a public-private partnership launched and supported by CTED, which focuses on supporting smaller tech platforms to address terrorist exploitation of their services. It is currently developing the Terrorist Content Analytics Platform (TCAP), a secure online platform that will host terrorist material and facilitate secure information-sharing between platforms, academia, and data scientists. See the TaT website [for more info](#).

⁴² See [Christchurch Call](#).

⁴³ Blackburn, Jessie, Nicola McGarrity & Kent Roach (2019), [Understanding and responding to right wing terrorism](#). Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism.

to redirect users searching for extremist material toward curated information debunking terrorist messaging.⁴⁴

CHALLENGES

Because different States classify the same act differently (varying from terrorist acts, including incitement, to hate crimes or racism, or ordinary crimes), it is difficult to gain a comprehensive sense of the scale of the threat. Classifying and identifying this form of terrorism is complex, as not all perpetrators share the same ideology and there is no homogenous understanding of what it means to be an “extreme-right-wing terrorist.”⁴⁵

Member States, civil society, and private-sector actors, including ICT companies, face significant challenges arising from terrorist use of the Internet for terrorism purposes (including to post terrorist manifestos or livestream terrorist acts.)⁴⁶ Although large tech companies have taken steps to remove extreme right-wing terrorist content from their platforms, both they and researchers have highlighted the contrast between those efforts and those employed to counter the activities of ISIL and Al-Qaida.⁴⁷

Law enforcement also faces challenges in preventing extreme right-wing terrorist attacks, particular as many have been carried out by lone actors,⁴⁸ who are more difficult to detect. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance has argued that lone actor terrorism is particularly impacted by classification issues, raising the risk that the race and religion of the attacker may influence the investigation and prosecution of suspected terrorists, with extreme right-wing violence often underestimated or not considered to be terrorism.⁴⁹

Member States have also faced challenges in the criminal prosecution of terrorist offences. Many individuals who carry out extreme right-wing violence do not claim responsibility. Their violent acts are considered to be isolated or spontaneous incidents and are frequently investigated and prosecuted as hate crimes rather than as terrorist offences.⁵⁰ The investigation tools available for hate crimes are often narrower than those available for terrorism investigations, thus impacting how the cases are treated and prioritized.

⁴⁴ Greer, Ryan and Vidhya Ramalingam (2020), [The Search for Extremism: Deploying the Redirect Method](#), The Washington Institute.

⁴⁵ Jackson, Paul (2016), “[Surveying the ‘Far Right’ in Europe: Reflections on Recent Trends and Conceptual Approaches](#),” European Yearbook of Minority Issues, 13.

⁴⁶ Blackbourn, Jessie, Nicola McGarrity & Kent Roach (2019), [Understanding and responding to right wing terrorism](#). Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism.

⁴⁷ Hannah Bloch-Wehba cited in ‘[Why Tech Platforms don’t Treat all Terrorism the Same](#)’, Wired.

⁴⁸ Aasland, J & Bjorgo, T (2018), [Investigating Terrorism from the Extreme Right: A Review of Past and Present Research](#), Perspectives on Terrorism.

⁴⁹ See report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance ([A/72/287](#)), para. 21.

⁵⁰ Pauwels, Annelies (2019), [Rising right-wing violence and its impact on the fight against terrorism](#). Vision of Humanity, Global Terrorism Index 2019.

Some Member States' legislation requires acts of terrorism to be of an international nature. However, although online and offline international linkages do exist within extreme right-wing terrorist movements, they are often less visible.⁵¹ There is a need for further research into attacks perpetrated by such groups and the responses of Member States' judicial systems, aimed at identifying areas for improvement and good practices in managing and prosecuting perpetrators of extreme right-wing terrorism.

Through its Member State assessments, and dialogue with relevant United Nations entities, international, regional and subregional organizations, the private sector, civil society and the research community, CTED will continue to monitor the growth of extreme right-wing terrorism with a view to identifying ways to strengthen Member States' responses.

⁵¹ Ibid.



CTED

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE



cted@un.org



<https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/>



@UN_CTED



@UnitedNationsCTED



@un_cted