

HOW TO EXPLAIN RADICALIZATION?

A comparison on the Driving Factors of
the Far-right, the Far-left, Separatist and
Religious Extremism

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Description
CAS	Complex adaptive system
CT	Counter-terrorism
CTN	Crime-terror nexus
ESCI	Emerging Sources Citation Index
FRE	Far right extremism
GDP	Gross domestic product
HDI	Human development index
IS	Islamic State
LARP	Live Action Role Playing
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisex, trans, queer, intersex
LWE	Left wing extremism and anarchism
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIE	Militant Islamist extremism
NLP	Natural language processing
OSCE	Organisation for security and cooperation in Europe
P-CVE	Prevention and countering of violent extremism
PRR	Populist radical right
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
RWE	Right wing extremism
SSCI	Social Sciences Citation Index
VE	Violent extremism

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4. DRIVERS OF FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Brief historical analysis. The far-right in the European Context

With the extreme right currently ruling in several countries, in Europe and outside of Europe, far-right parties are enjoying a growing electoral success in many other places. These developments have triggered a heated academic and public debate about how to interpret them, in light of the history of the experiences of the interwar years, the persistence of the far-right in Europe since and newer phenomena, such as “illiberalism” and “populism”, that borrow elements of discourse and practice (Betz 2018). In his 2019 book, political scientist Cas Mudde argued there are 4 different phases of far-right ideology, neo-Fascism, 1945–55, right-wing populism, 1955–80, radical right, 1980–2000, the Fourth Wave since 2000 (Mudde 2019). And so, it is important to understand the translation of an ideology from one period to the other or from one group to the other as an organic process of continuous appropriation and re-appropriation. ‘After the Second World War, efforts to prosecute fascist war criminals and come to terms with the past were secondary to the social and economic pursuits, the European Union project and the rise of Christian Democracy as a unifying force (Kaiser, 2017). Tony Judt called it “the politics of amnesia” which fascists benefitted greatly from during this time of states looking to “forget” the past (Judt, 2005, Fulbrook 2018). This allowed pan-European fascist movements to continue, such as the European Social Movement (ESM) combined with the works of the two main intellectuals: Maurice Bardèche and Julius Evola (Mammone, 2015) or the Italian far-right actors. They were, just like the remnants of these movements in Central and Eastern Europe brought together by the “anticommunist” belief and advocated for an ideological radicalization, rejecting the existing order and regenerating activism. In their view, fascism had to be pure, an aspiration, but also able to cross borders, and, consequently, be de-territorialized and independent from existing world powers. The most relevant examples of this trend were Jean-François Thiriart’s *Jeune Europe*, and also movements like *Ordine Nuovo*

and *Avanguardia Nazionale* in Italy, *Ordre Nouveau* in France, or the *Círculo Español de Amigos de Europa* (CEDADE) in Spain (EuropeNow, 2020). After the 1968 momentum and the evident global decline in prestige of the Left worldwide, the slow but steady consolidation of the right led to a new change in the political spectrum. Until 2000, the persistence of the right was only bolstered by the dominance of the neoliberal post-Cold War politics.

As Mudde wrote, “mainstream European parties increasingly converged on a new elite consensus—a common agenda that called for integration through the EU, multi-ethnic societies, and neoliberal economic reforms,” thus creating a fertile breeding ground for far-right parties, “as many voters began to see political elites as indistinguishable from one another, regardless of their party affiliations.” (ibid). This convergence, together with the growing international terrorist threat, the growing migratory fluxes coming into Europe and, of course, the 2008 economic crisis, contributed to the perfect breeding ground of far-right parties in many countries to “call out” people’s fears after 2000. It is important to mention is the relevance of the younger militants and their engagement with the online space and social media. ‘As the political campaigns by Salvini’s *La Lega*, or by Abascal’s *Vox* have shown, an aggressive digital strategy can be extremely useful to reach and mobilize the sectors of the society who are more disenchanting with the current state of affairs’ (Forti 2018). This chapter is an exploration of more recent dynamics of the field that have continued in this context. Authors have discussed the “reassembly of the far-right”, its new facets and reach. This contribution analyses such changes and its drivers.

Key features of far-right landscape

Ideologically, the far-right landscape comprises two main categories. *Radicalism* which calls for “root and branch” reform of the political and economic system without explicitly seeking to eliminate all forms of democracy (Golder, 2016). It looks for the support of the people by criticising crucial aspects of liberal democracy, such as pluralism and minority rights and publicly condemn the use of violence as an instrument of politics. This is the most common variant of the right movement with the majority of far-right parties in Europe, such as the Sweden Democrats and the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), as well as the Justice and Development Party in Turkey (Jupskås and Leidig, 2020). *Extremism*, in contrast, is directly opposed to democracy and its features such as sovereignty and majority rule. Often inspired by fascism or national socialism, the extreme right views inequality as part of the natural order and not something that should

be subject to state intervention. It rejects all forms of ethnic or cultural diversity within a state and are open to violence for obtaining their political goals (ibid). For example, Golden Dawn can be classified as an extreme right group, if we define “extreme” as those that “are often openly racist, have clear ties to fascism and also employ violence and aggressive tactics” (Halikiopoulou, 2018). Furthermore, ‘extreme’ groups are typically opposed to democracy and reject cultural diversity (Gattinara et al. 2020).

In short, right-wing extremism can be defined as “anti-democratic opposition towards equality” (Jupskås and Segers, 2020), whereas right-wing radicalism can be defined as “illiberal opposition to equality” (ibid). As such, radical groups often seek to change a political system but will refrain from eliminating all aspects of democracy. This is in direct contrast to extremists whom seek to end democracy: the recent 2021 White House riots being an example (Golder, 2016). ”Historical key ingredients of far-right extremism (FRE) are racism, xenophobia, (ultra-)nationalism, an anti-democratic or anti-establishment stance and a call for a strong state, although individual FRE ideologies may not incorporate all these components” (Sterkenburg et al. 2019; p. 2). However, as it will be shown in the gender section below, gender-equality discourses have also become a key marker of the far-right.

Scholars recognize “nativist” components of the far-right ideology:

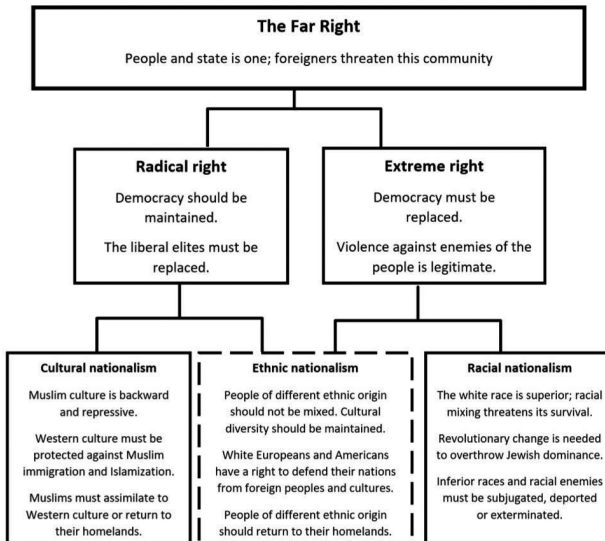


Figure 1. Extracted from Bjørgo and Ravndal (2019)

Cultural nationalists usually operate within a democratic framework and do not promote violence, although they may differ in their degree of radicalism. It is typically represented by radical-right populist parties and movements against immigration and Islam. These movements are not preoccupied with racial or cultural differences but promote assimilation (i.e. the idea that immigrants of a different ethnic and cultural origin should abandon their original culture and adopt Western culture) (ICCT, 2019; p. 4).

Ethnic nationalists are exemplified by the Identitarian movement in Europe (see *Generation Identity* in the youth section). “The Identitarians avoid speaking about “race” altogether, preferring to use the less stigmatised notion of “ethnic identity” instead. They believe that all ethnic groups, including whites, have an equal right of self-preservation but ethnic mixing and assimilation are considered to be harmful. To maintain ethnic diversity, which they see as valuable, different ethnic groups should be kept separate in order to preserve their unique norms, cultures, and characteristics. This idea is often referred to as “ethnopluralism” by the Identitarians tend to distance themselves from many core liberal values and promote conservative views on gender roles. They strongly oppose immigration, while they uphold European values. The Identitarians have embraced and popularised the conspiracy theory of “The Great Replacement”, claiming that policies by global liberal elites are intentionally replacing the native European populations with non-European peoples in a “genocide by substitution” (Sima 2019). They claim that in order to prevent the so-called “great replacement” of ethnic Europeans, it will be necessary that all or most people of foreign descent return to their homelands. “The Great Replacement” rhetoric has subsequently been adopted by cultural nationalists as well as by racial nationalists, and was on the title page of the manifesto of the “Christchurch terrorist” (ibid). To support these theories, individuals often portray issues within a black-and-white mindset (Obaidi, 2020), where far-right groups establish simple and easy solutions to perceived issues such as mass immigration (Roache, 2020).

Racial nationalists fight for the so-called “racial purity” and embrace totalitarian principles, drawing inspiration from National Socialism, Fascism, Christian Identity or varieties of white supremacy. This category is predominantly based on anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, targeting Jews as the problem for immigration and egalitarianism, which will destroy the white race (ibid; p. 5).

There is also a *civic nationalism* movement according to which the state is the primary unit of human organisation as individuals “choose”

to be members of the civic nations with its common cultural values and practices. Civic nationalism emphasises the ideas of both assimilation and repatriation as a method for achieving a monocultural state (Mudde, 2020).

A more recent dynamics of the radical/extreme far right groups is the growing cross-pollination between ideological positions. The usage of traditionally leftist ideology demands such as environmental protection and women’s rights helps nativist and nationalist agendas. What far-right groups try to do is blur the line between mainstream and far right politics by repackaging radical and extreme ideas in ways that resonate with widespread pop culture symbols and world-views. Hence, attracting in this way international media and influencing mainstream politics (Jupskås and Leidig, 2020).

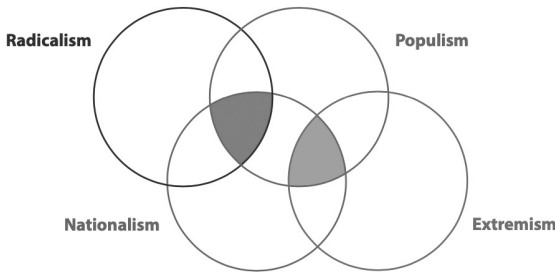


Figure 2. The four circles represent the core ideological features of the far right. The populism and nationalism circles in grey represent the fact that not all far right parties share nationalist or populist components and can also be found among mainstream parties. The purple area shows the combination of traits—radicalism, populism, and nationalism—that is increasingly dominant on the contemporary far right. The orange region indicates the location of fascism. Figure extracted from Golder (2016).

Populism has been a factor to spread widely among many far-right parties and has been influenced by them at the same time. Populism now is seen as fighting against Europe’s elite which includes the established political parties, intellectuals, the media and the economic upper class; all of whom are considered responsible for society’s ills. Unlike elitism, populism considers the people to be at the core of society’s decisions and the morally superior group. Populism views society divided in “the corrupt elite” and

“the pure people” with majority rule at its core. It calls for increased use of referenda, popular initiatives, and direct executive elections. The simple, ordinary people” who have suffered from disengaged representatives and ignorant elites who do not understand their struggle anymore and oppose the elitist nature of liberal democratic politics, the scale and pace of the ethnic change, and the increasingly capitalistic and unequal economic settlement. Populism views society divided in “the corrupt elite” and “the pure people” with majority rule at its core. It calls for increased use of referenda, popular initiatives, and direct executive elections.

National Populism has been in the last decade most visible in Central and Eastern Europe. Fighting internal and external enemies of the “state”, be them Muslims, Roma, neighbouring nations; LGBT people, ecologists, feminists; liberal elites, Brussels, George Soros, Jews, national populists argue society works better if heterogeneous. They place western Europe as an antithesis to their own region, while all the same are defenders of a “declining” West. ” (Eatwell & Goodwin (2018, p. 69).

Fascism: Although part of the far-right spectrum, fascist parties in Europe are not very frequent anymore. It has been written that the way fascism can still be viewed today, although sporadic, is through the so called “groupuscular right”; a group composed of militant activists who continue to promote various forms of revolutionary nationalism. Unlike fascist parties that seek to establish a new political system through national rebirth, most radical right parties are reactionary in that they desire a “return” to a mythical and idealized version of the past where states were ethnically homogeneous. Several far-right groups ranging from the English Defence League in the UK, to the Golden Dawn in Greece use gender values to progress their values against a supposed threat, for example immigration (Fangen and Skjelsbaek, 2020). In Eastern Europe, political parties such as Slovenská Národná Strana and Liga Polskich Rodzin, are rooted in deep anti-government and anti-immigration values, which many be shared by other groups in Eastern Europe (Buščíková, 2018). Greece’s Golden Dawn and Hungary’s Jobbik, with their youth movements and paramilitary organizations, have recently rekindled concerns with electoral forms of fascism” (Golder, 2016). Several far-right groups ranging from the English Defence League in the UK, to the Golden Dawn in Greece use gender values to progress their values against a supposed threat, for example immigration (Fangen and Skjelsbaek, 2020). In Eastern Europe, political parties such as Slovenská Národná Strana and Liga Polskich Rodzin, are rooted in deep anti-government and anti-immigration values, which many be shared by other groups in Eastern Europe (Buščíková, 2018).

Essentially, most groups share common features, or are inspired by certain values and threats:

- “Racial supremacy/replacement, anti-government, policy-centred beliefs such as anti-abortion, civil liberties, and pro-gun rights, and misogyny” (Ong, 2020; p. 1). Some far-right groups, such as those in the Balkans, however, refuse to be identified as far-right and instead as ‘third way’. These groups “advocate the return to tradition as the only possible means to restore authentic national and European values” and sovereignty (Mulhall and Khan-Kuf, 2020; pp. 47).
- Whilst there are some extremists that carry out attacks alone - “lone wolves” - a common feature is the importance of group hierarchy (Roache, 2020). Even with lone wolves, many are involved in online communities, often aspiring and being inspired by similar like-minded individuals.
- Right-wing radical groups overall employ the attitude of “us vs them”, where “them” may refer to political elites, refugees and migrants, ‘left’ wing groups or thinkers, LGBTQI+ communities, Jews, Muslims, and other targets of hate or communities singled out because of their perceived difference and the ‘threat’ they pose to a right-wing group’s collective ethnic identity. (Jupskås, 2020). It is also argued, however, that although it is important to explore these trends between different groups, such groups are evolving, “namely the emergence of a transnational and post-organisational threat” (ibid). In this online, transnational state, groups are less focused on traditional groups structures and hierarchies and are instead using social media to recruit, inspire and connect with other networks (Ong, 2020).
- Important to note is a new wave called “accelerationism”, exacerbated by the pandemic and driven by a violent agenda (ADL, 2018; Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2020).

Current research into the far-right movement is increasingly directed to the ‘re-assemblage’ of far-right extremism in Europe today (Forchtner & Kolvraa, 2017), in particular associated with digital cultures, involving transformations of fandom, gamification, ‘meme-magic’, consumer cultures, conspiracy theories and identity politics, and new expressions of occultism which we will analyse in the following chapters. There are important convergences occurring across far-right movements and cultures, evident in the development of pan-European far-right movements and platforms. These are linked in particular to forms of networking practices and cultures associated with social media, online gaming, and

digital cultures. Far-right violent extremism is the fastest growing form of violent extremism in Europe today. Part of the complexity comes from the diversity of this extremism, shaped by different national and regional cultures, which bring very different relationships with far-right traditions, extremisms and memories of violence.

Contemporary mutations

Populism and the dealignment of political representation: Academic literature on far-right extremism is dominated by studies of the rise of populist political parties and movements, framed in terms of a ‘dealignment’ of political parties and representation (Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015; Abou-Chadi and Kraus, 2020). This development is explored in terms of the emergence of anti-immigration movements (Abbas, 2020), movements structured around fear of crime (Amengay & Stocjemer 2019; Burscher, van Spanje and de Vreese, 2015) and loss of employment as part of responses to deindustrialisation. These movements are frequently framed as political expressions of the ‘losers in globalisation’ (Alfonso and Papadopoulos 2020, Agarin 2020).

Adverse impacts of globalisation: The discipline of political science in particular points to changing patterns of political structuration, where political parties and debates are less organised in terms of economic categories, and increasingly structured by cultural themes. Anxiety about change is presented as a driver of authoritarianism, while fear of the impact of migration is seen as a driver of xenophobia, which in some cases can develop into anti-immigrant violence. It is argued that what unifies these different actors is a belief in the adverse impact of globalisation and associated new mobilities.

Rejection of bureaucratic politics: Studies of populist movements argue that they are characterised by a rejection of bureaucratic, impersonal organisational processes and political models. This is articulated and mobilised by political actors in terms of ‘the people’ versus ‘the elites’, sustaining political ideologies framed as anti-elitist, anti-institutional, and anti-parliamentary democracy.

Beyond status-frustration of the losers of globalisation: Significant currents within academic literature caution against seeing violent right-wing extremism as a consequence or an extension of populist movements. Such ‘causal’ analyses suggest that violent right-wing extremism is ‘caused’ by social polarisation, negative personal experiences or social and psychological needs (Pisoiu 2015). While ‘status frustration’ may

be an important dimension of the rise of certain expressions of populism, the empirical evidence for this in relation to the passage to extreme violence appears limited. Pisoiu examines pathways to violent extremism in Germany, highlighting the shift from ‘skinheads’ to ‘autonomous nationalists’ in the case of far-right activists, with jihadist violence more associated with themes of ‘guilt’ rather than economic exclusion. Rather than seeking ‘causal factors’, the study of violent extremism needs to capture ‘agency’ and ‘meaning’; something she suggests points to culture that she frames in terms of ‘sub-cultures of political violence’. Other approaches that argue on similar lines propose that far-right extremism needs to be understood as a social movement.

The creative re-assembling of far-right extremism in Europe today

‘Re-assembling’ far-right extremism - from political ideologies to the construction of subjectivities: Forchtner and Kolvraa (2017) explore this re-assembling in terms of the ‘cultural imaginaries’ of the extreme right, through an examination of neo-Nazi groups and networks on Facebook. They argue that the scientific focus on populist parties has led to an insufficient analysis of extremist groups. These include, among others, contemporary Nazism and the increasing interpenetration of Nazi themes with contemporary youth culture through forms of ‘bricolage’ or creative re-assembling and ad-hoc improvisation. They explore what they argue is a new ‘scale of values’ emerging in contemporary fascism, that involve a break with classical expressions of energy, dynamism, power, movement, willpower and youth. While some expressions of this take the form of hyper-masculinity, as in the Nordic Resistance Movement, others are more connected with intimacy and authenticity.

The politics of memory: The field of memory, and particularly of those symbolic elements for democracy (the memory of the Holocaust, colonialism etc) is a critically contested space in European societies; not only as part of the attempt by populist movements to reframe national narratives (Petzold 2020, Steenvoorden and Harteveled 2018), but also as a site for the production of local ‘memory landscapes’ that may play a key role in creating diverse and pluralist communities (Saunders 2020).

Lifestyles: Food cultures, national socialism and veganism: Forchtner and Kolvraa explore the importance of visual media – from YouTube videos to Facebook – exploring the way food cultures associated with veganism have proved fertile grounds for expressions of Nazism, evident in the Nazism of *Balacalava Küche* (Balacalava Kitchen) and the wide network it

was part of on Facebook. What is critical to understand here, they argue, is less far-right political ideologies than the *construction of subjectivities*.

Consumption: Fashion and Nipsters (Nazi hipsters): Other researchers point to the ‘mainstreaming’ and transformation of neo-Nazism through consumer culture, in particular through the growth of global fashion brands that celebrate key dimensions of Nazism. Elke Gaugele (2019) highlights the importance of ‘street’ fashion, through which celebrations of Nazism become associated with its semantic capital of rebellion and commodification of protest and resistance. These emergence of neo-Nazi street-style fashion brands break with the skinhead style of street violence. Here Nazism is instead framed in terms of the ‘Nipster’, where fashion is emerging as a vehicle for unification of European Identitarianism and the US alt-right.

Pre-Christian religions, Nordic mythologies, Satanism: An important challenge facing researchers is to understand the significance of new religious movements such as Nordic mythologies and the Occult and Satanism to violent far-right extremism. In some cases this appears to be more an identity marker, but in others the synthesis of ‘left-hand path Satanism’ and Neo-Nazism recurs across groups committed to violent extremism such as the System Resistance Network and Sonnenkrieg Division in Europe, extensions of the US-based Atomwaffen Division and the Order of Nine Angles (O9A), that emerged from this group. Occult symbols such as the Black Sun (*Sonnenrad*) were associated with the author of the Christchurch massacre in 2018, while the far-right extremist who murdered a UK member of Parliament Jo Cox as part of the campaign for Brexit in 2016 was connected to occult networks.

The re-assembly of far-right extremism and the digital culture

The creative re-assembly of the European far-right in digital culture represents a critical challenge to both researchers that are more familiar with international politics than memes, and to practitioners who understand radicalisation in terms of the recruitment of the vulnerable. The critical challenge is to understand the kinds of *agency* present in the re-assembly of right-wing extremism in the digital space. One of the most significant expressions of agency in the digital space is *fandom*, that Jenkins (2006) suggests is not simply a source of cultural innovation but a model of citizenship and activism. We can see this in the three-finger salute of *Hunger Games* in protests ranging from the United States to Hong Kong, Myanmar, and Thailand. Marc Tuters explores such ‘transmedia organising’

(Costanza-Chock 214), arguing that this involves ‘the co-creation of world-building leading to narratives or story elements dispersing across multiple delivery channels’ (2019 45).

Digital platforms, Pepe the Frog and LARPing: In the case of far-right extremism, such ‘world-building leading to narratives’ emerged out of digital platforms such as 4chan, based on anonymity and ‘mask culture’ (McDonald 2015, Tuters 2019). Tuters argues that this culture that emerged on 4chan represents a ‘deep vernacular’ where individual identity is ‘effaced by the totemic deployment of memes’ (2019 40). These processes are evident in the world building evident in the significance of bizarre figures such as *Pepe the Frog*, or the convergence of Incel misogyny and gaming culture in #Gamergate. This, making the /pol/ board of 4chan and later 8chan as critical locations for the world-building and narratives associated with novel convergences of Nazism and youth culture. In such cases, far-right activism blurs into expressions of LARPing (Live Action Role Playing) (May and Feldman 2019).

Gamification of violent extremism: Mirroring its significance in violent jihadism (McDonald 2018), gamification has become increasingly significant in far-right extremism (Tuters 2019). This is most evident in ideas of ‘score’ and images of agency articulated by killers, as in the attack on a synagogue in Halle in October 2019.

LARPing and the production of conspiracies: Gamification is increasingly important as a source of the production of conspiracies. This is evident in the creation of ‘Pizzagate’ on 4chan, which emerged out of communications where participants on the 4chan /pol/ board set out to explore leaked email communications. They believed that they had discovered a secret cabal of child abusers among Democrat politicians who were using a Washington Pizza parlour to traffic children, described as the emergence of ‘post-truth protest’ (Tuters et al 2018).

Hiding in plain sight - symbols: An important dimension of far-right extremism is the role of symbols as media of communication, structured around hidden messages (Miller-Idriss 2019). This is an important dimension of extremist far-right consumerism, where hidden references to Nazism are to be found on T-shirts and home furnishings (Kekistan). Understanding this domain has emerged as a critical challenge for contemporary policing.

Hiding in plain sight – conspiracies: Conspiracy theories are both a product of far-right extremism, and increasingly a fundamental vehicle for the discovery of, and engagement with, far right themes (Sturm and Albrecht 2020). One well-known example is the development of conspiracy theories around Covid-19 associated with movements ranging

from anti-Vax activists to conspiracy theory activists that have emerged out of the ‘9/11 Truth Movement’ in the United States, and which now have a significant presence in Europe. Key aspects of the QAnon conspiracy theory figure in the communications of the author of the attack on two Shisha bars in Hanau, Germany, in 2020. In this case, the attacker claimed that the United States was ruled by a power group involved in Satanism and child abuse; this group involved in murderous rituals taking place in hidden underground bases (McDonald 2020).

While concerning US politicians, this conspiracy theory has ongoing impact across Europe; from the claims made by the Hanau murder in 2020, to the emergence of *#SaveTheChildren* networks in Europe as significant pathways for women in particular to become part of extreme-right activism. This pathway, based on Pizzagate, is premised on the conviction that those in power throughout Europe are part of a conspiracy committed to mind control and child abuse.

The ecology of far right extremism

According to the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, between 2017 and 2019 there has been a rise in right-wing violent extremism by lone wolf actors or by small cells, while being directed by larger organisations (TE-SAT, 2018). On this note, there is an increasing prevalence of the ‘manosphere’ where individuals will coordinate attacks (Lewis, 2019). The ability for far-right groups to operate in a globalised environment is also due to the considerable influence that social media has in communication. Social media influence has allowed far-right groups to spread their influence and, consequently, “these groups are far more communicative, sharing outrage, ideologies, platforms and in some cases defence and military training” (Daniei et al, 2020). This overall exploitation of the online space to spread ideology and conspiracy theories results in the radicalisation of individuals. Using the terminology of popular video games, and also memes, is a method used to attract young people (Daniei et al, 2020). Algorithms on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Reddit also provide far-right groups with an increased space to spread extremist views (Roache, 2020).

Several factors have been invoked to explain the emergence of extremist ideologies - be it inserted into mainstream politics, identity politics or the rise of populism and ethno-nationalism - or at the root of extreme far right groups and movements: economic causes, globalisation and trade interdependence, rising inequality and adverse income shocks generated

by the recession. There are also *cultural factors* playing into the picture, such as opposition to multiculturalism, backlash against the cultural evolution over the past 50 years (meaning evolution over gender equality, laws addressing discrimination against LGBTQI+ rights and other sexual minorities). However, some factors may be both cultural and economic, as is the case of the opposition to immigration. Although, anti-immigration attitudes are not new, the 2015 refugee crisis has been used by the far right to further mobilise the support for stricter anti-immigration policies and intensified discourses that scapegoats immigrants for societal issues.

The economic adversities towards immigration are partly borne from the fear of competition over jobs with domestic workers. The cultural adversities come from fear as well, but this time stemming from presuming that migrants will not adapt to local cultures or will change local cultures, mentalities or practices (Noury and Roland, 2020) (On the same line, empirical research has shown that not only individuals' or groups' negative perceptions of outgroup members ("they are threatening our culture") are important to consider, but also meta-perceptions of symbolic threats relating to oneself viewed by others as a threat ("I believe they think that we threaten their culture"). This, which fuels outgroup violence and influence party votes (ibid; p. 4). This is evident in the COVID-19 pandemic, in which immigrants and refugees have been blamed for spreading the virus (Mulhall and Khan-Ruf, 2020). The anti-immigration discourses that far-right groups employ are often justified under the banner of threat by immigrants who take away their jobs and a perceived fear of demographic change (Chhor, 2018). Some far-right extremists refer to themselves as altruists who are 'protecting' their country, people and community against 'invading' populations of immigrants (Close, 2020). This idea of the 'Islamification' of Europe motivated far-right extremists to control demographics and target increasing birth rates from Muslim ethnic minorities.

A cultural "threat" that is becoming prominent, especially in Eastern Europe, is "homonegativity". Of course, the narratives surrounding homosexuality are quite differently framed in Eastern versus Western Europe. Research has shown that negativity towards the LGBTQI+ community stems in part from religiosity, economic insecurity, and uneven educational opportunities. There is also the factor of uneven transitions to democracy and cultural inflexibility characterising the post-communist EE states. Therefore, homosexuality is associated with perceptions of threat, failed morals and consequences of personal choice such as drug addiction, heavy drinking or even AIDS (Bolzendahl and Gracheva, 2017).

In Western nations, although being part of the LGBTQI+ community does not influence voter behaviours that substantially, right wing parties have traditionally been supporting (or having at their nucleus of their ideologies) the traditional forms of authority, patriarchal family structures and conservative attitudes towards sexual relations. One belief associated with the far-right ideology is that one's identity based on sexual orientation introduces a level of individualism which is threatening people's solidarity and its overall unnatural and very much corrupting society, family and young people everywhere (Siegel, 2017).

The 2015 refugee crisis has been used by the far right to further mobilise the support for stricter anti-immigration policies and intensified discourses that scapegoats immigrants for societal issues. Together with the reaction of member states to close borders, reform immigration policies to curtail the number of people seeking asylum a country could admit, and reinstate identification checks, right-wing nationalists have flooded the European media with this myth. Also according to the myth, white women's bodies are in need of the paternalist state's protection from the possible sexual violence by brown men so borders should be kept shut and immigration policies harshened. And so, the feminist arguments against sexual violence is used to express inflated nationalist concerns about the insecurity of national and European borders (Carroll, 2017).

There are notable differences, therefore, in the shape and narrative of the localization of the far-right in Europe, which is different in manifestations, despite its transnational character. In specific areas of Europe, like Eastern Europe, , the spread of far-right attitudes and values coincided with the end of the Cold War. Particularly in the context of the former Yugoslavia, resulted in revolts against socialist ideology (Mulhall and Khan-Ruf, 2020; p. 46). In Croatia, young people are drawn into far-right groups by popular sport culture (for Poland, see Kossakowski et al 2018 and for Hungary see Molnar & Whigham 2021). Furthermore, in schools World War II history is downplayed and ideologies that consumed the region, such as fascism and Nazism, are not explored well enough (Milekic, 2020). This is important from an educational perspective, especially considering the impact and role that the media has in spreading far-right rhetoric (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2017). Moreover, far-right extremists in Croatia are influenced by the country's roots in "ultra-nationalism", of which the spread of ideas on "ethnic supremacy" dating back to the country's independence wars in the 1990s (Jegic, 2020). The various independence wars of the former Yugoslavia countries, in addition to war crimes committed in the region – notably the

Bosnian genocide – are likely to have contributed to waves of “hyper-nationalism” within the countries.

Elsewhere in Europe, these discourses, some of which have emerged in recent years, have intensified the “us” and “them” narratives normalised through right-wing radical populism. In Europe, right wing populist have been exploiting economic recessions and anxiety in order to push for anti-immigration and nationalist programs (Noury and Roland, 2020). An example is The People’s Party-Our Slovakia which was recognised as a major social media presence alongside the Hungarian Jobbik party (Bayer, 2018). Finally, modernisation grievances have also been linked to far-right success. The social-psychological condition of not being able to cope with rapid and fundamental societal change, feeling like the “modernisation loser” generates frustration at the perceived inability of mainstream parties to offer solutions, has opened up the path to the right’s simplistic and nativist narratives and politics (Golder, 2016; p. 483).

The refugee crisis, economic recessions and ethnic diversity have had an impact on the political landscape of Europe. Yet, pull factors such as technological improvements to communication over the internet have also played a role in how far-right groups have evolved and given rise to online-inspired terrorism and extremism. As seen by the *Halle* synagogue shooting in 2019, in Germany, lone actors have responded to technological improvements by livestreaming attacks online and are encouraged by fellow viewers to carry out attacks (Ravndal et al. 2020).

Also seen in the literature is the assumption that whilst Islamist extremism has been around for a while often quoting attacks such as 9/11 right-wing extremism is often discussed as being a ‘new phenomenon’ (Abbas, 2017). Yet, Rapoport’s (2016) argument questions this understanding and puts right-wing extremism into two potential branches: that “modern right-wing terror is really part of the fourth, religious wave of terrorism; or that it is merely a continuation of long-standing right-wing groups (and that those groups engage in what might be called “non-wave” or “counter-wave” types of terrorism)” (Auger, 2020).

Ethno-nationalist groups with anti-immigrant and particularly anti-Muslim xenophobia narratives are pushing the story of the hardworking European natives suffering the economic and cultural losses of immigrant and ethnic minorities’ integration. Examples of this are the AfD in Germany; the far-right, anti-immigrant Lega Nord (“Northern League”) in Italy; Jobbik in Hungary and Generation Identity across Europe propagating anti-Semitic narratives for young people (Counter Extremism Project, 2021a). Consequently, right wing populism and hate speech are rising and

spreading robustly in Europe which contributes to a significant growth in “homegrown” radicalisation (ESPAS, 2019).

Far-right groups have also rebranded their identities to differ from neo-Nazi groups and advocate for “ethnopluralism” rather than “apartheid” in an attempt to gain more support and influence (Roache, 2020). Subsequently, there is a new wave of Philosemitism: the growth of identity politics has generated a new notion of nationhood, based on the concept of a shared culture, with far-right parties trying to avoid the traditional association with Nazi or neo-Nazi elements in order to achieve relevance. And so, there is an increase in support among Jewish communities for the far-right, despite the continued existence of anti-Semitic sentiments alongside philosemitism (Rose, 2020). This trend is observed despite the fact that more anti-Semitic incidents are taking place, especially online campaigns against Jews and hate crime (Kingsley, 2019). This reflects a wider trend of the ideology of far-right groups. In the past, neo-Nazi groups used ideology as a tool to effectuate uniformity. Nowadays, ideology is much more regarded as a personal quest by far-right extremists. Far-right extremists support groups online based on affinity with particular expressions or a single issue put forward by the far-right group (Sterkenburg, 2020).

Is far-right extremism a social movement?

There is an increasing interconnectedness with far-right groups and social movements, whereas right wing organisations and movements are seen to maintain international links. Far-right extremists in recent years have established links with individuals from social movements that do not typically align with far-right values; “the events themselves, and participation in them, has a radicalizing effect. And they also have an inspirational effect. The battle of Capitol Hill is now part of the mythology” (Selsky, 2021). Some U.S. neo-Nazi groups have created a European presence. Atomwaffen Division and other U.S.-based groups have inspired European offshoots such as the Feuerkrieg Division. The Nationalist Social Club has established followers in countries such as Germany and Bulgaria (Counter Extremism Project, 2021).

Contemporary far-right movement have evolved to vary among each other on the account of ideology, membership and strategy, with some of them only mobilising on the streets because they lack resources (such as the Nordic Resistance Movement), while others consider themselves as part of a movement that will change people’s mentality (the Identitarians, for example). Social movements such as the English Defence League or

PEGIDA have been increasingly successful at organising protests against Islam and refugees (Jupskås and Leidig, 2020).

Right-wing extremists, and even groups, can be seen to mix and traverse with other social groups, especially if these groups contain similar perspectives and views. The transnational nature of far-right extremism connects individuals globally, both in the online and offline environments (CTED, 2020). This is because, just like other forms of radicalisation, far right extremism “takes place at the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory, where the process is triggered by personal experiences, kinship, friendship, group dynamics and socialisation” (Sterkenburg et al. 2019; 4). In fact, authors such as Daniel Byman explains the broadness and interconnectedness of far-right groups, “right-wing terrorism should be seen as a label of convenience that lumps together various causes” (Auger, 2020; pp. 88). Thus, more recent definitions of far-right extremism has also included conspiracy theories in its definition as “a decentralized, grand and multifaceted phenomenon, at once a conspiracy theory, a political movement and a quasi-religion, with variants tailored to chime with different subcultures and national contexts” (Mulhall and Khan-Ruf, 2021; p. 8).

Right-wing extremists, therefore, are often interlinked with other social groups in society. For example, whilst the *Soldiers of Odin* claim not to be a neo-Nazi group to be ‘protecting’ women, there are several connections with the Nordic Resistance Movement (HopeNotHate, N.A). Social movements that come up in response to societal issues such as the 2015 migration crisis have provided the opportunity for an increase in far-right engagement of grassroots involvement (Gattinara and Pirro, 2018).

There are also less internally structured and institutionally oriented organisations in contrast to parties or social movements, called *media and intellectual organisations*. They seem to focus their work on indirectly changing public debates rather than influencing voting or policymaking. With a very loose structure, they are mostly made of think tanks, clubs, online and offline media organisations and their activities vary from organising conferences to publishing books or magazines (eg. GRECE in France and the publishing houses Arkos and Counter-Currents) (Jupskås and Leidig, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, measures by governments have flared up cross-pollinations. In Ireland, for example, far-right extremists are known to mix with anti-mask protests (Gallagher, 2020). This has also extended to other anti-COVID movements in Germany to the point where far-right extremists are involved in a mass majority of ongoing protests (Rettman,

2020). In Germany, which has been described as the epicentre of anti-lockdown movements in Europe during the COVID-19 (Ankel, 2020), far-right extremists have been involved in anti-vaxxer protests and more general protests against government lockdown measures (Gossner, 2021). Due to the large number of protests occurring in Germany, the nature of protests included “conspiracy theorists, radical extremists, anti-Semites”; all of whom mix with ordinary citizens to unite against a shared goal, in this context, government’s COVID measures (Ankel, 2020a). Branches of *Generation Identity* have also infiltrated other types of protests and social movements in countries such as the UK. Whilst far-right extremists have mixed with these social movements, some grassroots movements have also actively attempted to get extremists to take part (Briggs and Goodwin, 2018).

The inclusion of individuals from different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities in movements such as the US Capitol insurrection, are further evidence of the growing interconnection between far-right individuals and social movements (Newton, 2021). Moreover, it is often difficult to distinguish social movements, of which seek to challenge existing structure, with far-right groups. This can be seen with groups such as *Greenpeace* and *Extinction Rebellion*: environmental groups that use unorthodox techniques to enforce climate action. Furthermore, the online environment makes it possible for far-right extremists to interact with social movements and other groups without needing to declare formal membership, thus increasing the spread of the ideology (Janik and Hanks, 2021). It is also possible for independence movements to be linked with far-right extremists, such as the Catalonia independence movement.

Important to note are also *subcultures* which may define the contemporary far-right, especially among youth. “They comprise a myriad of loosely linked groups sharing specific identities, values, and codes. These subcultures differ from other organizations because while they coalesce around far right cultural objects (e.g., music or sports), they rest on a fluid organizational structure and lack internal institutions. Furthermore, their primary motivation is often more identity-related than political. Because of their looseness and emphasis on identity building, it is often difficult for parties and other more established political groups to form enduring collaborations with them. Most far right subcultures today are also present online and on social media platforms and mobile applications such as 4chan, 8kun (previously 8chan), Telegram, and Signal, which illustrates that the far right is quickly adapting to new technologies to spread their ideology, recruit members, and mobilize support” (Jupskås and Leidig, 2020).

Main drivers of radicalisation

Drivers at the micro level

Psycho-sociology has much to contribute to the understanding of violent extremism (VE), but that should not lead to the understanding of a general shared psychopathology; it rather provides valuable insights into group dynamics or “groupthinking” processes and the feeling of commitment and friendship that leads to very strong and prolonged dedication to the cause. The openness to extreme violence can be understood based on a variety of factors and their interaction, keeping in mind that no single factor can validly describe why some people or groups choose the violent path. Based on both academic and grey literature, the following section will analyse some of the ‘psychological factors’ seen as common in perpetrators of VE acts.

Individual-level attributes matter widely because, due to their background and pre-existing individual narratives and outlook on life, certain types of individuals will be more vulnerable to VE groups and organisations. As a result of these structural issues, the identities are blurred, which can refer to a lack of hope and self-actualisation. This, ultimately leading to individuals seeking for a purpose - aptly filled by far-right groups (Abbas, 2017; p. 56).

One of the reasons for right-wing extremists’ behaviour is believed to begin in dysfunctional familial and interpersonal relations. The stress of dysfunctional family relationships can predispose young people to seek belonging with peer groups, gangs, or the “fictive kin” of a violent extremist group. In search of safety and the comfort of a substitute family, young people can become susceptible to the familial narrative of a violent extremist group (Nemr and Savage, 2019). Whilst relatively few individuals have family members involved in violent groups, many report growing up in environments marked by racism, prejudice and extreme right-wing views. Moreover, the search for acceptance and belonging seems to be one of the most prominent pull factors into right-wing groups. Many far-right extremists lack social connections and report being isolated and lonely before finding friends in the extreme right. The desire to maintain these links motivates extremists to deepen their involvement and helps them deal with extreme ideas or actions they might otherwise feel uncomfortable with. Some of the factors resulting from issues with family backgrounds include: maltreatment and abuse; dysfunctional family environments; absent family members;

childhood trauma; poor relationships with family members; permissive environments for extremism (Copeland and Marsden, 2020).

However, common factors related to psychological distress such as toxic or lacking familial support, rigid mindset, avenging the death of a loved one or reciprocate for pain inflicted on their communities, is not always the case; the truth is nuanced giving that research shows radicalised individuals also come from “normal” and non-toxic backgrounds (Jupskås and Leidig, 2020; p. 50). In many cases, what brings violent extremists together is their shared dedication to a particular vision of how society ought to be organised, and/or their strong questioning of the foundations upon which their societies are presently organised. A strong commitment to an ideology does not exclude personal motivations or economic advantages. These opinions are often driven, in part, by culture-based and culture-specific perceptions of what is fair and unfair, just and unjust. Women’s participation, support and vulnerability to VE groups or movements have to also be analysed from a cultural perspective.

Distraught individuals looking for meaning, a sense of brotherhood / sisterhood, companionship, and a conceptual framework to make sense of a bewildering environment may be particularly at risk. Yet again, however, it is difficult to separate such personal attributes from the environments that often promote them. Thus, for instance, widespread social exclusion, marginalisation and dispossession may feed the search for empowerment through violence. Combining these feelings of marginalisation with external events, such as the pandemic, promotes the ideals of far-right groups, of which offer a sense of direction and family (Mulhall and Khan-Ruf, 2020). By the same token, for reasons analysed earlier, urban or peri-urban enclaves that are culturally and socio-economically alienated from mainstream society may encourage a propensity to lash out at that society (USAID, 2009). Furthermore, “an individual may fuse emotionally with the mutual sufferings of their in-group at home or abroad, which further lowers complexity of thought and can be used by radicalizers and recruiters to legitimize violence” (Nemr and Savage, 2019; p. 3).

Another factor is related to education, or lack thereof, as a driver of radicalisation. Research shows that “the term education refers not only to formal schooling but also education across the life course, in formal and non-formal settings, such as popular culture” (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2017; p. 135). In addition to formal education and media rhetoric, individuals – particularly youth – are influenced by the non-formal cultural environment, including music, clothing and aesthetics. Clothing can become part of an identity, as with music concerts or music in general

becoming an entry point. With this in mind, individuals radicalised into far-right groups may similarly find interest and/or opportunities in other social movements (Copeland, 2019; Copeland and Marsden, 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2020).

Alongside these factors, “pull factors” play a significant role in the decision of adherence or support for a VE group. These would be: the appeal of the leader, diverse rewards which membership in a group or movement gain such as social status, materials, jobs and an overall sense of purpose, adventure and a sense of a higher purpose.

Emphasis is added on a particular pull factor and that is networks and social relationships that often attract people into VE groups and the group dynamics that eventually “seals the bond” and radicalises them (Danieş et al. 2020).

What is important to note is that the nuances of the analysis should be equally seen from the cultural, economic, social and political and personal experience of both men and women. This, while recognising the perhaps underestimated linkages between their participation beyond gender, which tend to be separated by the patriarchal view on VE participation. However, there is not enough empirical research based on gender differentiating data that accounts for women’s agency on the ground and in the online space, part of VE, or radicalised. We must put emphasis on “how” they are drawn into radicalisation to better understand the why and act in prevention and countering.

Drivers at the meso level

Psychological factors that pull individuals into considering their participation into violent acts or which act as a radicalisation element are closely related to their participation into certain groups, and closely related to the groups’ approach to them.

The lack of an individual and collective identity is a strong pull factor for vulnerable individuals, and these feelings of identity can arise from various socio-economic factors. The emphasis on individual and collective identity also plays a key role in women’s involvement in far-right groups, especially since far-right groups have mobilised female voters by linking their goals with women’s rights (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2019).

The group dynamics that drive people into far-right movements are usually seen as focused on binary thinking – between black and white. With this simplistic image, groups simplify their causes as being between “us” and “them”, which can extend to a number of focuses such as

immigration, religion, ethnicity, gender, and social status. Additionally, group dynamics often employ a sense of superiority, empowering otherwise vulnerable individuals within these groups (Copeland, 2019). For example, individuals with feelings of isolation will be drawn to groups that offer easy explanations, i.e. job loss as a result of immigration (Roache, 2020). This focus on “the other”, however, is framed in the sense of masculinity. In terms of masculinity, “the others” are not seen as men, either because they are too feminine, or reserved, or they generally do not possess typical masculine characteristics (Mudde, 2018). Crucially, the reason suggested here for why men join far-right groups is to reclaim their masculinity and, amongst other things, reclaim their social and economic status. “The other” typically involves non-white men, generally immigrants, whereby in joining far-right groups, masculine men are sought to defend “their women” and restore natural order (ibid).

Individual perceptions of threats and other extremist attitudes are often influenced or exacerbated by group behaviour. For example, “individual perceptions of economic threats have been linked with stronger anti-immigrant attitudes. Anti-immigrant attitudes have, in turn, been strongly linked with far-right support” (Golder, 2016; p. 484). Gaston (2017) describes that far-right extremists will seek to define a constructed enemy for their citizens to defend against, which is often justified under the lens of immigration. The same author correlates the rise and strength of far-right groups in Europe with the increase of migration. This narrative establishes a group identity against a perceived threat of the ‘other’. Moreover, within these group structures, individuals portray their ideology as an “absolute, unqualified truth and pits it against the ‘all bad’ out-group and their ‘false’ ideology” (Nemr and Savage, 2019). Under the latter, people are drawn towards far-right groups under the feeling that their identity, or group, is under threat. Again, this is where a strong anti-Muslim perspective gains weight, and in some cases, outweighs anti-immigration as the main threat to their way of life (Perraudin, 2019).

As seen by the UK’s EDL, although people joined to unite under the perceived threat of Islam, the lack of direction, motive and goal of the movement ultimately caused people to disengage from participating in the group (Allchorn, 2016). This feeling of connection, purpose and community is a strong driver that motivates individuals to join groups.

While many do join groups to engage in violent behaviour, some join far-right groups for other psychological and social needs (Bjorgo and Munden, 2020). These individuals are referred to as ‘followers’ who are influenced by the social attraction of joining a group and having a community. Some

examples of factors playing into this can be: seeking protection against discrimination and marginalisation, such as by being bullied previously; peer pressure from friends and other connections already inside the group structure; and the need for belonging (ibid).

Other group level dynamics include (Bjorgo and Munden, 2020): 1) militancy and the opportunism for violence. Here, less people are concerned about the ideology of the group and more by the opportunity to justify violent action; 2) family structure: this is the case where individuals are “born” into the narrative and group dynamics of far-right groups in their community and family.

Additionally, researchers split drivers of radicalisation into several levels, all of which can influence group dynamics (Sterkenburg et al., 2019):

- Conformists: who are motivated by the desire to please or support a friend – not ideologically driven but will support the cause;
- Loners: already radicalised meeting like-minded people;
- Wanderers: who see themselves as saviours defending the people of ‘the nation’ – convinced that migrants receive preferential treatment.

Far-right groups also react to individual vulnerabilities, particularly via voids in government responses. For example, groups are known to provide vulnerable individuals with material support, which can range from food and accommodation to also providing religious support (Abushi and Nordbruch, 2020).

While the profile of extremists varies significantly across regions and time periods, social networks and group dynamics consistently play a critical role in recruitment, self-recruitment and radicalisation.

An area to explore could be not only the reason why individuals join far-right groups (“us vs them”, for a sense of belonging, etc.), but why they stay and participate in these groups and if they join other groups at the same time. It might be useful in the case of policies or country specific programmes required for helping people to transition from VE groups.

Drivers at the macro level

It has been recognised that “the typical story is a social-psychological one in which individuals who are unable to cope with rapid and fundamental societal change—the modernization losers—turn to the far right” (Golder, 2016; p. 483).

Historical and recent trends show that rising frustrations are a more frequent driver of radicalisation and extremism rather than economic deprivation. That's because the upward mobile, educated and future orientated demographic show discontent with the local or global inability of sluggish economies, political and social discrimination, lack of true representation or gap in education on significant needs of the labour market and global economy (USAID, 2009; p. 20).

Social exclusion and marginality

Social exclusion and marginalisation, especially affecting the youth, may feed VE. This variable plays a significant role in building personal relationships and adhering to old or new group dynamics that are formed in response to the phenomena. The communities being born out of social dissatisfaction and social marginalisation are increasingly being formed online, though social media: Facebook, Instagram, 8kan, telegram, etc. This should be thoroughly analysed since violent discourses disseminated through online social channels are becoming increasingly popular (Townsend, 2021). This, attracting curiosity even in individuals who do not associate themselves with the movements (Odofer, 2015).

Economic and cultural exclusion

Individuals resorting to violence seek a measure of influence, recognition and dignity for their countries or regions as well as for themselves. Governments failing to remedy or address economic and cultural affairs – or which exist in a subordinate political position or in a precarious military situation – are bound to generate dissatisfaction, and with that, frustration and anger. This will then lead individuals to engage in widespread actions to remedy the situations, including through extreme violence. Moreover, there is a continuous argument that men are more likely to have suffered from the Neo-liberal economic restructuring and the post 2008 recession, “explanations for the electoral success of the populist right have stressed frustration in response to economic distress, massive migration, and economic globalization” (Caiani and Porta, 2018; p.16).

Endemic corruption, nepotism, cronyism and favouritism are also suggested to have possible linkages with VE. However, this is not to say that widespread corruption and impunity necessarily lead to a general response of VE, as the majority of times it either generates political disengagement or a feeling of an inescapable phenomena - without the need

to resort to violence. Some indirect linkages from corruption to VE is the former's ability to foster dissatisfaction by acting as a powerful deterrent on both domestic and private investment. Therefore, in relation to youth, unemployment can represent a major driver, especially for marginalised communities. As unemployment creates a particular individual narrative related to possible large amounts of free time, no purpose, no excitement and possibly no connections or friendships, VE movements may allow for new kind of adventures and excitement and above all, a sense of revenge on a system that seems to have turned its back on them (USAID, 2009; p. 40; Jupskås and Leidig, 2020; p. 53).

Civil injustice

The systematic denial of avenues for influencing decision-making at a local/national level while being confronted with corruption and unjust treatment based on lack of representation or lack of civil liberties, can lead to a significant influence to join VE groups or activities. Violence is seen as a justified modus in the face of exclusionary regimes. The state of political rights and civil liberties represent the decisive macro-variable, alongside economic variables, shaping a country's vulnerability to VE and radicalised citizens. Additionally, there is the predominant trend of "absolutizing" conflicts by the injection of religious imagery into the violence fed by political and social exclusion (USAID, 2009; p. 40)

Combined causes

Declining international collaboration, accompanied with the challenges faced by governments in different countries, has encouraged an increase in individuals exploring racial ideology (Mulhall and Khan-Ruf, 2021). This can be correlated with increasing themes of anger and frustration, either caused by human rights abuses or corrupt governance (Nemr and Savage, 2019), which leads to individuals joining groups for a sense of purpose and ability to express themselves (Pearson, 2018).

Social vulnerabilities can make it difficult for individuals to find a place in society, especially due to limited access to basic social conditions, such as education and housing. As a result, from past and current experiences, grievances can be formed, which then forms a route into far-right groups (Abushi and Nordbruch, 2020). Furthermore, youth experiencing entry barriers in their economic or political prospects or who are coming from disadvantaged economic backgrounds or developing countries are more

sensitive to experience relative deprivation and feel anger, denial and exclusion. It increasingly seems to grow as a cross-class phenomenon.

The role of gender

Intersectionality and the far-right.

The role of gender has been increasingly reconsidered within the far right in the past decade, with more attention to the numbers of women joining and their voting behaviours. Although research focusing on the data gap between women and men in far-right parties has risen in interest (Coffe, 2018; Harteveld and Ivarsflaten, 2016; de Lange and Mugge, 2015), studies have neglected the intersection between gender (as a social construct) with race and class as factors majorly playing into the pre-conditions of entering/ exiting VE groups (Crenshaw, 2017).

Across religions and regions, a common thread shared by extremist groups is that women's, gender groups' and minority groups' needs and agency are under fire. This mostly happens through attacks on rights to their education, to public life, to decision-making over their own bodies or to their very belonging to any of these groups. Identity politics depends on intersectionality in that many of them tend to use the argument that they are a minority, there is a special standard or treatment in place. What the problem seems to be is not the common understanding of the different ways people experience discrimination and violence given different identities – but how intersectionality goes from mere descriptive to prescriptive. The international security community in recent years has not paid much attention on an equally dangerous and arguably more pernicious form of radicalisation: extreme misogyny and the universalisation of the male experience – the generalisation of the (white) male reference point – which has not only made everyday life much harder for women, sexual and ethnic minorities, but perpetuated a kind of violence which is almost invisible (Perez, 2020). The far-right is capitalizing on these fears of (white) men being victimised by the rest of society, by minorities, by feminists.

Women in the far-right movement

In understanding women's desire to become members of violent extremist groups, it is also critical to recognize the nature of women's agency. Initial responses to the upswing in foreign women traveling to Iraq

and Syria to support ISIS (Huckerby,2015) have perpetuated stereotypes about women and Islam, assuming young Muslim women must be tricked or brainwashed, or only join ISIS to become ‘jihadi brides,’ and that they would not join if they knew the full extent of ISIS’ horrors toward women. While in some cases women may be motivated by romance or be unduly influenced, others are drawn to groups like ISIS for many of the same reasons as men: adventure, inequality, alienation and the pull of the cause (Huckerby, 2015) A study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue outlined three self-identified reasons why women travelled to ISIS: oppression of Muslims throughout the world; desire to contribute to state-building; and individual duty and identity (Hoyle, Bradford, 2015). However, policy and public discourse rarely acknowledge that women may have such grievances and motivations. In Western countries, it is Muslim women and girls, particularly in religious attire, who bear the brunt of the Islamophobic attacks and harassment that can increase alienation, as well as, for some, the appeal of ISIS narratives that position the West against Islam (ibid) .

There are women who do join violent extremism movements, some against their will but others with a measure of enthusiasm. They may join, as was mentioned earlier, because of the same root causes that make men join. Coming from conservative families, they may also be seduced by powerful internet advertisement imagery to join extremist groups as ‘liberation’ fighters. Academics describing such female combatants have spoken about their ‘ambivalent agency,’ that allows them a certain freedom from family and social restraints though they have to function within a strict hierarchy dominated by men (UN Women, 2015).

In 2017, after Corinna Miazga was elected to the German parliament for the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, a male colleague suggested she would be better suited to being a pole dancer than an MP. That may be so because she has not only cheated her role from *Kinder, Küche, Karce*” to a movement leader, but also speaks to her unlikability as a woman in that space and the extreme misogyny that is integral to the far-right (Gattinara, P.C., O’Connor, F.P., and Lasse 2018). Others like her, Alice Weidel, Georgia Meloni of the Brothers of Italy, Marine Le Pen of the French National Rally (former Front National), Pia Kjaersgaard, co-founder of the rampantly anti-immigration Danish People’s party, and Norway’s former finance minister, Siv Jensen, leader of the country’s similarly anti-immigration Progress party, have chosen far-right politics and have equally faced the challenge of being a woman inside the movement. That shows us, on the one side, that there has been a sharp rise in popularity of such groups amongst women participating

and leading. On the other side, it shows that the far-right has chosen, at least recently, to reframe their completely anti-feminist rhetoric in order to tap into the female vote bank. What it reveals is the characteristically nostalgic, mythic past in which women and men are destined to fulfil biological roles still lingers into the ideology of the far-right movements. Women are seen as fulfillers of their domestic destiny, wives and bearers of the future generation that will fix the declining birth rate and save humanity. Elise Thomas writes that the most common feature which unites extremist (online) communities - from national populists in Europe, pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine to white supremacists in the US and Islamic State supporters in the Middle East and Asia, is a fundamental disrespect for women (Thomas 2018). Julia Ebner writes in an essay that victimhood plays an important role. These narratives are capitalizing on multicultural environments and communities and are being used by the far-right to spread the propaganda of fundamentally backwards gender perceptions and to return to patriarchal and protectionist attitudes toward women. "Their traditionalist perceptions of gender roles and claims of ownership over women are, however, reflected in their language. For example, many counter-jihad accounts warn that Islam destroys "our women, our country, our sense of right and wrong and our lives," and claim that the "U.K. police let Muslim gangs rape our girls" or argue that they won't let migrants "treat our women as easy meat." (Ebner 2018: 37). As a result, women have developed an inner community of the far-right movement focusing on advancing the 'mother of the nation', patriarchal and submissive role women should have as mothers and partners.

Similar to the manosphere, women interact inside the movement to attract more 'tradwives' (traditional wives) and blame the personal and social problems they are facing on feminism and liberal thought. But the reason they are joining the TradWives is not political. Ebner writes in her book that, similar to men joining the manosphere, the search for love is what radicalises most TradWives and these women do not want to be 'saved' by feminism.

"Don't blame yourself, blame it on feminism, blame it on modernity. We have been brainwashed; it's normal that it takes you some time to go back to your natural state [...] Forget your career and just concentrate on the things men look for in a woman: make sure you always look great, are family oriented, cook very well, and show submission and respect" (Ebner, 2020: 60-1)

Part of the countermovement is to make their followers understand how to expose the hypocrisy, lunacy and lies of feminism and liberalism. The

steps these communities are using to attract their members follow, in most cases, a step-by-step guide:

Step 1. Exploit fears and grievances to cast doubt on the current system

Step 2. Blame a demonised out-group (e.g. feminists, liberals, immigrants, Muslims, LGBTQI+ people, racial minorities) for these societal failures by linking them to conspiracy theories

Step 3. Provide a radical solution to all existing problems (e.g. RedPilling, incelism, etc)

Influence of the so-called “anti-gender movements”

Politicians targeting LGBTQI+ people often propagate narratives promoted by the so-called “anti-gender movements”. For some years now, there have been reports about the expansion – in Europe and the rest of the world – of these increasingly organised, transnational, and well-funded movements, made-up of religious extremists and ultra-conservative organisations. The anti-gender movements call into question the concept of gender and whether it is a protected category in the human rights framework, promoting an ultra-conservative view of the family, sexuality and women’s role in society. Anti-gender movement actors seek to blur the lines for their audience by adopting the vocabulary of human rights, but what they are doing in reality is working to deprive other groups – mainly women and LGBTQI+ people – of their rights (CoE 2021). The restructuring of the far-right, or for that matter, of most extremist groups, to capitalize on originally leftist values to attract voters isn’t new but recently the anti-gender movements in politics has been increasing.

Toxic masculinity and the far-right’s promise land

“What if male identity, rather than racist ideology, is the most important reason why people join far-right groups” asks US sociologist Michael Kimmel in his book *Healing from Hate: How Young Men Get Into – and Out of – Violent Extremism* (Kimmel 2015). Although not so popular in security research – or often seen from the wrong perspective – toxic masculinity has a crucial role in the movement and should be seen as a ‘non-traditional’ threat that defies easy categorisation. Kimmel explains that, in part, men’s attraction to violent extremist groups is due to a need to reclaim manhood and restore a sense of masculine entitlement potentially at risk because of political and economic change, globalisation and a sense of not belonging. Research shows that this type of membership helps restore men’s sense

of manhood through violence, comradery, male bonding, fighting for a common cause and arguably, the power of providing protection (usually of women from different ‘others’). Identity politics and the connection to the perceived loss of (white) male privilege also provides a cultural impetus for social violence (Ravndal JA, Enstad J.D. 2020).

As discourses and practices pertaining to gender are integral to the nationalist ideology of the far-right, rigid masculinity and weak femininity are symbolic capital and an ideological resource and rhetorical device to problematize and aggravate the identities of those against whom they believe they are fighting. The need to protect women (and children) fuels particular forms of male empowerment but it is also a form of gendered violence. However, the far-right discourse of gender equality is adaptable depending on the ‘enemy’. Anti-immigrant groups characterised by Islamophobia (take EDL and Stop Islamisation of Norway as well as Pim Fortuyn List in the Netherlands) have mobilised on a common rhetoric of progressive gender values that oppose those of Islam, such as unequal and oppressive practices. And so, manipulating western liberal ‘values’ (mostly talking about white women’s emancipation), the far-right takes on an equality agenda for the LGBTIQ+ community as well. That is seen in the agendas of far-right political parties such as the French National Rally or For Britain but also in the speeches of alt-right celebrities like Milo Yiannopoulos or Norwegian activist Hege Stornhaug. Researchers and analysts have called these phenomena femonationalism and homonationalism – the manipulation of progressive gender policies for anti-immigration and anti-Islam purposes (Farris 2019).

Less dissected in this type of far-right analysis is the strong sense of white victimisation men assign to their status. Whether it’s coming from a feeling of white solidarity, a strong sense of white identity or the ‘left behind from the world’ attitude, men in the far-right all seem to be victims that need to use violence to preserve themselves and their world. The reasons might be either exaggerated (e.g. incels and the manosphere) or might be justified fears coming from downward economic mobility, the constant change in a globalising world or political disenfranchisement, as Kimmel suggests in his book (). If analysing the discourses of the manosphere, the underlining common narrative is the hate, disdain, and brotherhood against women – because they are unloved or unlovable, because women are planning to take over the world, because feminism is destroying their families or because they just think women want to trick them all their lives into manipulation. But the far-right movement is providing white scared men with an avenue for protecting themselves by being violent and angry and everything they want to be. And the world is arguably

lenient to letting them do it. Talking about the incel community and the mansphere in general, Bates argues that desentisation to low-level, ubiquitous misogyny is preventing us from recognising a fully blown crisis.

Youth and the far-right

Attractive social arenas and trends of violence pulling youth into extreme-right or racist movements have been active for a long time. For example, the White Power music scene during Europe's 1990s was very influential and "trendy", although not so much anymore (Bjørge and Ravndal, 2019; p. 12). Far-right movements, in the 1990s and later, represented a mix of values of masculinity, of community and strength.

Present time Europe has its own new set of powerful youth scenes, such as the ever growing identitarian *Generation Identity (GI) or Identitäre Bewegung (IB)*, originally created in 2012 in France as the youth wing of France's "*Les Identitaires*" movement. Since then, it has grown significantly to cover other 4 countries including Germany, Austria, the UK and Ireland, which the group claims are "inflicted by extreme multiculturalism" (The Economist, 2016). GI believes that white Europeans are falling victims to "the Great Replacement"—"the process by which the indigenous European population is replaced by non-European migrants." They' seek to stop what they view as the Islamisation of Europe, stop globalisation, and reverse the "Great Replacement." GI claims it does not "provide a platform for any kind of national-socialist or fascist groups or views" (Counter Extremism Project, 2021a). Nonetheless, GI's German chapter, Identitäre Bewegung, has reportedly marched alongside neo-Nazi skinheads, and the German neo-Nazi political party NPD has held up GI's tactics as a model (The Economist, 2016). Austrian GI leader Martin Sellner has also professed the group's dedication to non-violence but GI has created militaristic training camps across Europe that feature combat training as well as anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant speakers (Maza, 2017). Moreover, GI created a spinoff group, *Defend Europe*, in order to stop what it believes to be illegal human trafficking by refugee aid organisations following their belief that humanitarian NGOs are smuggling millions of people into Europe and Africa. The reasons for youth engagement in far-right groups can vary. Radicalisation in youth comes as the result of, possibly predominantly, very attractive pull factors such as positive characteristics or benefits offered by a group in exchange for participation - without undermining the negative social, political, economic and cultural drivers of individual decision-making.

Harper (2018) notes that young people going through identity formation are more prone to radical and extreme ideologies wrapped around promises of something noble to fight for, something to fight against. They also add that the elements of youth unemployment coupled with weak social safety nets, raising prices, and lack of familial support has profoundly impacted social mobility and fed a narrative of purposeful marginalisation and prioritisation of the elite, at the expense of ‘the rest’ (ibid, p. 13). These arguments find support in theories on relative deprivation; the idea that when young peoples’ aspirations and frustrations collide, bringing their disadvantaged position to bear, they seek out alternatives to assert their relevance and obtain status. Violent extremist groups tap into these feelings in two ways: offering to fill the extant deficit with immediate employment and future opportunities, and by offering a political model that embodies equality and meritocracy (ibid). And this is not to overlook. Young people are extremely driven and increasingly interested in getting involvement in politics and change from a very young age, with a minority of them turning to violence to achieve representation.

Drivers of radicalisation and participation in extremist groups and movements

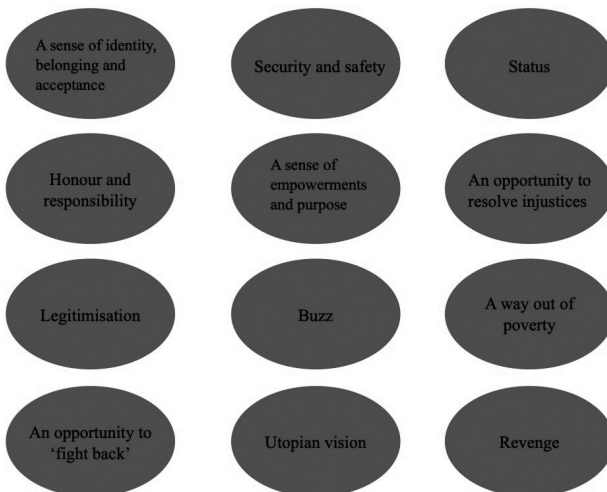


Figure 4: Drivers of radicalisation and participation in extremist groups and movements. Source: (Salto-Youth, 2016; p. 10):

An important phenomenon which had a massive impact also on physical violence is the growing extremist activism on the internet, with various social media platforms carrying materials, groups and manifestos, such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Telegram, 8chan, Discord, MeWe, VKontakte. Moreover, there seems to be a growing number of perpetrators that have been self-radicalised through these online platforms, sharing their ideologies on 4chan and 8chan. “Having started as a countercultural playing ground for young outsiders interested in Japanese manga and anime, online gaming, anarchism, and anti-fascist trolling, they have later expanded to include a wide range of topics, including politically incorrect threads mixing ideas and memes from the quickly expanding and misogynist incel subculture with some of the most extreme elements from the far-right universe” (Bjørge and Ravndal, 2019; p. 13)

Far-right groups often target population groups in society that are marginalised and stigmatised. This is especially the case for young people that are often in conflict with authority and regarded as trouble-makers by the wider society. Some of the factors leading to youth joining far-right groups are (Salto-Youth, 2016):

- *Vengeance*: either against a particular individual, group or institution (for example, the government).
- *Empowerment*: particularly in poor areas, there is a feeling of resentment towards the government. Youth may join groups to protect their communities and to “fight back” against injustice.
- The community *status* of the far-right group. Especially when relating radical groups with extremist, far-right groups hold a certain level of legitimacy in society, as shown by the number of votes and support the group receives on a political level. Moreover, as seen in the propaganda by some groups that use video games references, many youth are drawn towards the attractiveness of working for a far-right group, of whom offer monetary support.
- An opportunity to get out of *poverty*. This is especially the case in poor rural or urban areas where some governments typically lack support.

Gaps in literature

Micro, Meso and Macro level analysis

There appears to be limited literature on the specific “micro”, “meso” and “macro” levels. This may be a result of the specific wording in the levels, or a general lack of literature focused on group level dynamics, as an example. As mentioned in the gender analysis, literature on the micro level focuses on the psychological factors into recruitment, typically aimed at young men and their mental state.

Main drivers of radicalisation

The nuances of the *micro-level analysis* of individuals engaging in violent extremism should be equally seen from the cultural, economic, social, political and personal experience of both men and women. This by also recognising the perhaps underestimated linkages between their participation *beyond gender* which tends to be separated by the patriarchal view on VE participation. However, there is not enough empirical research and scientific data that is gender differentiating and accounts for women’s agency and active role in the online and offline space, part of VE or radicalised. We must put emphasis on “*how*” they are drawn into radicalisation to better understand the why and act in prevention and countering.

At *meso-level*, an underdeveloped area of research is the one looking at the “*how*” of radicalisation or “*self-radicalisation*”. On the same line, while the profile of extremists varies significantly across regions and time periods, social networks and group dynamics consistently play a critical role in recruitment, self-recruitment and radicalisation. There is a recognised lack in data targeting how individuals interact with radical or extreme content on the internet.

At *macro-level*, more research should be done on possible links, if not outright institutionalised cooperation, between clandestine or extra-parliamentary groups and established political parties from the far-right spectrum. Right-wing parties, movements and propaganda do have a big influence on levels of everyday and general xenophobia and racism that are, in turn, intensified and made more explicit in smaller, more extremist groups.

Gender dimension

In a special issue on gender and the far-right, Blee (2020) suggests several areas of research to deepen our understanding of gendered dynamics within far-right groups and movements. More specifically, she argues for the need to develop a “conceptual framework that more seriously examines *intersections* across the far right with gender and sexual essentialism, transphobia, homophobia, and support for misogyny” to understand how gender and sexuality manifest in various forms of the far right and across time and space (Blee, 2020; 427).

In the same way Miller-Idriss (2020) also highlights the importance of intersectionality and brings our attention to the dynamics of *gender-based violence*, including domestic and intimate partner violence within the far right. Connected to this is also the need to explore “role that exploitative sexual images – including child pornography, ‘rape fantasy’ iconography and other misogynistic images – play in far right and white supremacist extremist cultures” (Miller-Idriss, 2020: 489).

There is also a need to deepen our understanding of how *gender-equality rhetoric* is used as a way to draw women into the far-right movement despite these discourses being gender essentialist and even anti-feminist. Social media are important platforms where such ideologies and emotions are expressed and contradictory, authoritarian and racist attitudes consumed and displayed which contribute to the *normalisation of far-right rhetoric* and ideology as well as serve as crucial pathways to radicalisation (Miller-Idriss, 2020).

Significant gap in the research focused on *gender and men*, looking at how men’s perspective of masculinity is affecting their view on life and purpose and it’s one of the factors of resorting to violence, and how “structural grievances” are almost always interlinked with micro level narratives. More qualitative and ethnographic research is needed that examines the issues of male supremacist ideologies and male subjectivity, as well as men’s entitlement to women’s bodies and how these narratives are played out within the far right.

A gap exists in exploring social movement dynamics in relation to the far-right. Seemingly, authors explore either far-right groups or social movements exclusively, but not combined. Another area would be to explore the boundaries between social movements and far-right groups that share similar viewpoints and how individuals are radicalised to joining these movements.

Finally, youth involvement and youth subcultures and the far right is a growing area of research. Yet, there is a serious research gap on the involvement of *young women and girls* in the far right and this is despite much educational work and preventive work being executed in schools and involving community engagement including family work.

Conclusions

Far-right extremism has been shown to adapt and evolve to the ever-changing landscape of Europe. Whilst far-right groups and extremists often view complex issues with a simple black and white mindset, the drivers and dynamics and far-right extremism are complex and multifaceted. According to the research conducted, several conclusions can be drawn that highlight the current far-right extremist atmosphere.

Firstly, the ideologies and values of far-right groups are diverse and interconnected. Evolving to developments in the online space, many individuals are able to connect under this branch of extremist ideologies that can range from anti-feminism, anti-immigration, and anti-establishment narratives. As such, far-right extremists are known to “infiltrate” and participate in other social movements. This can be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, where anti-government protests have acted as an opportunity for far-right extremists. Together, with the lack of a universal definition of terrorism and extremism, governments have difficulty in differentiating between these social movements and extremist groups, especially in the online space.

Secondly, the “profile” and characteristics of extremists are often broad and diverse, as it has mostly been throughout history. However, whilst women have played an increasingly important role in far-right groups throughout history, this has become more transparent, especially in the media. Despite far-right groups existing in a “hyper-masculine ecosystem”, with the particular emphasis on the ‘manosphere’, the variety of ideologies that groups share can explain the high involvement of women. Extremist discourses often concentrate on this anti-femininity when referring to gender, though as highlighted in this review, emphasis should be placed on the male perspective on far-right extremism that is isolated from this anti-femininity narrative.

Thirdly, as COVID-19 has illuminated inequalities and discrimination in society, in addition to the lack of capacity from governments to act on extremist involved in social movements, it can be postulated that more

youth are resonating with the ideals of far-right groups. Identifying several push and pull factors, youth are increasingly joining far-right groups in response to an unable government in relation to aspects such as weak environmental action and poor socio-economic policies. Far-right groups are able to exploit this sense of marginalisation to recruit not only youth but also adults into their ideology. In some cases, far-right groups provide support, including financial assistance, which – in comparison to an absent government – can be seen as attractive for many.

Finally, as mentioned in this analysis, there exist several gaps in research on far-right extremism. There is still the assumption by many that far-right extremism is an emerging phenomenon, whilst Islamic extremism is perceived as more prominent and, therefore, receives more attention. Authorities have felt that they are ill-equipped and underprepared to respond to this threat. More research and attention needs to be placed on it (list overall gap).

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