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Far-Right Extremism in Europe

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Abstract

Religious extremism and terrorism in the name of Islam have been contentious issues in Europe and the West for well over a decade. Far-right extremism, however, is an emerging spectre that haunts Europe today. While there are indeed concerns about right-wing terrorism in Europe that are growing owing to a series of recent attacks by right-wing terrorists, far-right extremism is still low on the security agenda in Europe. This is despite the transnational nature of the far-right movement which makes it potentially dangerous for Europe and the West. This paper discusses challenges and complexities in countering far-right extremism, such as Western media bias, the definition of right-wing terrorism and violence, and laws related to far-right extremism. It has suggested to the European policymakers to revisit their security narrative for countering far-right extremism.

Keywords: Far-right extremism, terrorism, violence, hate crime, transnational, laws, media bias, xenophobia, Islamophobia, Europe, European security, US.

Introduction

There has been the presence of far-right extremist individuals and groups in Europe since at least the 19th century, and they continued their activity after the Second World War. It was evident from the National Party of Europe established in Venice by far-right extremists in 1962. A loose group of neo-Nazis, Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (National Socialist Underground, or NSU), was one of the most active recent groups which

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carried out bombings from 2000 to 2007, killing 10 people in Germany of whom nine were immigrants.[1]

However, the fall and summer of 1980 saw the resurgence of right-wing terrorism with the bombings at Bologna train station, the Munich Oktoberfest, and a synagogue in Paris. Such violence was far bloodier than left-wing terrorism, for it targeted innocent people. The right-wing terrorism seemed to have an objective of having fascist regimes on the pattern that Germany, Italy, and Japan had before and after the Second World War.

Although there are more deaths owing to terrorist attacks by the so-called 'jihadists' in Europe, there have been increasing trends in right-wing terrorism and deaths in Europe and the US since 2010. The far-right terrorism has become transnational in nature as far-right terrorists, involved in violent acts, get inspiration from other right-wing extremists in different parts of the world.[2]

According to the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report 2020 by Europol, although there are several far-right extremist groups in EU which have not been involved in violence so far, they are instrumental in spreading fear and hostility against the minority communities. It is feared that this xenophobia, antagonism and hate towards Muslims and Jews may encourage far-right extremists to commit violence against minority groups. This was evident from the recent far-right terrorist attacks in Europe. In 2019, a total of six far-right terrorist attacks were reported by three EU member states of which one was completed in the UK, one failed in Lithuania and four were prevented – three in the UK and one in Poland. While there were two more attacks in Germany by far-right extremists in which three people were killed, they were not considered terrorism under the national law.[3]

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[1] Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee and Nicholas Harrington, The Right-Wing Terrorism Threat in Europe, Report (24 March 2020), 5. Visit at https://www.csis.org/analysis/right-wing-terrorism-threat-europe.

[2] Vincent A. Auger, "Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?" *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, No.3 (June 2020): 87.

[3] EUROPOL, European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020, 4. Visit at https://www.europol. europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020.

The far-right extremism has gone through several changes in the last three decades. It has shifted from offline to online. It adopted the gaming culture, and has sought transnational cooperation.[4] The close transnational activities and the use of online technology were evident from the fact that perpetrators of attacks in Poway (USA), El Paso (USA), Bærum (Norway), Christchurch (New Zealand), and Halle (Germany), were a part of the same transnational online communities and were inspired by each other. Apart from opposition to minority rights and diversity, belief in the superiority of the white race is one of the major factors and a driving force behind the violent far-right activities. Besides, while a far-right extremist movement like the Identitarian Movement may be non-violent, it can be a motivating factor in radicalisation of lone wolf right-wing extremists fomenting violence and hatred.[5]

The Global Terrorism Index 2019 considers an increase in far-right political terrorism one of the more 'worrying trends' in the last five years. This is despite the fact that number of far-right attacks remained low compared to other types of terrorism. In Western Europe, North America and Oceania, the last five years saw a rise of 320 per cent in far-right attacks. The numbers of arrests related to far-right terrorism in Europe saw a rise for the third consecutive year.[6]

Defining and conceptualising the far-right

Before discussing the far-right extremism landscape and the groups involved in it, it is vital to deliberate upon major components of far-right extremism. Although far-right extremism may have various definitions in every country and historical period, it is an 'umbrella concept' for the radical right and extreme right. The far-right extremism has the following five major characteristics: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, call for a strong state and anti-democratic attitude.[7]

However, not all five characteristics are always present and to determine if someone or a group is extreme right, a set of these characteristics are

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4 Nikki Sterkenburg, "Far-Right Extremism: A Practical Introduction," The RAN Centre of Excellence (December 5, 2019), 5.
5 European Union Terrorism: Situation and Trend Report 2020, 18.
6 Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Institute for Economics & Peace, (November 2019). Available from: http://visionofhumanity.org/reports.
7 Nikki Sterkenburg, "Far-Right Extremism: A Practical Introduction," op.cit, 6.

joined with a decisive element, such as opposition to the democratic constitutional state and principle of equality. There is another worrying trend in the shape of what is known as the 'radical right', which may not be violent, yet it is a cause of concern for practitioners as they help in creating violent extremist groups. The radical right has three distinctive characteristics – authoritarianism, nativism and populism.[8]

Far-right extremism experts Tore Bjørgo and Lars Erik Berntzen have developed a new typology which defines far-right ideology as: "people and state are one and foreigners threaten this community." According to them, the radical right believes that while democracy should be maintained, the ruling elites must be toppled. On the other hand, 'extreme right' is anti-democracy and considers violence against the 'enemy of the people' legitimate. The radical right advocates cultural nationalism, arguing that Muslim culture is backward and repressive, and Western societies must be protected against Muslim immigration and what they call 'Islamisation'. People belonging to this group believe that either Muslims should assimilate into Western polities and adopt their culture or 'return to their homelands.'[9]

The extreme right, on the other hand, focusses on racial culturalism. White supremacy is its agenda as it believes racial mixing threatens the white race's survival. The extreme right suggests 'revolutionary changes' to end Jewish dominance, and to 'subjugate, deport or exterminate the inferior race and racial enemies.' However, both the radical right and extreme right have a common characteristic that is 'ethnic culturalism'. They do not believe people of different ethnic origins should live together in Western societies and suggest that white Europeans and Americans have a right to defend their nations from foreign people and culture. They want all foreigners to return to their homelands.[10]

What is extreme right terrorism, violence and hate crime?
It has been a puzzle for researchers to differentiate between extreme right terrorism, violence and hate crime, because these terms have often been defined vaguely and used interchangeably. This makes it harder to know

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, 7.
[10] Ibid.

which form of violence is being discussed. It also provides incorrect statistics.[11]

Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal describe extreme right terrorism as an attack carried out with an objective to create fear among a larger population to seek a political outcome. On the other hand, extreme right violence has a broader range of attacks. For example, attacks against minority groups, immigrants, political rivals and the government, could be considered extreme right violence. This also includes vandalism and spur-of-the-moment violence.[12]

However, things are bit more complex when hate crimes are discussed. Hate crimes can include acts which can be termed extreme right terrorism or violence but, at the same time, such acts may be non-violent, such as racial harassment and hate speech. Such acts are committed owing to prejudices or hatred against certain groups of people on the basis of religion, race, or people with disabilities. But not all such people are always protected by hate crimes, for countries have different hate crime-related legislations. Besides, there are also instances where an incident was extreme right terrorism but was not considered one such as the Anders Behring Breivik's terrorist attacks in Utøya and Oslo on July 22, 2011, which targeted a political youth camp and government buildings. The frequency level and trends are difficult to ascertain as far-right terrorism, violence and hate crimes cannot be compared with each other in different countries, mainly because governments categorise them differently according to their national law. This is why in Europol's annual Terrorism Situation and Trend Report far-right extremism seems a marginal issue, partially because some European countries consider it a 'hate crime', 'right-wing extremist violence' or merely 'violence', but not 'terrorism'.[13]

However, a few researchers have compiled datasets on right-wing extremist violence and terrorism in Western Europe and the United States that are considered more reliable and comparable. According to the data for Western Europe, the region saw an increase in violent right-wing

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[11] Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses," International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (Policy Brief, Sept 2019), 5-6.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, 6.

attacks in the first half of the 1990s and then in the beginning of the new millennium. While there was no deadly far-right attack in Europe in 2014, there was one in 2015. But 2016 had a sharp rise in far-right violence with 10 deadly attacks, perhaps, because of the refugee crisis. The same was the scenario in the US with a little higher number of attacks in the 1990s compared to the last decade. However, there was a rise in number of attacks in 2009, the year when Barack Obama took over as US president for the first time. The election of a black person as president came as a shock for the American far-right. All these statistics are about deadly attacks.[14]

Far-right extremism vs violence in the name of Islam
Considering the frequency and intensity, far-right extremism and violence is also different than violent acts committed in the name of Islam. Muslim extremists killed 119 people in 31 attacks in the US between 2001 and 2016, whereas 158 people were killed in 89 deadly attacks by right-wing extremists. During the same period in Western Europe, 539 people were killed by Muslim extremists in 17 attacks, while right-wing extremists killed 179 people in 85 attacks of which no less than 77 were killed in the Utøya and Oslo attacks by Breivik. Attacks by Muslim extremists have a high intensity and low frequency pattern compared to right-wing extremism, which is high frequency but low intensity. There are, however, exceptions and one can see high intensity pattern also in right-wing lone wolf terrorism or violence, such as the Utøya and Oslo attacks that left 77 people dead and New Zealand mosque attacks in which 51 people were killed. It is because of the high intensity pattern in terrorism in the name of Islam owing to which it is considered a bigger threat than right-wing terrorism/violence. But, at the same time, there are few countries, such as Sweden, Norway, Germany and the US post-Sept 11, where more people were killed by right-wing terrorists than by Muslims. However, this factor has not been focused upon in the US and European counter-terrorism policy or threat assessment, as the so-called 'jihadi terrorism' has been the major concern. Another significant difference between right-wing terrorism and terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam, at least in Europe, is the involvement of a group or organisation. In case of attacks by so-called 'jihadis', a majority of them were either carried out by groups and networks affiliated directly or indirectly with terrorist groups like Al Qaeda or Islamic State, or by individuals operating on behalf of these groups. On

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[14] Ibid, 6-7.

the other hand, a majority of right-wing terrorist attacks are committed by gangs and lone wolves. There are reasons for underestimating right-wing violent by the authorities in Western Europe where the police failed to understand that the series of acts of violence as the manifestation of some organised far-right agenda. For instance, in Germany the police did not realise that the "kebab murders" of ethnic Turks and Kurds was terrorism by the neo-Nazi group, NSU, and was not a result of some underworld gang war. Police kept shooting in the dark as there was lack of coordination with security services which did not share information with the police, opting to protect their sources. Likewise, in the 2000s lone wolf racial serial killer Peter Mangs was arrested for a series of murders of immigrants in Malmö, Sweden, but the police considered him a member of an underground criminal gang. It was only after extensive interviews with Mangs by scholar Mattias Gardell that it was confirmed he was a racially motivated lone wolf terrorist. However, the Oslo and Utøya attacks changed the perspective, and far-right extremism is taken more seriously. The attacks in Bærum, Christchurch, Poway and El Paso in 2019 will force security services and policymakers to focus more on far-right extremism. The most lethal among the far-right terrorism are not organisations or skinhead gangs, but the lone wolves who are radicalised online by the far-right extremist community.[15]

Changes in the far-right extremist movement
The far-right extremism can be a loose or disorganised network having no website, official ideology, social media presence and structured membership. These factors make it harder to identify far-right extremist recruiters, for they can be among anti-immigrant or anti-Islam groups, neo-Nazi groups, study groups, elitist groups, ultranationalist groups, youth gangs, football hooligans, social media platforms, political parties or even lone wolves.[16]

One can have an idea of how the far-right extremism landscape changes by studying the far-right extremism in Norway in the last 30 years, though in other EU countries the changes in the phenomenon can be different. Norway has seen a total decline in far-right extremist youth movements as the young generation lives in a more multicultural society. At the moment,

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[15] Ibid, 8-9.
[16] Nikki Sterkenburg, Yasmine Gssime and Marije Meines, "Local-Level Management of Far-Right Extremism," The RAN Centre of Excellence, 5.

adults and the older generation tend to be more xenophobic. Another significant change is the shift from street activism to online activism. This means there are less chances of clashe with the opposition on streets and more opportunities for hate speech and threats by far-right extremists on social media. The social media has provided far-right extremist groups an opportunity of transnational diffusion and to become brand names. Far-right extremist groups, such as Soldiers of Odin, the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida), and several other 'defence leagues' in other countries now are able to mobilise quickly because of this globalisation and transnational diffusion. In the past, 'immigrants with a foreign culture' or 'Jews' were considered dangerous in Norwegian far-right extremism. Now, 'Islam' is the new 'threat'.[17]

Transnational groups and 'alt-right'
The far-right extremism is more lethal now as the Internet has helped it form transnational networks, giving a rise to the 'alt-right'. This can be gauged from the presence of far-right extremist groups like the Soldiers of Odin and Pegida, in several EU member states. There are also transnational neo-Nazi groups like the Racial Volunteer Force and Combat 18, which interact with likeminded people from other countries in order to forge alliances to 'defend white supremacy'. Although in some cases no shared 'brand' is involved, leaders of local or national far-right extremism groups suspend their activity to share ideas and information on their agenda and ideology with their counterparts in other countries. More worrying trend is 'transnational flow of information and consensus building' among the American alt-right groups and their Europeans counterparts.[18]

After a long campaign by the security services against 'Islamist movements' in Europe and the US, where hundreds of people are believed to have returned from the war theatres of Iraq and Syria, analysts recommend law enforcement agencies on both sides of Atlantic to focus on far-right terrorism. This is being suggested especially in the wake of the coronavirus which has increased unemployment, and the economic indicators are poor due to the lockdowns. Such conditions could increase radicalisation through social media. Seth Jones, who runs the Transnational Threats Project at the US-based think tank, Center for Strategic and International

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, 7.

Studies (CSIS), recorded 14 terrorist incidents from Jan 1 to May 8, 2020, of which 13 involved the far-right, while only one was religiously motivated.[19]

The seriousness of the far-right extremism may be gauged from the report by Jones which said that 90 per cent of deaths in the US in 2018 and 2019 as a result of terrorism were because of far-right terrorists. It is believed that polarised politics and the Black Lives Matter movement may have activated the right-wing extremists in the US. According to CSIS, 335 Americans have been killed by far-right terrorists, which is more than killings by any other terrorist ideology.

However, despite such bloodshed, Thomas Hegghammer, a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment in Oslo, believes that online platforms which could be source of radicalisation of right-wing extremists are still not being monitored by law enforcement agencies. This is, he says, may be because there have not been mass casualties owing to far-right terrorism which could attract the attention of the security apparatus.[20]

Transnational relations between right-wing terrorist groups are, however, not new as there was a strong 'fraternal relationship' among neo-fascist groups in France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium in the 1970s. Besides, there were also connections between European far-right extremists and their counterparts in the US, such as the American Nazi Party and Ku Klux Klan.[21] Today, right-wing violence in the US has become a greater threat than the so-called 'religious terrorism'. According to the CSIS dataset of terrorist incidents in the US from January 1994 to May 8, 2020, there were 893 terrorist attacks and plots out of which 57 per cent were carried out by right-wing terrorists, while left-wing terrorists committed 25 per cent, 15 per cent were by religious terrorists, three per cent by ethno-nationalists and 0.7 per cent by terrorists for other reasons.[22]

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[19] Willem Marx, "Jihadist Plots used to be U.S. and Europe's Biggest Terrorist Threat. Now it's the Far Right," *NBC News*, July 27, 2020. Available at https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/jihadist-plots-used-be-u-s-europe-s-biggest-terrorist-n1234840.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Bruce Hoffman, "Right-Wing Terrorism in Europe," *RAND*, 22.

[22] Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington, "The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States," *CSIS Policy Brief* (June 2020), 2, https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states.

According to a report by US-based think tank New America, since September 11 there has been only one attack in which a 'jihadist' foreign outfit was involved directing a deadly attack inside the US, or in which a 'jihadist' attacker was trained and supported by groups outside the US. It was the incident in which Mohammed Al-Shamrani shot dead three people at Naval Air Station Pensacola on Dec 6, 2019. Al-Shamrani was supported by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The think tank considered anyone following Osama bin Laden's global ideology a 'jihadist'. In the last 19 years since September 11 attacks, the far-right emerged as the biggest threat in the US with 114 killings by right-wing terrorists, compared to 107 people killed by the so-called 'jihadists'. Despite violence in the name of Islam, it has become increasingly difficult for a foreign terrorist organisation to attack the US due to the layered security system.[23]

Not only the white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups have become active in the US and Europe in the last decade, they have also developed close contacts with each other, thanks to online platforms. They share common interests in the conflict in Ukraine where far-right extremist movements have interacted and welcomed far-right extremists and fighters from Europe and the US as well, making far-right a truly transnational movement.[24]

Far-right terrorists have been using manifestos as part of their campaign to spread their hate agenda. Such manifestos inspire and offer advice to potential copycats on how they can increase their impact. This was evident from the fact that a Norwegian neo-Nazi inspired an Australian xenophobe, who inspired through his screed a white supremacist in Texas. El Paso gunman's manifesto is a perfect example to show how these manifestos have become a tool to inspire and perpetrate terrorism. The right-wing El Paso terrorist wrote in his manifesto: "In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto." This also shows these manifestos are a great source of transnational connections between far-right extremists. To spread their message globally, even far-right terrorists who are non-native English speakers, write their manifestos in English, such as

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[23] "Part IV. What is the Threat to the United States Today?" *New America*, available from https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/terrorism-in-america/what-threat-united-states-today/.

[24] Tim Lister, "The Nexus between Far-right Extremists in the United States and Ukraine," *CTC Sentinel* 13, No. 4 (April 2020): 30.

Breivik in Norway and Stephan Balliet, the Halle synagogue attacker, in Germany.[25]

Far-right narratives

The far-right extremist groups push their agenda using different narratives to attract an audience, and recruit and radicalise far-right members. One of such narratives is that far-right is under threat as the natives are turning into a minority owing to their low birth rate and higher birth rates in migrant communities. It is claimed that when Muslims will be in majority in Europe, sharia law will be imposed and the natives will be oppressed. This is argued while using terms, such as 'demographic jihad', 'white genocide' and 'Islamisation'. Like Muslim extremists who think the West is at war with Islam, far-right extremists believe Muslims are at war with the West. They also believe that multiculturalism and diversity are a 'conspiracy' to eliminate Western culture.[26]

Another far-right extremist narrative is that conspiracies are being hatched against it to weaken the white race and the liberal politicians and governments are spreading 'Islamisation' through immigration. While posing themselves as 'defenders of liberal values' and expressing anti-immigrant sentiments, far-right extremists talk against multiculturalism. They believe Islam and Muslims are what they call 'intolerant outsiders', and that different cultures and ethnicities cannot coexist in a society.[27]

Categories and motivating factors

The far-right extremists are motivated through different factors which provide them opportunity to participate in various activities of far-right extremism. There are 'revolutionaries' who are attracted towards far-right politics out of sheer adventure. Such far-right extremists join neo-Nazi or skinhead groups from a young age, between 12 and 16 years. They are often getting involved in vandalism, rioting and street fights. 'Wanderers' are mostly those who once were active in the national or local politics and later get frustrated as they are convinced that migrants receive preferential treatment. 'Converts' belong to a category which feels neglected by the

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[25] Jacob Ware, "Testament to Murder: The Violent Far-Right's Increasing Use of Terrorist Manifestos," International Center for Counter-Terrorism, *Policy Brief* (March 2020), 3, 8, 10, 12.

[26] Nikki Sterkenburg, Far-Right Extremism: A Practical Introduction, 10.

[27] Ibid, 11.

government as they come from an underprivileged background, which forces them to go through a hard life and struggle. Although 'conformists' are among those who are disillusioned, they are not extremists. They tend to please or support a friend by joining a far-right extremist movement and participating in demonstrations. 'Loners' start their journey of far-right extremism by getting radicalised online before getting acquainted by likeminded people offline.[28]

Western media and 'counter-jihadists'
While the West is becoming increasingly polarised on the basis of religion and ideology, the Western media has been adding fuel to the fire with either misreporting, underreporting or presenting opinion which could be best described as biased. *The Wall Street Journal*'s editorial soon after the Oslo and Utøya attacks by far-right terrorist Breivik can be used as a case study.

The Western media's focus, rather, obsession with coverage of terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam, was clearly demonstrated when *The Wall Street Journal*'s editorial 'Terror in Oslo' soon after the attacks claimed that Norway was chosen for the attack by 'Islamist jihadists' because of being "a liberal nation committed to freedom of speech and conscience, equality between the sexes, representative democracy and every other freedom that still defines the West." It all, however, proved a figment of the imagination of the publication. But the worst part was that although newspapers write editorials based on their own news reports, the *Journal*'s editorial ignored its own front-page news coverage of the horrid incident which mentioned that Norwegian TV had identified the 32-year-old suspect as an Oslo resident, Anders Behring Breivik, who, according to his own Facebook page, is a 'Christian' and a 'conservative'. The front-page news story also quoted a Norwegian police officer describing the incident as 'homegrown' more like the Oklahoma bombings, and not like the World Trade Centre attack.[29]

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[28] Nikki Sterkenburg, Yasmine Gssime and Marije Meines, "Local-Level Management of Far-Right Extremism", 4.

[29] Andrés Martinez, "*The Wall Street Journal*'s Oslo Two Step," *Zócalo Public Square*, July 24, 2011, https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2011/07/24/the-wall-street-journals-oslo-two-step/ideas/nexus/.

However, such an approach is not limited to the Western media, but the anti-terrorism community also mostly focus on the terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam. Despite the fact that researchers are trying to know how the 'war on terror' meta-narrative is being exploited by the so-called 'jihadists' for recruitment, there has been no research to know how far-right 'counter-jihadists' justify their anti-Islam and anti-Muslim violence by exploiting the global focus on 'radical Islam'. The English Defence League (EDL), the far-right Islamophobic organisation formed in Luton, Bedfordshire, Britain, in 2009, is a perfect example of a far-right 'anti-jihadi' outfit. Unlike traditional far-right, EDL's 'counter-jihadist' ideology is basically against Islam, which it considers 'extremist political ideology' and multiculturalism – a factor which it believes is responsible for what it calls 'Islamification'. However, it apparently presents a civilised discourse by talking about freedom of speech, equality, racism, anti-Semitism and Western values, instead of white supremacy. This has enabled EDL to gain an audience and the membership of a large English population, which otherwise would have rejected neo-Nazi and colour-based racism, but is supportive of such an agenda. This has helped the EDL to become Europe's leading 'counter-jihadist' movement, inspiring many other 'defence leagues' across the continent and resulting in the creation of the European Defence League in Aarhus, Denmark in 2012. There have been Nazi salutes and racial violence during the demonstrations by EDL since its inception.[30]

Thomas Mair, an extreme right-wing terrorist, murdered British MP Jo Cox during an EU referendum campaign on June 16, 2016. His online activity and literature recovered from him proved his obsession with Nazism, white supremacy and apartheid-era South Africa.[31] More importantly, he also had links with US and South African far-right groups. While he had some contact with the right-wing French political party, National Front, in the early 1990s, he was also spotted at an EDL rally besides attending a meeting of nationalists in London.[32]

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[30] Dr Arun Kundani, "Blind Spot? Security Narratives and Far-Right Violence in Europe," International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Research Paper (June 2012), 1-3.

[31] Ian Cobain and Matthew Taylor, "Far-Right Terrorist Thomas Mair Jailed for Life for Jo Cox Murder," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2016. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-found-guilty-of-jo-cox-murder.

[32] Ian Cobain, Nazia Parveen and Matthew Taylor, "The Slow-Burning Hatred that Led Thomas Mair to Murder Jo Cox," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2016. Visit

Cox's murder highlighted far-right terrorism in Britain, but at the same time also exposed the Western media bias. It is what is known as 'Islamic political extremism' in the West which is focused upon by the media, while ignoring the far-right extremism. This is despite the fact that there has been more violence owing to far-right extremists than by Muslims in Western Europe. This lack of focus on far-right extremism has reasons. The major factor is underreporting or misreporting by the Western media. Whenever far-right terrorists are involved in violence it is considered that only loners and the mentally ill could be involved in such bloodshed. But whenever a young Muslim is involved in such acts, it is always considered 'jihadism', 'Islamic radicalism' or even 'Islamic State' is associated with the violence. In Cox's murder case too, the media and political elites were slow in bringing the issue under the spotlight, though the evidence suggested the suspect was connected with far-right extremist community, was coming up fast.[33]

According to Europol, the UK had the highest number of far-right terror attacks in 2019. One such attack occurred in Stanwell, while three were thwarted. The attack in Stanwell was carried out after the Christchurch mosque attack in New Zealand by a white supremacist. The Stanwell attack was considered a "part of a wave of violent incidents worldwide" that include Christchurch, El Paso and Poway shootings and attackers were members of the transnational online communities. Although the so-called 'Islamist attacks' were the deadliest in 2019, the UK counter-terror police chief declared far-right extremism the fastest growing terror threat, with lone wolves being the major concern. Europol believes that unlike 'jihadists', far-right extremists "enjoy greater freedom to act on major social media platforms" and spread their ideology despite online surveillance and restrictions.[34]

However, what is more alarming is the fact that it is not only the non-political far-right actors in Europe who have been showing their hate for immigrant and minority communities, such as Muslims. Today, it is the

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https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-slow-burning-hatred-led-to-jo-cox-murder.

[33] Abbas Tahir, "Ethnicity and Politics in Contextualising Far Right and Islamist Extremism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, No.3 (2017), 58.

[34] Lizzie Dearden, "UK Saw Highest Number of Far-Right Terror Attacks and Plots in Europe in 2019, Europol Says," *The Independent*, June 23, 2019.

political far-right which has been creating anti-Muslim sentiment across the continent. It is a state-sponsored effort to suppress the multicultural narratives. This fear of Islam and Muslims has resulted in the institutionalisation of racist government policies, giving an opportunity for anti-Muslim movements like the EDL in Britain and Pegida in Germany to operate more openly.[35]

Switzerland is one of the examples of this fear of Islam created at state level. Although the Swiss law allows all to practice religion and it protects religious freedom, the Swiss government in 2009 banned the minarets at mosques, for the political far-right considered the towers as 'threat' to Swiss values. This was despite the fact that there were only four minarets in Switzerland which were never used for the call to prayer. Like elsewhere in Europe, Switzerland too tried to ban the burqa in 2016. The Leader of the Swiss far-right party, the *Swiss People's Party*, Walter Wobmann, was behind the move which was approved by the Lower House only to be rejected by the Upper House in 2017. Had this move been approved, Switzerland would have joined Belgium, Bulgaria, and Austria, which had already approved the burqa ban, and also France, which banned the full-face veil in 2011.[36]

Germany and France: hotbeds of far-right extremism

While the July 2011 Oslo massacre by Breivik is remembered as the bloodiest far-right terrorist attacks in recent times, Germany has also been a hotbed of right-wing extremism. Tobias Rathjen, the 43-year-old gunman, massacred nine people at two shisha bars in Hanau, Germany, in February 2020. His 24-page 'manifesto' tells us his plans for ethnic cleansing. For this, he had named more than two dozen countries where, according to him, the entire population needed to be eliminated. Those countries included Algeria, Afghanistan, Israel and Turkey.[37]

In October 2019, armed with guns and a camera installed on his head, Stephen Balliet tried to enter a synagogue in Halle, Germany, and killed two people and injured an equal number of people while streaming the incident

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[35] Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 228-29.

[36] Ibid, 229.

[37] Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington, The Right-Wing Terrorism Threat in Europe, *CSIS*, 1.

live on a gaming website. In his manifesto, he had planned to kill as many anti-whites, preferably Jews, as he could. Walter Lübcke, who was a member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right party, was murdered in June 2019 by a far-right terrorist Stephen Ernst for being pro-refugee. There has been a debate on the intensity of far-right terrorism and some even call it a bigger threat than extremism in the name of Islam.[38]

Marwa El-Sherbini, a resident of Dresden, Germany, was stabbed to death in a courtroom by a 28-year-old Russian German on July 1, 2009, soon after she testified against him in a verbal abuse case. The man was facing charges of calling El-Sherbini a 'terrorist' and an 'Islamist'. She is believed to be the first murder victim of an Islamophobic attack in Germany. On July 22, 2016, a xenophobic German of Iranian descent killed 10 people and wounded 36 in a mass shooting at a Munich shopping mall.[39]

Germany has been criticised for being complacent and ignoring the rising threat of far-right extremists. But following the Hanau shootings Berlin made it clear that it would increase efforts to fight the menace when Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht declared that far-right terrorism was the biggest threat to German democracy, considering the number and intensity of the right-wing attacks. German security officials believe there is a sharp rise in the far-right hate crimes and there are 12,000 known right-wing extremists in the country. The German democratic institutions face a daunting challenge as these far-right terrorist attacks were carried out when the country is seeing the rise of the right-wing and populist party, Alternative for Germany.[40]

In a latest alarming report, Germany's domestic intelligence service has revealed that it has detected over 1,400 cases of suspected far-right extremists in the German military, police and intelligence services in the last three years. The 98-page report believed that the actual number of far-right extremists infiltrated into the German security apparatus is certainly higher than reported. It warned that small number of highly trained officers

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Right-Wing Extremist Terror Attacks: A Timeline, *Deutsche Welle*, available at https://www.dw.com/en/right-wing-extremist-terror-attacks-a-timeline/g-47940167.

[40] Melissa Eddy, "Far-Right Terrorism is No. 1 Threat, Germany is Told after Attack," *New York Times*, February 21, 2020. See https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/21 /world/europe/germany-shooting-terrorism.html.

having right-wing ideologies are a "significant danger for the state and for society." However, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, who made the report public, considers there is no "structural problem" and Germany has to deal with only a small number of far-right extremists within the security services.[41]

German politicians and security services chiefs have been rejecting the claim that security apparatus have been infiltrated by the far-right extremists, claiming that there are only individual cases. It has always been rejected that networks of extremists with violent right-wing tendencies work within the security services. On the other hand, the arrested security officials who commanded far-right extremists, were protected. With the series of far-right attacks in the country and revelations about hundreds of far-right extremists within security services, Germany is now investigating if far-right networks are active.[42]

However, Germany also became a new home to millions of refugees from war-ravaged countries in 2015, which later created law order issues and integration problems. The massive refugee influx also gave rise to far-right party Alternative for Germany.[43] The number of asylum seekers has, however, decreased in 2020 third year in a row due to measures taken by German government to discourage immigration.[44]

Speaking of anti-Muslim sentiment and far-right extremism, France is another hotbed of right-wing radicalism with Marine Le Pen's far-right party, National Front, now renamed as National Rally, in mainstream

[41] Christopher F. Schuetze and Katrin Bennhold, "Far-Right Extremism Taints German Security Services in Hundreds of Cases," *New York Times*, October 6, 2020, available from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/06/world/europe/germany-police-far-right-report.html.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Stefan Trines, "The State of Refugee Integration in Germany in 2019", World Education News + Reviews, Aug 8, 2019, https://wenr.wes.org/2019/08/the-state-of-refugee-integration-in-germany-in-2019.

[44] Tim Wyatt, "Germany records big fall in refugee numbers for third year in a row," *The Independent*, Jan 8, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-refugee-asylum-seeker-eu-migrant-crisis-syria-iraq-afghanistan-a9275521.html.

French politics.[45] France became the first European country in April 2011 to put a ban on veil.[46]

There is also a ban on headscarves in French schools, while women can be penalised for wearing burqa at any public place in France. Surprisingly, the 2004 'religious neutrality law' allows small crosses, Star of David necklaces, but it prohibits wearing the religious headgear, such as hijabs, Sikh turban, and Jewish kippahs. Such laws are considered discriminatory in favour of French Christians, which creates alienation in other communities, especially Muslims. There has been a series of anti-Muslim hate crimes in France and 226 of such crimes were reported only in 2013, while the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* and Paris attacks were believed to be in reaction to the increasing anti-Muslim hate crimes. At least 133 hate crimes were reported in 2014, while 400 were committed the following year, which, according to the French National Human Rights Commission, was a 223 per cent increase. These crimes included violence, such as bomb explosion at a kebab restaurant, grenade attack at a mosque, and gunfire. The French government has also been closing mosques on the pretext of being a source of extremism, although those involved in terrorism could have been prosecuted individually. [47]

Whereas anti-Semitism is not acceptable in France at the government level, Islamophobia is not seen as a threat to society. French President Emmanuel Macron further polarised polity by creating a furore in the Muslim world when he defended blasphemous drawings against the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), considering them 'freedom of speech'. His October 2020 statement came in response to the murder of the Paris schoolteacher Samuel Paty, who had displayed the offensive sketches in the classroom as an example of 'freedom of expression'.[48] In a bid to

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[45] "Europe and right-wing nationalism: A country-by-country guide," BBC News, Nov 13, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006.

[46] "The Islamic veil across Europe", BBC News, May 31, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095#:~:text=France,the%20risk%20of%20a%20fine.

[47] Engy Abdelkader, "A Comparative Analysis of European Islamophobia: France, UK, Germany, Netherlands and Sweden," *Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, 29 (2017), 45-46, 48-49.

[48] "Anti-Semitism is unacceptable in France, why not Islamophobia?", TRT World, Oct 27, 2020, https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/anti-semitism-is-unacceptable-in-france-why-not-islamophobia-40954.

apparently prevail over Muslim rights groups, French government shut down anti-racist group 'Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF)' in December 2020, accusing it of spreading what it called 'Islamist propaganda'.[49] It is now believed that Macron, facing rising far-right populism and a tough political opponent in National Rally in next elections, has been using incendiary rhetoric against Muslims and far-right narratives to bolster his position and vote bank.[50] Macron's tilt towards far-right is sheer political opportunism as he was the one who stated after the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks by Islamic State that discrimination might not be main cause of terrorism, "but it provides a fertile ground."[51]

It is generally believed that Islam and Muslims are seen negatively in France owing to the terrorist acts committed by non-state actors. However, research shows that there were such views even before the September 11 attacks, the launch of the so-called 'war on terror' and the rise of the 'Islamic State'. In fact, such perceptions in France are believed to be because of massive migration of Muslims from North Africa to France more than 30 years ago, and, perhaps, owing to the country being a coloniser of the Muslim and Arab people.[52]

Conclusion

Despite being recognised as an emerging threat, and in some EU countries such as Germany – the biggest threat – far-right extremism is still largely ignored and is low on the security agenda in Europe. However, ignoring far-right terrorism can only result in another nightmare for Europe after a decline in terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam. Far-right extremism is especially dangerous, considering the infiltration of right-wing sympathisers and ideologues in militaries and security services of some European states, such as Germany, and even the US.

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[49] Cindi Cook, "French government shuts down anti-racist group", Anadolu Agency, Dec 2, 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/french-government-shuts-down-anti-racist-group/2063586.

[50] Murat Sofuoglo, "Is Macron moving to the far-right for political survival?", TRT World, Oct 26, 2020, https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/is-macron-moving-to-the-far-right-for-political-survival-40923.

[51] Marie-Anne Valfort, "Anti-Muslim Discrimination in France: Evidence from a Field Experiment," IZA Institute of Labour Economics," Discussion Papers Series, (March 2018): 1.

[52] Engy Abdelkader, op.cit, 32.

The most worrying factor is the transnational nature of the far-right movement. Although far-right extremists, unlike terrorists who commit violence in the name of Islam, tend to operate successfully as lone wolves, transnational connections make far right terrorism as dangerous as any other form of terrorism can be. Not only within Europe, European far-right extremists are also inspired and motivated by American far-right white supremacists, neo-Nazi groups and individuals. This trend is particularly dangerous as now far-right terrorism in the US is more lethal, for the numbers of deaths in far-right attacks are more than killings in the name of Islam.

It is vital to understand that far-right extremists in Europe seek inspiration and motivation from other right-wing extremists using the online community. It is necessary to understand these online subcultures. While shutting down some extremist websites may temporarily curb far-right extremist activity, it will become a much more arduous task to track and monitor far-right extremists' activities and intentions. Detecting and stopping lone actors from committing violent acts is difficult, but it is possible to do so with the help of the community, as most lone wolves, before going for the attack talk about their intentions with family and friends. For this, people's trust in police and security services is vital.[53]

It has become difficult to differentiate between far-right terrorism, violence and hate crime, mostly because all these are seen differently in different countries in Europe. It has been observed that what may have been perceived as terrorism if committed by a Muslim, is not considered terrorism if committed by a far-right extremist ostensibly owing to the legislation of a particular country. This prevents the governments from awarding the punishment to the culprit he deserves, which is also a motivating factor for far-right terrorists. To eliminate far-right terrorism from Europe, there should be a consensus among the EU member states on laws related to far-right extremism. The governments in Europe with the assistance of academia and legal experts should enact relevant laws and give more severe punishments, defining far-right terrorism and violence. This may not completely eliminate far-right extremism but will surely work as a deterrent.

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[53] Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses," op.cit, 16-17.

The far-right movement has also been benefitting from the official security narrative in Europe and often works as what is considered in Europe to be a 'counter-jihadist' movement. The European security narrative talks about 'war' against 'Islamist extremism', and Muslims are needed to pass a test to confirm their values before being considered equal citizens. Such a narrative and policies portray Muslims as a 'cultural threat' to European polities.[54] This needs to be stopped, for this discrimination against Muslims in Europe not only creates a sense of alienation among the community, it also provides an opportunity to those involved in terrorism in the name of Islam to recruit more terrorists. More importantly, far-right terrorists also cash in on this European security narrative by posing and presenting themselves as 'anti-jihadists'. This not only provides an opportunity to the far-right terrorists to justify their violent acts, xenophobia and Islamophobia, but also to seek support from and acceptance by a wider European population which will otherwise not condone violence or extremism.

A solution to countering far-right extremism is connected to the current European security discourse. To tackle far-right terrorism and violence, it is vital to review policies related to dealing with Muslims in the wake of terrorism in the name of Islam. This will have a double impact on the European societies, for it help them eliminate, or at least reduce, terrorism by both far-right extremists and by those involved in violence in the name of Islam.

In this connection, the use of 'us', 'moderate Muslims' and 'extremist Muslims' in Western European security discourse is leading to unintended negative effects. This means 'us', Europeans in this case, is a non-Muslim majority fighting terrorism, leaving Muslims to prove themselves as 'moderate' by proving they share European liberal values. By talking about 'national values', the policymakers have created a confusion, mixing up the question of violence with the question of cultural identity. Instead of using words, such as 'moderate' and 'extremist' Islam to combat terrorism, it would be better to talk about Muslims who commit or support violence and those who don't. Multiculturalism should be seen as a solution to curbing violence instead of a stumbling block in overcoming extremism. Such an official security narrative can prove helpful in reducing far-right extremism.[55]

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[54] Dr Arun Kundani, "Blind Spot? Security Narratives and Far-Right Violence in Europe", op.cit, 30.

[55] Ibid.