



Right-Wing Extremism in Europe



To what extent is the ascendancy of right-wing extremism a threat to stable societies in Europe? –
Evie Barrett | Lotty Greig | Georgia Tollis | 2022



Right-Wing Extremism in Europe

To what extent is the ascendancy of right-wing extremism a threat to stable societies in Europe? – Evie Barrett | Lotty Greig | Georgia Tollis | 2022

Abstract

This paper is researching right-wing extremism, and whether its growth is proving to be a threat to stable societies, specifically, in Europe. It addresses what right-wing extremism is, where it is growing and why, why right-wing movements are a threat and how it is predicted to grow, all of which will help to establish to what extent the extremist movements are a threat to Europe. It is important to answer this question as right-wing extremism, as the threat has not been examined as much as it should considering the potential risks it poses. This paper looks at a wide breadth of secondary resources to be able to fully answer the question. The literature researched has shown right-wing extremism to be a relatively significant threat to societies in Europe, as it is a risk to immigrant communities, and the popularity of the internet means it is easier for movements to spread ideas quickly and anonymously, with limited risk of getting caught. This means measures should ideally be put in place, as if right-wing extremism is a threat, it should be contained. This paper gave the hypothesis that the ascendancy of right-wing extremism is a relatively considerable threat to stable societies in Europe and this was confirmed by the research.

What is the Future Researchers' Programme?



Nebula Research is an organisation built through curiosity, discovery, and the desire to add to the sum of human knowledge.

Education and research hold the key to building a better world.

The Future Researchers' Programme was established to provide College/Sixth Form students with an opportunity to work on a piece of research that fosters their curiosity and desire to learn more, add to the sum of human knowledge and provide benefit to citizens.

Working under a lead Professor – but given the autonomy to follow their own research path – students conduct high level research and become fully published authors with Nebula.

Not only does this special opportunity develop the attributes necessary to become academics, but the students also hone the skills necessary to achieve the highest of grades at University.

The top universities require a high standard of academic writing skill, yet this is something that students and professors alike do not feel receives enough attention in the academic curriculum. The Future Researchers' Programme by Nebula helps to bridge this gap.

Completion of the Programme and the recognition of such through the publication of a paper with Nebula, adds tremendous value to university applications, personal statements and CVs.



Contents

Introduction..... 3

What is right wing extremism?..... 4

Where is it growing and why?..... 6

Why is it a threat?..... 8

Predictions for potential growth 10

Conclusion:..... 13

Discussion:..... 13

Bibliography 15



Introduction

Right-wing extremism has been a feature of the European social and political fabric consistently through the period of modern political culture - certainly through the 20th and 21st centuries. However, like other socio-political forces, its influence has waxed and waned over the last 120 years and in some respects the social drivers and issues it attaches to, the people who engage in it and the modality for expressing extreme right-wing views have changed considerably over this period.

In the 21st century, the general antipathy towards right-wing extremism that took hold through the Second World War has faded, whilst social issues that stimulate extremist views have re-emerged. Concerns about mass immigration, nationalism and social inequality or a feeling of an underclass trapped with limited prospects for improvement because of emerging technology in the workplace have once again, become more commonplace. Right-wing reactionary perspectives on social change, such as the 'Incel' movement - involuntary celibates objecting to gender equality - are another thread that hark back to earlier times.

But what has changed significantly in the last twenty years is the technology that gives extremist voices an opportunity to broadcast their views - not just through the internet but through social media, bypassing sense-checks in the mainstream media. A good example of this was the development of the QAnon movement in the US, representing more extremist support for Donald Trump. Another change in recent years is the growing willingness and ability of right-wing extremists to use violence – terrorism – to promote their perspectives, to the extent that many people in the security community regard right-wing extremism as a bigger threat than religious extremism to public safety.

In this context, it is germane to ask whether right-wing extremism is now a real threat to social and political societies in Western Europe, and whether the huge changes currently underway due to mass migration (which can be accredited to climate change or events like the Ukraine conflict) or changing social pressures due to new technology might actually increase the threat further.



What is right wing extremism?

Right-wing extremism is a broad concept, but with a consistent theme of groups focussing on their own (national, racial, cultural or religious) identity in a supremacist manner, denigrating those who do not fit into this self-defined social category. The concept developed from research on fascism in quite a general sense after World War Two and morphed from ideas of radicalism to extremism through the 1980s-1990's (Pauwels, 2021).

Today, the term 'right-wing extremism' is commonly taken to refer to ideologies that are inherently anti-democratic and opposed to social equality, in contrast to 'right-wing radicalism' that features ideologies that are illiberal, but still democratic (Jupskås and Segers, 2020). Seeing themselves as superior to all other people by reference to some category, Right-wing extremists consider it to be their natural right to dominate the rest of the population, hence the anti-democratic element. For many analysts, right-wing extremist ideologies also typically have behavioural characteristics such as perpetrating violent, terrorist actions (Koehler, 2016).

Right-wing extremism is generally considered to be politically 'right-wing' (even if some proponents describe themselves as national socialists (Justin Gest *et al*, 2021)) because it is based on a concept of hierarchical social groups that are inherently reactionary and conservative - groups which perceive a social order that they wish to preserve and empower.

Variants include neo-Nazism, neo-Fascism and ultra-nationalist groups, but could also extend to areas such as gender-based distinctions – incels (an online subculture in which men assert blame to women for their involuntary celibacy), for example (Europol, 2021). Some of these groups have overlapping sources of antipathy, such as anti-social diversity, racism, xenophobia / anti-immigration attitudes and hostility towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGTBQ+) communities. Some groups are inherently anti-Establishment or anti-State.

However whilst these hate-orientated views are common amongst Right-Wing Extremists, they are not defining in themselves and make the specification of right-wing extremism inherently nebulous - indeed the focus of members of these groups may vary between themselves and over time. For example, one more recent trend reported by the Europol (Europol, 2021), is significant growth in eco-fascism, an ideology with a foundation in National Socialism featuring antipathy towards modernity and drastic solutions for population control as well as accelerationist ideas that could lead to violent action. Eco-fascism blends ideas of environmental damage being caused by capitalism with anti-Semitism, anti-immigration and over-population to create a manifesto for violence to re-build 'white ethnic-states'.

One additional challenge in defining right-wing extremism is that members and organisations in this sphere do not generally self-identify as such, perhaps due to social stigma or the fact that in many countries right-wing extremist organisations are proscribed. Moreover, even within groups of distinct ideologies, there may be different manifestations - from lower-impact hate crimes to explicitly violent terrorism (Koehler, 2017).

In the same way that Right Wing Extremism represents a spectrum of grievances and objectives, it manifests itself in many different forms of behaviour and action. Indeed, behavioural differences are



used by some academics to classify the spectrum – from radicalism to extremism (Carter, 2018; Pauwels, 2021).

In this taxonomy, one end of the spectrum (radicalism) involves holding extreme anti-egalitarian views such as racial, ethnic or cultural supremacy or nationalism manifested through promotion and dissemination of these views perhaps through print or social media. The spectrum moves through more active manifestations, often designed to intimidate the subjects of these views – for example through large public displays such as marches or intimidating behaviour at public events. An example of this is the EDL march in East London (September 2013) when the leader of the EDL Tommy Robinson was arrested for incitement during the march. In total 14 people who were mainly EDL members were arrested for public order offences (BBC, 2013). The final part is full-fledged extremism, which is often associated with direct action, either against the subjects of the extremism or against people or institutions who are perceived to protect those subjects (such as institutions of the state or other groups). Direct action could relate to intimidation or physical threats against people or property up to acts of violence or terrorism such as bombings or shootings. Koehler argues that right wing terrorism is actually a very fluid form of political violence ranging from hate-crimes to organised terrorism, a form of ‘low-intensity warfare’ against perceived enemies (Koehler, 2019).

Within this spectrum of behaviour, there are also quite different forms of manifestation. For example, the radical end of the spectrum often involves larger groups of adherents, such as organised (if sometimes proscribed) quasi-political parties or organised demonstrations. There are many organised groups in Europe in this category, such as PEGIDA (spread across Europe) or ultra-nationalist groups such as Bastion Social (France), Legio Hungaria (Hungary) or CasaPound (Italy) (Pauwels, 2021). Conversely extremism, particularly terrorism, is more likely to involve much smaller groups – in several cases these have manifested through ‘lone-wolf’ attacks such as the Anders Breivik attack in Norway on 22nd July 2011 or David Ali Sonboly in Munich, also July 22nd 2016.

The security services across Western democracies, but especially in Europe and the US, are starting to regard Right-Wing Extremism as one of the main threats facing pluralistic, liberal democracies (Europol, 2021), compared even with Islamic militancy. This partly reflects the growing willingness of these groups to use violence to project extremist views and partly the fact that increasing arrest or intervention rates suggest that the phenomenon is becoming much more prevalent (Europol, 2021). An additional cause for concern is that Right-Wing Extremists have been at pains (for example with social media) to bring their philosophies into the political mainstream, blurring the distinction between extremism and radicalism.

Right-Wing Extremists may also benefit from support of hostile powers in their endeavours (because their ambition of destabilising democracies is consistent with the strategic agendas of these powers), but in fact the current geopolitical context suggests that there may be several additional sources of sustenance (Stabile, 2020). In particular, it seems likely that there will be significantly increased levels of migration to western countries as a result of regional conflicts, particularly in Ukraine. These conflicts create direct drivers for migration because people are displaced by fleeing, but also even bigger indirect effects - for example conflict in Ukraine is having a very deleterious effect on agricultural production which is critical for food exported to North Africa and thereby indirectly promotes raised levels of migration as people seek food and security. These conflicts create direct

drivers for migration because people are displaced by fighting, but also even bigger indirect effects - for example conflict in Ukraine is having a very deleterious effect on agricultural production which is critical for food exported to North Africa. If the findings of Europol (2021) are anything to go by, this is likely to promote raised levels of migration as people seek food and security (Europol, 2021). COVID-19 restrictions also prompted an uptick in extremist right-wing rhetorics – for instance, the UK reported that groups harnessed COVID-19 to push their agendas and conspiracy theories (often based upon anti-immigration, anti-Semitic and / or anti-Islamic sentiments) forward. Belgium also reported that right-wing extremists argued that immigration exacerbated the spread of COVID-19 (Europol, 2021).

These effects may be expected to multiply significantly in the near term, with raised levels of distressed immigration in Western countries fostering growing popular resentment and nationalism, thereby growing levels of Right-Wing Extremism.

Where is it growing and why?

When establishing where or why right-wing extremism is growing it's important to know which sub-ideologies are experiencing the growth. The European Commission has established six main right-wing ideologies which are growing (Pauwels, 2021):

- Neo-Nazi movements
- Anti-Islam and anti-migration movements;
- Identarian movements
- Ultranationalist and neofascist movements
- Far-right sovereign citizen movements
- Single-issue extremists

In 2020, the main targets for these far-right groups tend to be overwhelmingly ethnic and religious minorities within Europe; included in this group are Immigrants, refugees, Jewish people and Muslims to name a few (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021). 102 out of the 149 attacks by far-right extremists in Western Europe in 2020 were carried out on ethnic and religious minorities, followed by political opponents with the next highest number of 21 out of 149 that year (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021).

These statistics prove that, at least in western Europe, these right-wing extremists do target ethnic and religious minorities most frequently. By looking at sub-sections of the most attacked group by far-right extremists we see that 74 out of the 102 attacks were towards people immigrating into a country, whether that be asylum seekers, refugees or immigrants, which is the biggest subsection in the most attacked group (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021). Within Italy, for example, an increase in attacks against immigrants has been detected from only have one attack against immigrants in 2010 to having six attacks against immigrants in 2018 only seven years later, this is suspected to have happened due to the increase of immigrants into the country (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2019). There has also been an increase in attacks against black people in Western Europe at 17 out of the 102 attacks (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021). It's unknown whether this rise in attacks from far-right extremism groups was enhanced by the 'black lives matter' movement (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021).



A stable society is comprised of peace and predictability. Therefore, with the evidence presented above, it can be concluded that right-wing extremism is a threat to stable societies; especially as these attacks would put other people within the attacked demographic on edge, creating a level of paranoia. However over recent years, there's been an observed decrease in fatal attacks by right-wing extremism groups, at least in Western Europe. There were 36 fatal attacks between 2001-2005 which decreased to 19 between 2016-2020. This a marked drop when compared with 1990-1994 which had 59 fatal attacks (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021). Not only that but whilst attacks against foreigners are rising, this is only in relative terms not absolute numbers (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2019). This shows that whilst there may be a rise in right-wing extremism, the extent to which this is actively causing the most extreme harm to a person has decreased, potentially making the increase in right-wing extremism in Europe less of a threat as first perceived.

There may be fewer fatal attacks, however, the correlation between the decrease in fatal attacks and the rise in plots has a seemingly inverse relationship. Plots were almost non-existent in the early 1990s when the fatal attacks were the highest; in 2020 fatal attacks being below 5 but plots being at 26 that year (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021). Germany had the largest amount of plots followed by the UK and France in 2020 (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021). The main type of plot differed for each country: Germany's main plot being 'preparation for armed struggled'; the UK's being vague plots and France having matured plots as its highest (Jacob Aasland Ravndal *et al*, 2021).

The trend in growth is not necessarily concentrated in one specific demographic (including gender (Justin Gest *et al*, 2021)) but in a more overall attitude from the residents who live in what could be considered their 'origin country', these attitudes have changed to a more nationalist point of view (European Commission , 2019). It's shown that in Eastern and Western European countries people with illiberal views (particularly in Eastern Europe) are 32.9% more likely to engage with far-right parties; of this residents who have the largest amount of immigrants entering their country are 30% more likely to favour the far-right, this number being 36% in Western Europe (Justin Gest *et al*, 2021).

It's thought that in more recent years (2015-2016), right-wing extremists in Europe could capitalise on the fear created by the refugee crisis (due to the wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan), along with the increase in terrorist attacks from groups such as the Islamic state and also Brexit and Trump being elected (Maura Conway *et al*, 2019). With the increase in the use of the internet (since the mid-1990s), the spreading of the far-right ideologies has travelled beyond their immediate borders within Europe ultimately strengthening their relevance (Bowman-Grieve, 2009). The creation of online groups on apps such as Discord which allow for an encrypted chat or social media sites such as YouTube or Twitter and unmoderated message boards, for example, Reddit have created a place of refuge for these far-right extremists to confer (Pauwels, 2021). This allows them to spread propaganda easily to a wider audience for recruitment (Pauwels, 2021). These far-right extremist groups do tend to be online and have been created online as well, for example, the Atomwaffen Division including its many branches in Europe (bellingcat, 2019).

Mainstreaming has been utilised by right-wing extremists – which is when right-wing extremist groups get involved in political activities to try and normalise their views (Pauwels, 2021). Some online tactics used to try and normalise right-wing extremist views are by placing their views as playful and humorous to be more appealing and acceptable to a wider audience through jokes and memes (Ahmed *et al*, 2021). Right-wing extremists also operate think tanks, newspapers and publishers to name a few in a bid to try and influence society and normalise their extremist views



(Hope not Hate, 2019), for example, the Scandza Forum held in Scandinavian countries for white nationalists every year (Pauwels, 2021). Clothing and products are also used by right-wing extremists to try and infiltrate the culture, this is more targeted towards the youth (Pauwels, 2021) for example, the skinhead style. However, in more recent times today's youth tend to dress more sophisticatedly so right-wing extremist memorabilia tends to be more subtle yet still have recognisable symbols (Pauwels, 2021).

We also see an increase in the political presence of these far-right extremist parties within both Western and Eastern Europe, for example, in the most recent elections in Hungary (2018), right-wing extremist parties make up a cumulative 79.9% of their parliament (Justin Gest *et al*, 2021). The trend with far-right extremist parties in parliaments tends to be the older the party is, the more votes it gets compared with the younger far-right parties (Justin Gest *et al*, 2021). An even more recent example is the French election of 2022 with Emmanuel Macron and Marine LePen, when it came between the two candidates 58.1% voted for Macron compared to the 41.5% who voted LePen, which was a greater margin than expected (Kirby, 2022).

Therefore the fact right-wing extremism is growing online on the media sites mentioned above across Europe mainly due to immigration and factors relating to immigration, proves a threat to European stable societies, particularly those in the immigrant communities. It can also be said that in the "offline world" the increased subtly in a more outwardly solidarity with these extremist groups through clothing could be adding to the underlying right wing extremist socio-political climate in Europe. Not only that but in regards to growing plots from the 1990's onwards, this could be because there might not have been the right infrastructure available to be able to find these plots in that period of time. So whilst the number of documented plots are on the rise, this could be because the technology is now available to be able to find them and they are actively being sought, not necessarily that they are on the rise.

Why is it a threat?

As already established, right-wing extremism is growing, and this results in it being a threat. The slight rise in nationalist party popularity can be demonstrated through growth in France (Kirby, 2022) and in Germany, with the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution estimating there are 6850 members of far-right parties (Koehler, 2016) and with more political influence, right-wing extremists have the power to enact more of their views which the past shows to be a threat to a stable society. Right-wing parties also influence xenophobic and racist actions in everyday life, and these are only increased in the smaller, extremist groups (Essed, 1991).

The rise of social media has increased right-wing extremists' ability to communicate with each other, creating international links between groups such as Neo-Nazis, Identarian and ultranationalist movements (Pauwels, 2021). They use encrypted chat apps such as Discord, unmoderated message boards such as Reddit and social networking sites (Pauwels, 2021), and this allows them to share strategies and other essential information needed to strengthen their movements with minimal risk of being discovered because of their presence online creating a safe space for them. (Conway *et al*, 2019). Similarly, the mainstreaming of their ideas also poses a threat as the internet already means extremists can reach a global audience (Pauwels, 2021). It is estimated there are roughly one billion monthly active users on Instagram (S.Dixon, 2022) and 150 million users on discord (LEVVEL, 2022) showing just how many potential people could be influenced by these right-wing extremist ideas. So,



making these hateful views common through the spreading of fake news and memes (for example) to the billions of people online, and then defending them by claiming it was all a joke increases the number of people who could potentially be radicalised through the ideas spread on social media (Pauwels, 2021). As a result, raising the popularity and influence of right-wing extremism and therefore increasing its threat level.

In the past few years, lone actors who have carried out high-profile terrorist attacks have been active on online forums, often alerting people of the attack, or posting videos of it on social media (Pantucci *et al*, 2021). The anonymity social media offers them has not only lowered the age of people involved with the right-wing extremist ideology (shown through the number of teenagers arrested in the UK for being involved in extreme right-wing forms such as the Order of the Nine Angels (Simone, 2020)) and increased the support for the extreme right, but also allows them to conspire together with limited risk of their identity being revealed (Pantucci *et al*, 2021). It is becoming increasingly harder to identify right-wing extremists, not only because of social media but because these people are moving away from right-wing stereotypes. Members of right-wing extremist groups have been moving away from the traditional image of a bomber jacket, shaved head and combat boots (Miller-Idriss, 2017), and are taking on different images which reflect their movements and strategies, such as Identarian extremists often blending into society, in an attempt to mainstream ideas and create confusion over their views, but strategically (Pauwels, 2021). Lack of identification contributes to the threat right-wing extremists present because if it is harder to identify these groups and the people in them, it is more difficult to restrict their growth and prevent the movements from gaining power and influence.

Another reason these extremists pose a threat is that they present a physical threat to society. Some of the worst acts of domestic terrorism have been motivated by right-wing extremism (Koehler, 2016) and so the physical threat of right-wing extremism is evident through these violent actions. The University of Bergen's Terrorism in Western Europe (TWEED) has registered 648 right-wing terrorist attacks between 1950 and 2004 and records that most of these were in France in the early 1960s, Italy in the 1970s and Germany in the early 1990s (Ravndal, 2015). In August of 1980, two members of an Italian group called the New Order bombed Bologna train station, and this resulted in 85 dead and over 200 wounded (Koehler, 2016) and in 1980 again Neo-Nazis bombed Munich Oktoberfest causing 13 deaths and in 2011 wounded, making it possibly one of the deadliest terrorist attacks since the Nazi regime (Koehler, 2016). The National Socialist Underground, discovered in Germany in 2011, assassinated 10 people and committed 2 bombings, however, went undetected for 14 years (Koehler, 2016), hinting that there could be other right-wing organisations posing a growing physical threat but going undetected. The instances listed are a few of the terrorist attacks which are causing direct harm to people and occurring because of right-wing extremism, hence it is obvious the material risk created by these people as well as the political one.

However, right-wing extremism does not pose the same level of threat as it has done in the past, and this can be seen by comparing the extreme right now to the fascism in Germany and Italy that was present during the interwar years (the 1920s-1940s), which were arguably some of the most dangerous examples of right-wing extremism, considering Naziism in Germany was one of the causes of World War Two. There are similarities between fascist movements today and those in Italy and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, such as the patriotic and violent ideals held by both, and the strong feelings of nationalism held (Hagtvet, 1994), however right-wing extremism in the interwar period was focused on imperialism –the German desire for Lebensraum, expansion, and restoration



of their empires from earlier times (Hagtvvet, 1994). This is different to right-wing movements today, as expansion is not highlighted to the same extent it was when Hitler and Mussolini were gaining power. There are suggestions of it around Europe, such as neo-Nazis in Germany who wanted to restore the boundaries of 1937 (Hagtvvet, 1994), however, it is not to the same extent as it was in the period leading up to the Second World War, as many right-wing movements have limited ideas of imperialist expansion (such as in Italy) (Hagtvvet, 1994).

In addition, the social conditions which allowed for the rapid growth and popularity of fascist groups such as the Nazis are not present today in Europe, meaning it is unlikely now right-wing extremism will grow to the same extent (as of 2022). Fascist movements have the strongest grounding in nation-states which have been weakened and humiliated by war, as it provides them with an opportunity to exploit the low national self-esteem and rise to power through the idea they can 'save the nation'. (Hagtvvet, 1994). After World War One, the Treaty of Versailles left Germany feeling very weak, with damaged national pride, creating the sense their international reputation had been harmed and was in need of fixing (Cantrell *et al*, 2018). This allowed the Nazi Party to come in, as the unclear national identity mobilised them through the people needing a leader who was going to make them a great nation again. However, countries in Europe are not feeling this way currently, and so it is highly unlikely for a right-wing movement to be able to rise to power in the same way the Nazis did, or Mussolini in Italy (Hagtvvet, 1994). Furthermore, right-wing extremists gain the greatest influence in countries which have suffered through an economic crisis (like the Great Depression), as unemployment increases and the power systems within a country become confused (Hagtvvet, 1994). A shaky democratic government (such as the Weimar Republic in Germany) would be less inclined to deal with this, once again making way for fascist movements, like the Nazis, to come into power (Cantrell *et al*, 2018). This is not the case in Europe as of now (Hagtvvet, 1994), and so there is a lower risk of right-wing extremists rising to power seen by comparing the right-wing extremist movements and the current social and political climate in Europe to what the world was like when fascists came to power in Germany and Italy in the interwar period, meaning as they are limited possibilities to genuine rise to power, the political threat of right-wing extremists is relatively small.

However, the social situation can change at any point, meaning it is not impossible for right-wing extremists to rise to power suddenly, and it is not accurate to use historical examples of fascism to predict whether right-wing extremism will grow and therefore determine their threat level (Hagtvvet, 1994). Similarly, the paper used is from 1994, meaning it is potentially unrepresentative of modern-day and its social climate, hence political threat is still very much there.

Predictions for potential growth

It is difficult to obtain consistent, clean data on the level of right wing extremist activity in Europe, partly because definitions vary materially between agencies, partly because these groups often do not claim responsibility for actions (less than a quarter of right-wing terrorists in Germany sent any form of claim (Koehler, 2020) (D Koehler, PRISM, Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe, 2020), and partly because the fragmented nature of groups means that detection rates are hard to assess. For example, in 2011 a right wing terrorist group called National Socialist Underground was discovered



in Germany, despite having operated for almost 14 years, assassinating at least ten people and committing at least two bombings, it had gone undetected by the authorities (Koehler, 2020) .

Perhaps the most consistent source of tracking trends in right-wing extremism in Europe is Europol's annual EU Terrorism Situation and Trends Report. The latest published report (Europol, 2021) shows that in 2020, 34 individuals were arrested in eight EU states on suspicion of involvement in right-wing terrorist activity: an increase compared to 2019 (21), but less than 2018 (44). The main offences reported were membership of a terrorist group plus attack planning and preparation, often accompanied by weapons preparation. Other trends reported by Europol (Europol, 2021) included:

- increasingly young age of suspects linked to violent on-line groups;
- video games and video game communication increasingly used to disseminate right wing extremist propaganda, especially to younger people;
- growing trend of right-wing extremists to promote eco-fascist views;
- exploitation of COVID-19 fears to support right-wing extremist narratives of accelerationism and conspiracy theories featuring ant-semitic, anti-immigration and anti-Islamic rhetoric.

These observations suggest that right-wing extremism is extremely adaptive to current issues (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) to make its underlying narrative more relevant, as well as new technology (video game communication) to spread these views. It is also noticeable that right-wing extremists have been increasingly working to 'normalise' their views in more mainstream political arenas (for example attempts to put the British National Party or the French National Rally becoming a mainstream with widespread electoral support under Marine Le Pen). Other examples of right wing extremist out-reach include cross-overs with football hooligans and organised criminal networks. For example Swedish authorities report that right wing extremists interact with known Swedish sports hooligans, even though there is no known formal cooperation between them, whilst this has extended into collaborative weapons procurement between Vorai MC ('Spiders MC') and skinheads in Lithuania in 2019 (Europol, 2021).

In the context of right-wing extremism being very able to adapt its narrative to contemporary issues that affect the whole community, to use technology to amplify its broadcast and to reach into adjacent groups, particularly in the political mainstream, there is strong cause to be concerned about the outlook for right wing extremism. In particular one can see several issues in the current geopolitical landscape that could easily fuel a significant growth in all of these trends:

- Most economists agree that the world is facing a severe economic shock, possibly on the scale of a global depression (World Bank , 2022). There are already clear signs of significant impacts on standards of living, with inflation increasing rapidly in many countries, along with growing industrial unrest. Many would also argue that whilst employment levels are currently high, the situation could easily develop into a stagflationary environment such that elevated unemployment could occur along with increased inflation leading to social hardship, a tradition fuel for right-wing sentiments (Manuel Funke et al , 2015);
- The war in Ukraine has already created the largest migration of refugees in Europe since the Second World War (Duszczuk and Kaczmarczyk, 2022), and many of these refugees have already moved into Central European countries known for anti-immigrant, right wing groups as well as gradually moving into more western countries such as Germany. The impact of



hosting this volume of Ukrainian refugees on countries such as Poland and Romania is potentially significant on economies and social services;

- However the bigger impact of the war in Ukraine is likely to be on the collapse of food supply to frontier economies, particularly in North Africa and the Middle East. Ukraine and Russia produce a huge proportion of fertilisers needed in global food production and a significant amount of staple food, especially grain, which is essential to populations in poorer countries around the periphery of Europe. It is not hard to see how this crisis could rapidly lead to starvation and thereby great pressure for mass-migration from Africa and the Middle East towards Europe (Sacko and Mayaki, 2022).

All of these factors are real, present dangers to the world economy and all of them are likely to fuel right-wing extremism as well as support efforts to bring these extremist views into the political mainstream. The threat facing western democracies is not just that there will be increased terrorist activity, but rather than there will be a hollowing out institutions and electoral attitudes in favour of right wing extremists as national populations face economic hardship and mass migration in the next decade.

To combat the ascendancy of right-wing extremism, a variety of mitigation strategies have been implemented across Europe in recent years, which largely focus on preventing and rehabilitating extremists. Combating discrimination, xenophobia and racism, as well as educating young people some of the preventative methods which European countries are taking to overcome right-wing extremism. For instance, in the city of Joensuu, the Finnish exit project has focused on dismantling xenophobic attitudes by providing safe social spaces that promote tolerance, where the local community can unite and engage in productive projects. This strategy could perhaps be accredited to a de-escalation of tension within the area, particularly with young people (Bjørgero, 2002). Educational approaches have also been successful: The Fair Skills approach by the German NGO Culture and Interactive has been implemented internationally (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic). This particular strategy engages at-risk young people with educational activities including mediation exercises, self-awareness group work and civic education (e.g. anti-bias training), which can help to dismantle intolerant attitudes (Kossack and Welinböck, 2018).

Outreach opportunities for right-wing extremists have also been implemented in European countries, providing them with the necessary support to rehabilitate themselves. For instance, in Sweden and Germany, EXIT programmes have created a twenty-four hour telephone hotline, managed by trained staff, which is accessible to anyone who wants to leave the scene (Pauwels, 2021).

It is certainly positive that European countries have started to recognise the threat posed by right-wing extremism and to take action in the form of preventive out-reach programmes as well as investing in stronger counter-extremist institutions, including the police. It must also be recognised that these responses are coming from behind - the West has been slow to see the threat posed by these groups. However the biggest challenge will be whether political support for this type of counter-extremism will sustain in the face of right-wing extremist ideology transitioning into the political mainstream. Elections in the US and Western European countries (or the EU referendum) has shown that there is growing support for populist nationalism and in some cases a blurring of this with right-wing extremism, which could threaten funding or political support to fight it.



Conclusion:

This literature available that has been analysed in this paper supports the original hypothesis that overall the ascendancy of right wing extremism is a relatively considerable threat to stable society in Europe.

The growing threat to the immigrant communities and demographics in particular further shows that right wing extremism is a threat to stable society in Europe. The growth of online presence of these communities and various groups enhances the threat to the attacked demographics. With the internet making it easier access to join and plot attacks on such groups, the threat is only increasing. It could also be said that the threat to stable societies in Europe is enhanced by globalisation, not only with the spreading of right wing extremism through the internet but with the increase in movement of people.

The growth of right wing extremism is also a considerable threat to stable societies in Europe because terrorist attacks harm people and cause fear and instability in the social environment across Europe. It could be argued that the fear and threat is heightened in the targeted areas and demographics. As seen in the past political climate in relation to right wing extremism, public figures such as Hitler and Mussolini highlight the socio-political climate that has been underlying in Europe historically concerning right wing extremism. Today we see right wing extremism in the socio-political climate with LePen in France, further showing that deep rooted underlying attitude and elongated association with right wing extremism.

The growth of right wing extremism, whilst a threat to stable society in Europe, is somewhat controlled by the mitigation strategies put in place that have proven effective in stunting the growth of right wing extremist groups and movements to an extent. This demonstrates that whilst right wing extremism is on the rise, the threat it poses to stable societies in Europe could be contained as more practiced approaches continue to be implemented across the right wing extremist communities or those vulnerable to joining them.

Discussion:

It was easy to find the information needed for where, who and why right wing extremism is growing. It is of importance that future researchers find more information on which immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers are being attacked by these groups in particular instead of the umbrella topic of this subsection. It's also would be worthwhile seeing how fast the right wing extremist movement has grown on the media sites and the trends associated with the uprising. Furthermore, it would be more beneficial for additional research to be conducted on the relationship of Europe as a whole in relation to right wing extremism and where its growing in terms of "are there similar areas within countries where its at its highest?" It's important for future researchers to also look into the effects of these attacks from right wing extremists becoming more common on the demographics more vulnerable to joining right wing extremist groups to help further explore the threat of right wing extremism on stable societies in Europe.

With the literature available, it can also be concluded that right-wing extremists are a threat to stable societies in Europe, more so physically than politically. However, the research available is limited to a few countries in Europe, with Germany, Italy and France being the predominant ones. This makes



it harder to draw conclusions about the whole of Europe, because the research found was focused on those countries. It is the belief of the paper more research should be done looking at the whole of Europe, instead of a few select countries in the continent.

Whilst there is a substantial volume of research available on right-wing extremism, the inconsistency of nomenclature amongst researchers and the rapid evolution of forms of extremism make comparisons of data more difficult. This means that whilst there are plenty of case studies on terrorist attacks or extremist groups, it is more difficult to produce evidence-based analysis of trends or threats across Europe or even within individual countries. Centralised analysis from bodies like Europol helps to address this, but it is certainly an area which would benefit from greater and more coordinated research. Comparing the drivers for right-wing extremism with threats facing European economies, together with the potential for increased migration due to food shortages arising from the war in Ukraine, it would be reasonable to take a pessimistic stance. The research from the paper suggests that whilst existing counter-terrorist efforts have shown some efficacy both in prevention and detection, but these will require considerable investment if they are to address the growing fertility of the social, political and economic breeding ground for right-wing extremism.

Bibliography

Ahmed, M. F. a. R., 2021. *It's not funny anymore. Far-right extremists' use of humour*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

BBC, 2013. *EDL leader Tommy Robinson held on east London march*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-24002252>
[Accessed 2 July 2022].

bellingcat, 2019. *Transnational White Terror: Exposing Atomwaffen And The Iron March Networks*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2019/12/19/transnational-white-terror-exposing-atomwaffen-and-the-iron-march-networks/>
[Accessed 14 June 2022].

Bjørge, T., 2002. *Exit Neo-Nazism reducing recruitment and promoting disengagement from Racist Groups*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs .

Bowman-Grieve, L., 2009. Exploring "Stormfront": A Virtual Community of the Radical Right. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32(11), pp. 989-1007.

Cantrell, J. N. S. P. S., 2018. *Complete 20th Century History*. 2nd Revised edition ed. s.l.:Oxford University Press.

Carter, E., 2018. *Right-Wing extremism/ radicalism: reconstructing the concept*, s.l.: s.n.

Conway M, S. R. M. L., 2019. *Right-wing extremists' persistent online presence: History and contemporary trends*, s.l.: s.n.

Essed, P., 1991. *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*. s.l.:Sage Publications .

European Commission , 2019. *Report on right-wing extremism: a study visit in Sweden*, s.l.: European commission .

Europol, 2021. *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report*, Luxembourg: publications office of the european union .

Hagtvet, B., 1994. Right-Wing Extremism in Europe. *Journal of Peace and Research*, 31(3), pp. 241-246.

Hope not Hate, 2019. *The Fringe & The Far Right: Racist Pseudoscience Conference in Norway*. [Online]
Available at: <https://hopenoathate.org.uk/2019/11/01/the-fringe-the-far-right-racist-pseudoscience-conference-in-norway/>
[Accessed 14 June 2022].

Jacob Aasland Ravndal, S. L. L. W. H. a. A. R. J., 2019. *RTV Trend Report 2018. Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe 1990-2018*, Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism: The Extreme Right, Hate Crime and Political Violence .

Jacob Aasland Ravndal, M. T. R. J. a. G. M., 2021. *RTV Trend Report 2021 Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence*, Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism: The Extreme Right, Hate Crime and Political Violence University of Oslo, 2021.

Justin Gest, J. F. T. R., 2021. *Europe's Path Back from the Fringe*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.iri.org/resources/iri-and-partners-release-new-study-on-triggers-to-fringe-party-voting-in-europe/#main> [Accessed 14 June 2022].

Kirby, P., 2022. *French election result: Macron defeats Le Pen and vows to unite divided France*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-61209058> [Accessed 6 June 2022].

Koehler, D., 2016. *Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe*, s.l.: PRISM 6.

Koehler, D., 2016. Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe Current Developments and Issues for the Future. *PRISM*, 6(2).

Koehler, D., 2017. *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe*, s.l.: s.n.

Koehler, D., 2019. *Violence and Terrorism from the Far Right*, s.l.: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism .

Koehler, D., 2020. *Right wing extremism and terrorism in Europe*, s.l.: s.n.

Kossack, H. W. a. O., 2018. *Name: Prevention of group hatred and right-wing extremism in Germany and Central and Eastern European – experiences, lessons learnt and ways forward from the European Fair Skills, Fair*in and CEE Prevent Net projects*, s.l.: s.n.

LEVVEL, 2022. *Discord Statistics and Facts 2022*. [Online] Available at: <https://levvvel.com/discord-statistics-and-facts/#:~:text=Discord%20has%20150%20million%20monthly%20active%20users.&text=The%20software%20reached%2010.6%20concurrent,for%20gaming%20and%20other%20activities>. [Accessed 28 June 2022].

Maciej Duszczuk, P. K., 2022. The War in Ukraine and Migration to Poland: Outlook and Challenges. *The ripple effects of the war in Ukraine*, 57(3).

Manuel Funke, M. S. C. T., 2015. *Politics in the Slump: Polarization and Extremism after Financial Crises 1870-2014*, s.l.: Europa .

Maura Conway, R. S. L. M., 2019. *Right-Wing Extremists' Persistent Online Presence:: History and Contemporary Trends*, s.l.: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (2019).

Mayaki, J. S. a. I., 2022. *How the Russia-Ukraine conflict impacts Africa*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2022/how-russia-ukraine-conflict%20A0impacts-africa> [Accessed 30 June 2022].

Miller-Idriss, C., 2017. *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*. s.l.:Princeton University Press.



Ong, P. a. R. a. K., 2021. Persistence of Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in the West. *counter terrorist trend and analyses* , 13(1), pp. 118-126 .

Pauwels, A., 2021. *Contemporary manifestations of violent right-wing extremism in the EU: An overview of P/CVE practices.* [Online]
 Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-04/ran_adhoc_cont_manif_vrwe_eu_overv_pcve_pract_2021_en.pdf
 [Accessed 1 june 2022].

Ravndal, J., 2015. A Thug or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe. *Journal for deradicalization.*

S.Dixon, 2022. *As already established, right-wing extremism is growing, and this results in it being a threat. The slight rise in nationalist party popularity can be demonstrated through growth in France (Kirby, 2022) and in Germany, with the Federal Office for Protecti.* [Online]
 Available at: [As already established, right-wing extremism is growing, and this results in it being a threat. The slight rise in nationalist party popularity can be demonstrated through growth in France \(Kirby, 2022\) and in Germany, with the Federal Office for Protecti](#)
 [Accessed 28 June 2022].

Segers, A. R. J. a. I. B., 2020. *What is right-wing extremism?.* [Online]
 Available at: <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/what-is-right-wing-extremism.html>
 [Accessed 30 june 2022].

Simone, 2020. *UK Nazi Satanist Group should be Outlawed, Campaigners Urge*, s.l.: BBC.

Stabile, E. G. A. a. J., 2020. *Confronting Russia's Rol in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism.* [Online]
 Available at: <http://www.justsecurity.org/68420/confronting-russias-role-in-transnational-white-supremacist-extremism/>
 [Accessed 2 july 2022].

World Bank , 2022. *STAGFLATION RISK RISES AMID SHARP SLOWDOWN IN GROWTH.* [Online]
 Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/07/stagflation-risk-rises-amid-sharp-slowdown-in-growth-energy-markets>
 [Accessed 30 june 2022].

