

The Growth of Far-Right Terrorism in the Digital Age

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i. Introduction

In March of this year, it was announced that the UK government was to start issuing official threat-level warnings for far-right terrorism, counter-terrorism officials having identified white supremacist terrorism as an increasing threat.¹ This came after 51 were killed in the Christchurch Attack in New Zealand, and against a recent backdrop whereby Europol had recorded five right-wing European terror plots in 2017 – all in the UK.² The picture, however, is much broader than this, and this recognition of a threat by the government of one country was one step towards the level of seriousness with which governments and the international community need to deal with the far-right.

As is dealt with in more detail in Section 2, the number of far-right terror attacks is increasing, and it is part of the same global phenomenon, where attacks are carried out on different targets, but with the same worldview. Many of the attackers have been open devotees of the same interlocking conspiracy theories – disseminated over the internet through both public and private social networks – in which Jews, Muslims, non-whites, immigrants, women, interracial couples, socialists, liberals, and mainstream politicians are all identified as enemy combatants.

These attacks of far-right terror in the digital age are not isolated events of wanton murder and destruction. Nor are they predominantly the work of traditional 20th century far-right organisations. We are dealing with a transnational ideology whose adherents occupy fringe online communities rife with cumulative radicalisation, spread propaganda and gain informal ‘recruits’ or ‘converts’ through mainstream social networks, periodically – and with greater frequency – emerge to commit real-world atrocities, and venerate those who massacre even children or retirees as ‘heroes of the cause’.

Let there be no doubt that there is more to the attacks of the new Digital-Age Far-Right Terror than the men behind the guns. These terrorists have all been both inspired and celebrated by many others who share their twisted worldview. The Chabad of Poway San Diego Synagogue attacker left a goodbye note to his online community on *8chan* and had previously tried to burn down a Mosque. The 2019 Christchurch Mosque attacker had the names of the perpetrators of several other of the attacks listed in Section 3 written on the guns he used to massacre Muslims at prayer. Charlottesville Victim Heather Heyer had to be buried in an unmarked grave at a secret location to protect her grave from vandalism from her murderer’s supporters.³

In Section 1, we look at the way the media has portrayed Digital-Age Far-Right Terror attacks. In Section 2, we substantiate the claim that there is a shared worldview among the terrorists. In Section 3, we chart out the links between Far-Right Terror attacks over the past decade. In Section 4, we look at the online networks of Digital-Age Far-Right Terror.

ii. Our Terminology

In order to distinguish between the more traditional organised far-right groups – largely now a throwback to the 20th century - and the modern form of far-right terror that has become ascendant over the past several years, we have employed the term ‘Digital-Age Far-Right Terror’.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/19/uk-to-start-issuing-far-right-terrorism-alerts>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47626859>

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/heather-heyer-grave-secret-hide-nazis-charlottesville-attack-mother-reveals-a8113056.html>

iii. Their Terminology

At certain points in this report, when examining the worldview, beliefs, and motivations shared by these terrorists and their networks, we will refer to terminology used by the far-right. All of this terminology denotes a worldview to which we can lend no credibility whatsoever. However, while all certainly disagreeable, some terminology is particularly objectionable. For instance, while we may agree that a far-right group that calls itself neo-Nazi is indeed neo-Nazi, we may observe that a terrorist considered himself an “Incel” or acted in opposition to “White Genocide” or “Cultural Marxists” without considering either these terms or what they refer to be at all legitimate.

It is in the nature of the subject of this report that reference is made throughout to theories that are invalid, to views that are unconscionable, and to acts that are evil.

We disavow ourselves entirely of all of these.

iv. A Note on Names

The reader will not find any of the names of the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks in the text of this report. If the reader wishes to know, for instance, the name of the perpetrator of the 22 July 2011 terrorist attack in Norway, the answer may be found by consulting the internet. We have chosen not to refer to any of the terrorists by name so as to dissociate ourselves from the veneration of these terrorists that is to be found among the hagiography of their supporters and their associates.

This report will close with an inexhaustive list of the names and ages of their victims.

1. Media Portrayal of Digital-Age Far-Right Terror

Media responses to Digital-Age Far-Right attacks have tended to present them as isolated incidents. There has been a general reluctance to classify them as instances of terrorism, with the attacks instead often framed as politically-nondescript mass shootings. *Sky News* headlines relating to the 2018 attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue made no reference to ‘terror’, referring to the attack only as a mass shooting and drawing parallels with the 2018 Thousand Oaks shooting, an indiscriminate attack perpetrated by a mentally-unstable Marine Corps veteran.⁴ When the question of categorising these attacks as terrorism has been brought up, it has typically been contested and debated, for instance in a *Washington Post* article asking whether the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting suspect should be called “a terrorist”.⁵ On other occasions, the categorisation has been rejected outright: another *Post* article, published in 2015, argued that the perpetrator of the Charleston Mother Emanuel Church shooting should not be called “a terrorist”. While acknowledging discrepancies between media responses to attacks by white men and those classified as Islamic terrorism, the article argued that it would be best to merely condemn the Charleston shooter as a “racist, grotesque person” and forget about him and his “desperate, terrible life”.⁶ The limitations of this approach lie in its isolation of the shooter as an individual, and the way it divorces the attack from wider trends. This discomfort with attributing the label of ‘terrorist’ to violent white supremacists places restrictions on analysis of these attacks, and leads commentators, policy makers, and the public, to ignore the connections between them.

This reluctance can be linked to the way in which the perpetrators of these attacks are presented by the media, which has more in common with reporting on school shooters than on those more often designated as terrorists. Reporting on the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting has noted the suspect’s family history,⁷ and his social isolation.⁸ The *USA Today*’s report on the Poway synagogue shooting suspect focused on his social reputation as “a quiet, successful student and an accomplished pianist”, and examined his family situation and wider community links.⁹ Similarly, a *Times* report on the Christchurch shooter characterised him as a “polite loner” in the article headline.¹⁰ Accounts of the trial of the Charleston church shooter often focused on discussions of the shooter’s mental health and the role of mental illness in his attack.¹¹ The conflation of many of these attacks with phenomena like school shootings – particularly in the USA – can be seen in articles which emphasise their identity as ‘angry young men’: for instance, the Charleston shooter was included in a list of young male mass murders, primarily school shooters, whose propensity towards violence was attributed in part to biological factors and social issues linked to male adolescents.¹² The reporting on these attackers positions them as individual mass shooters, and usually fails to consider any connections to wider groups or to other attackers.

⁴ <https://news.sky.com/topic/pittsburgh-shooting-7836>

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/11/01/should-robert-bowers-the-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-suspect-be-called-a-terrorist>

⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/06/19/why-we-shouldnt-call-dylann-roof-a-terrorist>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/02/us/pittsburgh-gunman-father-rape-case.html>

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/us/pittsburgh-shooting-robert-bowers.html>

⁹ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/28/california-synagogue-shooting-who-suspect-john-t-earnest/3608583002/>

¹⁰ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/christchurch-killings-couple-say-they-shared-house-with-polite-loner-brenton-tarrant-2gr3tr9tg>

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/us/dylann-roof-charleston-killing-mental.html>

¹² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/18/10-percent-of-the-population-commits-63-percent-of-the-homicide>

Reports on the most recent attacks on a synagogue in Poway, California, and on two mosques in Christchurch have made some connections between the events, particularly because of the short time between the attacks and clear links in the expressed views of the perpetrators. The Christchurch attack was more quickly labelled a terrorist attack, following the lead of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. However, broad connections made between the attacks and other incidences of violence have often conflated a number of essentially different forms of violence, and consequently distorted the specific nature of these attacks. Media coverage has often framed the attacks as centring on places of religious worship, with the *New York Times* describing the Poway synagogue attack as, “the most recent in a series of deadly attacks at houses of worship, including the mass shooting at mosques in New Zealand last month and the church bombings in Sri Lanka this past week. It came exactly six months after one of the worst acts of violence against the American Jewish community in decades left 11 dead in a Pittsburgh synagogue.”¹³

By including the attacks alongside the church bombing in Sri Lanka, the article categorises them as religiously motivated, and disregards the precise contribution of white nationalist ideologies. It also undermines attempts to draw clear connections between these attacks. The inclusion of these attacks in discussions of mass shootings in general presents similar problems. Another article compared the situation to that in American schools, warning that, “like school principals across the country, religious leaders now must take measures to prepare for the horrors of mass shootings”.¹⁴ Meanwhile, a 2018 report on mass shootings in houses of worship examined the attacks on the Pittsburgh Synagogue in 2018, the Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston in 2015 and a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in 2012 – all perpetrated by white nationalists – alongside a 2017 mass shooting at a church in Texas, which appears to have been motivated by personal grievances.¹⁵

1.1 Conclusion

Analysis of the role of social media in these attacks has often taken a similarly broad-brushed approach. A *New York Times* article looked at the attacks in Pittsburgh and Christchurch alongside a range of other instances of violence, examining the role of social media in the Easter attacks in Sri Lanka, the 2017 Las Vegas massacre, and violence and riots in Indonesia, India, and Mexico. It argues that one of the key common denominators of these attacks is the role of “hatred spread over social media”.¹⁶ However, conflating a number of different types of attack undermines analysis of the precise ways in which Digital-Age Far-Right attacks have operated and developed. Above all, this prevents a focused analysis of the connections between the perpetrators of such attacks.

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/27/us/poway-synagogue-shooting.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/28/us/synagogue-shooting-chabad-poway.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/mass-shootings-church-synagogue-temple.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/22/opinion/sri-lanka-bombings.html>

2. Different Targets, Same Worldview

We must analyse the commonalities between the string of Digital-Age Far-Right Terror Attacks which have occurred since 2011 if we are to both develop an understanding of the nature of these attacks and have somewhere from which to begin to tackle this global phenomenon. Starting from November 2011, the Global Terrorism Index have identified 196 attacks¹⁷ which were carried out and hundreds more which were planned but prevented. It is difficult to confirm these numbers precisely however. It is essential here to note that these attacks are greatly increasing in frequency, from 1, 2 and 3 attacks in 2002, 2003 and 2004 respectively, escalating to 4, 10 and 9 attacks in 2011, 2012 and 2013 and finally to 26, 23 and 59 attacks in 2015, 2016 and 2017.¹⁸ The numbers for 2018 and eventually 2019 are likely to be increasing in a similar manner.

Defining and distinguishing these far-right attacks can at times be difficult. One of the defining features of this “wave” of attacks is the lack of a central organising body or codified ideology. For this reason these attacks are often termed “lone wolf” and are usually explained by the specific identity and nature of the shooter in question. It is of central importance that these shooters, though acting independently, are driven by the same ideological beliefs. Similar behaviour among Islamic extremists (attacks perpetrated by individuals with a shared belief in a single ideology) is rarely similarly dismissed as “lone wolf” events. In part, this is due to the fact that specific Islamist terrorist groups will often claim responsibility for attacks they did not organise but did inspire, but it is also due to the failure of many in the media and government to recognise the new phenomenon of Digital-Age Far-Right Terror and draw the connections between the attacks.

The first defining attack of this kind was the 2011 Norway Attacks in Oslo and Utøya which saw the murder of 69 people, mostly children. The perpetrator’s evocation of certain concepts, such as fighting “Cultural Marxism” and “White Genocide” (arising from the conspiracy theory typically presented as Jews and liberals conspiring to destroy the ‘white race’), would rapidly become a consistent theme of terrorist attacks.

It is the estimation of this report that an essential link exists between the vast majority of modern far-right attacks and that a failure to understand this shared ideological motivation is preventing media outlets from reporting on such attacks in a responsible way, stifling governments from establishing reliable anti-extremist policies to prevent such attacks, and allowing the far-right greater manoeuvrability in spreading propaganda and radicalising ‘recruits’ to their cause.

2.1 Codifying the Modern Far-Right Terrorist

Though codifying these attackers may appear difficult, we will work to establish a series of parameters that enable a rapid and consistent system of identification. The primary factors involved in this will be the explicitly expressed ideology of the attackers. Whilst Digital-Age Far-Right Terrorists do not have to fulfil all of these conditions to be considered as such, an examination of more than a dozen manifestos or public statements have led to the identification of the following traits:

- Targets are varied but all play a supposed role in the “White Genocide” conspiracy theory.
- The terms “Cultural Marxism” and/or “Multiculturalism” are used to identify the “enemy”.
- The attacks are invariably anti-feminist and often espouse more specific anti-feminist ideologies such as “Incel”-ism or “MGTOW”.

¹⁷ <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibid.

- Liberals, leftists, anti-racists, social democrats, and/or mainstream politicians are considered ‘traitors’.
- Attackers publish either an explicit manifesto espousing these views and declaring their intent to act. Should this not be the case, a social media post is often made outlining these beliefs less formally. This most often takes place via *4chan* or *8chan* but may also occur on more obscure sites such as *Gab*, *Voat*, or even more mainstream websites like *Facebook*.

The links between these men often go unidentified and though some organisations have consistently noticed and pointed out the ideological and methodological connections, others downplay these links and overemphasise mental health. Understanding why and how this misidentification occurs is important if it is to be prevented.

2.2 Identification and Missing the Link

There are two major ways in which the far-right, terrorist, and interlinked nature of these attacks is downplayed. Most commonly the shooter is focused on as a “lone wolf”, and their lack of official or traditional organisational backing sees the mental health and personal history of the attacker analysed in depth whilst their ideology remains unexamined or dismissed. When comparisons are made, they are often made to school shootings and other such incidents, rather than to ideological terrorism. This is misleading, as it in effect suggests that the individual’s political beliefs were unimportant or even developed simply as a side effect of mental health issues. Further, it underestimates the capacity of such extremist beliefs to drive otherwise ‘normal’ individuals to commit atrocities. In addition, such explanations of attacks are unhelpful as these tend to overly humanise and downplay the guilt of the attackers, seeking explanations which at times border on apologist.

Secondly, the identity of the victims is focused on almost in exclusivity. In these cases, observers may note the bigotry of the attacker and then focus on the oppression and demonisation of this group in particular. Whilst these investigations in anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and racism more broadly are insightful, they neglect to make the connection between attacks against Muslims (such as the Christchurch Shootings of March 2019), Jews (the October 2018 and April 2019 Synagogue attacks), black and/or non-white people (such as in the 2015 Charleston Church Shootings) or political targets (such as liberals, leftists, anti-racists, mainstream politicians, or supposed “Cultural Marxists” as in the 2011 Norway Attack). The specific experience and identity of the victim group of the specific attack - which of course are fundamentally important - is focused on as the central motivator and the bigotry against this group in isolation is identified as the sole or primary motivation behind the attack. Again, analysis of shooter motivations may focus too keenly on personal experiences with the target group rather than on ideological framework (grand conspiracy theories) which established the shooters desire to attack. This is fundamentally misleading and neglects an analysis of the overarching ideology behind these attacks. In the eyes of these terrorists, socialists, Jews, Blacks and Muslims are all part of a wide-spread conspiracy to exterminate or oppress whites (specifically, white men). This view most often manifests in terms of “White Genocide” or as some far-right commentators have attempted to relabel it “The Great Replacement”.

2.3 Understanding the “White Genocide” Connection

As stated above, the variability in victim identity makes understanding these attacks as part of a consistent trend difficult for many. However, each attack is targeted at one or more supposed groups behind the supposed “White Genocide”. In the eyes of these far-right conspiracy theorists, there is an active and deliberate effort by various groups to infiltrate and destroy “white countries” via the immigration of large numbers of non-white individuals, mainly people of African, South

Asian, and Middle Eastern descent. To most believers in this conspiracy theory, whilst these non-whites are often the biggest immediate threat, they are not considered to be the ‘masterminds’ behind the move; the finger there is instead pointed at a large-scale Jewish conspiracy, socialists, liberals, ‘traitor’ politicians, or some configuration thereof, who become prominent targets in and of themselves.

Jewish or socialist/liberal targets may be decried as “cultural marxists” or linked as one and the same. This linking of Jewish Europeans and European socialists is a far-right tactic dating back to at least the 1930s, and the term “Cultural Marxism”, though a term that distinguishes the Digital-Age Far-Right from the earlier far-right, itself stems from a Nazi conspiracy theory. The language and theory of Nazism is expressed, though often not packaged within an explicitly Neo-Nazi or fascistic shell. The central tenets of this ideology are shared even when the broad theoretical structure and aesthetics of specific far-right ideologies are not. Some terrorists are aware of this connection, others may not be. The ‘selection’ of a specific target and a terrorist’s decision to target a certain group over others does not seem to follow a consistent pattern but broadly follows the trend that attackers target the group they are most familiar with who play a supposed role in the “White Genocide”.

Finally, it is worth understanding that, while the tangible goal of these shooters is not immediately clear and in many cases seems to be an immediate and base desire for “revenge”, a significant proportion of the attackers were deliberately attempting to ferment further mistrust and hatred, even to trigger an outright ‘race war’, either immediately or eventually by adding tension.

3. Charting the Link

3.1 Inexhaustive List of Digital-Age Far-Right Terror Attacks

Date	Location	Attack	Manifesto?	Motivations
27/07/08	Tennessee, USA	Knoxville Unitarian Universalist church shooting	Racist manifesto with fixation on white women having children with black men.	Hatred of liberals, black people, & gay people. ¹⁹
10/06/09	Washington D.C., USA	US Holocaust Memorial Museum shooting	No. Involved in traditional Neo-Nazi far-right political parties.	Anti-Semitism, Neo-Nazism.
22/07/11	Oslo & Utøya, Norway	“22 July” Norway Attack	>1,500-page combined manifesto and call-to-arms to other terrorists	Cultural Marxism and White Genocide. ²⁰
05/08/12	Wisconsin, USA	Wisconsin Sikh Temple Shooting	No. Perpetrator was a long-standing Neo-Nazi.	White Supremacy, Neo-Nazism, White Genocide. ²¹
29/04/13	UK (perpetrator from Ukraine)	Murder of Mohammed Saleem & planned mosque bombings	No. Perpetrator had collection of white supremacist literature and video games.	Hatred of Muslims and/or of non-white immigrants
15/12/13	Stockholm, Sweden	Anti-racist demo attacked by Far-Right	No. Perpetrators were members of a far-right organisation.	Anti-anti-racism, Neo-Nazism, Pan-Nordicism
13/04/14	Kansas, USA	Overland Park Jewish Community Center shooting	Shooter was member of the KKK & leader of the “White Patriot Party”.	Anti-Semitism, Neo-Nazism, White Genocide. ²²
24/05/14	Isla Vista, California	2014 Isla Vista Massacre	<i>YouTube</i> video and manifesto expressing contempt for women and interracial couples.	Misogyny, sexual jealousy, hatred of interracial couples. “Incel”.

¹⁹

<https://web.archive.org/web/20080812023544/http://www.ihf.com/articles/reuters/2008/07/28/america/OUKWD-UK-TENNESSEE-SHOOTING.php>

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/26/breivik-manifesto-email-uk-contacts>

²¹ <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Latest-News-Wires/2012/0806/Sikh-temple-shooter-identified-as-Wade-Michael-Page-white-supremacist>

²² <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/kansas-killer-worshipper-neo-pagan-odinism-article-1.1757496>

17/06/15	South Carolina, USA	Charleston church shooting	2,444 page online racist manifesto titled “The Great Replacement”.	Race War, White Genocide, White Supremacy. ²³
16/06/16	Birstall, UK	Murder of British Labour MP Jo Cox	Shouted “Britain First”. Linked to far-right organisations.	Wanted to kill a “traitor” politician. ²⁴
2016	Germany	Nearly 10 attacks a day on refugees across the year. ²⁵		
29/01/17	Quebec, Canada	Quebec City Mosque Shootings	Social Media attacks on Cultural Marxism, immigrants, Muslims.	Cultural Marxism, Anti-Feminism, White Genocide. ²⁶
20/03/17	New York City, USA	Murder of Timothy Caughman, a 66-year-old black man	No. Perpetrator had uploaded alt-right and Holocaust Denial <i>YouTube</i> videos.	White Supremacy, white women having interracial relationships. ²⁷
19/06/17	London, UK	Finsbury Park Mosque attack	No. Perpetrator had been radicalised against Muslims by the media.	Hatred of Muslims.
12/08/17	Virginia, USA	Car attack at the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville	No. Perpetrator was part of the Unite the Right Rally, victim was an anti-racist protestor.	Neo-Nazism, White Supremacism, anti-anti-racism.
10/01/18	California, USA	Murder of Blaze Bernstein	No. Perpetrator was a member of an alt-right organisation that celebrated the murder via <i>Discord</i> , a gaming communications app.	Neo-Nazism, Anti-Semitism, Homophobia.
23/04/18	Toronto, Canada	Toronto van attack	<i>Facebook</i> post called the attack an “Incel Rebellion”, praised the perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista massacre, and made reference to <i>4chan</i> .	“Incel”.

²³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20150620195150/http://gawker.com/here-is-what-appears-to-be-dylann-roofs-racist-manifest-1712767241>

²⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-slow-burning-hatred-led-to-jo-cox-murder>

²⁵ <https://www.dw.com/en/more-than-3500-attacks-on-refugees-in-germany-in-2016-report/a-37719365>

²⁶ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/quebec-city-mosque-attack-suspect-known-for-right-wing-online-posts/article33833044/>

²⁷ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/james-harris-jackson-timothy-caughman-baltimore-stabbing-ny-times-square-racist-attack-a8549011.html>

27/10/18	Pennsylvania USA	Pittsburg Synagogue Attack	No. Social Media Posts mentioned “Globalism”, White Genocide, Jewish Conspiracy Theories. Extensive posts on <i>Gab</i> .	White Genocide, White Nationalism. ²⁸
02/11/18	Florida, USA	Tallahassee shooting of 6 women	No. Perpetrator was active in online “Incel” communities and made <i>YouTube</i> videos attacking black people, illegal immigrants, interracial relationships, diversity.	“Incel”.
15/03/19	Christchurch New Zealand	Christchurch Mosque Attack	74-page manifesto titled ‘The Great Replacement’ obsessed with non-white birth-rates. Streamed attack on <i>Facebook</i> .	White Genocide, Inciting Race War, hatred of Muslims. ²⁹
27/04/19	California, USA	Chabad of Poway Synagogue Attack	In-depth <i>8chan</i> post attacking Jews and claiming responsibility for an earlier arson attempt on a mosque.	White Genocide, Anti-Semitism. ³⁰

Note: It must be remembered that terms such as “Cultural Marxism” and “White Genocide” are ideological and inaccurate terms relating to respective, typically anti-Semitic, conspiracy theories. They are used here to identify ideological links between terrorists, not to legitimise or acknowledge them. Similarly, “Incel”.

Above, we have charted a series of prominent and illustrative Far-Right attacks over the past decade and analysed the manifestos or public statements of each attacker in an attempt to chart the corresponding the beliefs and motivations of each. The consistency with which “White Genocide” was found to be a/the primary motivator was surprising as either it or related motivators appear to be present effectively 100% of the time. The racist “Incel” who commits a terrorist attack, fuelled with hatred or interracial couples, is essentially acting out of the same basic motivation as the terrorist with a manifesto detailing a grand “White Genocide” conspiracy theory. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Numerous attacks and events that could have been added have been left off, largely due to the great number of instances that could fit on this list. Instead, an attempt has been made to make an illustrative part-picture of the phenomenon through a partial list of various different far-right attacks over the past decade or so.

There have been other foiled attacks that clearly form part of the same phenomenon too. In February 2019, a two-year plot was uncovered by a US Coast Guard who planned the assassination of a series of left-wing, Democratic politicians. Unsurprisingly, the would-be terrorist was a racist who hated Muslims, leftists, “Cultural Marxists”, frequented online far-right websites, and wrote

²⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pennsylvania-shooting-suspect/who-is-robert-bowers-the-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-suspect-idUSKCN1N10S6>

²⁹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/03/violence-new-zealand-echoes-past-terrorist-patterns/585043/>

³⁰ <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/california-police-investigate-hate-filled-8chan-manifesto-that-could-link-synagogue-shooting-to-mosque-attack>

about a Jewish conspiracy trying to destroy the ‘white race’ (“White Genocide”), as well as explicitly evoking the 2011 Norway Attack.³¹ Despite this, the plotter was not charged with terrorism. This is a consistent trend and these terrorists are rarely charged as such, simply treated as murderers by the authorities - a fundamental misunderstanding and an issue of identification.

Though there are some deviations from the norm (the Charleston church shooter’s evocation of Rhodesia and Apartheid South Africa – white supremacist nostalgia – for instance), all attackers were linked to this “White Genocide” conspiracy theory, with many (but not all) suggesting “Cultural Marxism” as a primary driver. It is notable that whilst some attacks had links to traditional racist and white supremacist movements, such as neo-Nazism in the 2012 Temple Shooting or pro-Apartheid White Supremacy during the 2015 Church Shooting, codified ideology is not always present. This is again a reason why this link has been missed. Though these attackers draw on the same strain of ideological thought, the fact that they are neither consistently members of the same official groups, nor even draw from the same specific literature, has likely made drawing a connection a more difficult task. Nevertheless, as multiple attackers explicitly identified, each of these attacks was viewed by the attackers as an assault on the same ‘enemy’ manifesting in simple forms.

Beyond this surface-level ideological commonality, there are a variety of observable trends. Shooters are universally or near-universally white supremacists, and may evoke or explicitly use neo-Nazi and fascist language, but rarely adhere to a specific school of thought. Figures of inspiration tend to be varied, some emphasising traditional white supremacist academics and others more moderate, mainstream right-wing or alt-right figures, such as Ben Shapiro, Candace Owens, and Donald Trump. A significant number referenced all three of these. It is also notable that while all of the above-mentioned attacks were framed by the perpetrators through primarily racial rather than religious perspectives, places of worship and religious congregation were almost always the chosen target. Though in many cases this is linked to the far-right’s equation of both Jewish and Muslim religious identity with an enemy race, this held true in attacks on black, Christian targets, most notably the Charleston Church Shooting. This is particularly notable as the perpetrator of said Church Shooting was a self-identified Christian. For this reason, among others, it is important that these attacks are understood to be racially-motivated first, and religiously-motivated second. There was little consistency in the faith of the attackers; some expressed neo-pagan beliefs, others atheistic, others Christian and even Christian supremacist. For some, faith played an explicit role - such as in the Wisconsin Temple Shooting - for others, even when the target was a place of worship, race was emphasised either exclusively or near-exclusively - such as the Christchurch and Quebec Mosque Attacks. There is some evidence that these shooters consider themselves to be connected and of-a-kind, with multiple attackers referencing the perpetrator of the 2011 Norway Attack specifically. Attackers are universally male and most often young. Their backgrounds are varied but shooters are often educated though not beyond the undergraduate level, maintained low-level white collar jobs and were socially isolated though rarely without friends. Some have tried and failed to begin careers in the armed forces, or else have clearly enjoyed using fanciful militaristic self-stylisation. All of the above allows us to create something of a profile of the average attacker, but the most consistent and important shared trait identified in this work is that of online radicalisation, usually on *4chan* or *8chan*, and the shared central belief that there is a global conspiracy trying to bring about “White Genocide”.

We can see a strong degree of transnationalism to this global phenomenon – certainly within the Anglosphere. Enabled by the internet and social media, national borders have been largely

³¹ <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/02/white-supremacist-coast-guard-lieutenant-hasson-mass-terrorist-attack.html>

irrelevant to the spread of ideas and propaganda, especially around attacks that have reached significant international attention such as the 2011 Norway Attacks. As explored later, the online communities, social networks, fora, communications, and propaganda of the modern far-right tend to employ the English language. Some of the possible Anglospheric aspect to the phenomenon is due to the high number of shooting attacks in the United States, irretrievably connected to the situation of gun ownership and gun control in the US, but it is worth noting that Europol recorded five right-wing terror plots in Europe in 2017. All of these were in the UK.³²

3.2 Conclusion

If governments are to prevent further attacks and crack down on far-right radicalisation, and if media outlets are to deal with Digital-Age Far-Right Terror attacks responsibly and accurately, then the links between these attackers must be made. These are not isolated incidents to be examined in exclusivity, nor are they expressions of individual bigotry, nor are they comparable to school shootings or explicable via mental health. Each of the attacks identified above and the majority of far-right terrorist attacks occurring are based on a variable, disorganised, but consistent ideology. At its core is the threat posed by “White Genocide”, itself orchestrated by “Cultural Marxism” which lumps together Jews and socialists into manipulators and puppet masters. Terrorists cannot be dismissed as ‘lone wolves’ when they are drawing on the same ideological touch stones, attacking what they perceive as a shared set of ‘targets’, and are explicitly driven by indoctrinated conspiracy theories rather than mental health issues.

³² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47626859>

4. The Online Networks of Far-Right Terror

The breeding grounds for Digital-Age Far-Right Terror are unpoliced discussion fora. On the internet, unmoderated spaces inevitably devolve into obscenity, regardless of their initial subject-matter or orientation, because obscene internet actors seek out unmoderated spaces. The most egregious and central examples are the scarcely-policed forum *4chan* (a breeding ground for racism, extreme misogyny, suicidality and depression which has in the past gotten into hot water for tolerating child pornography),³³ and the even more minimally-moderated derivative messaging board *8chan* (the platform on which both the Christchurch- and San Diego shooters provided links to their respective manifestos and livestreams). Both are ‘safe-spaces’ for far-right activity, and the usual locus of co-ordination for anything ranging from online trolling campaigns to mass murder. Yet radicalization does not of course begin here. Rather, various strategies to encourage incremental radicalization in ‘plain-daylight’ online spaces are hashed out. These strategies merit more discussion.

Online radicalization strategies rely on irony and subtlety. As such, they exemplify a piece of internet-wisdom known as ‘Poe’s law’. Originating in a 2005 forum post about online discourse around the atheism-creationism debate, the concept originally referred to the problem of irony being overlooked in posts which refused to identify it explicitly per obvious signifiers; the phenomenon has since come to refer to the practice of neutralizing critique of racist or offensive remarks by giving them a veneer of irony.³⁴ Poe’s law accounts for the recrudescence and normalization of otherwise unacceptable imagery of Adolf Hitler, Nazi death camps or the anti-Semitic ‘eternal Jew’ trope on the internet. Alt-right innovators, however, have gone further in harnessing the phenomenon. In spring of 2017, alt-right online activists began identifying themselves using an emoji of a seemingly innocuous glass of milk, in reference to a widespread conspiracy theory that progressive men are becoming effeminate because of drinking soymilk, as well as to white supremacist ideas about race and lactose tolerance. Around the same time, the alt-right adopted innocuous or even positive symbols, like the ‘okay’-sign or the LGBTQ flag, in order to identify itself. More infamous examples include ‘Pepe the Frog’, one of *4chan*’s most visible denizens, as well as the flag of ‘Kekistan’, a fictional alt-right polity, which was modelled on the Nazi German imperial war flag (*Reichskriegsflagge*).³⁵ Worries about such symbols are then easily presented to undecided audiences as manifestations of outrage, pettiness, paranoia, and conspiratorialism. The dynamic is made more complicated by that fact that non-alt-right actors will sometimes buy into these trends, blissfully unaware of their deeper significance. This grants alt-right actors and dog-whistlers a smokescreen of deniability, and also leads to mistaken accusations. As a result, slogans such as “according to the left, everyone is a Nazi now” abound.

In part, this is due to the unique tenacity and staying-power acts of atrocity have acquired in the internet age. In the age of livestreams, atrocities are easily broadcast to a wide audience as they are being perpetrated: mass-murder becomes its own performance-piece and propaganda before a live audience. The same is true of shooters’ manifestos, which it is made sure are published digitally as pdfs. While some efforts are made to keep the distribution of such digital material in check, one need not stray far from the well-trodden digital pathway to find these digital legacies of mass-

³³ <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/file/4chan-user-arrest?page=0>

<https://ia802706.us.archive.org/29/items/gov.uscourts.mied.267305/gov.uscourts.mied.267305.1.0.pdf>

³⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170114124412/http://www.christianforums.com/threads/big-contradictions-in-the-evolution-theory.1962980/page-3#post-17606580>

³⁵ <http://theconversation.com/how-the-alt-right-uses-milk-to-promote-white-supremacy-94854>

<https://www.wired.com/2017/05/alt-rights-newest-ploy-trolling-false-symbols/>
<https://theoutline.com/post/1428/the-ok-sign-is-becoming-an-alt-right-symbol>

murderers readily available in non-policeable spaces of the internet. As access to such material has become astronomically easier, the response to it has become more elaborate and intensive. *Achan*, no stranger to suicide- and death cults, has become the site of semi-ironic worship of the perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista killings near UC Santa Barbara as a “Saint” (in the months leading up to the atrocity, the perpetrator was able to create a series of *YouTube* vlogs intimately documenting his homicidal resentment of sexually active men and women).³⁶

Such strategies also take advantage of structural components of the internet, and even the digital-capitalist profit motive. *YouTube*, often the starting point for online radicalization, is home to a burgeoning cottage industry of video collages in which controversial-to-far-right internet and media personalities regurgitate talking points. *YouTube* algorithms, which tailor the user’s homepage and feed of ‘recommended’ videos, leads to a creation of echo-chambers in which audiences are bombarded with self-affirming propaganda. *YouTube*’s policy of suggesting ostensibly similar or related videos to the viewer also often creates a chain linking progressively more radical content. One possible chain of this kind might consist, for example, of ostensible refutations of Keynesian economics leading to pseudoscientific arguments about race and intelligence, and eventually to “white genocide” conspiracy theories.³⁷ This and similar structural mechanisms allow for the development of echo-chambers and ‘creeping’ radicalization.

³⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-43892189>

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-elliott-rodger-incel-20180426-story.html>

³⁷ <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-youtube-pulled-these-men-down-a-vortex-of-far-right-hate>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html>

<https://www.counterextremism.com/press/youtube%E2%80%99s-algorithms-are-radicalizing-youth-faster-ever>

5. Conclusion

This report has presented the wave of far-right terror attacks that has emerged over the past several years (what we have referred to as ‘Digital-Age Far-Right Terror’) such that the reader may easily understand each of these attacks as being part of one and the same phenomenon.

Media responses to these attacks have largely misrepresented them as isolated incidents, emerging solely from the circumstances of each individual perpetrator. Attempts at integrating the attacks into wider trends have generally been too broad, conflating them with other forms of violence in a way which obscures their interrelatedness and fails to understand the greater, transnational phenomenon behind them. Further, when media outlets have reported on Digital-Age Far-Right Terror attacks, a deeper analysis of the connection between these terror attacks has been missing. This report has gone further in pointing to the spaces and strategies of radicalization which the internet has allowed the far-right to appropriate, and which link these attacks.

Despite disparate targets and the lack of any formal central organising body, it is folly for governments to continue to ignore the key ideological links and similar occurrences of online radicalisation that tie together the recent string of far-right terrorist attacks. Instances of Digital-Age Far-Right Terror have different targets but stem from the same worldview. Only by confronting these attacks as a singular phenomenon, tied together by ideology and origin, can governments attempt to prevent their continuing rise, and the media report on it in a meaningful and responsible manner.

5.1 Final Remarks

We must love one another or die.

- W.H. Auden, “September 1, 1939”

These terrorists will not win. The world they seek to create is a fiction, as are the conspiracies and menaces they believe they are fighting. There can be no ‘race war’, only further innocent dead – Muslims or Jews, children or the old, black Christians or liberal women. They will be the victims not of ‘lone wolf’ attacks, but of a larger phenomenon, of the same abhorrent worldview.

It is beyond the remit of this report to identify or recommend policies or approaches to tackling the growth of far-right terrorism in the digital age, but the first step is recognising that this is part of one phenomenon of Digital-Age Far-Right Terror. These are not isolated, tragic events, and nor are the perpetrators simply the same as the more traditional far-right organisations that litter the twentieth century.

Perhaps the fatal flaw of these terrorists will lie in their targeting of so many otherwise disparate and disunited groups. For, if all these groups are brought together against these far-right terrorists, then all the far-right will have accomplished by their violence will be to have made their victims stronger than ever before and impervious to their terror.

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6. In Memoriam

Greg McKendry (60), Linda Kraeger (61), Stephen Tyrone Johns (40), Hanna Endresen (61), Tove Ashill Knutsen (56), Kai Hauge (32), Jon Vegard Lervag (32), Ida Marie Hill (34), Hanne Ekroll Loevlie (30), Anne Lise Holter (51), Kjersti Berg Sand (26), Mona Abdinur (18), Maria Maageroe Johannesen (17), Ismail Haji Ahmed (19), Ronja Soettar Johansen (17), Thomas Margido Antonsen (16), Sondre Kjoeren (17), Porntip Ardam (21), Margrethe Boeyum Kloeven (16), Modupe Ellen Awoyemi (15), Syvert Knudsen (17), Lene Maria Bergum (19), Anders Kristiansen (18), Kevin Daae Berland (15), Elisabeth Troennes Lie (16), Trond Berntsen (51), Gunnar Linaker (23), Sverre Flate Bjoerkavag (28), Tamta Lipartelliani (23), Torjus Jakobsen Blattmann (17), Eva Kathinka Lutken (17), Monica Boesei (45), Even Flugstad Malmedal (18), Carina Borgund (18), Tarald Kuven Mjelde (18), Johannes Buoe (14), Ruth Benedicte Vatndal Nilsen (15), Asta Sofie Helland Dahl (16), Hakon Oedegaard (17), Sondre Furseth Dale (17), Emil Okkenhaug (15), Monica Iselin Didriksen (18), Diderik Aamodt Olsen (19), Gizem Dogan (17), Henrik Pedersen (27), Andreas Edvardsen (18), Rolf Christopher Johansen Perreau (25), Tore Eikeland (21), Karar Mustafa Qasim (19), Bendik Rosnaes Ellingsen (18), Bano Abobakar Rashid (18), Aleksander Aas Eriksen (16), Henrik Rasmussen (18), Andrine Bakkene Espeland (16), Synne Roeyneland (18), Hanne Balch Fjalestad (43), Ida Beathe Rogne (17), Silje Merete Fjellbu (17), Simon Saebo (18), Hanne Kristine Fridtun (19), Marianne Sandvik (16), Andreas Dalby Groennesby (17), Fredrik Lund Schjetne (18), Snorre Haller (30), Lejla Selaci (17), Rune Havdal (43), Birgitte Smetbak (15), Guro Vartdal Havoll (18), Isabel Victoria Green Sogn (17), Ingrid Berg Heggelund (18), Silje Stammeshagen (18), Karin Elena Holst (15), Victoria Stenberg (17), Eivind Hovden (15), Tina Sukuvara (18), Jamil Rafal Mohamad Jamil (20), Sharidyn Svebakk-Boehn (14), Steinar Jessen (16), Havard Vederhus (21), Espen Joergensen (17), Paramjit Kaur (41), Satwant Singh Kaleka (65), Prakash Singh (39), Sita Singh (41), Ranjit Singh (49), Suveg Singh (84), Mohammed Saleem (82), Reat Griffin Underwood (14), William Lewis Corporon (69), Terri LaManno (53), George Chen (19), Cheng Yuan "James" Hong (20), Weihan "David" Wang (20), Katherine Breann Cooper (22), Christopher Ross Michaels-Martinez (20), Veronika Elizabeth Weiss (19), Clementa C. Pinckney (41), Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd (54), Susie Jackson (87), Ethel Lee Lance (70), Depayne Middleton-Doctor (49), Tywanza Sanders (26), Daniel L. Simmons (74), Sharonda Coleman-Singleton (45), Myra Thompson (59), Jo Cox (41), Ibrahima Barry (39), Mamadou Tanou Barry (42), Khaled Belkacemi (60), Aboubaker Thabti (44), Abdelkrim Hassane (41), Azzedine Soufiane (57), Timothy Caughman (66), Makram Ali (51), Heather Heyer (32), Blaze Bernstein (19), Beutis Renuka Amarasinghe (45), Andrea Bradden (33), Geraldine Brady (83), So He Chung (22), Anne Marie D'Amico (30), Mary Elizabeth Forsyth (94), Chul Min "Eddie" Kang (45), Ji Hun Kim (22), Munir Najjar (85), Dorothy Sewell (80), Joyce Fienberg (75), Richard Gottfried (65), Rose Mallinger (97), Jerry Rabinowitz (66), Cecil Rosenthal (59), David Rosenthal (54), Bernice Simon (84), Sylvan Simon (86), Daniel Stein (71), Melvin Wax (88), Irving Younger (69), Maura Binkley (21), Nancy Van Vessem (61), Abdukadir Elmi (70), Abdul Fattah Qasem (60), Ahmed Abdel Ghani (68), Ali Elmadani (66), Amjad Hamid (57), Ansi Alibava (24), Ashraf Ali (58), Ashraf Al-Masri (54), Ashraf Morsi (54), Asif Vora (56), Atta Elayyan (33), Daoud Nabi (71), Farhaj Ahsan (30), Ghulam Husain (66), Hafiz Musa Vali Patel (59), Hamza Mustafa (16), Haroon Mehmood (40), Hosne Ahmed (44), Hussain al-Umari (35), Hussein Moustafa (70), Junaid Ismail (36), Kamel Mohamad Kamel Darweesh (39), Karam Bibi (63), Khaled Mustafa (44), Linda Armstrong (65), Maheboob Khokhar (65), Matiullah Safi (55), Mohammed Imran Khan (47), Omar Faruk (36), Mohsen Mohammed Al Harbi (63), Mojammel Hoq (30), Mounir Suleiman (68), Mucad Ibrahim (3), Lilik Abdul Hamid (58), Abdus Samad (66), Musa Nur Awale (77), Naeem Rashid (50), Osama Adnan Abu Kweik (37), Ozair Kadir (25), Ramiz Vora (28), Sayyad Milne (14), Sohail Shahid (40), Syed Areeb Ahmed (27), Syed Jahandad Ali (34), Talha Rashid (21), Tariq Omar (24), Zakaria Bhuiya (33), Zeeshan Raza (38), Muhammad Haziq bin Mohd Tarmizi (17), Mohamad Moosi Mohamedhosen (54), Zekeriya Tuyan (46), Lori Gilbert-Kaye (60), and those nameless others.

May their memory be a blessing.