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Final Dissertation

THE INCIPIENT DANGER OF THE FAR-RIGHT:

THE HARBINGER OF A FIFTH WAVE OF

TERRORISM?

Author: **Angélica Samaniego Arbide**
Supervisor: **Javier Gil Pérez**

Universidad Pontificia Comillas
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Abstract

The 26th of July 2024, the EU designated "The Base" as part of its 22-name long list of terrorist threats (Council of the European Union, 2024). The addition of the first far-right organization to the list marks a pivotal transformation in the EU counter-terrorism effort (Craanen, 2024) and could be the reflection of a greater paradigm shift in the global sphere. While extreme - left ideology motivated attacks as well as religiously motivated attacks remain, recent data suggests that we might be witnessing the beginning of a new wave, one motivated by feelings of anti-immigration, hatred and racism towards ethnic and religious minorities, xenophobia, Islamophobia and /or anti-Semitism (United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2020), which is redirecting both national and international security efforts towards domestic terrorism as the long forgotten yet unmistakably present threat. This is so despite the fact that "for a long time, this matter has been neglected by scholars, policymakers, legislators and security forces and a much stronger, almost singular focus been put on Islamist terrorism" (Görder & Chavannes, 2020, p.2).

David Rapoport's essay *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* argued that the history of modern terrorism can be best understood through the lens of a wave system that groups previously indistinguishable patterns of terrorist attacks into four different groups, namely: an initial *anarchist wave* from the 1880s to the 1920s, an *anti-colonial wave* that started in the 1920s up until the 1960s, the so-called *New Left Wave* from the 60s to the 90s and a fourth *religious wave* that started in 1979 and we will still witness, according to Rapoport, until 2025 if it follows the same pattern as previous ones (Rapoport D. C., 2004b). With this framework in mind, this thesis aims at analyzing the existing literature in order to state whether the new far-right terrorist trend could constitute the harbinger of a fifth wave of global terrorism.

Key words: Four Waves of Modern Terrorism, David Rapoport, far-right, terrorism, fifth wave, anti-immigration, extremism, radicalization

Resumen

El 26 de julio de 2024, la UE designó "The Base" como parte de su larga lista de 22 nombres de amenazas terroristas (Consejo de la Unión Europea, 2024). La inclusión de la primera organización de extrema derecha de la lista marca una transformación fundamental en el esfuerzo antiterrorista de la UE (Craanen, 2024) y podría ser el reflejo de un paradigma mayor en la esfera global. Aunque sigue habiendo atentados motivados por ideologías de extrema izquierda, así como por motivos religiosos, datos recientes sugieren que podríamos estar asistiendo al comienzo de una nueva oleada, motivada por sentimientos de antiinmigración, odio y racismo hacia minorías étnicas y religiosas, xenofobia, islamofobia y/o antisemitismo (Dirección Ejecutiva del Comité contra el Terrorismo del Consejo de Seguridad de Naciones Unidas, 2020), que está reorientando los esfuerzos en materia de seguridad, tanto nacionales como internacionales, hacia el terrorismo doméstico como la amenaza largamente olvidada pero inequívocamente presente. Y ello a pesar de que "durante mucho tiempo, este asunto ha sido desatendido por los académicos, los responsables políticos, los legisladores y las fuerzas de seguridad y se ha prestado una atención mucho mayor, casi singular, al terrorismo islamista" (Görder & Chavannes, 2020, p.2).

El ensayo de David Rapoport *Las cuatro olas del terrorismo moderno* sostenía que la historia del terrorismo moderno puede entenderse mejor a través de la lente de un sistema de olas que agrupa patrones de atentados terroristas anteriormente indistinguibles en cuatro grupos diferentes, en concreto: una *ola anarquista* inicial desde la década de 1880 hasta 1920, una *ola anticolonial* que comenzó en la década de 1920 hasta los años 1960, la llamada *Nueva Ola de Izquierda* desde la década de 1960 hasta la de 1990 y una cuarta *ola religiosa* que comenzó en 1979 y que aún presenciamos, según Rapoport, hasta 2025 si sigue el patrón de las anteriores (Rapoport D. C., 2004b). Con este marco en mente, esta tesis pretende analizar la literatura existente para afirmar si la nueva tendencia terrorista de extrema derecha podría constituir el presagio de una quinta ola de terrorismo global.

Palabras clave: Cuatro Olas de Terrorismo Moderno, David Rapoport, extrema derecha, terrorismo, quinta ola, anti-inmigración, extremismo, radicalización

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Declaración de Uso de Herramientas de IA Generativa en Trabajos Fin de Grado en Relaciones Internacionales.

Por la presente, yo, Angélica Samaniego Arbide, estudiante de Relaciones Internacionales de Comunicación Global de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas al presentar mi Trabajo Fin de Grado titulado "The incipient danger of the far-right: the harbinger of the fifth wave of terrorism?", declaro que he utilizado la herramienta de IA Generativa ChatGPT u otras similares de IAG de código sólo en el contexto de las actividades descritas a continuación:

1. **Asistente en la elaboración de referencias bibliográficas**: Para asegurar que la estructura fuera correcta según el estilo APA, aunque su redacción fuera manual

2. **Traductor**: Para traducir textos de un lenguaje a otro

3. **Asistente en la reformulación de ideas**: Utilizado para sugerir alternativas de redacción, asegurando la autoría original final en todo caso

Afirmo que toda la información y contenido presentados en este trabajo son producto de mi investigación y esfuerzo individual, excepto donde se ha indicado lo contrario y se han dado los créditos correspondientes (he incluido las referencias adecuadas en el TFG y he explicitado para qué se ha usado ChatGPT u otras herramientas similares). Soy consciente de las implicaciones académicas y éticas de presentar un trabajo no original y acepto las consecuencias de cualquier violación a esta declaración.

Fecha: 27/04/2025

Firma:

"He is a terrorist. He is a criminal.

He is an extremist.

But he will, when I speak, be nameless"

(Ardern, 2019)

1. INTRODUCTION

On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, former U.S. army soldiers and militants involved in the far-right *Patriot Movement*, orchestrated a devastating terrorist attack. They detonated a homemade bomb inside a rental truck outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, leading to massive destruction, the deaths of 168 people and hundreds of injured. While initially the attack had been attributed to Islamic terrorist groups, it soon became clear that it was linked to anti-government ideology. It was the deadliest domestic terrorist attack in US in history, until the events of September 11 six years later (Britannica, 2024a).

On July 22, 2011, a car bomb exploded near government offices in downtown Oslo. Short after, reports emerged of gunfire in the island of Utøya, in Southern Norway. Anders Behring Breivik, posing as a security official, had gained access to the island and opened fire. By the time the police arrived, 68 people had been killed, mostly teenagers attending the youth camp hosted by the Norwegian Labour Party. This attack became Norway's deadliest act of terrorism since World War 2 (Britannica, 2024b).

On March 15, 2019, New Zealand experienced its deadliest terrorist attack in decades when Brenton Tarrant entered two mosques in Christchurch and fatally shot 51 people. Before the attack, he posted into 8chan: "Well lads, it's time to stop shitposting and time to make a real-life effort post. I will carry out and [*sic*] attack against the invaders, and will even live stream the attack via facebook" (Macklin, 2019, under Christchurch Terrorist Attacks). The Facebook livestream linked his manifesto titled *The Great Replacement* as justification for the massacre. He had already sent

it to Prime Minister Jacinda Arden's generic email account and to about 70 media outlets, as a warning, but help came late (Macklin, 2019).

Between 2014 and 2018 far-right terrorism surged, with a staggering 320% increase in attacks in Western countries (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). Between 2016 and 2021, there have been at least 35 acts of terrorism related to right-wing ideology every year in the West (Rapoport D. , 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic further fueled far-right extremism, as conspiracy theories became a tool for recruiting new followers (Pantucci, 2022), particularly in relation with anti-government groups and ideology (RAN Practitioners, 2022). By 2020, the Center for Strategic and International Studies identified white-supremacist ideology as the driving force behind the majority terrorist attacks in the United States (Gross, 2020).

In August 2022, the United Nations Report of the Secretary General on *Terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief* emphasized *far-right* or *extreme-right wing* ideology as the "most prominent security threat" in Western Member States (United Nations General Assembly, 2022, p.2). This concern was further confirmed in 2023, when 5 out of 7 terrorist attacks carried out in the United States were linked to far-right ideology (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). In 2025, "the threat of far-right terrorism is expected to increase […] due to the tendency of far-right extremists to capitalize on societal tensions to forward their narrative" and the "growing political polarization, populism and anti-immigrant sentiments in Western Europe" (Max Security Solutions, 2024, para.4).

Despite the apparent growing prominence of far-right terrorism, global counterterrorism efforts have remained disproportionately focused on jihadist and Islamic-inspired violence, particularly in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks (Martini, 2023). A staggering 80% of research publications on terrorism since 2001 still focus on jihadism (Ahmed & Lynch, 2021), an emphasis that has resulted in an imbalance in addressing other emerging security threats, including far-right terrorism (Koehler, 2019). While there seems to be a growing trend of acknowledgment of far-right extremism, studies have long centered around single attacks rather than overall trends (Collins J. , 2021). As a result, the continued focus on isolated incidents has hindered the ability

to fully grasp the scope of the threat, and the frequency of attacks persists as research struggles to keep pace.

Several underlying factors have contributed to the rise of far-right ideologies, including globalization, increasing migration and arguably the legacy of past waves of terrorism. Other relevant global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter Movement and the 2015 migrant crisis have fueled anti-immigrant rhetoric that has contributed to an increasingly polarized political arena. These factors, combined with recent technological advancements, have facilitated radicalization and the rise of individually planned terror by so called *lone-wolves* alongside it (Hartleb, 2020). The transnational nature of this phenomenon raises important questions about whether future counterterrorism efforts should redirect their focus towards what could potentially constitute a new *wave* of attacks, fundamentally different both in targets and means, as well as in the underlying ideology that inspires it, to previous ones. Future counterterrorism, nonetheless, requires present analysis, hence the importance of focusing on global trends rather than individual assaults.

This thesis draws on David Rapoport's *Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* framework. In it, he argued that the history of modern terrorism can be best understood through the lens of a wave system that groups previously indistinguishable patterns of terrorist attacks into four different groups, namely: an initial *anarchist wave* from the 1880s to the 1920s, an *anti-colonial wave* that started in the 1920s up until the 1960s, the so-called *New Left Wave* from the 60s to the 90s and a fourth *religious wave* that started in 1979 and we will witness, according to Rapoport, until the very same year that this thesis is being written, 2025, if it follows the same pattern as previous ones (Rapoport D. C., The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11, 2004).

By applying Rapoport's wave theory, this analysis argues that the current rise in far-right violence could represent the emergence of a fifth wave of global terrorism. The goal is to raise awareness in the international community and mitigate future casualties by attempting to grasp the scope of the potential threat. Additionally, this thesis will highlight the importance of identifying patterns of political violence to enhance counterterrorism strategies, as opposed to focusing exclusively on specific terrorist organizations (Walls, 2017). As Rapoport himself stated, the wave framework

provides a way to contextualize terrorism historically and develop theories that could anticipate the future (Simon, 2011). Indeed, Rapoport's "application of an orderly, evidence-based understanding of terrorism, national identity, and political legitimacy may be the most effective weapon we could employ in any 'war on terrorism' now or in the future" (Rosenfeld J. E., 2011, p.9).

1.1. PURPOSE AND MOTIVATIONS

The Global Terrorism Index published yearly since 2007 by the Institute for Economics and Peace has recorded over 66,000 terrorist incidents since the beginning of their research until 2024 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). In 2023, deaths by terrorism reached their highest level since 2017, with 8,352 victims in just one year, and I quote: "Terrorism worsens as global conflict drives risk of new wave" (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). The North Atlantic Treaty Organization equally defines terrorism as "the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of citizens of NATO countries, and to international stability and prosperity" and one that distinguishes no nationality or border (NATO, 2024, para.1), while the Europol, on the other hand, considers it "an attack on our society intending to create fear and chaos amongst EU citizens" (EUROPOL, 2023, p.4).

While in the West fatalities dropped in 2023 in comparison to the previous year, political tensions since the October 7th 2023 attacks have increased concerns over a resurgence in politically motivated violence (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). The last Global Terrorism Index, 2025, highlights that "organizations like the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, once defining actors in the ecosystem of global extremism, no longer represent the predominant threats facing Western societies" (p.86). Instead, "more radical groups are emerging from internal divisions within extremist factions, with the hierarchical structures of conventional movements no longer being followed" (p.86).

The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) pointed at extreme right-wing terrorism as Member States' growing concern in its 2020 *Trends Alert*, for the first time since its continuous focus on Islamic terrorism from its start. The Executive Directorate describes the threat

as a phenomenon that is not new but has increased in frequency and lethality, with the number of arrests nearly doubling between the years 2017 and 2018 as stated in the European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation Trend Report (United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2020).

Whatever each institution's definition and extent, what is increasingly clear is that terrorism is a continuous societal threat that cannot be ignored. Global in scope and intent, and disruptive by nature, it proves its unforeseen qualities in each and every attack, just as it does in each and every new wave. It takes place everywhere in the world, and there is no single clear predictive cause for it, nor a single effective solution to it. The main issue remains that intelligence agencies often act reactively instead of preemptively and, in this context, the emergence of new forms of terrorism proves especially challenging.

The worrying data presented above has served as motivation for the writing of the present thesis. A course the author took during her exchange year at Georgetown University on "*The Weaponization of Hate*" which focused on far-right extremism and was formerly taught by Bruce Hoffman then by one of his alumni, Jacob Ware, opened her eyes to the extent of the threat at hand and provided the incentive to focus on this topic. This academic experience, added to a childhood in a region in Spain where the fear of terrorism controlled people's spirits until barely a decade ago, and a wish that nothing ever takes us to that point again.

It is clear that public safety calls for greater government efforts at combating it and that constructive counterterrorism starts by understanding what it is trying to combat in the first place, thus the significance of finding patterns. Quoting the introduction to the book *Terrorism, Identity and Legitimacy: The Four Waves theory and political violence*: "whether violence is local or global, it tends to be both patterned and innovative. It elicits chaos, but can be reduced to an orderly paradigm, model or theory, depending on the methods and data scholars employ to understand it" (Rosenfeld J. E., 2011, foreword).

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis will be to find those patterns and determine the scope of the threat at hand, in the hopes of understanding it better and ideally, adding to the existent literature in its job to reduce the number of deaths in the future.

The research objectives will thus be:

I.   Assess whether there has been a measurable increase in far-right terrorism over the past decade

II.   Examine the scope and transnational nature of this potential wave

III.   Evaluate contemporary fifth wave terrorism theories

IV.   Determine whether extreme right-wing ideology- driven attacks provide a convincing foundation for the theory of a fifth wave of modern terrorism

1.2.   RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis will focus on the growing danger that the far-right ideology motivated attacks pose to the West. The research question that the following pages will make an attempt at answering is the following:

Does the recent increase in extreme right-wing motivated attacks constitute the harbinger of a fifth wave of modern terrorism, according to Rapoport's *Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* framework?

In order to answer the question above, the following pages will first dive into Rapoport's theoretical framework then focus on the origins of modern terrorism and the difficulties of defining both terrorism and terrorism motivated by far-right ideology. Next will be to search for the characteristics that constitute a *wave* and how the broader pattern of recent right-wing inspired incidents fits into it. The thesis will then do a quick overview on existing fifth wave theories and finally connect the analyzed categories to conclude whether, all other things equal, a further development of similar events could signify that we are witnessing the emergence of a new wave of terrorism that governments ought to already be prepared for.

1.3. HYPOTHESIS

The initial hypothesis of this study is that the increase in right-wing ideology-driven terrorist attacks does in fact constitute the beginning of a fifth global wave of modern terrorism. The beginning of a new wave does not imply the sudden end of the previous ones, as we still witness attacks perpetrated by left-wing and Islamist terrorist groups. It simply suggests the start of a change in paradigm, the emergence of dynamics that may act as a common catalyst for future attacks to come.

Right wing extremism has existed throughout the 20th century, as will be discussed later on. The sudden change, especially throughout the 2010s, towards common means and tactics, as well as the use of social media to published manifestoes based on similar attacks, however, points at a trend different from those in the past (Dafinger & Florin, 2022). The increase in attacks has been recent and coincides with changes in global dynamics such as increased migration, the rise of far-right parties in Western countries and increased radicalization online due to an ever-growing development in technologies and media, which would serve as argument for the existence of a generalized underlying pattern.

1.4. METHODOLOGY

To determine whether a fifth wave is emerging, this study will consider both quantitative and qualitative research methods. By applying numerical data to the identified components of a *Wave of Terrorism* as determined by Rapoport, this thesis will attempt to determine whether far-right terrorism constitutes a new wave in the global trend, or if the scope of the threat is regional or not strong enough to last for a *generation*.

The data will be drawn from official sources such as the European Commission or US government institutions, previous comparative research papers on far-right terrorism such as Auger's analysis *Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?* and available terrorism databases. With this purpose in mind, the state of the art has been developed through a literature review of what terrorism means and whether far-right extremism fits this category, before delving into whether it fits the key

characteristics of a wave of terrorism. As expected by the choice of topic, the theoretical framework has mostly been built around Rapoport's published work. Then, the discussion on the fifth wave will focus more specifically around his most recent book *Waves of Global Terrorism: From 1879 to The Present* where he briefly concludes by exploring the potential of far-right attacks to constitute a fifth wave.

This thesis will also use comparative analysis in order to establish the criteria necessary to compare past waves to this potential new one. This comparison will be especially centered around the fourth wave, referred to as the *religious wave,* as it is widely considered by scholars as the wave we continue to experience today. Therefore, this focus is justified by the persistent global threat of Jihadist terrorism around the world, regardless of the emergence of far-right motivations as suggested by the evidence.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

First, the need for a deep understanding of what constitutes a *wave* takes us to Rapoport's wave theory of terrorism. Rapoport himself did not make speculations about what future waves of terror might look like, but he did set the example for others to do so. Following this framework, he identified four different waves of modern terrorism to this day, each with a name that reflects the dominant feature but not its only characteristic, all with a unique character, tactics and popular religious and political themes (Rapoport, 2004a).

When the author first had the idea to write this thesis, she had not yet encountered Rapoport's last book *Waves of Global Terrorism: from 1879 to the Present*, where he reviews his own theory and gives credit to the emerging literature on the possibility that far-right terrorism might constitute a fifth global wave. The conclusion of the book is titled *The fifth wave?* as a hint to the uncertainty of the statement. While undermining the originality attributed to the original thesis topic, this last chapter's inclusion of far-right terrorism as a potential fifth wave is very telling of the magnitude of the phenomenon at hand.

Other authors have already attempted to apply Rapoport's Four Wave Theory to the recently developing threat of the extreme right. Vincent A. Auger's paper titled *Right-Wing Terror: A Fifth Global Wave?* is an analysis that, already back in 2020, tackled the topic from a comprehensive, international perspective. So did Jonathan Collins' *A New Wave of Terrorism? A Comparative Analysis of the Rise of Far-Right Terrorism*, in which the comparative study of the phenomenon in the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia shows the emergence of a new wave. Amber Hart also wrote about this phenomenon in *Right-Wing Waves: Applying the Four Waves Theory to Transnational and Transhistorical Right-Wing Threat Trends*, but decided to go beyond and differentiate between waves of *anti-communism*, *anti-immigration* and *anti-Islam.*

The three papers conclude that we may be witnessing the beginning of a new wave motivated by extreme right ideology. On a similar note, Erin Walls' paper on *Waves of Modern Terrorism: Examining the Past and Predicting the Future* goes through multiple existent fifth wave theories, with an emphasis on the *Anti-Globalization Fifth Wave Theory*. Finally, lots of studies point at the surge in extreme right ideology and/or attacks, without linking this phenomenon to Rapoport's Wave Theory. An example is Marta Sara Stempien's in-depth examination of *Far-Right Terrorism in the West in Years 2015-2022*.

2.1.   RAPOPORT'S WAVE FRAMEWORK OF TERRORISM

Rapoport places the beginning of modern terrorism in the late 19th century when the evolution of doctrine alongside technology allowed for the development of global patterns (Rapoport, 2004b). Before the 1880s, terrorist attacks were more limited geographically, with groups in one state rarely cooperating with groups in another, yet often having a lifespan much longer than present terror organizations (Rapoport D. , 2022). He states that "unlike crime, terrorism is not a permanent feature of our societies. Intermittent political events inspire terrorist activity" (Rapoport D. C., 2022, p.10). and argues that "time and the changing character of the international political context… gives terrorism a cyclical character." (Rapoport D. C., 2016, p.1). He also emphasizes, however, that because of terrorists' innovative approach, even if the fourth wave follows the same

pattern as previous waves, the emergence of a new form of terrorism is likely to arise just as unpredictably as it has in the past (Walls, 2017).

As used in his work, a *wave* is defined as "a cycle of activity in a given time period – a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases. A crucial feature is its international character; similar activities occur in several countries, driven by a common predominant energy that shapes participating groups' characteristics and mutual relationships" (Rapoport, 2004b, p.27). The concept of *energy* can be best understood as underlying ideology, driven by sudden political changes, which does not mean the goals are the exact same everywhere, since most attacks are still driven by local aims (Auger, 2020).

Rapoport emphasizes that each wave was triggered by "unexpected dramatic political events" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.615). The first one was stimulated by the insufficient efforts at modernization by Czar Alexander II in Russia. The second, by the sudden importance of self-determination when the Versailles Treaty was signed at the end of WWI. The third was inherently linked to the Cold War, its spark more precisely with developments in Cuba and Vietnam. Finally, the Fourth Wave resulted from various events that changed the political sphere in the Islamic World in 1979. (Rapoport D. , 2022)

He also underscores that each had different *rhythms* and different *geography*. That is, the number of groups was higher at the beginning in some and in the last decades in the Second Wave, for instance. The First Wave began in Europe and spread through the continents with time, focusing in the Western world. The Second Wave was strongest in overseas territories of Western Empires. The Third Wave spread throughout the world, except for those regions controlled by the Soviet Union or were allies. Finally, the Fourth Wave began in the Islamic World, then spread to India, Israel and the United States, with Europe becoming one of the main targets (Rapoport D. , 2022). But they all shared one same *pattern*: "a young generation visualizing a new world initiated each wave" (Rapoport D. , 2022)

Rapoport focuses on the interactions between terrorist organizations, diaspora communities, states, sympathetic foreigners and supranational organizations (Rapoport, 2004a) in the defining of each

wave. He equally suggests that this system follows a *human life cycle pattern*, with each wave lasting around 40 years or a *generation*. This would mean that the incentives and rationality behind terrorist activities have, since the late 19th century, changed generationally, as "dreams that inspire fathers lose their attractiveness for the sons" (Rapoport, 2004b, under The Waves) which also explains the broad differences in *targets* and *target audiences*. Indeed, he describes terrorism as a "strategy, not and end", so that in each wave, "the specific tactics used depended upon both on the context and the rebel's political objectives" (Rapoport, 2004b, under The Waves). In this sense, the patterns developed in new forms of terrorism cannot be separated from their historical, social and essentially political contexts, as they are key to understanding the motivations behind the attacks, as well as the means to carry them out. Only with a historical analysis such can the necessary patterns be sought that answer what instantaneous current affairs analysis cannot; that is, what the future might bring.

2.1.1. FIRST WAVE: The "anarchist wave" (1879-1920s)

The first wave was the *anarchist wave* that began in the 1870s in Russia with movements against the Czarist regime (Collins J. , 2021) by anarchists who in response to the lack of social reforms (Walls, 2017) believed that their attacks "once declared immoral would be hailed by later generations as noble efforts to liberate humanity" (Rapoport, 2004a, p.50). Their main *tactic* were assassinations and their main *target*, high value political figures (Walls, 2017).

The first such organization was Narodnaya Volya (The People's Will), created by university students who rarely surpassed the age of thirty and mostly belonged to the middle and upper classes (Rapoport D. , 2022). The wave can be said to have culminated with the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 (Collins J. , 2021), but it significantly diminished by the mid-20s, when anarchists sought different methods to achieve their objectives (Rapoport D. , 2022)

During this wave, the so-called *Golden Age of Assassination* took place, during which period "more monarchs, presidents and prime ministers were assassinated than ever before" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.152). While it lasted over forty years, the amount of time that is equaled to a generation, individual organizations did not usually last longer than five. (Rapoport D. , 2022)

Rapoport identifies various *enablers* for this first wave, the first being "the transformation in communication and transportation patterns" (Rapoport D., 2004a, p.48-49). He draws our attention to the big changes in communications at the end of the 19th century, such as the emergence of the telegraph, daily mass newspapers and the railroad Rapoport D., 2004a).

2.1.2. SECOND WAVE: The "Anti-colonial wave" (1919-1960s)

The First Wave was followed by an *anti-colonial* wave that the post-World War I ideal of self-determination helped spur, leading to nationalist movements in European colonies (Auger, 2020). Its main *catalyst* was the change in world order that the Congress of Vienna originated to the new order sparked by the Treaty of Versailles, as European multiethnic empires collapsed and nationalist uprisings expanded, and its decline unfolded "when governments agreed to leave their colonial territories" (Rapoport D., 2002, p.260).

This wave mostly took place in territories where European rule had led to divisions between local populations (Walls, 2017), most importantly in overseas territories previously controlled by European empires, with some exceptions such as Yugoslavia and Italy (Rapoport D. , 2022). It took place between the 1920s and the 1960s, at a much more global stage than the previous one: in most of Africa, Palestine, Pakistan, the Philippines and Cyprus (Collins J. , 2021).

The first terrorist organization of this Second Wave was the IRA (Irish Republican Army). A significant part of the Irish who, from 1919 onwards would argue independence from the British on the principle of self-determination, were soon convinced that independence would not be achieved by political means only. After gradual violence, the IRA would start its first terror campaign in 1920 with the first primary target being the police (The Royal Irish Constabulary). It would culminate with the Anglo-Irish Peace Treaty, which created the newly free Republic of Ireland. It would not, however, fulfill the objective of uniting "the whole people of Ireland" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.266), which would explain why it is one of the rare occasions where an organization survives its original wave (Rapoport, 2004a).

The timing or *rhythm* of the anti-colonial wave differed greatly from that of the First Wave. During the Anarchist Wave organizations appeared to emerge simultaneously across various regions, creating the perception that they were closely interconnected. Direct and tangible links between groups reinforced the notion of an *international conspiracy*. However, this dynamic shifted entirely in the anti-colonial wave, as terrorist groups began to turn their violence against one another. Organizations also tended to be much larger and centralized (Rapoport D. , 2022)

Terrorist *tactics* were transformed in this new cycle (Walls, 2017), from "high-impact acts of terrorism" to acts that resembled guerrilla warfare (Collins J., 2021, p.3). The strategy sought to mostly fight the police as "a government's eyes and ears" (Rapoport D. 2004a, p.54), instead of the assassination of relevant political figures like the previous one did.

2.1.3. THIRD WAVE: The "New Left" (1960s-1990s)

The following *left-wing* wave started developing throughout the West, was mostly inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology and is said to have been *triggered* by the Vietnam war (Walls, 2017) as well as Castro's triumph in Cuba. It was, like the Anarchist Wave, mostly driven initially by young university students, who, this time, described themselves as *freedom fighters*, a term reminiscent of the Second Wave (Rapoport D. , 2022).

Organizations such as ETA, the IRA and the RAF, led by nationalist motivations, used more "spectacular acts of terrorism" (Collins J., 2021, p.3) than previous ones had. Publicity became more prominent since the introduction of mainstream television, but the number of deaths was lower than in previous waves (Rapoport D. , 2022). Apart from murder of prominent political figures, such as the anarchists had, hijackings, kidnappings and foreign embassy occupations also became more common (Collins J. , 2021).

The most prominent organization during this wave was the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), mainly due to its preference to attack abroad. There were, however, hundreds of different organizations that were categorized for the first time, mainly between *separatists* and either transnational or national *revolutionaries*. (Rapoport D. , 2022).

2.1.4. FOURTH WAVE: The "religious wave" (1979-2020s?)

Finally, the *religious wave* started in the 1980s and lasts to our day. The biggest tactical innovation of this last wave were suicide bombings (Rapoport D., 2004a), it was mostly centered around political Islam (Collins J. , 2021), which has been the deadliest form of terror in history. Terrorism driven by Islamist extremism has been responsible for the highest level of fatalities worldwide (Hart, 2023), with a significant role given to diaspora communities (Rapoport D. , 2022).

The Fourth Wave was *triggered* by a variety of international events, amongst which we can find the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the rise of a Jihad movement in the Islamic world (Collins J. , 2021). These events were proof that religion had the ability to "eliminate a secular superpower" (Rapoport, 2004b, under The Waves) and set an example for future attacks to come. In previous waves, there was a significant gap between the events that triggered them and the emergence of terrorist actions, but in this wave, as the events themselves were associated with terrorism, such gap did not take place (Rapoport D. , 2022).

Since then, Islamist groups like Boko Haram, al Qaeda, Hezbollah and ISIS have been characteristic of this wave, even though attacks have not only been perpetrated by followers of Islam. Incidents caused by Jewish terrorists, such as the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, by the Buddhist/Hindu Japanese Cult Aum Shinrikyo that same year or by Christian cults such as the Lord's Resistance Army in Africa, also make up a significant part of the events inside the Religious Wave. We equally find the Christian Identity movement in the US in what is described by Rapoport as "racial interpretations of the Bible" (Rapoport D., 2004b, under The Waves). The main difference between religions was that while Christian, Sikh and Jewish terrorist movements were mostly made up of nationals from one country, Islamic groups recruited from various states at once (Rapoport D. , 2022).

According to Rapoport, while "the Christian level of violence has been minimal – so far" (p.61) some argue that Oklahoma City bombing is an example of such (Rapoport D. 2004a). These pages will later argue, however, that such incidents motivated by white supremacist and anti-government

ideas (Walls, 2017) ought to best be analyzed through a political and identitarian lens rather than a purely religious one, thus furthering the premise that they in fact constitute the beginning of a different wave of non-state violence. This argument stems from the use of Christian symbols with racist and xenophobic goals, instead of the other way around.

Since according to Rapoport, each wave has a lifespan of 40 years, the religious wave is likely to fade throughout this decade. This prediction, seen as Jihadist terrorism remains, is however still drowned in uncertainty. In fact, subsequent studies have designated it as particularly strong (Walls, 2017) and Rapoport, aware of this, already warned 20 years ago, while still in the middle of it, that "the life cycle of its predecessor may mislead us" (Rapoport D. 2004a, p.66). Nevertheless, multiple scholars have been developing a variety of different theories for what the future might hold, as seen already in present patterns. Indeed, this wave system leaves the question of what the next wave of modern terrorism will look like, and what ideological grounding will replace the current religious one (Simon, 2011). One cannot help but wonder if said wave has already reached us and we are simply too focused on the past to realize it.

2.2.   FIFTH WAVE THEORIES

When it comes to *fifth wave* theories, some authors such as Jeffrey Simon suggest that anti-globalization will be the main characteristic of the fifth wave of terrorism, driven by increasing interconnectedness and an aversion to it, calling it the *Technological Wave*, with the Internet as its main triggering force (Simon, 2011).

On another note, Jeffrey Kaplan theorizes about the possibility that the fifth wave be motivated by the creation of new *ethnicity* or *tribal* societies in which minority groups are persecuted, thus being characterized by genocidal efforts (Kaplan, 2008). He actually argues that the "goal of such groups is the creation of a new man and a new woman comprising an ethnicity or tribal society that is the reconstruction of a lost 'Golden Age' model" (Kaplan, 2008, p.12).

Similarly, D. K. Gupta suggests that a fifth wave "should exhibit a collective consciousness based on ethno-nationalism, religious identity, or economic class. In all probability it would contain elements of all three." (Gupta, 2011, as cited by Auger, 2020, p.88).

While the existing literature seems to focus on a competitive comparison of the existing theories, to the author of this thesis what stands out is that the main underlying characteristics of these theories; that is, anti-globalization driven by online developments, preservation of national or religious identities and the search for a future than resembles a better past driven by racial supremacist ideas, all of them are found in the broader spectrum of far-right extremism. Seen this way, the fifth wave would comprise the underlying ideas of most current theories and would, quite worryingly, already be among us.

2.2.1. FIFTH WAVE OF GLOBAL TERRORISM: THE FAR-RIGHT

As mentioned above, Rapoport himself has written about the rise of the far-right movement as a harbinger of a fifth wave of terrorism (Rapoport D. , 2022). He mentions the rise of right-wing violence in the United States during Trump's first presidency and the multiplication of far-right demonstrations in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as racial violence following the Covid-19 pandemic, threats that have been largely ignored by politicians who far from stopping such narratives, feed into them (Rapoport D. , 2021).

In his article titled *The Capitol Attack and the 5th Terrorism Wave*, he delves into some of the worrying data: The Anti-Defamation League states that far-right ideology was responsible for 71% of extremist-related fatalities in the United States between 2008 and 2017, compared to 26% attributed to jihadist ideology. Hate crimes against minority religious groups, sexual orientations or ethnicities surged, leading to 1700 in 2017 alone. Perhaps most worrying of all, far-right terror groups have started to internationalize (Rapoport D. , 2021) which would transform the Fifth Wave from a possibility to a reality.

Simply Rapoport's publishing of a paper titled *The capitol Attack and the 5th Terrorism Wave* back in 2021 would seem to answer the question of whether far-right terrorism constitutes a fifth global wave of modern terrorism in his eyes. It would, were it not because, in it, he goes through the far-right political landscape in the United States, focusing on the first Trump administration but does not delve into why he suddenly calls this phenomenon a *wave*. It is striking, because in his next book published in 2022 *Waves of Global Terrorism: From 1979 to the Present* he very much goes back to the hypothetical tone that had disappeared in the paper mentioned before: "Far-right terror and its distinctive characteristics will certainly persist for few more years, but will it last long enough to constitute a Fifth Wave?" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.694).

3. STATE OF THE ART

3.1. DEFINING TERRORISM

Domestic terrorism, and right-wing terrorism as a subcategory inside it, poses specific and long-standing description issues. In the absence of consent on what constitutes an act of far-right terrorism, there seems to be an underrepresentation of this phenomenon in the literature (Peterka-Benton & Laguardia, 2021). This is so, in fact, even if more than 90% of the literature on terrorism has been written in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Silke, 2008).

In the field of terrorism, theoretical work often revolves around the very definition of the word (Lizardo, 2008). This is so, allegedly, because it is "easy to recognize, but difficult to define" (Prabha, 2000, para.1). In other words,

> "it would be much easier to point the flaws in extant conceptions and usages of the term than to come up with a definition that would be free of those same faults, while being comprehensive enough to be both acceptable to most lay observers and useful for the conduct of academic research on the subject" (Lizardo, 2008, p.91).

The difficulty of defining it often resides in the perception of whether the use of violence is legitimate in that context (Gaswaga, 2013).

This often results in the media choosing one word or another for both perpetrators: "extremists, protesters, terrorists" and actions: "attack, hate crime, riot", in order to spark public interest and frame their opinions. However, "whether an act of violence is hate, extremism or terrorism changes the legal responses, the likely jail term, and the perception of how seriously the state takes that violence" (Pearson, 2024, under Far Right Terrorism, Changing the Narrative). Hence the importance to call things by their name, without making the ever-so-common mistake of overusing the term.

Non-state violence has historically existed alongside the complexities of defining it. Its inherent political nature leads to a never-ending lack of consensus over whose freedom fighter should in fact be labelled as a terrorist. Indeed, terrorism is fundamentally a political concept, associated with the idea of State enemy, with those who seek power and systematically plan the way to achieve political change, which makes it inherently different from other forms of political violence.

Since its origins in the French Revolution and its *Régime de la terreur*, the word terrorism has always been linked to deliberate, organized use of terror justified in the idea of achieving a "new and better society" (Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 1998). "Ironically, perhaps, terrorism in its original context was also closely associated with the ideals of virtue and democracy" (Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 1998). Shortly after Robespierre and his close allies ceased rule in France, the word would be further associated with criminality and abuse of power, and in the following 19th century, the anti-monarchical sentiment that spread throughout Europe added revolutionary and anti-state connotations. Throughout the last two centuries, terrorism has been associated with violent anarchist, nationalist and separatist groups, totalitarian abuse of power, self-determination and national-liberation movements, both left-wing and right-wing extremism, radical religious ideologies, global conspiracies and even to describe non-traditional wars (Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 1998).

While early terrorism did not hide behind other words, modern-day terrorists do not use that label for themselves, which leaves it up to the State to decide what terrorism actually means, and thus which ways should be developed to counter it. This, of course, also makes the system of terrorism waves extremely dependent on the observer, and the development of patterns for counterterrorism

systems to work more effectively a much harder task than it would be to simply target *violence*. It is nonetheless possible and desirable to distinguish terrorism from other types of violence at a global consensual level. An example would be the distinction between guerrilla warfare and terrorism, as the first one mostly targets the military and the second tends to target civilians (Ganor, 2002). In this sense, regarding the principles of international law and what is permitted in conventional warfare, the killing of civilians for political purposes, no matter how "legitimate" to some, should always be declared to constitute a form of terrorism (Ganor, 2002).

The practice of terror is typically defined along the lines of threats or acts of violence with political reasons and purposes and far-reaching psychological repercussions for a target audience that is not in fact necessarily equal the victim (Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 1998). Rapoport writes that "rebels using violence to achieve a political or religious end are terrorists when they operate unfettered by military rules governing violence" (Rapoport D., 2022).

Terrorism is subnational in nature, and until recently, it was considered as such when conducted by organizations (Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 1998). Nowadays, the rise in lone actors who "typically draw ideological inspiration from formal terrorist organizations but operate on the fringes of those movements" (Hoffman, 2019, para.11), has become a major focus and is equally considered terrorism. As Berger states, "the involvement in a terrorist organization […] is sufficient but not necessary categorize an attack as terrorism" (Berger J., 2018a, para.21), since it is the attacker's intention which designates it as such. This is because it is always defined by the perpetrator; through the message their act aims at sending.

Indeed, "terrorism is about sending messages" (Berger J., 2018a, para.15), just as designating terrorists is.

> "On one point, at least, everyone agrees: 'Terrorism' is a pejorative term. It is a word with intrinsically negative connotations that is generally applied to one's enemies and opponents, or to those with whom one disagrees and would otherwise prefer to ignore. 'What is called terrorism', Brian Jerkins has written, 'thus seems to depend on one's point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgement; and if one party can successfully attach the label terrorist to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral

viewpoint'. Hence the decision to call someone (…) 'terrorist' becomes almost unavoidably subjective (…)". (Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 1998).

What distinguishes it from other types of violence is that it inherently applies to threats or uses of violence with the aim to change the status quo by those who lack mass support and have the superior state power acting against them, after other methods have failed (Crenshaw, 1998). The violence therefore needs to go against its State, in its clearest form against its Constitution, for it to be considered terrorism (Bjelopera, 2013).

The question that remains then is whether modern far-right violence constitutes 'mere' extremism or takes the form of terrorism, and whether these attacks are sufficiently broad and global in nature for them to characterize the emergence of a new wave.

3.2.   DEFINING FAR-RIGHT

In order to determine whether far-right extremism should be viewed as part of a broader international pattern, there is a need to define *far-right ideology* in the first place. This is no easy task, given the lack of a consensual definition in the literature and the different perceptions of radicality that coexist. Following Car Mudde (2019)'s approach in his book *Far Right Today*, far-right can be understood as an umbrella term that does not necessarily imply violence (Ahmed & Lynch, 2021). Although far-right extremism and far-right terrorism are often used to refer to the same, this thesis' focus will be on far-right political violence and thus terrorism (Ahmed & Lynch, 2021), whose underlying ideology can be understood to be far-right extremism. This specific version of violent far-right extremism is also labeled as *Violent Right-Wing Extremism (VRWE)*.

It is important to note that

"although the global extreme right-wing remains a heterogeneous movement with distinct local ideological agendas, motivations and recruitment and organizational strategies, VRWE [Violent Right Wing Extremist] movements in different parts of the world often share core elements of their ideologies and narratives and VRWE groups and actors across

the world have formed strong transnational links through a variety of online and offline channels" (Wallner & White, 2022, p.8).

According to the Institute for Economics & Peace, "far-right refers to a political ideology that is centered on one or more of the following elements: strident nationalism (usually racial or exclusivist in some fashion), fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigration chauvinism, nativism and xenophobia" (Auger, 2020, p.8) . In words of Koehler (2014):

> "the term right-wing extremism covers a broad range of ideologies that essentially see violence as a legitimate tool to combat a political and ethnic 'enemy' (including individuals with different culture, religion, nationality or sexual orientation) seen as a threat to the [*sic*] own race or nation" (Auger, 2020, p.89).

Thus, the far-right can be argued to be *exclusivist* in nature, based on the exclusion of minorities, the preservation of hierarchies and a fear of replacement and loss of status quo.

The ideological stance of far-right parties typically leans towards what is categorized as either *radicalism* or *extremism*, the first used to refer to parties that put aspects of the democratic and/or economic order into question and the second to ideological forms that are inherently antidemocratic, even though one is not really a moderate form of the other (Golder, 2016). In his book *Extremism* Berger J. M. (2018b) defines it as the conviction that an in-group's survival is inherently tied to the necessity to be hostile against an out-group.

In their paper *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*, Bjørgo and Ravndal (2019) provide a very clear visual represetation of these categories and how they intersect:
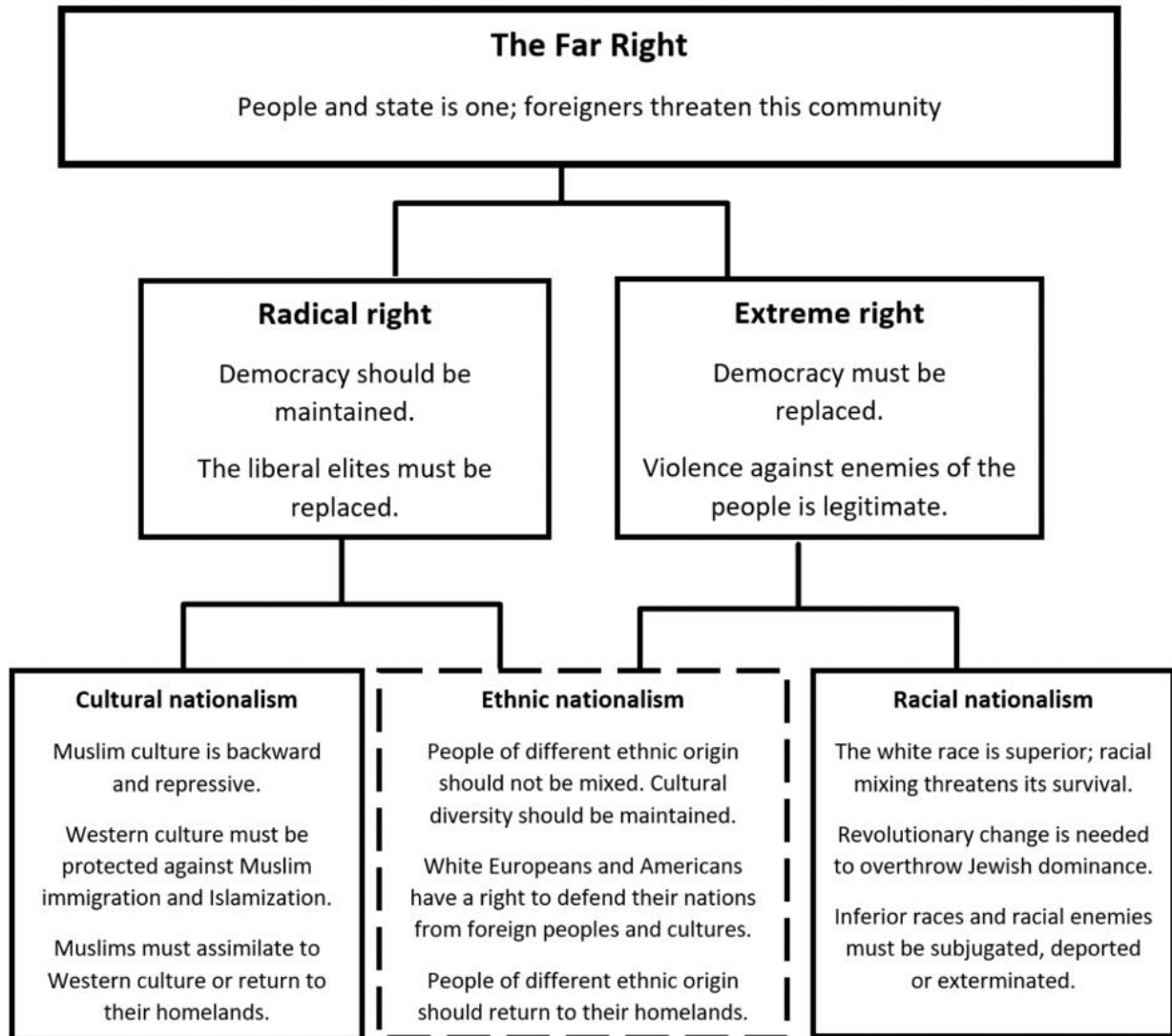
Figure 1: Conceptualizing the Extreme Right

The Far Right

People and state is one; foreigners threaten this community

Radical right

Democracy should be maintained.

The liberal elites must be replaced.

Extreme right

Democracy must be replaced.

Violence against enemies of the people is legitimate.

Cultural nationalism

Muslim culture is backward and repressive.

Western culture must be protected against Muslim immigration and Islamization.

Muslims must assimilate to Western culture or return to their homelands.

Ethnic nationalism

People of different ethnic origin should not be mixed. Cultural diversity should be maintained.

White Europeans and Americans have a right to defend their nations from foreign peoples and cultures.

People of different ethnic origin should return to their homelands.

Racial nationalism

The white race is superior; racial mixing threatens its survival.

Revolutionary change is needed to overthrow Jewish dominance.

Inferior races and racial enemies must be subjugated, deported or exterminated.

Figure 1. Originally developed by Berntzen (2018), revised in collaboration with Bjørgo and Ravndal, and conceptually based on Mudde (2002) and Teitelbaum (2017)

Source: Bjørgo, T., & Ravndal, J. (2019). Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns and Responses. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*.

Both the far-right and the far-left show variations described as *radical* or *extreme* according to what has been described above. In fact, in the past, politically motivated terror attacks in the West have been driven by individuals and groups that aligned with far-left ideology (Stempień, 2024). While the far-left opposes the system on the premise that it generates unnatural inequality levels, favoring major State intervention, "what far-right parties have in common is a desire to create an

authoritarian system that is strictly ordered according to the "natural" differences that exist in society, as well as a law-and-order system that severely punishes deviant behavior" (Golder, 2016, p.479).

Because of the perceived *elitism* of a more centric liberal stance that has long prevailed in democratic societies, and the feeding upon the accumulated disenchantment of big parts of the population, left-wing and right-wing politicians increasingly claim to work in the interest of the *people* in opposition to the establishment that has allegedly conspired against them. This is what is commonly referred to as *populism*, a concept which, likely because of its pejorative connotation, has been overused to refer to political opponents (Hudson & Shah, 2022). It is nonetheless central to far-right ideology, which argues that the *elite* or traditional parties in power have enriched themselves and ignored the general will of the people. The exclusionary populism often associated to emerging right-wing parties rejects meaningful divisions within the idea of "the people" and denies the need for compromise, leaving cultural/religious or ethnic minorities out (Golder, 2016).

The far-right political bloc is experiencing the fastest growth amongst party families in Europe (Golder, 2016), in stark contrast to the trend at the beginning of the century. As a striking example, when the global refugee crisis reached its peak in 2015, Germany welcomed around 1.5 million refugees inside its borders (McGuinness, 2024) and a plain two years later, *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)*, the country's far-right force which previously had no seats in Parliament, fed into a xenophobic narrative that turned it into the country's third largest party in the 2017 elections. What started as opposition to the previous open migration policy soon added Covid-19 restriction protests, links to an attempt to storm the German parliament building in 2020, and later in 2022, to a plot to restore Germany's Kaiser. By the 2024 European elections, the AfD rose as the second most popular party in the country (Beauchamp, 2024), a trend that persisted at the beginning of this year at the German federal election, where AfD won over 20% of the votes (Zeier & Grün, 2025).

The recent rise of the far-right, however, is not mainly European. In December 2023, Foreign Policy predicted: "Right-Wing Populism is set to Sweep the West in 2024". Cas Mudde (2019) noted already back in 2019, that three of out the five most populous States were governed by a far-

right leader (India, Brazil and the United States). The list could also contain Turkey, the Philipines or Russia, despite the focus on rising Eurosceptics in Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Austria, France, Spain… all after a Brexit that succeeded in the United Kingdom.

With Milei's election in Argentina, and Trump's reemerging shadow, it seems like right wing politics are on the rise and, alongside it, so is right-wing extremism and political violence. In a comprehensive study of far-right terrorism in the West between the years 2015 to 2022, it is clearly stated that "terrorism in the West has increased in parallel with political unrest, the polarization of society and the rise of populist movements and political parties" (Stempień, 2024, p.244). For instance, in the US, white supremacist groups' activities reemerged under the first Trump administration, under a certain feeling of political legitimacy (Rapoport D. , 2022). In his second, more authoritative term, experts go as far as to argue that Trump "is now likely to keep the extra-legal forces of groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers within his orbit and to informally cooperate with them to achieve his political goals" (Gallaher, 2025, para.1). His pardoning of nearly 1600 individuals who were involved in the January 6th attack on the capitol, experts argue, "will embolden […] extremist groups such as white supremacists who have openly called for political violence" (Layne, Parker, Eisler, Tanfani, 2025, para.2). After all, domestic radicalization, either as a contributor or a reflection of international political polarization, is on the rise.

2.1.1   FAR-RIGHT IDEOLOGY

As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, *Violent Right-Wing Extremism* can be understood as the underlying ideology of far-right terrorism. It lacks the cohesion of a singular bloc and the groups that are described under this umbrella term are far from uniform. There are international branches to most ideological subcategories but the lack of holistic studies on the matter leave fragmented regional or national sections. Moreover, it is important to note that the similarities amongst categorizations are not at random, since far-right groups have imported ideas from each other for long.

The European Commission, for instance, provides a comprehensive general overview of the six main extreme far-right ideological subcurrents in the continent: Neo-Nazi Movements (who call

for the ideals of Nazi Germany, such as racial supremacy, anti-Semitism and a totalitarian State); Anti-Islam or Anti-Migration Movements (whose objective is to preserve the Christian or European identity in the face of what they see as the Islamization of the continent), Identarian Movements (who call for "ethnopluralism", the coexistence of different ethnic groups but separate from one another), Ultranationalist and Neofascist Movements (who seek the establishment of a totalitarian, traditionalist and often Christian, ethnic-nationalist State), Far-Right Sovereign Citizen Movements (who see government institutions as illegitimate) and Single-issue Extremists (motivated by misogynistic views). (Pauwels, 2021)

The UK's National Counter Terrorism Security Office identifies the following ideological subcategories: Cultural Nationalism (rooted in the perception that *Western culture* has been put in danger by mass migration, linked to anti-Islam ideology), white nationalism (based on the idea that "the white race" and "the white homeland" are in existential danger again due to mass migration), and White Supremacism or the belief that "the white race" is superior to other races (ProtectUK, 2023)

In the United States, the Center for Strategic & International Studies identifies right-wing ideology as the main inspiration for the majority of all terrorist incidents in the US since 1994 and distinguishes between three types of right-wing terrorists: white supremacists, anti-government extremists and *incels* (involuntary celibates) (Jones, Doxsee, & Harrington, 2022). White supremacy also seems to be the most relevant ideological component, responsible for 43% of far-right attacks. Around white supremacy we can find traditional white supremacy (such as the Ku Klux klan), Religious White Supremacy (in the form of Christian Identity or Norse Paganism), Racist Skinheads or the Alt Right. (Pitcavage, 2019)

As can be observed, many categories overlap and many groups subscribe to ideas from different categories at the same time (ProtectUK, 2023). The graph below sows that, while traditional white supremacists have prevailed and anti-communist extremists disappeared as the Cold War ended, the last two decades of the 20th century saw an unconceivable surge in right-wing movements that are often alien to each other, but often share common ideas and enemies (Pitcavage, 2019). This complexity hinders immensely the task of grouping them all under one same label, especially given

the differences in categories that each country uses. What seems clear is that there has been some sort of catalyst for similar ideologies to be emerging at the same time.

Figure 2: Surveying the Landscape of the American Far-Right
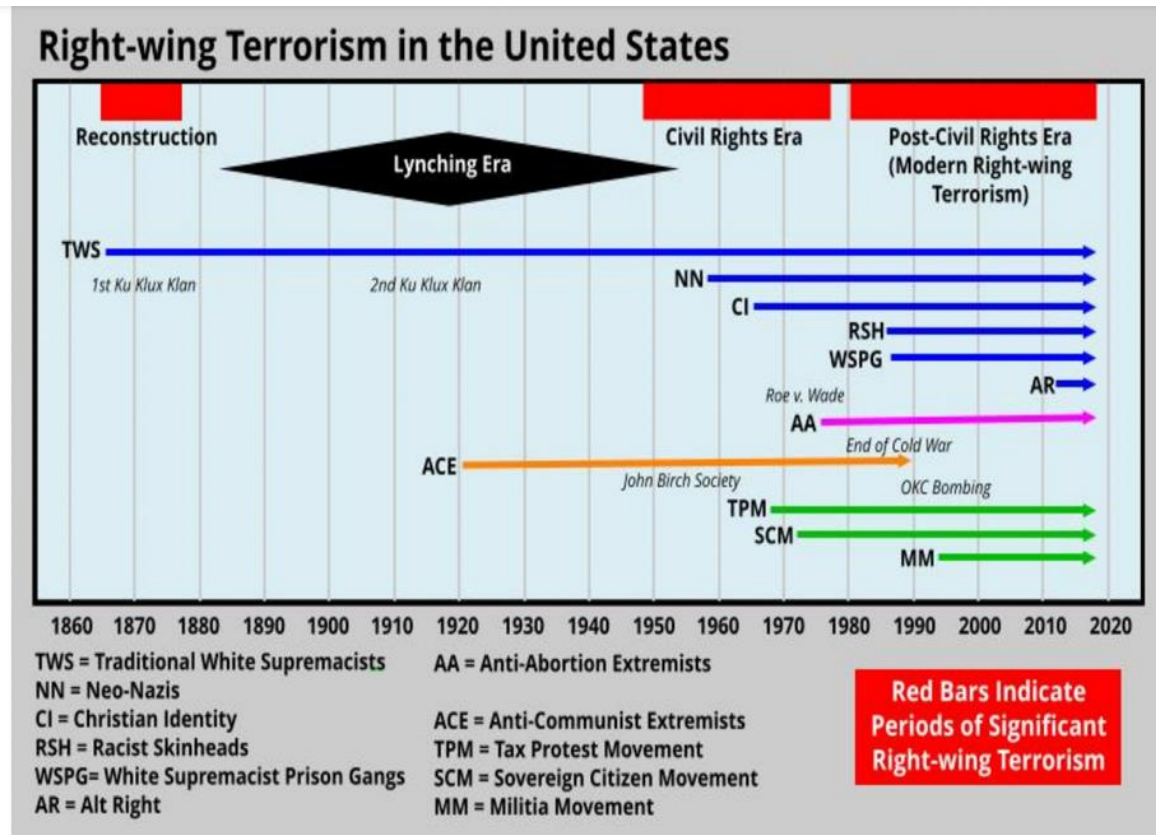
Source: Pitcavage, M. (2019). Surveying the Landscape of the American Far-Right. *Program on Extremism: the George Washington University*.

Some consider that the timely increase in far-right ideology, coupled with political unrest that has served as background for the increase in attacks, shows nothing further than political instability with sporadic extremism. While it is essential to differentiate between extremism and terrorism, knowing that not all right-wing extremism is a form of terrorism, it is also of outmost importance to keep an eye on groups and individuals ascribing to radical ideology in order to catch terrorist attacks while they germinate (Stempień, 2024). After all, waves do emerge from times of political instability, one way or another. Rapoport (2022) writes: "each wave was triggered by dramatic and unanticipated events that transformed the political world for a new generation. The parallel today may be developing" (p.622).

2.1.2   FAR- RIGHT TERRORISM

While Muslim communities in the West have often felt stigmatized as "terrorists", far-right extremists' actions are perceived as a result of "mental illness" or even "stupidity" (Pearson, 2024). Cinthia Miller-Idriss, professor of education and sociology at American University researching extremism writes about this phenomenon in an article at POLITICO. She gives the example of 2020 Hanau shooting in Germany, whose perpetrator had issued a manifesto fueled with xenophobic statements, conspiracies and supremacist ideology. In it, he described "German superiority" and his intention to exterminate full ethnic groups from the country. Observers soon pointed at his mental illness (Miller-Idriss, 2020), thus depoliticizing the attack (Kauhanen, 2020), which would immediately discard the terrorist label.

If we take the definition for terrorism stated above, however, broadly as *threats or acts of violence with political reasons and purposes and far-reaching psychological repercussions for a target audience that is not necessarily equal the victim*; attacks motivated by this ideology fit the description. The Hanau shooter's reasons were political, as were his purposes. Indeed, all the nine victims had a migrant background and his writings called for the "complete extermination" of a list of 24 different nationalities (McHugh, Rising, & Jordans, 2020). Such an attack then, was not merely the result of "mental illness", but of a process of radicalization characteristically found in an act of terrorism. It was, in other words, a "message"; a failed political message (Pattwell, Mitman, & Porpora, 2015) sent through the most violent of means. It was a way to gain "publicity for the cause", a factor that constituted the primary objective of each wave starting from the first one. Back then, attacks were described as "propaganda by the deed". (Rapoport D., 2022, p.614).

Then, the problem to frame terror incidents as such arises when the *motives* behind a lone wolf's attack remain unknown. While there seems to be consensus around the fact that the far-right has remained largely unresearched in recent literature (Ahmed & Lynch, 2021) (Martini, 2023) (Koehler, 2019), it must also be said that the media are quick to put the *terrorist* label simply by ascribing ideological motivations to religious affiliation, nationality or ethnicity. This phenomenon has led to white offenders often being labeled as *lone-wolves* by the general public, without anyone looking past that labeling to the actual motives behind the attack. When this happens, then, the

quick society labeling that easily results in individuals being called terrorists is not reflected in terrorism databases because they seem to lack "the instrumental value of violence as a tool for political or social change" (Ahmed & Lynch, 2021, p.201).

In spite of the recurrent definitional issues, efforts have been made to frame right-wing terrorism. The Center for Strategic & International Studies describes it as "the use or threat of violence by sub-national or non-state entities whose goals may include racial, ethnic, or religious supremacy; opposition to government authority; and the end of practices like abortion" (Seth G. Jones, 2018, under The Issue). Terrorists fueled by this ideology usually oppose liberal democracies and their social welfare, for their protection of diverse opinions and minorities, most importantly immigrants. (Seth G. Jones, 2018). The CSIS equally states that *decentralization* is a common characteristic of these groups, that is, a feature that distinguishes the far-right terrorist pattern from previous ones is the significant increase in *lone wolf* strategy. Another key characteristic is that they mostly radicalize, operate and organize *online*. Thirdly, it seems that the culture of *martyrdom* present in other waves (the religious one and the anarchist one to a lesser extent) has resurfaced (Jones, Doxsee, & Harrington, 2022).

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. WAVE COMPONENTS

David Rapoport seems to acknowledge that he did not sufficiently account for right-wing terrorism, but initially replied to critics by saying far-right extremists either fought against mainstream waves all along, or more recently were part of the religious wave (Auger, 2020). While plausible, the idea that right-wing extremism might constitute its own distinct wave of modern terrorism is worth diving into, especially seen as the current model does not prepare policymakers for this type of violence. It does explain far-right religious terrorism but does not provide answers for the emergence of a wave of *replacement* theories and racist attacks. Then, in order to be considered a fifth wave, right-wing extremism would need to develop away from "a more explicit religious character" and prevail alongside immigration issues (Auger, 2020, p.93).

It would, as Auger suggests with his questions, need to meet the following criteria: it would need to be clearly increasing in numbers at a specific time-period, be transnational in character, motivated by an identifiable and distinct ideology, differ from previous forms of terror and waves (Auger, 2020), as well as arguably be characterized by new tactical developments, have different targets and have an identifiable catalyst.

Conversely, Erin Wall, in her thesis titled *Waves of Modern Terrorism: Examining the Past and Predicting the Future*, identifies the following variables as key determinants of a wave, as outlined in the chart: *catalyst, goals, targets, tactics* and *reasons for decline.*

Figure 3: Table defining characteristics of the Four Waves of Modern Terrorism

Wave	Catalyst	Goals	Targets	Tactics	Reasons for Decline
Anarchist 1870s – 1910s	Slow political reform, declining legitimacies of monarchies	Revolution, eliminate government oppression	Heads of state	Assassinations using dynamite, bank robberies	Aggressive state opposition, beginning of World War I
Nationalist 1920s – 1960s	Versailles Peace Treaty, increased desire for self-determination	Eliminate colonial rule, create new states	Police and military	Guerilla style hit and run attacks	Achieved goals, colonial rulers withdrew from territories
New Left 1960s – 1980s	Vietnam War, Cold War tensions	Eliminate the capitalist system	Governments, increased focus on U.S.	Hijackings, kidnappings, assassinations	End of Cold War
Religious 1979 – 2020s (predicted)	Iranian Revolution, new Islamic century, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan	Creation of global Islamic Caliphate	U.S., Israel, Europe, mass transportation systems, public venues	Suicide bombings, aircrafts and vehicles as weapons	Unknown

Source: Walls, E. (2017). *Waves of modern terrorism: examining the past and predicting the future.*

Drawing from Auger's, Wall's and Rapoport's identified variables, the author of this study has selected nine determinants of a Wave of Terrorism that ought to ideally serve to define future waves to come.

The variables this study will focus on are the following:

1. Increase in numbers in a specific time-period
2. Catalyst
3. Underlying ideology or "*common predominant energy*"
4. The transnationality of the phenomenon or "*its international character*"
5. Generational spirit or "*human life cycle*"
6. Targets and target audience
7. Tactics: Means and weapons used
8. Characteristics of the perpetrator
9. Organizational structure

The specific selection of these variables stems from the idea that noticeable differences between them would distinguish one wave from the next, and thus reveal a change in general trend. *Reasons for decline* was left out, as neither the religious wave nor the emerging far-right wave have yet had sufficient time to decline.

4.1.1. INCREASE IN NUMBERS IN A SPECIFIC TIME-PERIOD

4.1.1.1. INCREASE IN NUMBERS IN THE WEST

The first variable that should be noticed is a recent and sudden increase in numbers motivated by an ideology that does not correspond with the past trend. In the Western world, while there has been far-right terror in the past, "historically nationalist or separatist, Islamist, and far-left terrorism has been much more common" (Rapoport, D., 2022, p. 678). In recent times, however, we observe an increase in far-right ideology-motivated attacks compared to Islamist attacks that were prevalent for the past decades. Again, it should be mentioned that an increase in numbers

fueled by new ideological motives does not mean the previous trend disappears. Instead, it means both coexist while the new trend shows slow signs of increasing.

Far-right terrorism is not new, it has haunted multitude of countries since decades ago. While some authors consider that right-wing terrorism emerged in the United States in the 19th century, with the murder of Abraham Lincoln and Ku Klux Klan violence, Dafinger & Florin (2022) argue that the connections between these events and what would follow in Europe, and the lack of "propaganda by the deed" as the terrorist tactic par excellence that would be introduced by the anarchists later on, would keep those cases out of what is considered "modern" terrorism. The issues when pointing at early right-wing terrorists is also a matter of label. In the early 20th century Russian empire, for example, right-wing radicals incited antisemitic violence, but "right-wing radicals themselves were usually reluctant to label their own violence 'terrorist' because they associated this term with the revolution" (Dafinger & Florin, 2022, p.4).

Then, right-wing violence was present at the beginning of modern terrorism, but it was asymmetrical at best, if compared to the mass-casualties of the anarchists (Wilson, 2020). Outwardly fascist attacks were present during the interwar period, and right-wing terrorism re-emerged after 1945 with a new anti-communist rhetoric (Dafinger & Florin, 2022). Between 1970 and 1980, however, out of 1677 attacks recorded in the West, 93% were related to far-left ideology (Vision of Humanity, s.f.). Right-wing violence did not disappear but did significantly shrink in Europe during the 1990s, where "many right-wing extremist groups […] abstained from terrorist violence, instead stepping up their efforts to influence public discourse in what they call 'metapolitics'".(Dafinger & Florin, 2022, p.10). Since then, demographic diversification, the emergence of radicalized lone actors and new conspiracy theories through social media and political polarization have served as catalysts (Stockhammer, 2024) for the stronger re-emergence of far-right violence, in the form of white supremacist or Pan-European *Identitarian* movements.

It must also be said that, when compared to the total share of terrorist attacks in the world, far-right attacks still remain a low yet growing fraction. This is so because, even if the Religious Wave is deteriorating, it is still producing more incidents globally. Far-right attacks, however, are on average five times as deadly as far-left incidents (Rapoport D. , 2022) and are starting to represent

the majority of attacks in those countries where the trend is emerging, mostly in the West. The fact that the trend is emerging in the West does not go against Rapoport framework, as mentioned earlier. He argues that each wave of modern terrorism developed with a different geography (Rapoport D. , 2022).

The following figures compare *far-right* and *Islamist* terror attacks in the European Union and the United States:

Figure 4: Terrorist incidents and fatalities in the US by ideology (far-right vs Islamist) between 2008 and 2017.
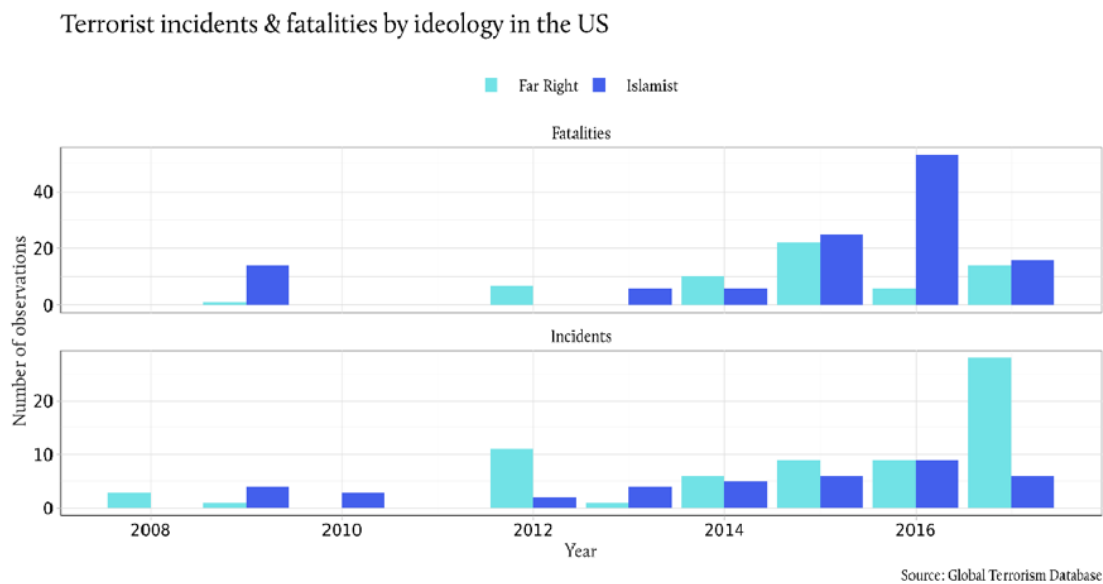
Source: Görder, T., & Chavannes, E. (2020). The Blind Eye Turned to the Far-Right. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

Figure 5: Terrorist incidents and fatalities in Europe by ideology (far-right vs Islamist) between 2008 and 2017
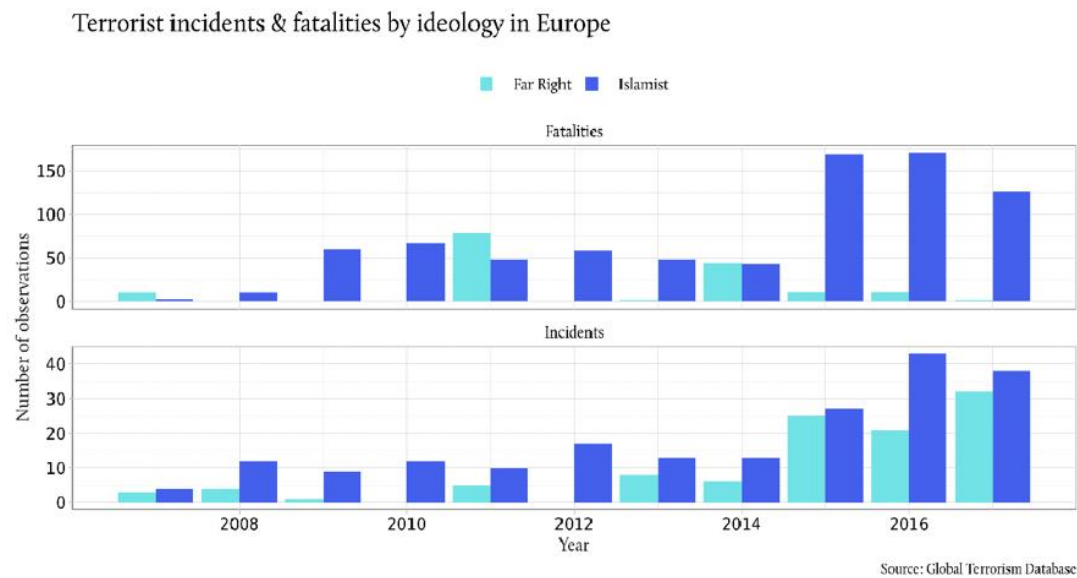
Source: Görder, T., & Chavannes, E. (2020). The Blind Eye Turned to the Far-Right. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

Figure 6: Terrorist incidents by ideology (Islamist and far-right) in the US & Europe from 2007-2017
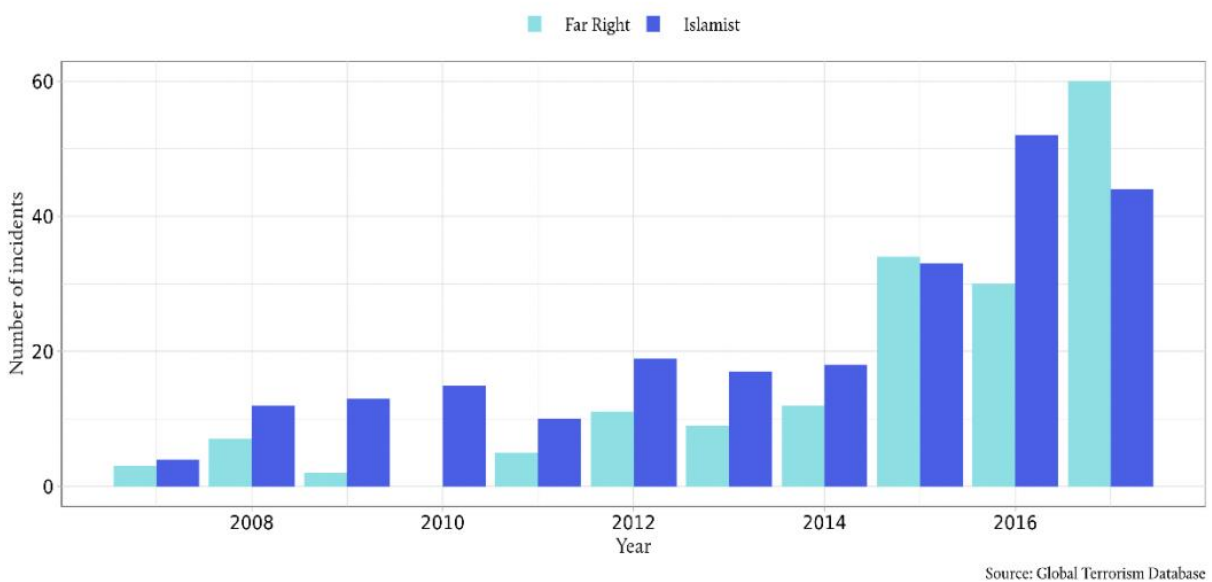
Source: Görder, T., & Chavannes, E. (2020). The Blind Eye Turned to the Far-Right. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

As shown by figure 6, which aggregates figures 4&5, the number of terrorist incidents motivated by far-right ideology has been slowly yet steadily increasing, to the point that, while still causing less fatalities than Islamist terrorism, it has surpassed it in number, especially in the US. Not only that, but the number of right-wing incidents might in reality be much higher, as it has been shown to create greater definitional problems than other types of terrorism.

In the US, for instance, domestic terrorism and international terrorism are differentiated, the second one being inspired by US-based movements of "extremist ideologies of a political, religious, social, racial or environmental nature", thus far-right ideology inspired attacks being considered as such. This differentiation, coupled with US First Amendment rights showing a high tolerance for hate speech under freedom of speech allegations, results in a very low number of individuals actually being charged as domestic terrorists.

Figure 7: Charges brought against individuals matching the criteria of domestic terrorism in the US between 2016 and 2018
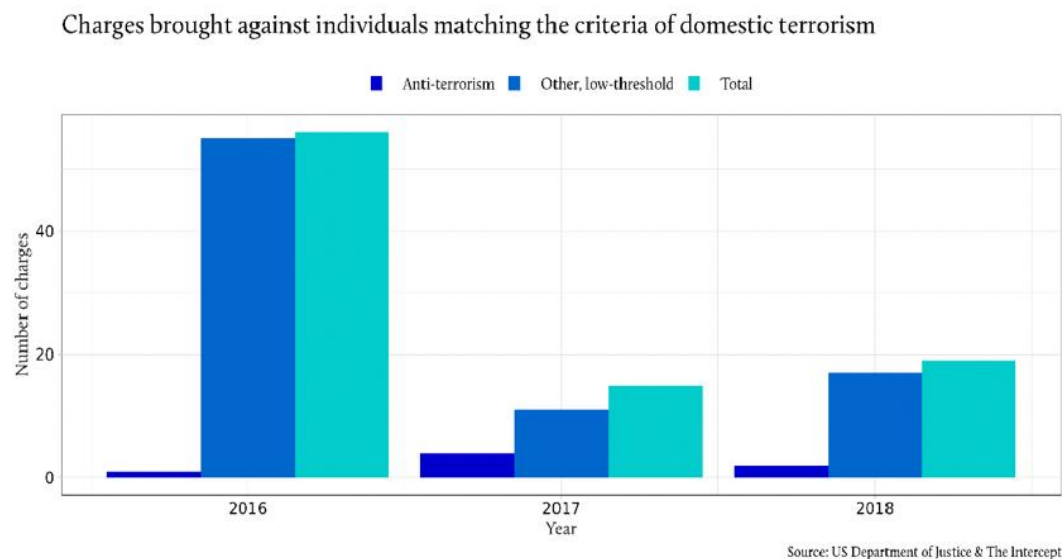
Charges brought against individuals matching the criteria of domestic terrorism

■ Anti-terrorism ■ Other, low-threshold ■ Total

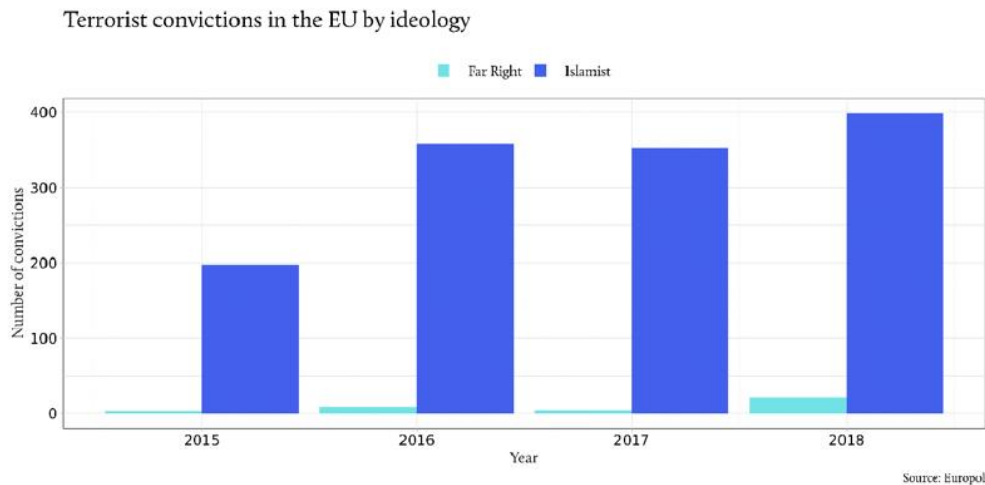Source: US Department of Justice & The Intercept

Source: Görder, T., & Chavannes, E. (2020). The Blind Eye Turned to the Far-Right. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

In Europe, there also seems to be an important definitional problem, especially since there is an overlap between domestic terrorism and hate crimes (Görder & Chavannes, The Blind Eye Turned

to the Far-right, 2020). This undervaluation of the danger of right-wing extremism is also shown in the striking difference between the arrests of Islamist extremists and far-right ones.

Figure 8: Terrorist convictions in the EU by ideology (far-right or Islamist) between 2015 and 2018

Source: Görder, T., & Chavannes, E. (2020). The Blind Eye Turned to the Far-Right. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

## Figure 9: Terrorist arrests in the EU by ideology between 2015 and 2018
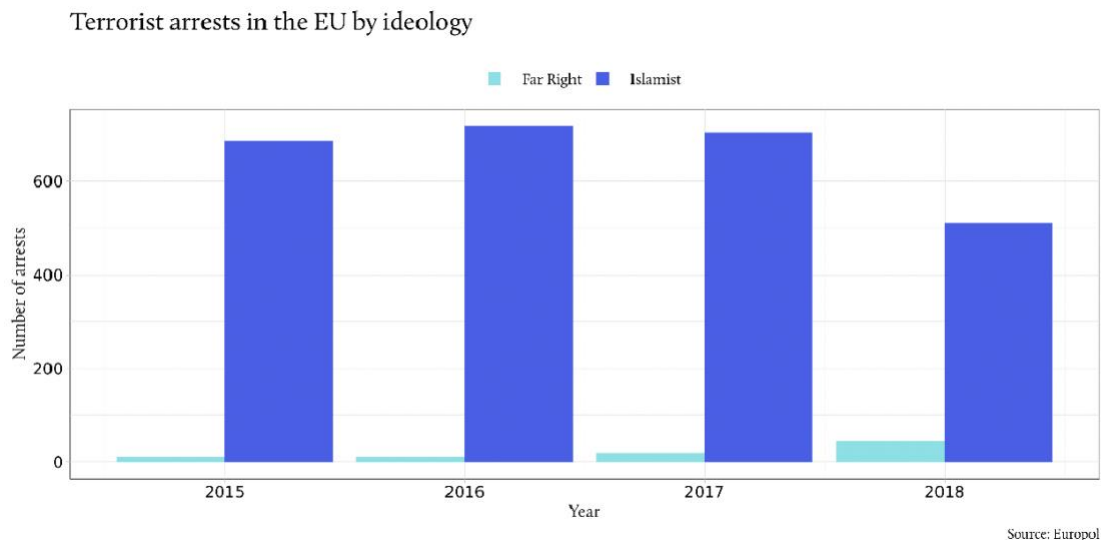
Source: Görder, T., & Chavannes, E. (2020). The Blind Eye Turned to the Far-Right. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

Overall, what the charts above show is that the rise of right-wing extremist activities is largely undervalued, which might suggest that the real problem at hand is bigger than it seems. Still, taking into account the problem that current research might not be considering characteristically right-wing extremism as terrorism because of Constitutional paradoxes in various countries, the growth of the phenomenon is clear.

The following map by the Center for Strategic and International Studies provides a visual representation of the number of right-wing attacks and plots in the United States in only 6 years, between 2014 and 2020. The intensity that it shows further demonstrates the need for governments to carry out legislation that increasingly takes into account this type of violence.

Figure 10: Map of right-wing attacks and plots in the United States, 2014-2020
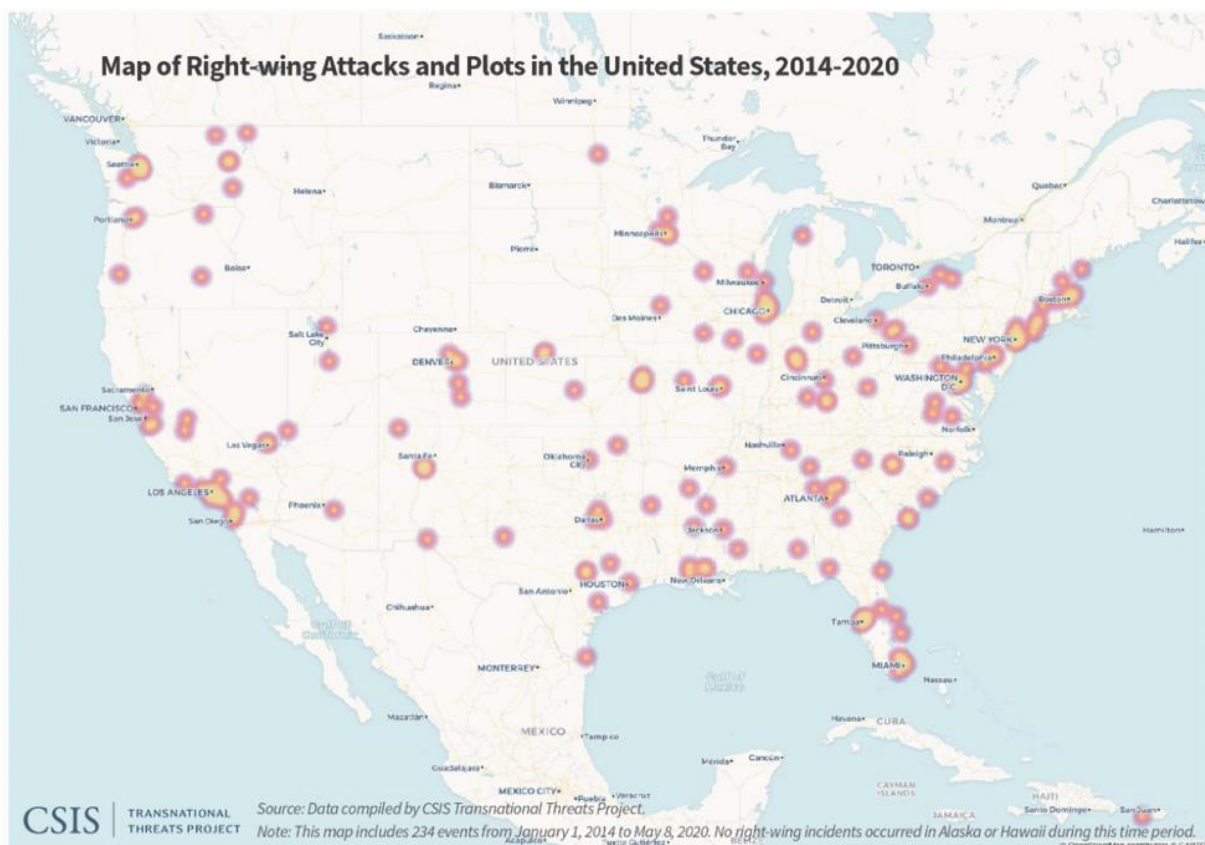
Source: ones, S. G., Doxsee, C., & Harrington, N. (2022). *CSIS: Center for Strategic and International studies*. Retrieved from The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States

When it comes to the European Union, where right-wing radicalization has been a highly debated issue during the last decade, the increase in number of right-wing attacks is also worrying. The non-profit organization ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event data) recently published a map that groups the attacks from the last 4 years:
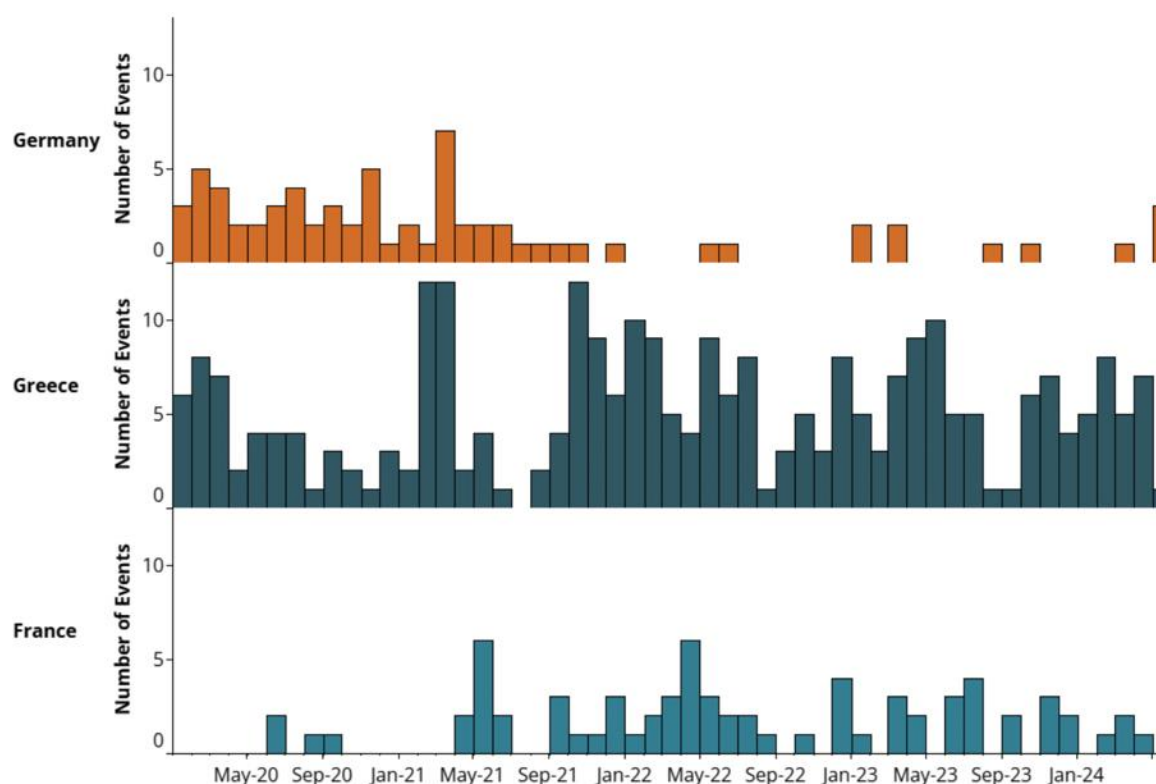
Figure 11: Activity by Far-Right Radical Groups in the EU (1st January 2020 – 24 May 2024)
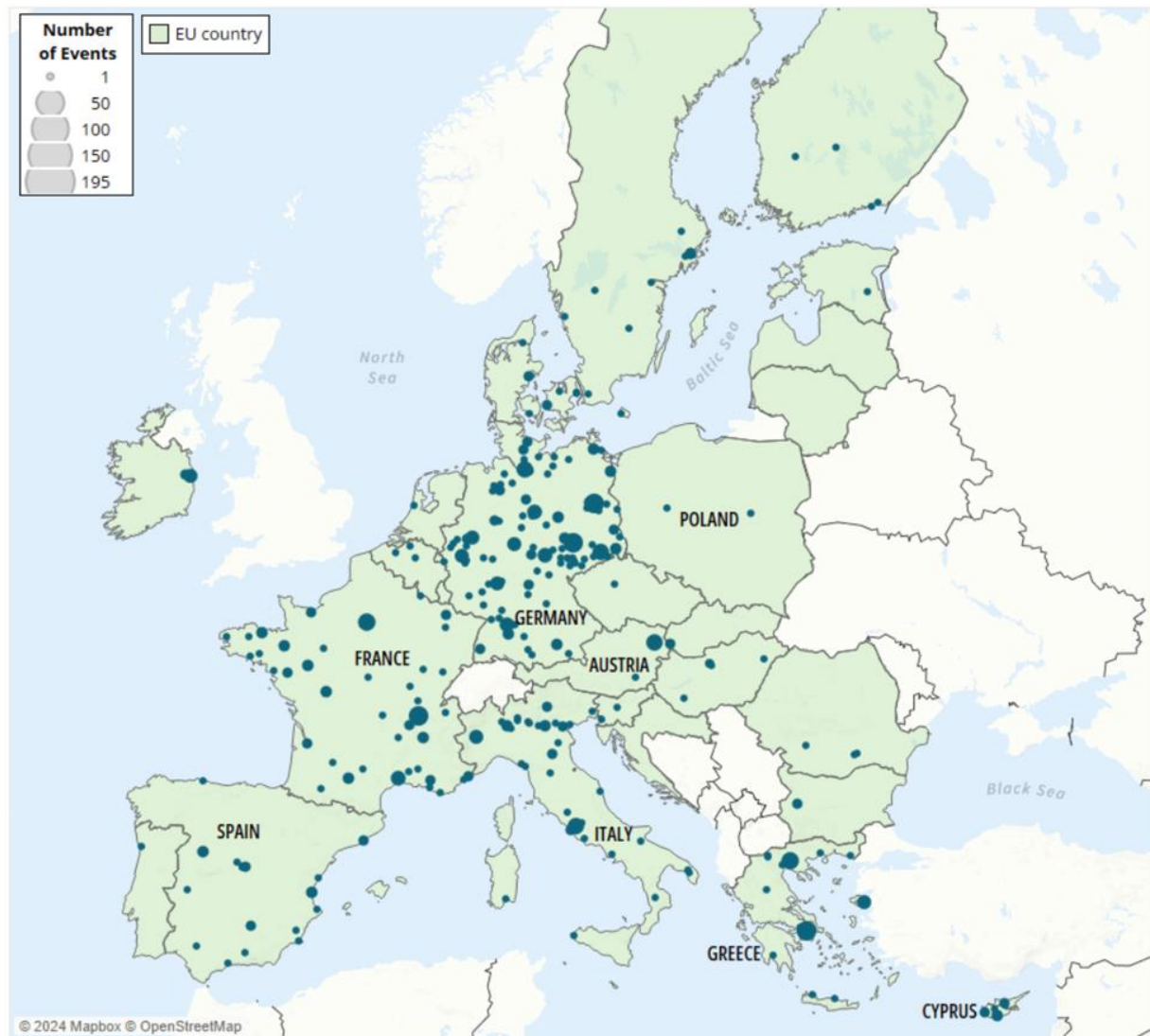
Source: Gurcov, N., Audibert, N., Yiagopoulou, V., & Crisetig, J. (2024). Is radical group violence on the rise in the EU? | ACLED Insight . *ACLED*.

They also published a graph grouping all sorts of "political violence involving radical groups" in Greece, Germany and France. The choice for these countries is that they have suffered the greatest number of terrorist attacks among EU countries in the last four years (57%, 15% and 14%). The organization notes that they recorded "targeted attacks" in twelve different EU countries from 2020 to 2024 and the far-right was involved in at least 85% of cases (Gurcov, Audibert, Yiagopoulou, & Crisetig, 2024)

Figure 12: Political Violence Involving Radical Groups in Greece, Germany and France (January 2020- April 2024)

Source: Gurcov, N., Audibert, N., Yiagopoulou, V., & Crisetig, J. (2024). Is radical group violence on the rise in the EU? | ACLED Insight . *ACLED*.

If attacks per capita are taken into account, the following graph by the Center for Strategic & International Studies illustrates it clearly (Jones, Doxsee, & Harrington, 2020):

## Figure 13: Number of Right-Wing Terrorist Attacks per capita (2009-2020)
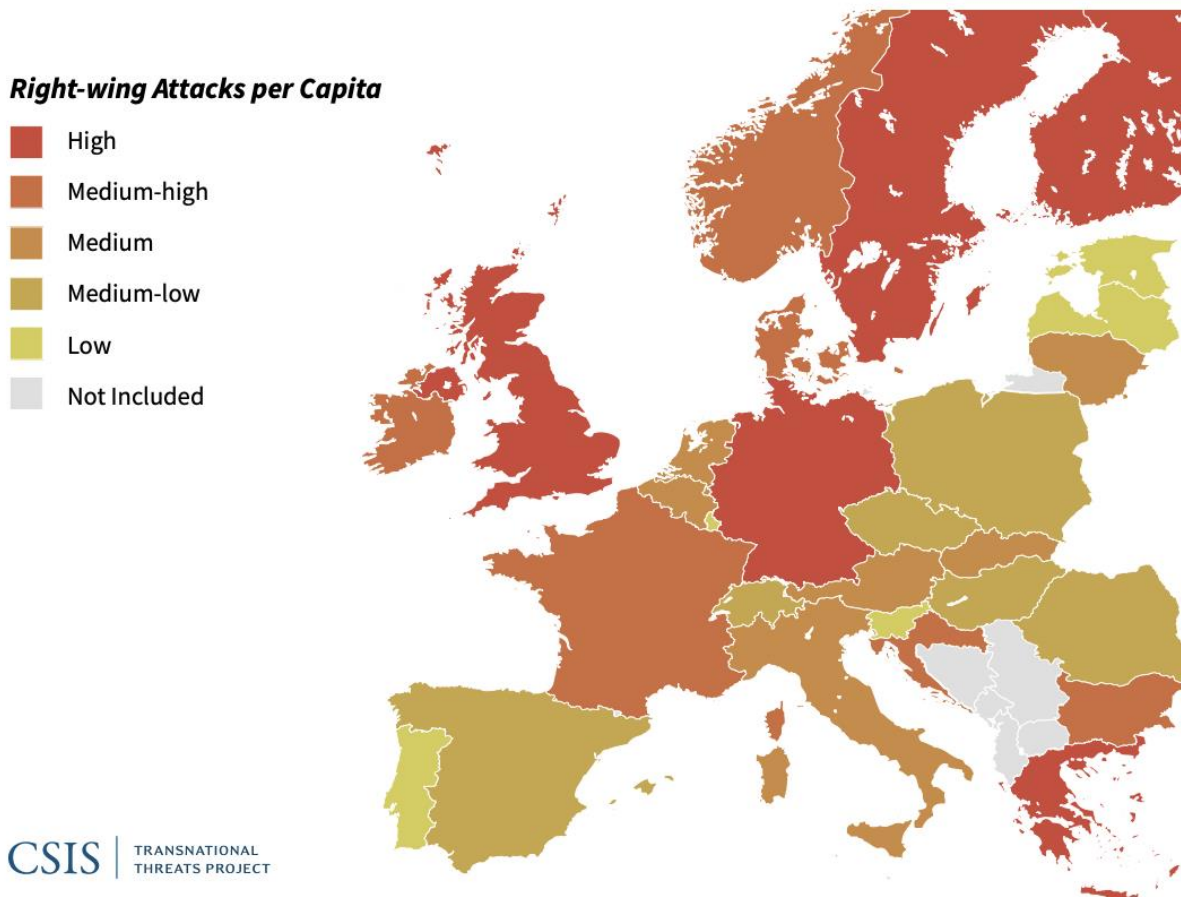
Source: The figure uses the most recent population data from "DataBank," World Bank, 2018, https://databank. worldbank.org/home.aspx. Note that countries in gray–such as Serbia and Albania–are not included in the data set.

Source: Jones, S., Doxsee, C., & Harrington, N. (2020). The Right-wing Terrorism Threat in Europe. *CSIS Transnational Threats Project*.

They also provide a visual graph or the increase in attacks in Europe between 2012 and 2017:

Figure 14: Extreme Right-Wing Attacks in Europe 2012-2017
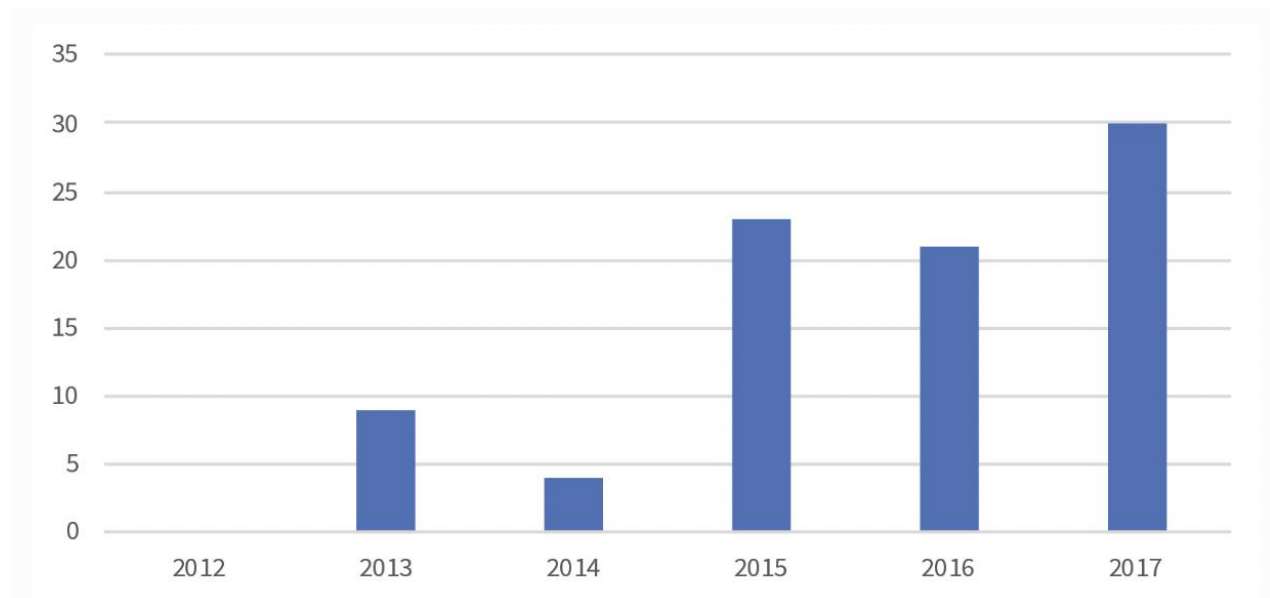
Source: Seth G. Jones. (2018). The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States. *CSIS Briefs - Center for Strategic and International Studies*.

The University of Oslo publishes Right Wing Terrorism reports annually, which also provide valuable data on the subject. In the 2023 *Right Wing Terrorism Report*, they identified 93 completed attacks in 2022 only in the European Union, the majority of which took place in Germany (Ravndal, Tandberg, Sessolo, Ravik Jupskås, & Bjørgo, 2023). The same report published last year (2024) showed another 83 completed attacks in the EU, most of which also took place in Germany. This same report provides a graph which shows the increase in number of far-right related violent plots in the EU between 2010 and 2023 (Ravndal, Tandberg, Ravik Jupskås, 2024):
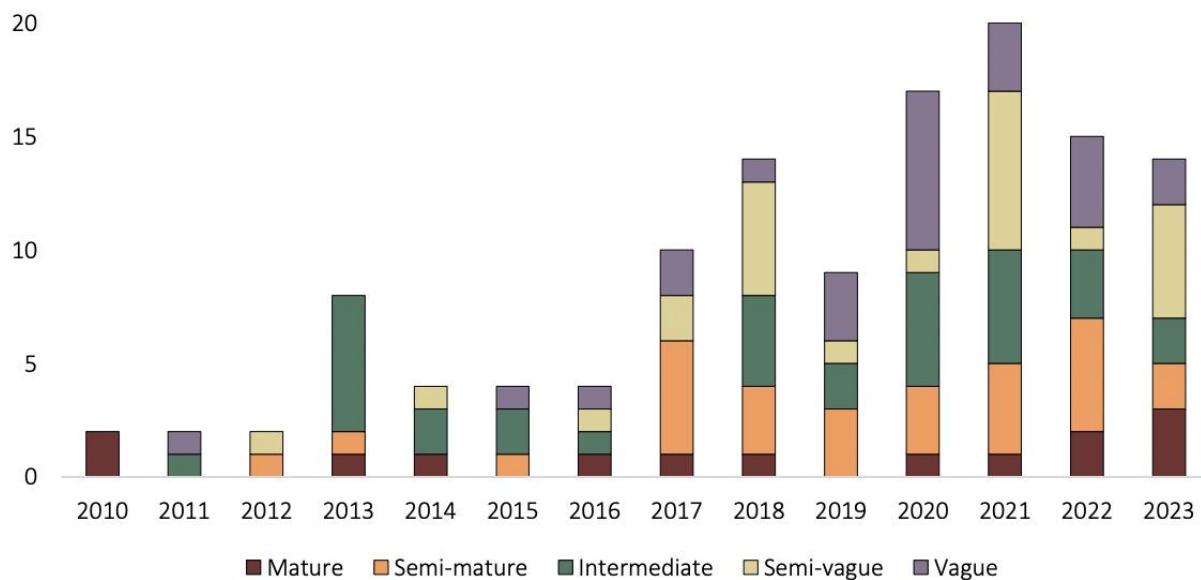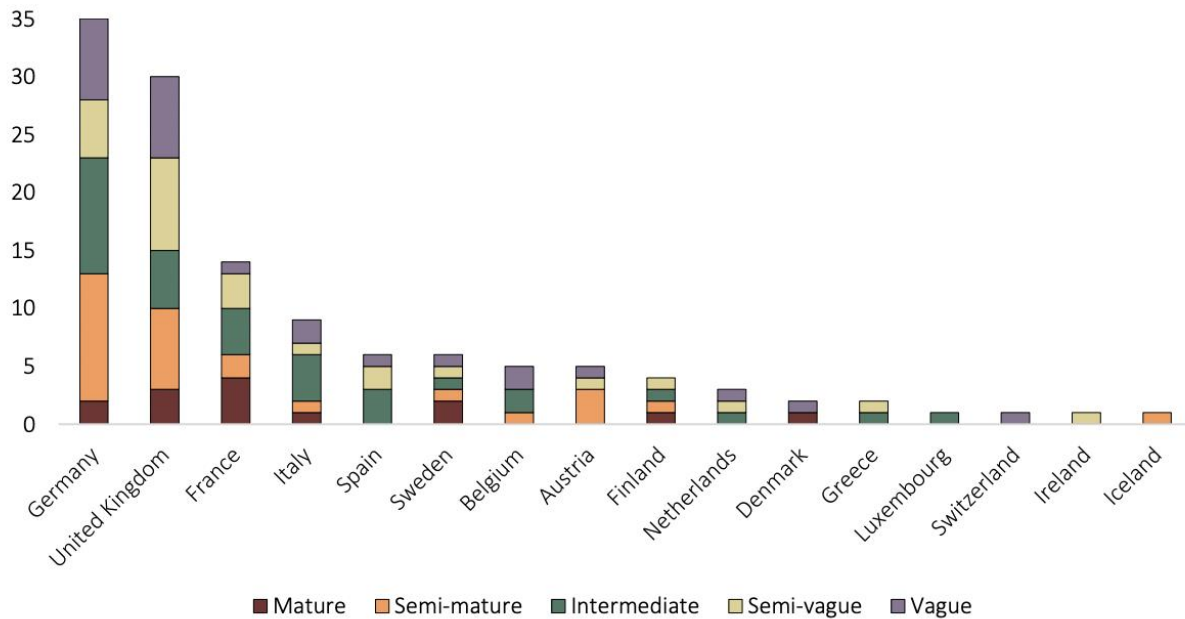
Source: Ravndal, Tandberg, Ravik Jupskås, 2024). RTV Trend Report 2024. Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990-2023

In Germany's case, Human Rights Watch warns that attacks motivated by right-wing ideology rose by 23% in 2023 already compared to 2022. Within the total of 60,028 attacks, right wing motivated crimes represented a figure of 28,945, almost half of all crimes in the country. Anti-Islamic crimes, more specifically, increased in 140% between 2022 and 2023, as did anti-Semitic attacks in 96%, most notably since October 7th (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Germany and the UK are the European countries with the highest number of far-right violent plots (Ravndal, Tandberg, Ravik Jupskås, 2024). While being careful not draw unfounded casual relationships, it might be worth noting that by 2017, Germany and the UK together accounted or about half of Europe's unauthorized migrants (Passel & Connor, 2019). This is because, as will be discussed further below, the rise in anti-immigration sentiments has served as one of the major catalysts for this wave.

Figure 16: Number of plots by type and country, 2010-2023

Source: Ravndal, Tandberg, Ravik Jupskås, 2024). RTV Trend Report 2024. Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990-2023

4.1.1.2.   INCREASE IN NUMERS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

While the trend is associated to the West, arguably because of its strong anti-immigration and white-supremacist components that will be discussed in the following subchapters, an increase in far-right extremism has also been documented in other countries. The little research that has been done on far-right terrorism has been comparative amongst Western nations or centered around a single Western nation as has been shown above with the United States. This hinders a proper global analysis but does not hide that similar phenomena are taking place elsewhere in the world, nor does it hide the emergence of a new wave at a global scale, even if mainly centered around one region for now.

This chapter will briefly delve into the global scope of the far-right political violent sphere, while acknowledging that this thesis will focus on the development of the trend in Western countries. This is because common variables have allowed for a more patterned emergence of political

violence and because the term itself is often alien to other political systems. Qureshi & Naz (2022) write about the phenomenon of far-right extremism in Pakistan, for example, and admit that in the interviews conducted, "since this term 'far-right' is alien in Pakistan, the participants envisioned it as a Western construct that might not be applicable in Pakistan" (p.38)

Research shows that two specific political landscapes have given rise to right-wing terrorism in Europe: In Northern European countries, "a combination of high immigration, low electoral support for anti-immigration (radical right) parties, and extensive public repression of radical right actors and opinions". In Southern European countries, a "combination of socioeconomic hardship, authoritarian legacies, and extensive left-wing terrorism and militancy" (Ravndal, 2017, p.1). These are characteristics that other Western nations fit due to similar political systems and high migration but that are hardly exportable to a global sphere. Therefore, some similar patterns occurring in countries around the world will be mentioned, in the hope that future research on the matter will be carried out.

It must be noted that because of the partial overlap with religiously motivated groups in all countries, be it Christian, Muslim or other religions such as Hindu, it is the anti-minority and anti-immigrant rhetoric that will be taken as key for the emergence of a global trend. This is because some studies group Islamism and far-right under a single *conservatism* while acknowledging that the first place importance on religion and the second in other factors, predominantly racism and anti-immigration (Jasko, LaFree, Piazza, & Becker, 2021). This is also discussed by (Hoffman, 1998) and Auger (2020) as mentioned under the *common predominant ideology* subchapter.

A good example of the rise of the violent far-right is India, where the rise of extreme right-wing ideology goes back to colonialism and the emergence of the Hindu Nationalist movement back in the 1920s, with a strong anti-minority component, notably against Muslims and Christians. This ideology has resurfaced under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leader of the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) (Indian People's Party). While violence has predominantly targeted Muslims, since 2014 political violence against Christians in India has shown clear signs of increasing. This trend has been particularly exacerbated under the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (or National Volunteer Corps), since its military wing leaders have stated that violent militants are the best way

to make India a Hindu State (Qureshi & Naz, 2022). In an *Introduction to Right-Wing Extremism in India* it is warned that "the unwillingness of the current government to tackle right-wing extremism could facilitate the rise of fringe groups that will eventually turn against the government for being too soft" (Siyech, 2021, p.1).

In Turkey, the 12th August 2024 saw a 18 year old stabbing multiple citizens near a mosque in Eskişehir, motivated by white supremacism and the conspiracy theory of accelerationism. He expressed admiration for Anders Breivik, who killed 70 people in the Norway attacks in 2011 and went on to livestreame his attack. He identified as *a lone-wolf* (Anti-Difamation League, 2024). Earlier this year, on January 21, 2025, the leader of the Turkish far-right opposition party was arrested for inciting anti-refugee violence on social media (The Associate Press, 2025).

In Brazil, two days and two years after the assault to the U.S capitol the 6th of January 2021, followers of former president Jair Bolsonaro forcefully entered Brazil's presidential palace, Congress and the Supreme Court, as a clear threat against democracy (Ware, 2023). 1200 people were arrested for connections to the attack, which had been motivated by hashtags claiming "stolen election" or "rigged ballots" (The Soufan Center, 2023). The 13th of November, 2024, a planned attack to detonate a bomb in Brazil's Supreme Court failed (France 24, 2024).

These are just some of the cases that may suggest that the scope of the threat is in fact much broader than the currently available data may allow us to think.

4.1.1.3.   INCREASE IN ONLINE CONTENT

The increase in numbers, however, is not only to be seen in terms of attacks. The Report published by the Terrorist Content Analytics Platform on *Mapping Far-Right Terrorist Propaganda Online* states that "an increasing proportion of far-right terrorist content is found on mainstream social media platforms" (Terrorist Content Analytics Platform, 2024) (p.9). Usually, because it is gamified or edited, it bypasses automatic content moderation, which poses great risks for anti-radicalization programs (Terrorist Content Analytics Platform, 2024).

This next graph shows the increasing trend in far-right terrorist content online. It represents "the [cumulative] number of unique URLs containing [far-right] terrorist content submitted to the TCAP [Terrorist Content Analytics Platform]" (Terrorist Content Analytics Platform, 2024).

Figure 17: Overall Trend in Far-Right Terrorist Content Over Time
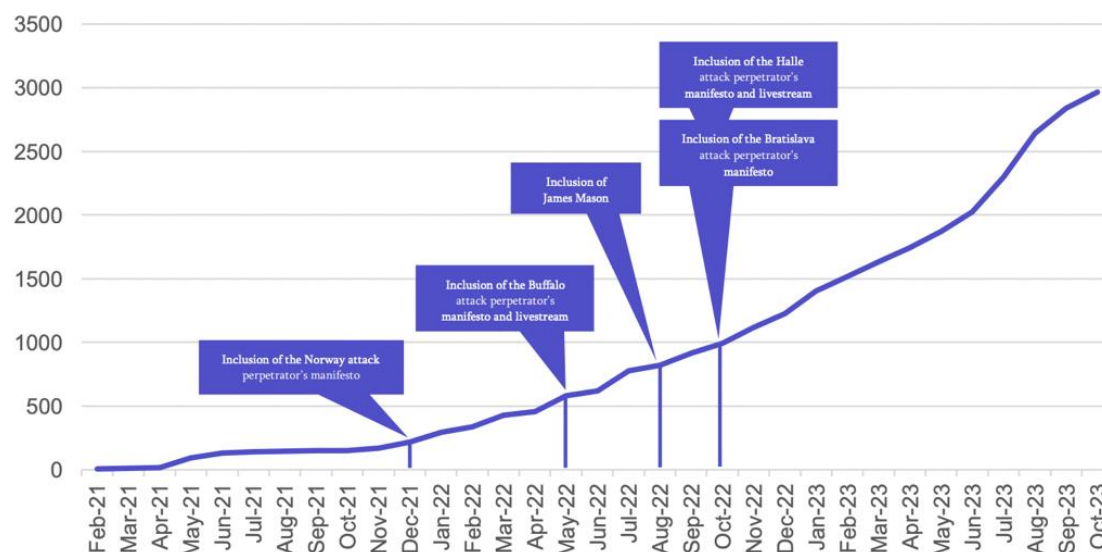

Figure 3: Cumulative TCAP submissions of far-right content over time.

Source: Terrorist Content Analytics Platform. (2024). Mapping Far-Right Terrorist Propaganda Online. *Tech Against Terrorism*

4.1.2. CATALYST

Apart from the generalized change in the political sphere, with "the rise of right-wing and populist political movements and concern about rising levels of immigration" (Auger, 2020, p.90), various events could also be seen as potential catalysts for the emergence of this type of terror in the early 2010s. In the US, "the (…) Department of Homeland Security warned in April 2009 that the election of Barack Obama and the economic recession were being used by right-wing groups in the U.S. to increase their recruiting and propaganda activity" (Auger, 2020, p.90). Two presidencies later, white supremacists would welcome Donald Trump. In Europe, the Syrian refugee crisis and subsequent concerns about rise in migration would result in increasing violence

against immigrants and in Australia, these ideas would spread from Europe, alongside a growing perception of an increase in Muslim immigrants. (Auger, 2020)

While right-wing violence increases in the Western world, studies link this new phenomenon with broader mainstream political changes, amongst which we can find "the reemergence of far-right populist parties, the mainstreaming of hateful rhetoric, the scapegoating of targeted minorities and communities, as well as the idolization of far-right mass murderers" (Collins J., 2021, p.2) . These show the existing dichotomy between how the last accepted wave of terrorism; that is, that of *religious* most particularly *Jihadist* terrorism and the proposed possible new wave of *far-right* terrorism, are perceived. The first, as fundamentally alien to Western societies and thus more easily identified and countered as such, while the second, perhaps even more worryingly, "has taken on the form of a less violent, domestic actor operating within the existing political order" (Collins J., 2021, p.2).

According to The Hague Institute for Security Studies, "Muslim perpetrators receive 357% more press coverage in the US than those committed by non-Muslims, even though far-right perpetrators have been responsible for almost twice as many attacks between 2008 and 2016" (Görder & Chavannes, 2020, p.4). This politicized double-standard seems to also be fueling the suitable political context for the emergence of yet more right-wing extremism in recent years (Collins J. , 2021).

4.1.3. UNDERLYING IDEOLOGY OR "COMMON PREDOMINANT ENERGY"

As the far-right wins in the political sphere, so it does in terms of political violence. The global trend towards political polarization and more precisely towards *affective polarization* or "the extent to which citizens feel more negatively toward other political parties than toward their own" (Boxell, Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2024, p.2) has been shown to increase in multitude of OCDE countries, most notably in the United States, but also Switzerland, France, Denmark, Canada or New Zealand, over the past four decades (Boxell, Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2024).

Studies show that political polarization is fundamentally linked to greater support for political violence (Piazza, 2022) and "undermines cooperation" (…) "as well as the ability of societies to provide the public goods that make for a healthy society" (Kelly, 2021, para. 4). What is perhaps most concerning, extreme ideological positions in the political spectrum also relate to a lower support for democracy (Torcal & Magalhães, 2022).

In a comprehensive cross-country study of trends in *affective polarization*, scholars conclude that the explanatory variables that correlate most with higher affective polarization are the increase in non-white share of the population and polarization of the elites (Boxell, Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2024), variables that are very present in today's geopolitical landscape and fundamentally linked to right-wing extremism, which suggests that the global trend is not likely to diminish anytime soon.

According to Hoffman, far-right ideology is changing and is now less concerned with Christian theology or identity than it is with immigration (Auger, 2020). He quotes: "The neo-Nazi types of the late 1980s to 2000 are being replaced by Nationalists concerned about immigration—and they are wearing suits and square-rimmed glasses rather than combat boots and red suspenders" (Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 1998). If Christian symbols are used, it is usually for propaganda purposes and seen as part of a broader racial identity (Auger, 2020).

As the following figure shows, far-right terrorist incidents have followed a similar trend in the US and Western Europe, but while different in time and frequency in between the 1970s and 2000s, as well as rather religious in nature at this point in time and thus still part of the Religious Wave, from 2005 onwards these incidents have moved into synchronization on both sides of the Atlantic and nowadays respond to different, non-religious triggers (Auger, 2020).

Figure 18: Far-right terrorist incidents in the US and western Europe, three-year moving average, 1970-2018

Far-right terrorist incidents in the US and western Europe, three-year moving average, 1970–2018

The trend in far-right terrorism in Western Europe is almost identical to the trend in the US.
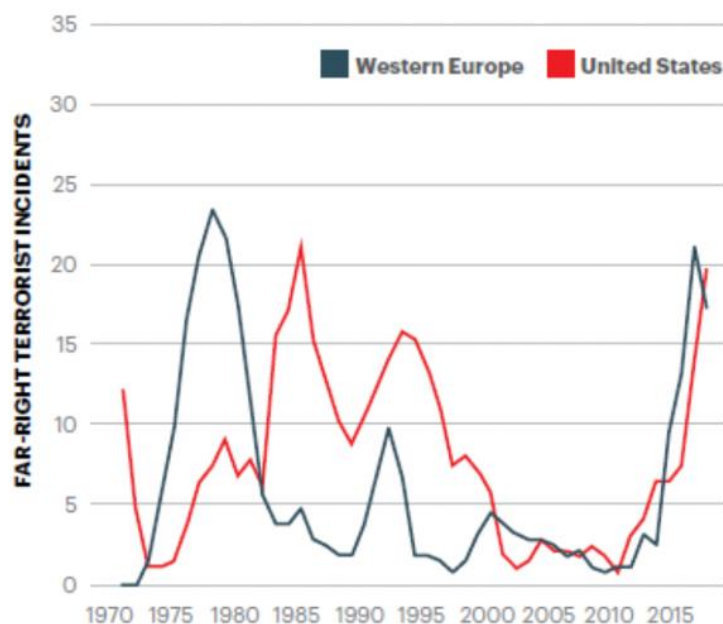
Source: START GTD. IEP Calculations

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2019*, p. 50.

Source: Auger, V. A. (2020). Right-wing terror: a fifth global wave? *Perspectives on terrorism*, 87-97.

Within far-right ideology, white supremacism seems to be the deadliest motivator (Auger, 2020), with 76% of far-right extremist killings between 2009 and 2018 in the United States being inspired by white-supremacism, and 19% by anti-government extremism (ADL Center on Extremism, 2019). This feeling of white-supremacism seems to be equally motivated anti-immigration conspiracy theories that have not only dominated violent extreme-right groups, but also overall far-right ideology over the past decade (Devey & Ebner, 2019).

Immigration has been a consistent scapegoat worldwide and its opposition increasingly legitimized through mainstream post 9/11 politics and the rising presence of social media for radical ideas that

used to only exist in the fringes of society (Miller-Idris, 2021). Because the motives that are commonly differentiated within far-right ideology, such as the ones listed in the graph below (anti-refugee, anti-islamic, white-supremacist, anti-government or anti-semitic) often easily intertwine, it is no easy task to point at one but rather the combination, such being "anti-immigration"/"anti-religious minorities" and "white supremacism".

Collins (2021) agrees that the sudden growth in far-right cases in Europe took place in 2014-2015, with a 350% increase, which coincides with the massive arrival of refugees into the continent. Therefore, "the ideological basis for the justification of right-wing extremism is the fear of an Islamization of the Western "Christian" world, with the White race losing its privileges" (Collins J., 2021, p.18). That fear would precisely be the *underlying ideology* or *common predominant energy* of the Fifth Wave.

Figure 19: Aggregate of motives for Germany, Scandinavia, the UK and the US from 2009 to 2018.
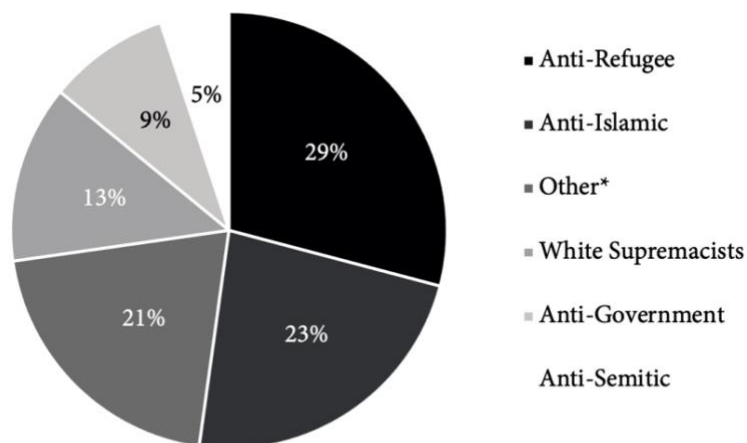
*Includes anti-abortion, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBT, conspiracy inspired, involuntary celibates, revenge, trump inspired and undefined.

Source: Collins, J. (2021). A New Wave of Terrorism? A Comparative Analysis of the Rise of Far-Right Terrorism. *Perspectives on terrorism*

When it comes to Rapoport's stance, he considers that, while "far-right terror and its distinctive characteristics will certainly persist for a few more years" (…) "if it is linked only to the immigration problem and significant [anti-]-Islamic attacks, it will end soon" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.694). He agrees, however, that it is white supremacism (or "the belief that whites could soon

become a minority") that seems to dominate the scene and adds "if that anxiety persists after the immigration and Islamic issues face, we may be seeing a Fifth Wave" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.696)

Lastly, in relation with the underlying ideology motivating the recent surge in attacks, it is important to note that right-wing extremists have been shown to be "more likely to engage in politically motivated violence". This is explained by the higher variables of "close-mindedness and dogmatism" and a "heightened need for order, structure, and cognitive closure", characteristics linked to greater "out-group hostility" (Jasko, LaFree, Piazza, & Becker, 2021).

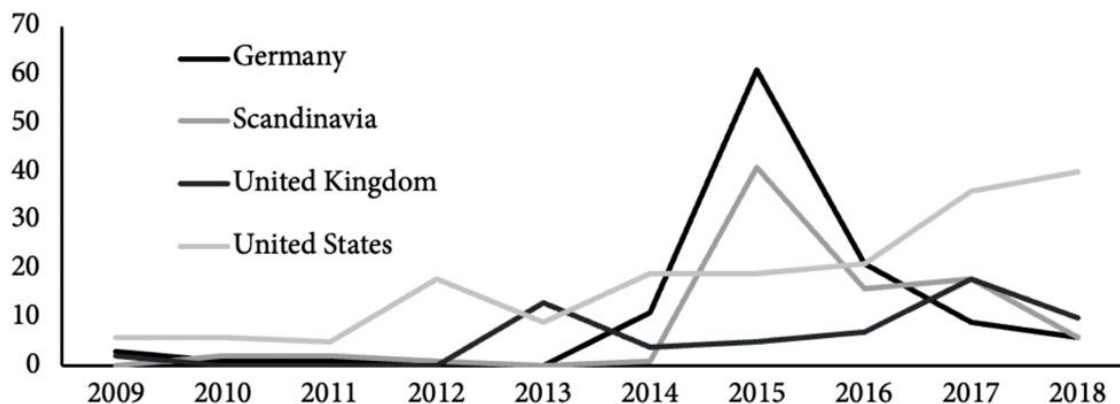### 4.1.4. TRANSNATIONALITY OR "INTERNATIONAL CHARACTER"

Nowadays, the movement seems to have suddenly internationalized, against all odds. Indeed, "the increasing globalization of the contemporary violent far-right may seem somehow paradoxical. After all, traditionally, far-right movements and parties aspire to emphasize local and national themes". In the United States, for example, the violent far-right landscape is more fragmented than it is in Europe, with White Supremacy Groups (Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis and Skinheads), Anti-federal groups such as the Patriot Movement, and "a smaller group of associations and organizations that advocated ideas of nativism, segregation, and white supremacy through religious texts, such as Christian Identity Groups". With rallies such as "Unite the Right" in 2017 in Charlottesville, however, "growing consensus around the leadership of President Trump facilitated a willingness to enhance coordination and collaboration between the various components of the American far-right". In Europe, the refugee crisis acted as a similar catalyst for transnationality, as explained above. (Stockhammer, 2024)

Dafinger & Florin equally argue that "transnational cooperation between right-wing terrorists has always faced significant ideological obstacles due to an intense antipathy towards outsiders" (Dafinger & Florin, 2022, p.2). Nonetheless, while far-right extremism has long been internationally connected, Web 2.0 tools have quickened the internationalization process amongst Neo-Nazis, ultranationalists and Identarian movements. Not only that, but "the current spiral of violence by lone-actor terrorists is an example of the internationalization of the right-wing extremist scene" (Pawels, 2021, p.6).

For instance, in the seven days following Brenton Tarrant's Christchurch attacks, in which he killed 51 Muslims in two different mosques in New Zealand, hate crimes in the UK increased by 593%, 89% of which referenced the Christchurch attack directly (Rapoport D. , 2022). Tarrant had published a manifesto titled *The Great Replacement* in which he called for others to follow his actions: "most of all show the invaders that our lands will never be their lands, our homelands are our own and that, as long as White man still lives, they will NEVER conquer our lands and they will never be our people*"* (Obaidi, Kunst, Ozer, & Kimel, 2021). In it, he cited the perpetrator of the Utøya attacks as his inspiration, Anders Breivik (Rapoport D. , 2022), highlighting the transnational nature of their ideas.
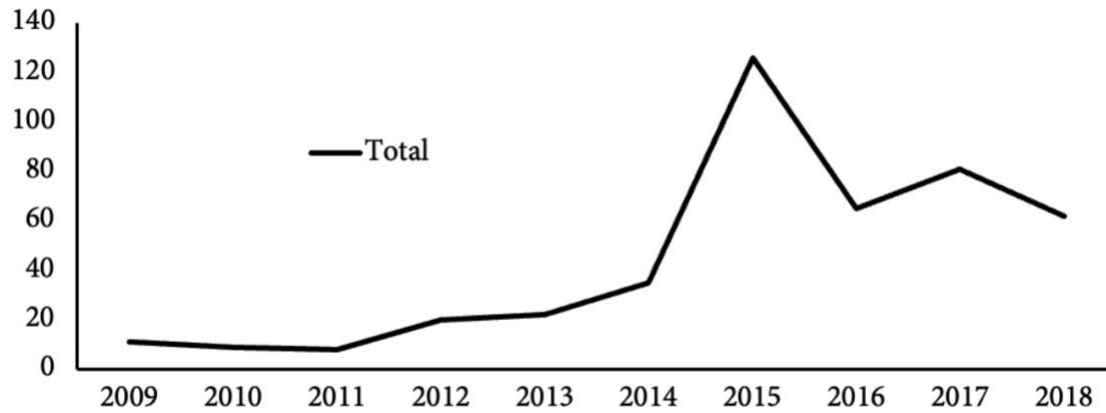
When it comes to this transnationality, the following graphs provide researched evidence of a growing quantity of attacks inspired by this ideology in the West since 2009, in a similar pattern in various countries at once:

Figure 20: Summary of Right-Wing Extremist incidents in Germany, Scandinavia, the UK and the US from 2009 to 2018 per country

Source: Perspectives on Terrorism (Collins J. , A New Wave of Terrorism? A Comparative Analysis of the Rise of Far-Right Terrorism, 2021)

Source: Perspectives on Terrorism (Collins J. , A New Wave of Terrorism? A Comparative Analysis of the Rise of Far-Right Terrorism, 2021)

As observed, the greatest increase in activity occurred in 2015, the year of the European migrant crisis, and the first attacks following the ideology can be traced back to the beginning of the last decade, soon after the election of Barack Obama.

The following figure published by the Institute for Economics and Peace represents the aggregates of far-right terrorist incidents in the West between 1970 and 2019.

Figure 22: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020 Global terrorism index

FIGURE 4.9
Far-right terrorist incidents in the West, 1970–2019
Far-right terrorist incidents have increased 250 per cent over the past five years.
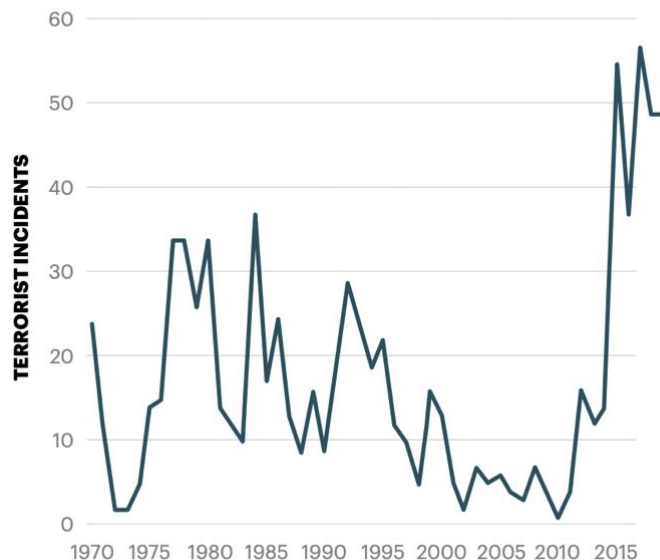
Source: START GTD, IEP calculations

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace. (2022). *Global Terrorism Index 2022*.

As has been previously explained, far-right terrorism has persisted in the West throughout the century. The difference is that the new surge is taking place at the same time throughout the West and is developing similar characteristics.

4.1.5. GENERATIONAL SPIRIT OR "HUMAN LIFE CYCLE"

Rapoport argued that the Fourth Wave would decline by 2025, if the *human life cycle* pattern took place as it has in previous waves. Recent events such as the ISIS-inspired attack in New Orleans on January 1st, 2025 (Goldman, 2025) weaken this statement while other attacks have been weaponized by extreme right wing parties when the ideology motivating them was actually closer to theirs than it was to jihadist aspirations. A recent example of this is the Christmas market attack

in Magdenburg, on December 19th, 2024. Germany's far-right party, the AfD, has instrumentalized the incident due to the perpetrator's immigrant origin (Pfeifer, 2024) when in reality his motives were closer to this ideology than to Islam, a religion he had renounced to. He had posted openly about renouncing his faith and accused Germany of promoting its own "islamization". (Sidhu, Kottasova, & Robertson, 2024)

It does seem like the peak of the Fourth Wave is already in the past and religiously motivate terrorist attacks are largely diminishing, which would point at the emergence of another wave while they both coexist. That is, "the history of global terrorism suggests that in the Fourth Wave's last decade, a Fifth Wave should begin" (Rapoport D., p.621).

The following graph by the CSIS (Jones, Doxsee, & Harrington, 2022) shows that, in Europe, ethno-nationalist and left-wing attacks remained strong, but are slowly diminishing with the appearance of right-wing terror. Once again, however, definitional problems may arise with the differentiation of "ethno-nationalist" separate from "right-wing", in which case the actual numbers might be higher:

Figure 23: Total Attacks, by Perpetrator Orientation (2009-2019)
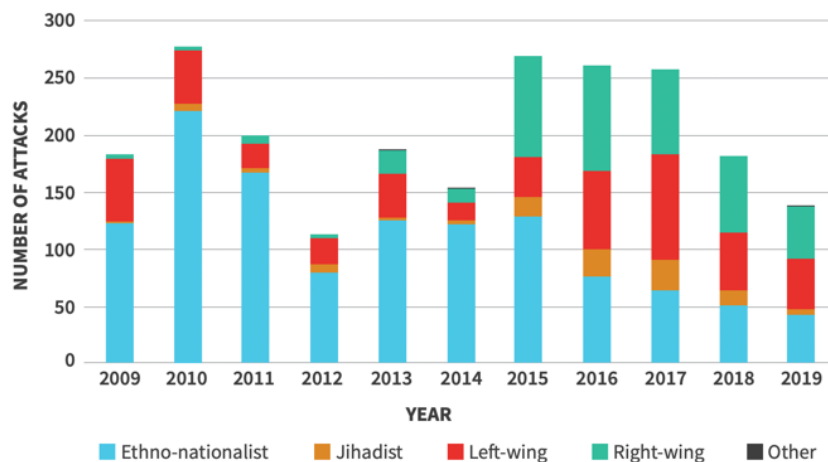
Source: ones, S. G., Doxsee, C., & Harrington, N. (2022). *CSIS: Center for Strategic and International studies*. Retrieved from The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States

In the United States, the new prevalence of right-wing terrorism is already clear. Even when the definitional problems of which is "religiously motivated", which is "ethno-nationalist" and

which "right-wing" are not taken into account. This is highlighted here because, as noted above, right-wing terrorism is often not labeled as such and is consequently undervalued.

Figure 24: Percentage of Terrorist Attacks and Plots by Perpetrator Orientation (1994-2020)

Source: Data compiled by CSIS Transnational Threats Project.
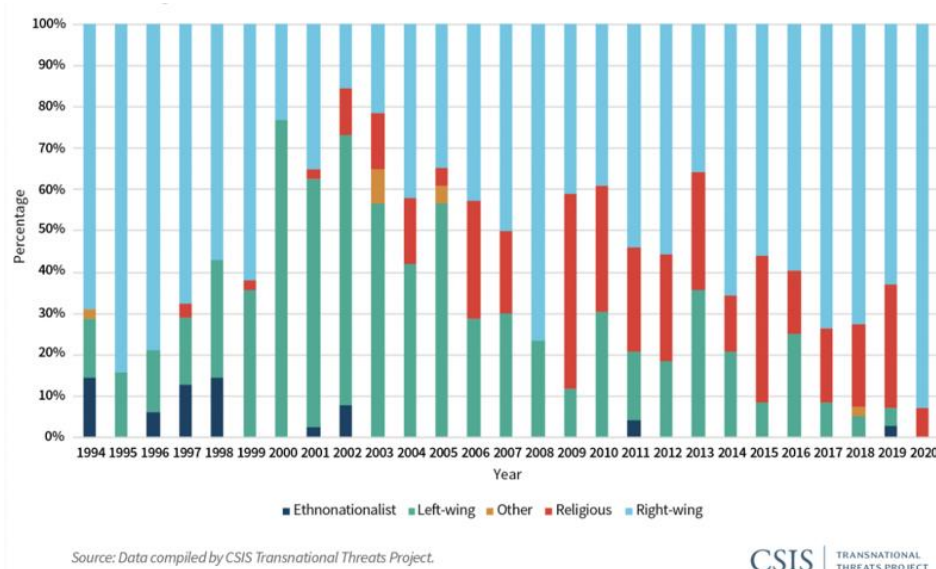
CSIS | TRANSNATIONAL THREATS PROJECT

Source: ones, S. G., Doxsee, C., & Harrington, N. (2022). *CSIS: Center for Strategic and International studies*. Retrieved from The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States

Finally, this graph by the Institute of Economics and Peace clearly shows how the "religious wave" is fading:

Figure 25: Religious and Political terrorism in the West, 2002-2019

Source: START GTD, IEP calculations
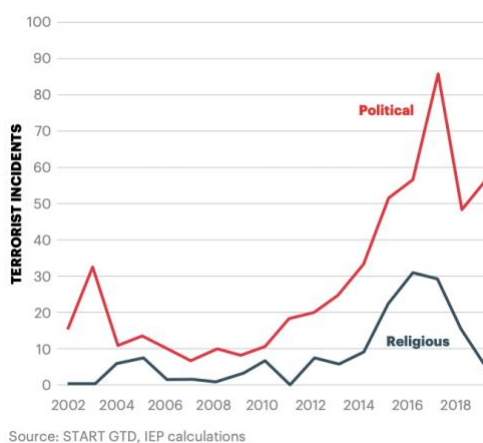
Source: Institute for Economics and Peace. (2022). *Global Terrorism Index 2022*.

4.1.6. TARGET AND TARGET AUDIENCE

When it comes to establishing unique characteristics of far-right terrorism, cross-national comparison in *Perspectives on Terrorism* concludes that most targets are Muslim individuals, Islamic facilities or refugee centers: 66% in Germany, 77.9% in Scandinavia and 55.9% in the UK, so there is a common target that widely differs from that of previous waves (Collins J. , 2021).

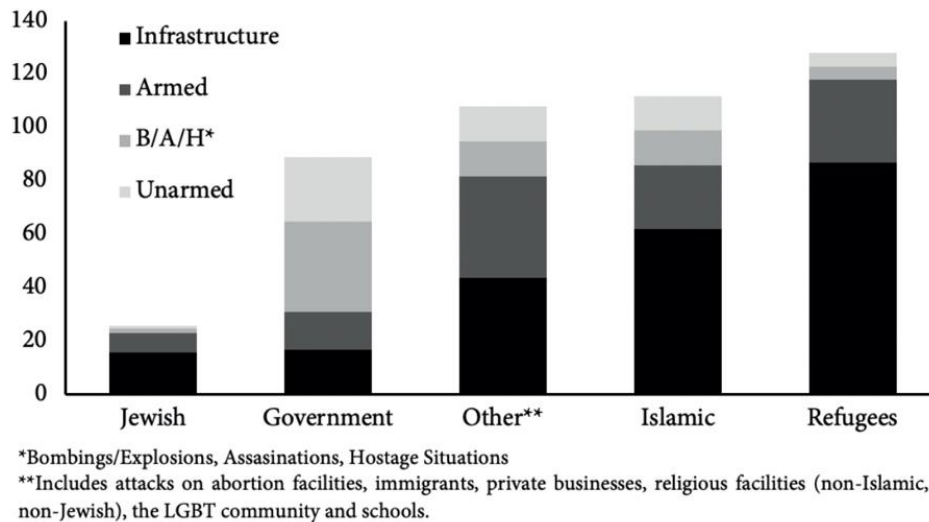Figure 26: Aggregate of target types, and attack types for Germany, Scandinavia, the UK and the US from 2009 to 2018.

*Bombings/Explosions, Assasinations, Hostage Situations
**Includes attacks on abortion facilities, immigrants, private businesses, religious facilities (non-Islamic, non-Jewish), the LGBT community and schools.

Source: Perspectives on Terrorism (Collins J. , A New Wave of Terrorism? A Comparative Analysis of the Rise of Far-Right Terrorism, 2021)

With data from the C-REX 2016 Right Wing Terrorism Trends Report, Ravndal also concludes that, both in Russia and in Western Europe, the main target are "racial enemies" (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2019)

Figure 27: Extreme Right target selection in Russia and Western Europe (deadly events). Figures by Johannes Due Enstad (2018), data on Western Europe by Jacob Aasland Ravndal (2016).
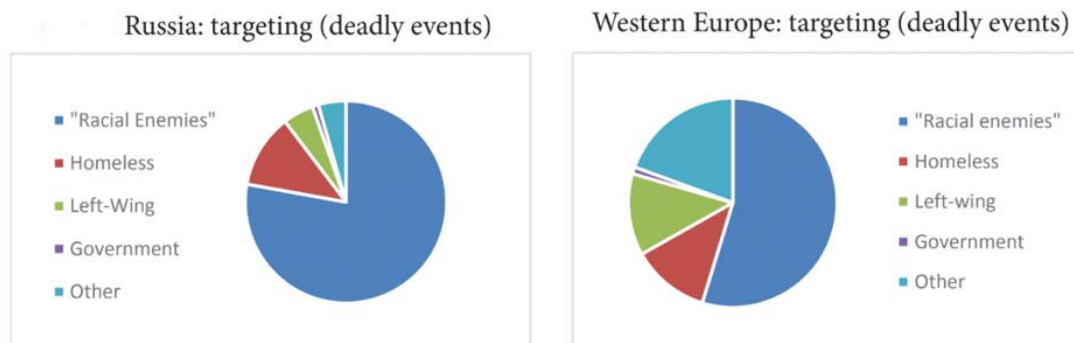
Source: Bjørgo, T., & Ravndal, J. (2019). Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns and Responses. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*.

Figure 28: Target Type for Right-Wing Attacks 2007-2017
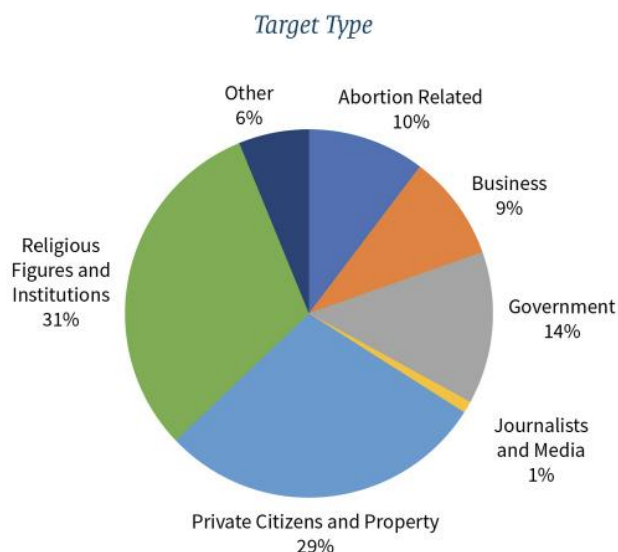
Source: Seth G. Jones. (2018). The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States. *CSIS Briefs - Center for Strategic and International Studies*.

Perhaps most interestingly in terms of target selection, "right-wing terrorist groups, contrary to other terrorists, usually avoid confrontation with the authorities and start their career by directing the majority of their operations at non-ruling groups" (Mamborg, 2019, p.8) and, contrary to Islamic terrorism, right-wing attacks tend to be "high frequency but low intensity" (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2019).

Ehud Sprinzak gives an explanation for this in *A Transnational History of Right-Wing Terrorism: Political Violence and the Far Right in Eastern and Western Europe since 1900*. He argues that:

> "the victims of right-wing terrorism are primarily non-governmental groups of people whom the perpetrators perceive as enemies they feel threatened by, or rather individuals whom right-wing terrorists imagine belonging to such groups based on racial, ethnical, religious, or social attributions. Only when right-wing terrorists start to believe that the government is either identical to the illegitimate minority group or fails to support their own platforms – or at least remains favorably silent – do they begin to engage in terrorist activities against agents and agencies of the state and government as well". (Dafinger & Florin, 2022, p.2)

When it comes to the message, right-wing extremists' narratives are similar in their apocalyptic tone but differ from those used previously by Islamic terrorists. "Whereas organizations from the Islamic spectrum communicate the ideas of a final battle between believers and non-believers" (…) "right-wing extremists distribute their idea of the extinction of the white population through mass immigration and Islamization of the West" (Steinek & Birgit, 2020, p.70). The message their propaganda tries to send is equally opposite. While Islamic narratives focus on the idea of *utopia* to appeal potential new members of the perfect Caliphate, right-wing extremists put the emphasis on a *dystopia* or catastrophic future that will take place if society keeps acting the way it does (Steinek & Birgit, 2020)

In terms of target audience, however, their logical main goal is to reach young people (Baldauf, Ebner, & Guhl , 2019), as it has been in previous waves. Quoting Rapoport on who the recruits during the First Anarchist Wave were, for instance: "they were young people; the young are more confident in their physical capacities and generally have more hope than the older generation" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.154). In the Forth Wave, this is why the Islamic State's propaganda has often imitated Hollywood films, or why far-right movements tend to use pop culture references (Baldauf, Ebner, & Guhl , 2019).

A key new strategy used by right-wing propaganda is dual: "they attempt to gain the attention of traditional media with co-ordinated provocations in order to gain the attention of the masses; and

in parallel they build up their media ecosystem and attempt to undermine the credibility of the established media" (Baldauf, Ebner & Guhl, 2019, p.21).

4.1.7.   MEANS AND WEAPONS USED

Figure 29: Weapon Type for Right-Wing Attacks 2007-2017
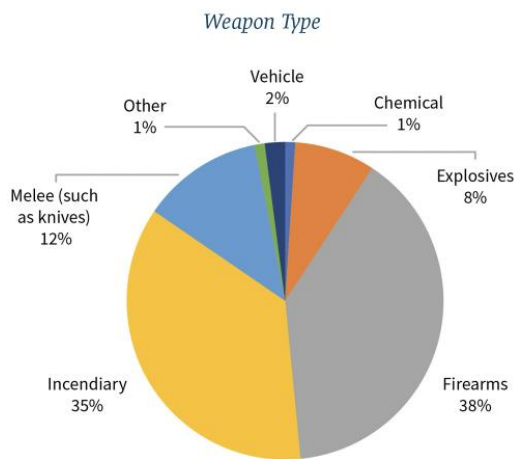
.

Source: Seth G. Jones. (2018). The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States. *CSIS Briefs - Center for Strategic and International Studies*.

Figures seem to confirm that firearms are becoming more and more common as the choice of weapon. Rapoport addresses this in his last book by writing: "Since 2011, armed assaults have outnumbered bombing attacks, and if a new wave is emerging, that will be its distinctive tactic. The bomb had been the previous weapon of every previous wave" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.677).

He argues that the change in chosen weapon must be found within the ideology that inspires the attack (Rapoport D. , Waves of Global Terrorism: From 1879 to the Present, 2022). The Oklahoma City bombing, which killed a total of 168 people with a homemade bomb and became the deadliest attack in US history until September 11 (Britannica, 2024), must have discouraged far-right terrorists away from indiscriminate casualties. Despite the choice for the firearm, however, far-right terrorism is proving more lethal than far-left terrorism. (Rapoport D. , 2022)

A study by the Combating Terrorism Center points not only as the firearm as a common characteristic of attacks motivated by right-wing ideology, but more specifically at a rise in 3D printed firearms across the movement. They point at five motives for the manufacturing/acquisition of this type of weapon: "symbolic/ideological reasons; complementing stocks of conventional firearms; circumventing regulations or due to lack of available alternatives; and financial motives" (Veilleux-Lepage, 2024, under Motives). When it comes to ideological reasons, which are the main concern of this thesis, they argue that "firearms can be seen as highly sophisticated and advanced cultural artifacts that are the results of a process of cultural production" (Veilleux-Lepage, 2024, under Symbolic/ Ideological Motives). Right-wing terrorists have used them symbolically, to the point of mythologizing the weapon. The examples of Anders Breivik, who engraved references to Norse mythology, or Brenton Tarrant, who inscribed names of figures and events linked to white supremacism, are given (Veilleux-Lepage, 2024).

Figure 30: Annual and cumulative Right-Wing Extremism-related incidents involving 3D Printed Firearms in the West

Figure 1: Annual and cumulative RWE-related incidents involving 3DPF
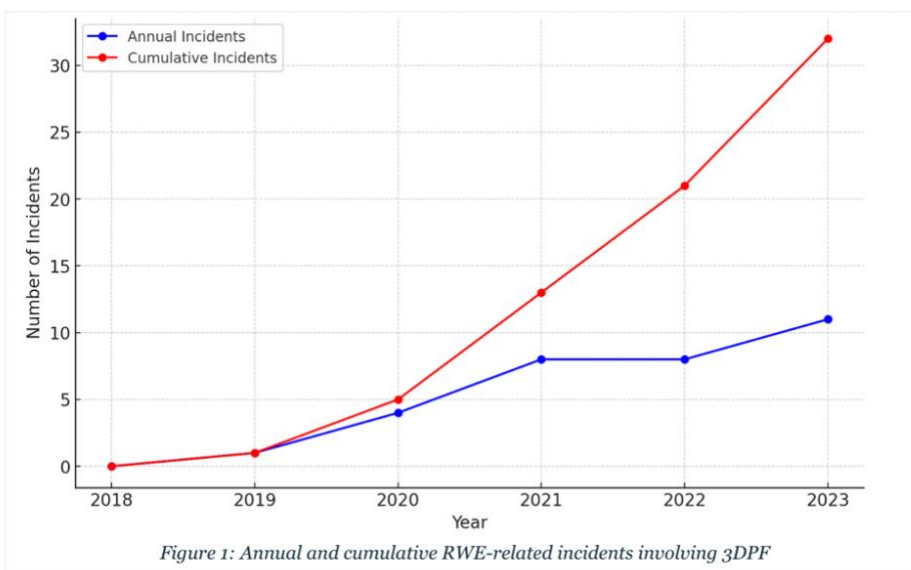
Source: Veilleux-Lepage, Y. (2024). Printing Terror: An Empirical Overview of the Use of 3D-Printed Firearms by Right-Wing Extremists . *Combating Terrorism Center*.

The data presented above was collected from incidents taking place in 18 different countries, further reflecting the transnationality of the phenomenon (Veilleux-Lepage, 2024).

4.1.8. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERPETRATOR

As noted above in the *far-right terrorism* section, decentralization is a common characteristic of far-right motivated terrorist groups. Attackers are often labeled *lone wolves* and one important characteristic is that they mostly radicalize, operate and organize online. Often, suicide attacks frame them as martyrs (Jones, Doxsee, & Harrington, 2022).

These characteristics can be illustrated by recent examples. Already short after Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people in Norway in 2011, Barack Obama stated that "the risk we are presently confronted with is that of the lone wolf terrorist someone with a single weapon, who is in a position to carry out a massacre on a large scale, as we witnessed in Norway a short time ago" (Hartleb, 2020). Research shows that he had radicalized online, writing his manifestoes after online sources and actively participating on a great number of extremist forums (Ravndal, 2013).

Later in 2019, Jacinda Arden would not hesitate to call the perpetrator of the Christchurch mosque attacks a terrorist (Hoffman, 2019), even if he had acted completely on his own, with no organization to follow orders from. "In the past, a terrorist was mostly recognizable as someone committing violence […] on behalf of some existent organizational entity or movement that had an identifiable chain of command. This criterion, as Ardern's statement suggests, has outlived its usefulness" (Hoffman, 2019, para.1). While lone wolf terrorism had also been characteristic of groups such as the Islamic State, a new pattern seemed to be emerging and that same year over 120 governments and tech companies gathered in Paris and committed to "'eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online' while simultaneously protecting freedom of expression", an initiative that acknowledged the key position of online platforms in radicalizing potential terrorists (Christchurch Call, 2022). Not only did the Internet play an essential role in Brenton Tarrant's radicalization process, but also in the spread of his "message". He live-streamed the shooting and shared links to access the footage, as well as his manifesto which, from its title to its content, clearly drew from the *The Great Replacement* theory, popular amongst far-right groups (Hoffman, 2019).

When it comes to the perpetrator's age, Rapoport emphasizes that most terrorists influenced by far-right ideology are in their thirties. He argues that the underlying ideology does not seem to be as prevalent in the younger generation, as it was during the previous waves an exemplifies this by the anti-immigration rhetoric that gave rise to Brexit. Most people in their twenties voted to remain, which would, in his argument, mean that it is not the younger generation that is holding these beliefs (Rapoport D. , 2022).

In the conclusion on whether far-right terrorism constitutes a new global wave, he writes that a
> "reason for doubting that the current set of attacks is a Fifth Wave is that the generation today is unlike those that created the previous waves. The youngest in each generation produced each wave, individuals in their teens and twenties who can give virtually all their time to the task because they do not have the commitments that jobs and marriages produce" (Rapoport D., 2022, p.695).

While there is truth to the statement that older perpetrators are found across the far-right terrorist movement, terrorists above the age of 45 were also not a new phenomenon within Islamic terrorism (Wells, 2023). What is more, the spread of far-right extremist views seems to be taking place especially amongst the young (Costa, 2024) (Ridgwell, 2024) (Edwards, 2024) and with the US as example, "the number of radicalized young people with no formal allegiances or ties to recognized extremist or terrorist groups has increased by 311% in the past 10 years alone as compared to the past 5 decades", the majority of lone-wolves being far-right affiliated (Jones, Guhl, Davey, & Moustafa, 2023). In the chapter titled "Youth and the Radical Right" within the Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right, Cynthia Mille-Idriss (2018) argues that "while not all far right youth engage in violence, young people are more likely than adults to engage in far-right violence".

Even if the previous statements were flawed, because they do indeed point at an increased radicalization of the young needed for a new wave to emerge, contrary to Rapoport's statement; the author of this thesis would argue that a delay in the age of radicalization logically stems from the lack of "commitments that jobs and marriages produce" quoting Rapoport above. There is no need but to look at the *incel* movement, core to the modern extreme right, whose main

characteristic is to be "involuntary celibate", mostly made up of men still living with their parents with no meaningful relationship to women (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020).

Without the need to further justify it, it seems clear that both marriages and meaningful jobs concern the present generation later in age than it did 100 years ago during the Anarchist Wave. This is why, contrary to Rapoport's judgement, the author of this thesis would not consider the average age of the perpetrator as key to the labeling of a wave of terrorism.

As a visual representation of the characteristics of this present wave's common perpetrator, the following graph has been retrieved from a "cross-sectional set of individual level data on persons who radicalized primarily within the United States and [who] have been linked to an ideologically motivated violent or non-violent crime". As can be observed, more than half the cases resulted in violence (54.4%) and 59% were related to far-right ideology. While almost half of the perpetrators had completed a college degree, 64% were not married, even if their average age was 34.62. 91.9% had no immigrant background and 76.1% were white. Perhaps most importantly, 77.7% had no previous military experience, and the last variable "decades" shows a clear pattern of acceleration (Jasko, LaFree, Piazza, & Becker, 2021).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (study 1)

Variable	Categories	Overall n	Missing values	%/mean (SD)
Violence		1,563	—	
	Violent			54.4
	Nonviolent			45.6
Ideology		1,563	—	
	Islamist			17.6
	Left-wing			23.4
	Right-wing			59
Education		595	968	
	Up to high school			39.7
	College or vocational education (some or complete degree)			47.7
	Postgraduate education (some or complete degree)			12.6
Marital status		909	654	
	Yes			35.9
	No			64.1
Immigration background		1,500	63	
	Yes			8.1
	No			91.9
Military experience		1,033	530	
	Yes			16.8
	No			83.2
Sex		1,558	—	
	Male			89.1
	Female			10.9
Age		1,507	56	34.62 (13.55)
Ethnicity (white)		1,434	124	
	Yes			76.1
	No			23.9
Previous violent criminal experience		919	644	
	Yes			22.3
	No			77.7
Decades		1,563	—	
	1940s–1960s			7.1
	1970s			8.1
	1980s			9.2
	1990s			15
	2000s			24.4
	2010s			36.2

Source: Jasko, K., LaFree, G., Piazza, J., & Becker, M. (2021). A comparison of political violence by left-wing, right wing, and Islamist extremists in the United States and the world. *PNAS Psychological and Cgonitive Sciences Vol. 119*.

4.1.9. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The CTDT (United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate) in its 2020 *Trends Alert* titled *Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism* pointed out that, in comparison with Islamic terrorist groups, organizational structures of those far-right ideology motivated are markedly different, the latter being characterized by lone-wolves who find support in online communities without being part of a group (United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2020). This characteristic is confirmed by most if not all sources dealing with the matter, as has been previously reiterated.

Figure 32: Extreme right terrorism: actor and attack types
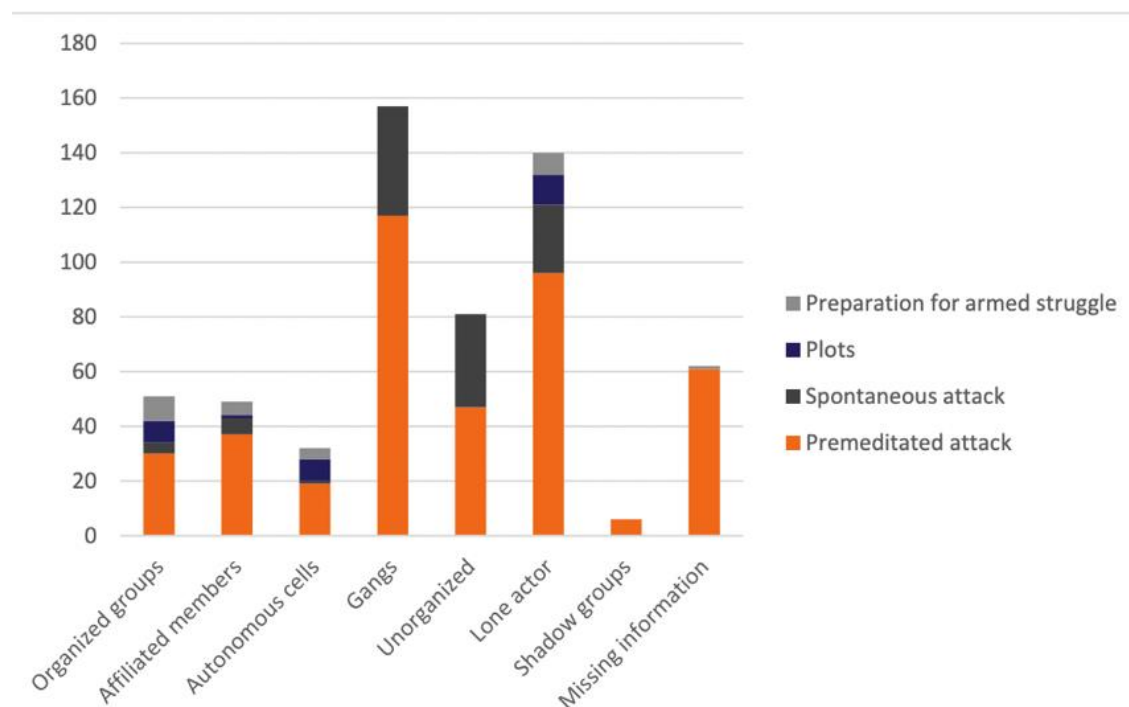
Source: Bjørgo, T., & Ravndal, J. (2019). Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns and Responses. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*.

In this previous graph, it seems like gangs are the most common type of organization, right before lone actors. In the policy brief *Classifying far-right groups as gangs*, the authors call for the classification of far-right violent groups as gangs, given the unequal treatment they legally get in comparison to other types of terrorists. Since domestic terrorism is still not labeled or countered as such, and hate crimes are also a very restrictive definition that implies lesser punishment, they argue that "the most appropriate and straightforward approach to disrupt far-right groups is to utilize existing gang laws" (Vasalik & Reid, 2021, p.75).

In the US,

> "the federal definition of a gang requires an association of three or more individuals who collectively adopt a group identity (e.g. name, sign, symbol, colors, etc.) and engage in criminal activity. What is not in the definition are racial or ethnic categories, urban or rural identifiers, age requirements, or gender designations" (Vasalik & Reid, 2021, p.75).
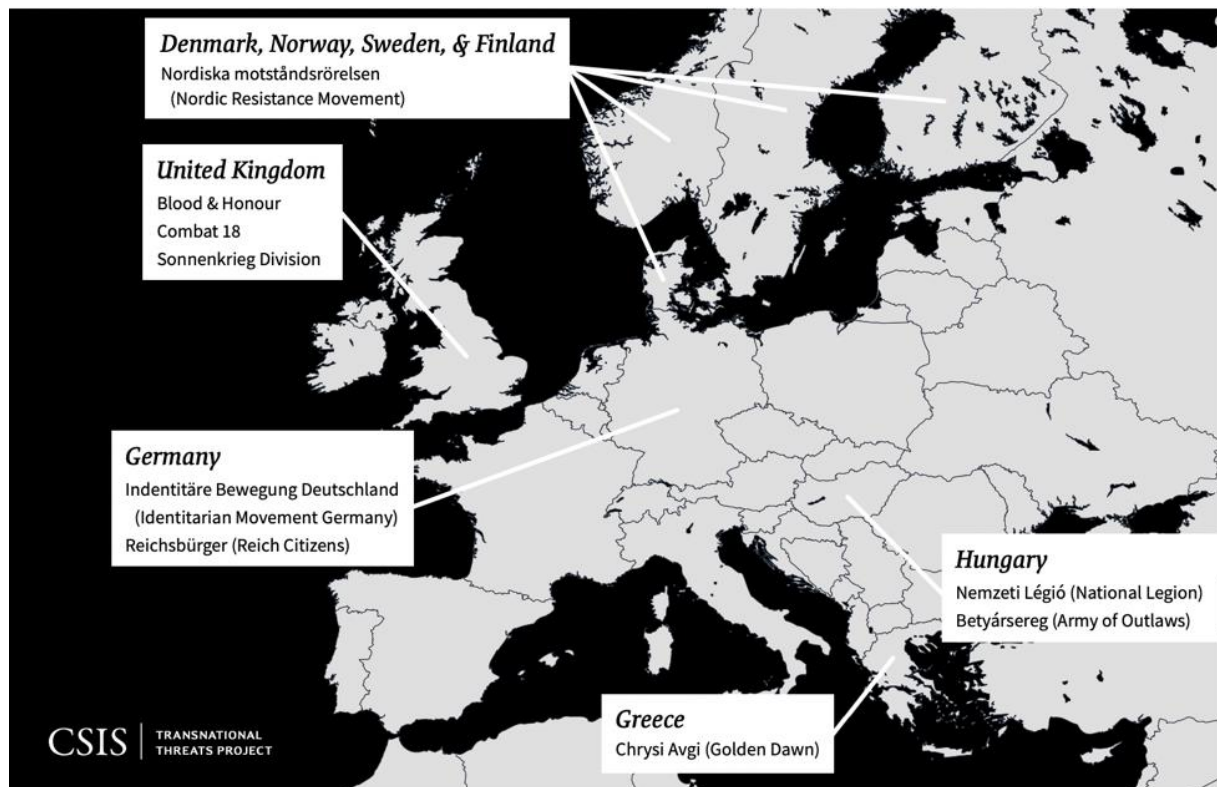
Therefore, it seems like an effort to counter far-right terrorism within the existing legal context that favors the definition of terrorism when applied to non-white, immigrant populations, has resulted in a greater chance to label these groups as "gangs", as an umbrella term.

The main difference with previous waves of terrorism also lies in the importance of the organization. Jihadist terror organizations have historically placed importance on organizational hierarchy and, despite the war on terror compelling Jihadi organizations to dismantle their networks, leaders never ceased to influence their trajectory and strategic direction. This was achieved through the management model referred to as "centralization of decision and decentralization of execution". In contrast, far-right extremism emphasizes the individual, thus enabling the formation of "decentralized collective[s] of loosely connected anonymous activists" (Azani, et al., 2020).

The prevalence of lone wolves is largely associated to the development of platforms and technologies that appeal to individuals that are disenchanted with society, making ideology the main force mobilizing violence before organized groups (Azani, et al., 2020). This does not mean, however, that organizations motivated by right-wing ideology do not exist. Governments have started to list right-wing groups as terrorist threats. CSIS provides a quick visual sample of some

far-right terror organizations existent in the EU, most of which are white-supremacists or Neo-Nazis (Jones, Doxsee, & Harrington, 2020).

Figure 33: Examples of Right-Wing Terrorist Networks in Europe

Denmark, Norway, Sweden, & Finland
Nordiska motståndsrörelsen
(Nordic Resistance Movement)

United Kingdom
Blood & Honour
Combat 18
Sonnenkrieg Division

Germany
Indentitäre Bewegung Deutschland
(Identitarian Movement Germany)
Reichsbürger (Reich Citizens)

Hungary
Nemzeti Légió (National Legion)
Betyársereg (Army of Outlaws)

Greece
Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn)

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Source: Jones, S., Doxsee, C., & Harrington, N. (2020). The Right-wing Terrorism Threat in Europe. *CSIS Transnational Threats Project*.

The report *Mapping Far-Right Terrorist Propaganda Online* mapped the organizations whose propaganda was included in the Terrorist Content Analytics Platform and gives a sense of their internationalization, as some are considered threats by various governments (Terrorist Content Analytics Platform, 2024)

Figure 34: Far-right designated terrorist entities for TCAP inclusion policy

	UN	EU	US State	US Treasury	UK	Canada	Australia	New Zealand
Atomwaffen Division					●	●		
National Socialist Order					○	○	●	
Blood and Honour						●		
Combat 18						●		
Feuerkrieg Division					●			
National Action					●			
National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action					○			
Scottish Dawn					○			
System Resistance Network					○			
Proud Boys						●		●
Russian Imperial Movement			●	●			●	
Sonnenkrieg Division					●		●	
The Base					●	●	●	●
James Mason						●		

● Designated terrorist entitiy   ○ Designated under a synonym or umbrella group or by affiliation

Source: Terrorist Content Analytics Platform. (2024). Mapping Far-Right Terrorist Propaganda Online. *Tech Against Terrorism*

4.2. CURRENT FAR-RIGHT VIOLENCE AS A NEW WAVE OF MODERN TERRORISM

As shown by previous graphs and information provided, and as other authors previously have concluded, far-right extremism meets the criteria required to be considered its own new wave of modern terrorism. While more research is needed to determine this fact, as well as more time to observe its evolution, right-wing terror is undeniably increasing at its fastest rate so far and shows specific and identifiable catalysts in an equally identifiable time period. It is also transnational in character and motivated by an identifiable and distinct ideology that clearly differs from previous waves of terror in that it is characterized by different use of tactics and targets.

As stated by Hoffman,

> "white nationalist terrorism and its violent, politically motivated variants — embracing racism, antisemitism, anti-immigration, and anti-government sentiments — have existed in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Australia among

other countries for decades. The difference is that in the past these acts were mostly isolated, spasmodic outbursts of violence. Today, however, the Internet and social media are capable of uniting disparate, disgruntled individuals into an ideologically more cohesive echo-chamber that serves as a platform to radicalize, inspire, motivate, and ultimately perpetrate acts of wanton violence as we have recently seen" (Hoffman, 2019, para.15).

The current political sphere and its increasing polarization should be a warning for intelligence agencies as radicalization keeps taking place online and politicians increasingly legitimize extremist worldviews offline. After all, not long ago, the right-wing extremist organization Proud Boys pledged allegiance to Donald Trump following his public directive to "stand back and stand by" (Collins & Brandy, 2020). In a similar tone, a former AfD MP in Germany was accused of plotting a coup with the aim of restoring the pre-World War Reich (Garland, 2024).

In France, the country that has historically had to deal the most with Islamist terrorism in Europe, 46% of terrorist arrests, according to Europol, were already related to the far right back in 2023 (France 24, 2023). In the US, media outlets tried to warn of a second Trump administration with headlines such as this one in the Washington Post: *Trump could hobble renewed fight against domestic terrorism, analysts warn* (Allam, 2024). Los Angeles Times warns: *The Trump administration is ignoring far right terrorism. That only makes it more dangerous* (Blazakis & Clarke, 2025). In Argentina, "it remains to be seen if the rise of Milei will embolden neo-Nazis and white supremacists in the country, as was the case with Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Donald Trump in the U.S*"* (Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, 2024).

In cities such as Berlin, attacks against asylum seekers point at an increase in far-right violence, with 77 assaults in the city in 2024 alone, in comparison with 32 the previous year (Cole, D., 2025). Human Rights Watch warns that, in Germany "mainstream political parties failed to forcefully counter, and even indulged, far-right, racist, anti-migrant narratives" (Human Rights Watch, 2025, under Discrimination and Intolerance). In Paris, an extreme right-wing group was arrested February 2025, after seriously injuring a 30-year-old man (Al Yahyai, 2025) while chanting "Paris is Nazi" (Song, 2025). It happened right outside the Cultural Association of Turkish Immigrant Workers (Al Yahyai, 2025).

In March 2025, three men were arrested by security services on grounds of an imminent attack in the UK. They "believed a race war was imminent" and "were planning terrorist attacks on mosques and synanogues" (BBC News, 2025). In April, following the attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on April 21ˢᵗ, which resulted in 26 deaths, there has been a reported rise in threats to Kashmiri students from members of the Hindu Raksha Dal, a right-wing organization targeting Muslims (Sharma, 2025). Also in April, a Muslim worshipper was stabbed in Southern France in an incident labeled as "Islamophobic" (AlJazeera, 2025).

While the 7.5 million Ukrainian refugees were gladly accepted into the EU, and humanitarian aid was extensively provided, the same positive treatment has not been as common with more than 13.5 million Syrian refugees seeking asylum since 2011 (Alsbeti, 2023). This attitude reinforces a double standard that sheds a stronger light on the issue at hand. Anti-immigration is indeed driving politics in the West, but not all types of migration are frowned upon. It seems like globalization has exacerbated feelings of a *European identity* presumably in danger, and identity that long centered on values of democracy and openness, and which is swiftly regressing to looks, ethnicity or nationalism in a historically incredibly threating form: *white supremacism*.

The greater likelihood of right-wing extremists to engage in political violence, coupled with the overall higher death toll average of far-right terrorist attacks, the increase in extremist content online and the lower monitoring of hate speech on social media (Williams, 2024) since the recent US elections, all point towards a future increase of the threat if measures are not taken soon. Policymakers should focus both on limitations of extremist speech in order to avoid its normalization, and on measures for social inclusivity in order to prevent the radicalization of lone-wolves. As noted by Trends research and Advisory,

> "promoting social cohesion and inclusivity, alongside providing opportunities and support for disenfranchised groups, can significantly weaken the ideological foundations of domestic terrorism, as these groups often prey on younger disenfranchised segments of society who often pine for a sense of belonging and community". (AlShehhi & Bou Serhal, 2024, under The significance of normalizing far-right extremism).

While right after a terrorist attack motivated by right-wing ideology, public opinion shifts away from the ideology at that end of the political spectrum (Pickard, Efthyvoulou, & Bove, 2022), "the paradox" remains, "that countermeasures intended to constrain radical right politics appear to fuel extreme right violence, while countermeasures that may constrain extreme right violence would imply an advancement of radical right politics" (Ravndal, 2017). At the same time, however, "it is the far-right political milieu, its political beliefs and its political agenda, which prepares the terrain on which right-wing terrorism is able to flourish" (Dafinger & Florin, 2022, p.1-2).

Subsequently, it can be said that while far-right terrorism is indeed on the rise, and should, theoretically speaking, be considered as such. As the current terrorism threat has shifted from external to domestic, the main challenge is a definitional one.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

This thesis concludes that right-wing terrorism is in fact emerging as a *fifth global wave*, since the violence that is taking place fulfils both the requirement to be considered terrorism and the nine determinants of a Wave of Terrorism that have been established at the beginning of the study. There has been a rapid global increase in the number of attacks in the last decade, especially in the West, and far-right populism, the mainstreaming of hateful rhetoric and rising concerns about migration have served as catalysts for the rise in attacks. Moreover, the common predominant energy of the Fifth Wave is present in the form of the fear of the Islamization of the Western world and it is becoming transnational in scope in spite of the historical emphasis of far-right movements to focus on local or national themes. It is emerging at the same time that the religious wave is said to be bound to fade and uses firearms as its main weapon while bombs have been consistently more common in every past wave. When it comes to the perpetrators of this wave, lone wolves are its most characteristic differentiator, as mostly white men in their 30s who radicalize, operate and organize online. Still, in spite of fulfilling the criteria to be considered the harbinger of a new wave of modern terrorism, far-right violence is not given as big a spotlight as religious political violence did when it started, precisely because it stems from the very political systems in which it is making

an appearance. This makes domestic terrorism harder to counter, since it is equally hard to consider it as such.

While globalization continues its natural course, and technologies continue to develop, the traditional left and right political spectrum is increasingly challenged in rapid, groundbreaking ways through which extremism is benefitted. While the religious wave of Rapoport's model of modern terrorism has so far been the most lethal and is very much still present, recent empirical analysis shows that waves of terrorism do tend to overlap and policymakers risk turning a blind eye on an extremely dangerous emerging threat as the Internet increasingly offers a safe haven for the sharing and developing of extremist ideas in an increasingly globalized world.

The Fifth Far-Right Wave is still not a global one, since we are witnessing most of its emergence in the West. This had led many to believe that it is not a wave in the first place, forgetting that all of the previous ones were equally geographically limited. Future research should focus on the global scope of the threat, on the acquisition of numerical data in other countries where similar trends seem to be emerging, such as Latin American countries, Turkey, India or Pakistan, as well as on comparative analyses that pave the way towards a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Most importantly, future studies should delve into the definitional paradox of far-right terrorism and the real scope of the threat, since most right-wing extremist attacks are not countered through a counter-terrorism lens. Terrorism is fundamentally innovative and, as much as common characteristics help intelligence agencies in the understanding of the threat, an eye needs to be kept on inventions and transformations to come.

The number of deaths should not be the driver of concern, but the reemergence of attacks and the influence they have on new ones across the globe. After all, as Brian M. Jenkins stated, "terrorism is a theater… Terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead" (Rapoport, 2022, p.344). This does not mean, however, that the death toll of this wave will not increase in years to come. The rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric is undeniable and constitutes one the fundamental pilar of both the global political shift towards the far-right and the emergence of extremist ideologies such as white-supremacism, the primary driver of far-right terrorist attacks.

Then the main danger of far-right terrorism, the author of this thesis would argue, is that its most significant ideological threads, such as anti-immigration, are easily politically legitimized and inherently transnational in nature, which in turn make it harder to counter at its purely ideological stage, before it becomes behavioral and causes victims. This may account for both its emergence and the general lack of mainstream studies relating to this phenomenon, as well as the consistent definitional challenge surrounding far-right violent attacks being labeled as anything else but *terrorism*.

As long as this is not understood, and extremism is fueled by populism and parties in power, the risks associated are far greater than we are prepared to believe. As threats for the mass deportation of migrants sweep the mainstream agenda, this author dares say that what constitutes a harbinger now, a warning of the dangers of extremism, might result in further violence tomorrow. It is not far-fetched to argue that the normalization of the alienization of the *other* in theory, does indeed result in its *otherness* in practice, and works as a justification for inhuman treatment. History should have long taught us this lesson.

While reaching the ending this thesis, the far-right Patriots for Europe movement has met in an international summit in Madrid (Heller, 2025). Their slogan, *Make Europe great Again* (Soler, 2025), might remind the reader of what is going on in America. The very same week, the 4th of February 2025, Sweden experienced what has been described as "the worst mass shooting in Swedish history" (AlJazeera, 2025) at an adult education center which offered Swedish classes for immigrants (The Local Sweden, 2025). The perpetrator, a 35 year old Swedish man, is believed to have acted alone and the police was quick to rule out an ideology behind the attack (Gunter, 2025). A couple days later, racist motivations are already being alleged by the media (Bryant, 2025) (The Local Sweden, 2025) "It looks to be a Swedish guy, and perhaps that is better than if it had been an immigrant responsible" commented a local salesman. (Gunter, 2025). Better for whom, may we ask?

The author of this thesis would like to conclude with Tomas Poletti Lundstrom's words, researcher on racism at the University of Uppsala, referring to Sweden's last attack: "The government and the main opposition support anti-immigrant policies and use anti-immigrant rhetoric" (…). "This

is what happens when politicians speak the way they are speaking" (Gunter, 2025). If terrorism is inherently political and its designation subjective, no limitations of political expression make the distinction between violence and terrorism blurred. No standard, on the other hand, erodes the credibility of counterterrorism efforts, and is likely to attract less funding. What does not exist, cannot be politically countered, which is what makes the designation of what does appear to be a new wave necessary. This is a lesson that will hopefully shape the future of the field for the better.

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