



Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures

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Abstract

This study titled “Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures” focuses on the transnational connections of the violent extreme right-wing milieus in six countries: Finland, France, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States. It was commissioned by the German Federal Foreign Office, Division “International Cooperation against Terrorism, Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Corruption”, in 2020.

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Analysis

Executive Summary

The 21st century, and the period after 2014 in particular, saw the emergence of a new leaderless, transnational and apocalyptic violent extreme right-wing (XRW) movement. Nowadays, national violent XRW scenes are transnationally linked through apocalyptic narratives such as the “great replacement,” “white genocide” and “Day X”. Transnationally oriented violent XRW propagandists argue that the “white race” can only be saved if all violent XRW abandon parochial national differences and divisions and work and fight together.

The movement is not structurally unified in one hierarchical structure but embraces a “divided we stand” approach. Its members include individuals, groups, organizations, and networks, as well as political parties.

The transnational violent XRW movement is driven by music, violent sport, money, and violence. Music and violent sport events are a common feature of many violent XRW scenes transnationally. They aim to provide the movement with finances to sustain its existence and attract previously unconnected individuals as potential recruits to its ranks.

Between 2015 and 2020, violence emanating from the violent XRW milieu has been steadily increasing and has become multi-faceted, yet it often does not fall under national legal definitions of terrorism. Attacks are regularly committed by violent XRW militants who do not belong to the movement’s most well-known organizational outlets. Nonetheless, some of these organizations also tried to stage spectacular terrorist attacks but their efforts so far have largely failed or were foiled by the security services.

The violence of the transnational movement is always justified as “defensive” or “reactive” to that of the movement’s ideological enemies and is planned and executed locally. However, its inspirations or wider justifications are often transnational in nature, for example, drawing on an online manifesto of a successful violent XRW terrorist attacker from another country.

The transnational violent XRW movement is male-dominated, but there have been cases of female terrorist plotters or attackers emerging from that milieu. The membership of some of the national violent XRW scenes are reportedly up to 15% female.

The transnational violent XRW movement features a strong online component that at times outpaces its offline counterpart and effectively takes on a life of its own. Consequently, the former is often unable to operationally boost the latter. However, violent XRW virtual structures continue to closely embrace and utilize currently available technologies and, similar to other extremist and terrorist milieus, are early adopters of these technologies. Nonetheless, the volume of violent XRW online communication should not be mistaken for a robust transnational operational online space.

The overall movement draws on a range of national inspirations:

- a. Anglo-Saxon – ideological via tracts published in the USA or practical with certain British and American violent XRW entities attempting either to lead coalitions of like-minded international actors or directly branch out to other countries;
- b. Germanic – ideological via national-socialist symbolism and imagery, and practical. German violent XRW entities are amongst the most internationally networked, with almost all other violent XRW actors attempting



to make connections in the country. This also includes organizations that fought on different sides of the war in Ukraine;

c. Nordic – the transnational Nordic Resistance Movement, an all-Scandinavia violent XRW organization, is often held up as a role model by other members of the movement;

d. Eastern European – as newer members of the transnational XRW movement from Russia and Ukraine rush to compete with each other while recruiting allies in the West.

The movement also is connected via international travel to common destinations:

a. political marches, rallies, for example, the Lukov March in Sofia, Bulgaria, or the Day of Honour in Budapest, Hungary;

b. violent sports, especially related to Mixed Martial Arts (MMA);

c. music events (festivals).

Common attendance at these events allows the violent XRW participants to interconnect, further strengthen their personal ties, and exchange experiences. These events, like some bigger MMA events, are also a significant source of funding.

Actors within the transnational violent XRW movement generally follow a common approach to the COVID-19 crisis. They largely see the pandemic as a chance to spread their ideology more widely and an opportunity to reach a broader recruitment base. However, its offline operations are constrained by the current restrictions and it is currently too early to assess what the medium to long-term effects of this will be on the movement as a whole.

The six countries at the center of this study all define “terrorism” in their national legislation but often rely only on administrative practice or working definitions of “extremism” or “right wing extremism.” On the one hand, this state of affairs necessitates a certain degree of improvisation while countering the threat and, simultaneously, reduces the availability of counterterrorism tools to address the threat emanating from the transnational violent XRW movement. As a result, the six countries deploy a variety of countermeasures to stem the threat emanating from the violent XRW movement. These can be grouped into three types: a) Scandinavian, b) multifaceted, and c) counterintelligence and counter-crime approaches.

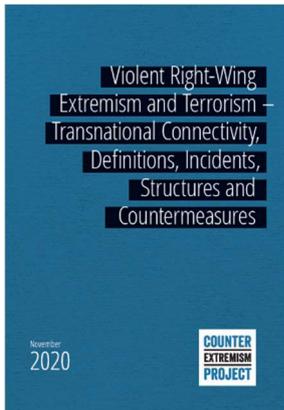
The research for this study demonstrated three general challenges governments encounter when designing countermeasures for the transnational violent XRW movement. First, multilateral consensus concerning the definition of the transnational violent XRW movement and its actors has not yet developed. Second, officially available data concerning various grouplets, groups, organizations and networks of the transnational violent XRW movement is not yet readily available in several of the countries at the center of this study. Third, many of the grouped actors, including significant ones, in the transnational violent XRW movement have not been designated as terrorism organizations by governments.

Consequently, using and strengthening domestic and multilateral dialogue and cooperation mechanisms are crucial to work towards multilateral consensus. Existing legal and administrative measures could be adapted to tackle the threat posed by the transnational violent XRW movement and its actors, including administrative measures on a local level. Finally, civil-society stakeholders have developed considerable expertise on the transnational violent XRW movement. These are useful resources for the adaptation of existing government capabilities.



Remarks: The positions presented in this study only reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily correspond with the positions of the German Federal Foreign Office.

Please find the full study here:



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About the Counter Extremism Project (CEP)

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) is a non-profit, non-partisan international organization that aims to counter the threat of extremist ideologies and to strengthen pluralistic-democratic forces. CEP deals with extremism in all forms – including Islamist extremism/terrorism as well as right-wing and left-wing extremism/terrorism. To this end, CEP exerts pressure on financial and material support networks of extremist and terrorist organizations through its own research and studies, works against extremist and terrorist narratives and their online recruitment tactics, develops good practices for the reintegration of extremists and terrorists, and promotes effective regulations and laws.

In addition to offices in the United States, CEP has an office and a separate legal entity, Counter Extremism Project Germany gGmbH, in Berlin, and maintains a representation in Brussels. CEP supports policymakers to develop laws and regulations to effectively prevent and combat extremism and terrorism, particularly in the area of combating terrorist financing.

For more information about the activities of the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) Germany, please visit www.counterextremism.com/german.

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The production of this study was managed/implemented by a special project team consisting of CEP leadership, staff and advisors in collaboration with external project experts focused on writing the country chapters, which formed the basis for the production of the core part of the study.

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