

THE RISE OF THE RIGHT-WING VIOLENT EXTREMISM THREAT IN GERMANY AND ITS TRANSNATIONAL CHARACTER

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INTRODUCTION

The recent attack in Hanau together with the terrorist attack in Halle in October 2019, the recurrent civil unrest episodes and the consistent increase in violent far-right extremism incidents highlighted by the 2018 Annual Report on the Protection of the Constitution, suggest that the right-wing violent extremism and, more in general, right-wing extremist ideologies, grew to represent a relevant challenge for the German authorities.

However, the latest attacks in Germany also signal a global interrelation between far-right extremists' behaviour. Among other shared elements, the modus operandi of these attacks appears to be linked to and inspired by previous right-wing terrorist attacks such as the one in Christchurch, New Zealand or in El Paso, United States.

The rapid expanse of social media appears to be facilitating the radicalization and recruitment within the right-wing extremist domain. Spaces in which radicalized individuals can communicate and share content enable the development of a worldwide, rapidly expanding network of far-right, neo-Nazi and white supremacy extremists. A challenge previously thought to be predominantly local is acquiring a transnational character, spreading from Canada to Australia and from the United States to western Europe and Ukraine, but at the same time evolving at a different pace in different parts of the world.

This analysis will focus on:

- The attacks in Hanau and Halle, analysing the manifestos, videos and letters left by the respective attackers to explain their motives
- The evolution of right-wing extremism in Germany in recent years
- Right-wing extremism online and the use of social media and messaging applications by right-wing extremist groups
- The transnational nature of the challenge posed by right-wing extremism.

- THE HANAU ATTACK

On Wednesday, February 19, in a far-right motivated shooting on 2 different locations in Hanau, Hesse, 43-year-old Tobias R. killed 9 people, and injured 5 others, before committing suicide at his home, where police discovered also the dead body of his mother.

The first attack occurred at the "Midnight" shisha bar in Heumarkt, in the city center, at around 9 pm, where the assailant shot dead 4 people. Following that, Tobias R. fled the scene and drove to the Kesselstadt neighbourhood, some 2.5km from the first location and started a second shooting at another shisha bar "Arena", where he killed 5.

Police found the perpetrator on Thursday morning dead in his home, located near the scene of the second shooting, next to the dead body his 72-year-old mother.

As per a statement by the Interior Minister Beuth, the man was reportedly neither known as xenophobic nor appeared in files of the police force. However, according to security sources, 9 of the victims have migration backgrounds, with 5 being of Turkish and one of Romanian origin. 4 of the 5 injured also have foreign roots.

Weapons used by the attacker

First indications revealed that the Tobias R. was trained in the use of weapons, was a member of a rifle club since 2012 and legally owned at least 3 weapons. According to his rifle club, Tobias Rathjen was a "rather calm guy" who had in no way become conspicuous

German media reported that the weapon used in the attack was a Glock 17.9-millimetre Luger pistol, which he allegedly ordered online. These types of weapons are of high firepower and are known to inflict maximum casualties in a short period of time. Other far-right attackers such as the assailant of the attack on the Munich Olympia shopping centre in 2016, also used weapons of this type. Rathjen is said to have owned 2 more pistols: one of the SIG Sauer type, 9 millimetres, and another of the Walther type, also 9 millimetres. The suspect legally acquired the SIG-Sauer pistol in 2014 together with the murder weapon in the same online shop.

Manifesto and videos' analysis

Based on Rathjen's confession letter, which police found at his home shortly after the attack, and the targeting of locations frequented by non-white migrants, Germany's Federal Prosecutor's Office has linked the attack to far-right extremism and a xenophobic motive was also confirmed by Interior Minister Beuth.

Through the continuous monitoring activity of far-right extremists' chats and channels on Telegram and other online platforms, the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC) was able to retrieve the 24-pages-long manifesto-like letter and to analyse its content together with two videos Tobias R. posted online before the attack.

The letter outlines several far-right extremist ideas (similarly to perpetrators of other right-wing violent extremist attacks), as well as Rathjen's xenophobic inclination and the ultimate rationale for the attack.

From an analysis of his personal experience outlined in the letter, Rathjen appears to have held many paranoid beliefs and to adhere to conspiracy theories well known in the far-right and white supremacist environment. While there is no apparent evidence that he was tied to a transnational far-right extremist group, the letter highlights many white supremacist theories, as the core of his communicated message includes a call for the elimination of non-white people while referencing their behaviour and committed crimes on German soil.

- The superiority of “German” people

Based on the examination of the letter, the far-right extremist motive of the attack is ascertained by Rathjen’s conviction of the superiority of the “German” people due to their contribution to important achievements and scientific accomplishments. To highlight the superiority of the “German race”, Tobias R. points at this discrepancy by indicating that non-whites failed in the development of their own country:

“[They] have not proved to be efficient in their own history. Conversely, I came to know my own people as a country from which the best and most beautiful the world has to offer is born and raised”.

Additional to the claimed historic inferiority, other details of the letter describe his resentment towards foreign ethnic groups by addressing their appearance, announcing that “these people are outwardly instinctively to be rejected”. He concludes that these people “were not allowed to be on earth”, again hinting at the theory of racial superiority and his stance against migrants which prompted his targeted attack. A xenophobic motive can be further asserted with Rathjen addressing the reader by stating that “This is a message to the entire German people!”, whereby he is specifically appealing to his target group and excluding all foreign population from his personal conception of the world.

These lines of thought correlate with the common white supremacists’ idea that white people are responsible for the West’s scientific and cultural achievements, while non-whites have contributed little, have failed in their own country and damage the societies they inhabit. This element connects the Hanau attacker with the assailants in Halle, Christchurch and El Paso.

- Criminal perception of non-white population

A second aspect to illustrate Rathjen’s far-right extremist orientation can be identified by his focus on crimes committed by non-white migrants. A major part of his writing refers to a conversation with a friend where he discussed the “bad behaviour” of certain ethnic groups such as Turks, Moroccans, Lebanese, and Kurds. Having witnessed a bank robbery - he writes - he had the chance to look into police records of potential suspects, of whom 90 per cent were non-Germans, the majority being Turks and Northern Africans.

He then continues by linking non-white ethnic groups to provocative behaviour, physical attacks, knife attacks leading to serious injuries or deaths and a general increase of crimes in Germany. This narrative is often used by far-right or white supremacist extremists, who routinely blame migrants, particularly those from developing countries, for an increase in nationals’ crime rates. To support their claim, far-right extremists also make use of distorted figures and numbers to underline the threat of migrants and certain ethnic groups. From the analysis of one of his self-recorded videos which have been taken down from YouTube shortly after the attack, it appears that Rathjen aims at reinforcing the anti-migrant narrative by claiming that at present, every day one German national is being killed by a migrant.



Screenshot of the self-recorded video of Tobias Rathjen reposted on a German Far-Right extremist channel on Telegram.

Rathjen also refers to another theory - often used by white supremacists - claiming that the non-action of the people, government and security forces of the “intruded country” are complicit in the destruction of their country. In a part of his letter titled ‘High Treason’, Tobias R. accuses certain sectors of the German population to have contributed to the current crime rate by not acting against the presence of foreign ethnic groups in the country.

“Already 20 years ago I came to the conclusion during the analysis of the problem of why Germany tolerates the constant crime of foreigners: the delinquent foreigners are only one side of the coin because on the other side there are Germans who are either ignorant or too weak or too stupid to solve the problem”

As potential underlying causes for this condition, Rathjen cites historical reasons, lack of information, empathy or “bad experiences”. The so-called “treason” would be, according to him, also being committed by a so-called non-governmental “secret service” who he believes is surveilling the “German population” instead of the migrant population.

- Destruction of non-white ethnic races

According to the manifesto-type letter, for Rathjen, the far-right/white supremacist theory of the necessary destruction of non-white races is essential to solving the problem of the white population. He explicitly names the groups that should be expelled from Germany and advocates for the elimination of foreign ethnic groups he deems “destructive”.

“We now have ethnic groups, races or cultures in our midst that are destructive in every respect....these people should not be here at all...An effort to completely expel these people from our country will no longer be a solution since the existence of certain ethnic groups per se and this fundamental mistake and problem would only be burdened onto future generations”.

According to Rathjen, the people from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the entire Saudi Peninsula, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia to the Philippines will have to be completely annihilated to get “rid of the problem” and stop their increased “reproduction”.

In his plan, following a “coarse-cleaning”, a “fine-cleaning” would be necessary in order to target ethnic groups in other countries in Africa, South and Central America and the Caribbean. Here, Rathjen again refers to the superiority of the German race and the necessity to purify so-called “mixed races societies” by stating that Germany will also need to be part of the cleaning process as not “everyone who owns a German passport today is purebred and valuable”.

The setting out of a plan for the destruction of non-white ethnicities is a common theme elaborated on by far-right extremists and has been analysed by ESISC to be a central part of several far-right manifestos. For instance, in the manifesto of the Halle attacker, the perpetrator outlined as one of his objectives of the attack to “kill as many anti-Whites as possible, Jews preferably”. Further to that, as we will see more in details in the next pages, the perceived threat of the reproduction of “non-whites”, which would ultimately replace the “white people” – as confirmed by the manifesto of the Christchurch shooter entitled “The Great Replacement” – has been at the core of far-right extremist theories and propaganda.

- Anti-Islam sentiment

Despite the generic xenophobic nature of the letter and the attacks against “foreign ethnic groups” in general, a deeper analysis of the document demonstrates that Rathjen had a specific anti-Islam sentiment behind his actions. One passage of the letter is particularly revealing to

this point: he writes that “very few races have emerged positively; other races and cultures have not only made no contribution here but are destructive - especially Islam”.

- Conspiratorial mindset

The analysis of the letter as a whole reveals that besides the far-right extremist motive, Rathjen held a worldview deeply corrupted by conspiracy theories and appeared to have a compulsive interest for the fate of America.

In a different passage of his manifesto-type letter, Rathjen refers to a conspiracy theory according to which a so-called “secret service” would be monitoring German citizens. The agents of this “secret service” would have the ability to read people’s minds and to “chime themselves” into their brains in order to exert a sort of “remote control” and influence the daily actions of common people.

Additionally, in a segment titled “Strategies for the US”, Tobias R. discusses a plan for Americans to remain the world’s superpower amid a potential conflict with China and the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Speaking in English, Rathjen reiterates these conspiracy theories in a self-recorded video addressing the American population and urging them to take action against “invisible secret societies” and “deep underground military bases,” where people are being enslaved, and children tortured.

Another part of his writing refers to his view on women, where he expresses his preferred type (blonde and curved) with however specifying to never have had a relationship with a woman - out of choice. This profile of an incel (“involuntary celibate”) surfaces in far-right online communities and previous attackers appear to have aligned with this image. For instance, the Halle shooter blamed in his manifesto immigration to be responsible for his inability to have a girlfriend.

In the last part, Rathjen justifies his violent attack as a mean to get the necessary public attention to the outlines problems and conspiracy theories and reiterates his conviction of the superiority of the German race, by ending the letter with “humans come and go. What remains is the people!”

- Connection to transnational far-right extremist movements

Upon closer analysis of the document, the perpetrator does not seem to have acted in a group, nor does any evidence point towards an activity within far-right online communities such as Chan-type image boards or other online platforms, which characterised the Halle attacker. In contrast with manifestos circulated by other far-right violent extremists, in his manifesto-like letter, Rathjen’s uses perfect German and does not include any reference to memes or gamer language, often used in the far-right extremists’ online community.

Despite Rathjen’s non-participation in an online community, ESISC detected that the news of his attack, the letter and videos were spread across numerous far-right extremist platforms. The attack furthermore highlights the magnitude of an online community in support of the shooting and sheds light on the threat of online radicalization. His action was in fact praised in several international far-right channels on Telegram, with some subscribers even calling him a “Saint”, a title already given to the Christchurch shooter and the Halle attacker.



Members of a Far-Right extremist chat on Telegram commenting on the Hanau attack (1).



Members of a Far-Right extremist chat on Telegram commenting on the Hanau attack (2).

Examining the manifesto-like letter and the videos more in detail, several characteristics emerge that resemble previous right-wing extremist motivated attacks and point towards an international trend.

The posting of a letter to explain his motive and to have been under the influence of ideology and conspiracy propaganda online makes Tobias R. a “lone wolf actor”, i.e. an attacker who prepares and commits violent acts alone. Several other far-right extremist attackers acted according to this profile: the Norwegian Anders Breivik, who committed a far-right motivated bomb and shooting attack in Oslo and Utoya, leaving 77 dead and 151 wounded, on July 22, 2011, also published a highly ideological manifesto online, pointing at the threat of the Muslim community to the European population. Similarly, the man accused of killing 22 people at the Walmart in El Paso has been linked to an anti-immigrant manifesto posted to an online platform, 8chan, where he claimed that his attack was a response “to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.”

In particular, the attack in Hanau is similar in modus operandi and narrative to the attack in Christchurch. To recall, the 28-year-old shooter Brenton Tarrant, an Australian right-wing extremist, killed 51 people in 2 mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019. In a 73-page document, the shooter states that he wanted to attack Muslims and refers to a thesis by Renaud Camus on the disappearance of "European peoples" who are "replaced" by non-European immigrant populations.

As does Tarrant's manifesto, Rathjen addresses several topics outlining his political and racial views, his background, and his motives for the attack. Similarly, extreme-right tendencies such as xenophobia and anti-Semitism have been referenced in the manifestos of both Halle and Christchurch shooter and appeared to have become the foundation in support of a transnational radical movement. Additionally, the fact that several of Rathjen's videos are recorded in English indicates that the attacker was seeking to draw the attention of an international audience.

In brief, the analysis of the manifesto-type letter of the attacker and the videos seems to confirm that Rathjen acted upon a racist far-right extremist motive and that he had spent a substantial amount of time online searching for evidence in support of conspiracy and far-right theories.

- THE HALLE ATTACK

On Wednesday, October 9, a 27-year-old German national killed 2 people and injured multiple others after trying to attack a synagogue on the day of Yom Kippur in Halle, North Rhine-Westphalia. Stephan Balliet, equipped with a military-style combat uniform and multiple homemade weapons, had - before the attack - released a manifesto and streamed his attack live on Twitch, an online platform owned by Amazon. The video has within an hour been seen by more than 2,000 people, not counting the times the stream was downloaded and then shared on other platforms and social media like Telegram or Twitter.

As per the 36-minute-long video, the gunman tries to enter the synagogue, at the time hosting 51 Jewish people, first shooting at a back door with a home-made weapon and then attempting to blow up the back entrance with a homemade explosive device. As the security precautions of the premise prevented him from entering, the man threw several grenades in the Jewish cemetery near the synagogue, in an attempt to make the individuals in the synagogue flee the location and then attack them.

Failed to break in into the building, the man shot dead a by-passing 40-year-old woman in the Humboldt-Street next to the synagogue. A second by-passer was then spared as the attacker's handmade gun jammed. The attacker then drove approximately 450m through the city, stopped at the kebab store Kiez-Döner in the Ludwig-Wucherer-Street and shot several times at 2 people in the shop, killing one of them. After a brief engagement with the police outside the store, Balliet fled the scene and was shortly after blocked and arrested by security forces in Zeitz.

The shooter testified for several hours in a court in Karlsruhe, Baden-Württemberg, and admitted the attack and the right-wing extremist and anti-Semitic motive. Although the tone and type of communication used by the attacker during the live stream of the attacks seemed to suggest that he was addressing other people involved in the preparation of the act, Stephan B. did not provide any information on potential supporters or accomplices.

On October 16, the police searched in Mönchengladbach, North Rhine-Westphalia, the apartment of 2 individuals suspected of being connected to the attack. The 2 men, 26 and 28 years old, are under suspicion of having uploaded the manifesto of Stephan B. online. The IP address of the confiscated computer, identified by US authorities, ultimately provided the location from where the manifesto of the shooter had been published. According to investigations of the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA)'s "Concordia", classified as a Special Organizational Structure (BAO), one of the suspects had been in contact with the shooter.

Manifesto and video's analysis

The attacker confesses an anti-Semitic motive behind the attack in a video recorded before to the attack. In this video, he denies the Holocaust and blames Jews for being "at the root of problems" in Western societies. He further accuses feminism to be the reason for low fertility rates which in turn would cause mass immigration.

The anti-Semitic motive is also confirmed by the symbolic choice of the date for the attack, which coincided with the Yom Kippur, the most important holiday in Judaism. In his bequeathed manifesto, a document of approximately 10 pages, under the section 'The Plan', the gunman also confirmed Yom Kippur as his day of choice, arguing that even "non-religious" Jews would be near the synagogue.

In the manifesto, Balliet also explains that he considered attacking a mosque or an Antifa center but decided that only Jewish targets would be worth the attack. However, in the document, the attacker also underlines the importance of targeting "Mudslimes, christkikes, commies, niggers and traitors" (i.e. Muslims, Christians, Communists, black people, and traitors).

In the manifesto, distributed one week before the attack in right-wing forums and several other pages including a Telegram channel called "Alt Right", the perpetrator also outlines the objectives of the attack: First, to "prove the viability of improvised weapons, second, increase the morale of other suppressed Whites by spreading the combat footage, and third, kill as many anti-Whites as possible, jews preferred".

Analysing the manifesto and the video more in detail, several characteristics emerge that link this attack to previous right-wing extremist attacks. Specifically, the attack in Halle is similar in modus operandi and narrative to the attack in Christchurch. Further to that, as the Christchurch attacker, also the Halle attacker decided to live-stream his actions and to publish a manifesto.

To recall, the 28-year-old shooter Brenton Tarrant, an Australian right-wing extremist, killed 51 people in 2 mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15. He filmed and broadcast his crime live on social networks in a 17-minute-long video and explained the reasons for the attack in a manifesto published on Twitter. The 73-page document entitled "The Great Replacement" states that the shooter wanted to attack Muslims and refers to a thesis originally drafted by Renaud Camus on the disappearance of "European peoples" who would be "replaced" by non-European immigrant populations. As already explained, extreme-right conspiracy theories such as the "great replacement" and "white genocide", referenced by the perpetrators of the attacks in Hanau, Halle and Christchurch, have become the foundation in support of a transnational radical movement.

Additionally, the fact that Balliet's manifesto was written in English indicates that in this case too, the attacker was seeking to draw the attention of an international audience. According to the analysis of the video, it appears that the main intended audience for the stream of the attack was on message forums like 8chan and that the perpetrator considered as his heroes people like Anders Breivik and the attackers in New Zealand and El Paso.

A large proportion of the uploaded document contains detailed descriptions and photos on how to make different types of weapons and explosives. The weapons, also visible in the video, included a self-made pump gun, also called Guerilla-Shotgun, handguns, and several types of explosives, whose preparation indicated Balliet's level of commitment and proved that he planned the attack long in advance. The timeline of his preparations can be traced back to March 8, 2019, as further analysis of Balliet's documents reveals that several of the image files showing his handmade weapons were created a week before the Christchurch attack in New Zealand.

Stephan B. also described the making of the lower part of one of his Luties (a homemade "Expedient Submachine Gun" originally designed by Philip A. Luty) and its magazines with a 3D printer. Information obtained by the German newspaper Zeit states that Balliet purchased a 3D printer in May. According to researchers at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), supplementary to the 3 documents completing Balliet's manifesto, folders containing numerous downloadable files that could be run through a 3D printer to make the same firearms, as well as ammunition, are present online. The use of 3D weapons is not surprising, given the number of instructions for building 3D weapons circulating on the Internet and especially in right-wing extremists' forums, chat and channels.

In the manifesto, Balliet also implies that the attack was partially funded by cryptocurrency donations. Stephan B. claims, that he wanted to thank a person alias Mark from a 'Chan' forum for his alleged bitcoin donation. Chan forums or Chan boards are image boards where people can anonymously share content or discuss video games. According to the manifesto, the amount of 0.1 Bitcoin (about 755 euros) had "helped him a lot", presumably to purchase components for his handmade weapons. According to the BKA, an investigation on the potential Bitcoin dispenser is still ongoing.

The use of cryptocurrency as a fundraising option bears further resemblance to many other terrorist attacks, such as the Easter bombing in April 2019 in Sri Lanka, as reported by the Israeli blockchain intelligence firm Whitestream. According to a recent report by RAND, lone-

wolf actors, i.e. attackers who prepare and commit violent acts alone as in the case of Balliet, are likely to attempt to use cryptocurrency transfer systems, as these individuals largely rely on external sources for funds¹. Statistics on the actual size of the stake that cryptocurrency funding have in right-wing circles are up to now not assessable due to the encrypted nature of this technology. Its growing influence can, however, be derived from public announcements of terrorist groups that attempt at educating their followers and donors to use bitcoins as a safe way to finance their activity².

In the section where he describes his plan, Balliet uses a gamer language, giving himself "objectives" and "achievements". The use of gamer language could be aimed at encouraging young, alienated men to carry out 'copycat' attacks. Examples of this "gaming jargon" can be found in the manifesto of the Christchurch shooter, who referred to his desire to "beat his high score", i.e. surpassing his gaming high score with real-life killings. Similarly, the online criticisms directed at the Halle gunman for "not killing more people" show how these attacks have become "gamified"³.

Putting the tone of the manifesto in contrast to Balliet's behaviour analysed in the live video, it can be observed how the attacker goes from being confident to chaotic. Although the manifesto indicated he had extensively planned for the attack in advance, Balliet did not plan out its execution, mentioning also in the document its difficulty due to the unreliability of his handmade weapons. By killing 2 people, Balliet did prove, as outlined in his objectives, the viability of improvised weapons. However, his homemade metal gun jammed several times and in the video, he stated that the only thing he proved was that handmade weapons are not effective, calling himself several times a "loser" and apologizing for not "being better".

The interaction and communication between Balliet and the online community observed in the video demonstrate how important for the attacker his potential audience was. His introduction as "anon" (an abbreviation for 'anonymous' predominantly used in online communities), his appeal on the viewers to make friends, and his mother's alleged statement that Balliet did not have many friends and spent most of his time online, points towards the profile of a marginalised individual who sought recognition online.

The importance of the audience is also connected to the behavioural trends observed in monitoring right-wing extremist communication online. ESISC has observed that far-right online influencers have become embedded in a milieu of platforms in which people inspire and instruct each other. In far-right extremist communities online, gaining recognition and appraisal from like-minded forum users/anons seems to be a relevant behavioural trend.

In conclusion, the analysis of the manifesto and the live stream video confirms that Balliet aimed at imitating previous far-right and white supremacist terrorist attacks. The analysis also demonstrates that the attacker had links to right-wing extremist online networks, thanks to which he was able to acquire the necessary knowledge to make his homemade weapons while strengthening his convictions.

It also appears clear from the analysis of the two attacks and respective manifestos and videos that the ritualised act of posting a manifesto before undertaking acts of extreme-right violence serves as a powerful act of propaganda designed to deliver an explanatory narrative, an ideological justification, a tactical lesson and a call to arms for others to follow.

¹ Dion-Schwarz, C., Manheim, D., and Johnston, P. B. (2019) *Terrorist Use of Cryptocurrencies: Technical and Organizational Barriers and Future Threats*. Santa Monica (CA): Rand Corporation. Available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR3000/RR3026/RAND_RR3026.pdf [Accessed: 26 October 2019]

²ESISC's *World Terror Watch Database* and Katz, R. (2019) 'Tales of Crypto-Currency: Bitcoin Jihad in Syria and Beyond', *The Daily Beast*, 13/10. Available at: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-bitcoin-jihad-in-syria-and-beyond-tales-of-crypto-currency?ref=scroll> [Accessed: 14 October 2019]

³ Mackintosh, E. and Mezzofiore, G. (2019) 'How the extreme-right gamified terror', *CNN*, 10/10. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/10/europe/germany-synagogue-attack-extremism-gamified-grm-intl/index.html> [Accessed: 29 October 2019]

- RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN GERMANY

The recent attacks in Hanau and Halle do not represent isolated right-wing extremism incidents in Germany.

Recent far-right incidents in Germany:

- **February 14:** Police forces arrest of 12 members of the German far-right terror group "Der Harte Kern" (The Hard Core). Later investigations revealed that the group plotted to launch a string of coordinated Christchurch-style attacks on mosques across Germany, with the aim of stirring up a civil war.
- **February 7:** In connection with the suspicion of far-right extremism activities, apartments and offices of 3 Frankfurt police officers are searched in Hesse.
- **February 6:** The Special Unit against right-wing extremism Soko Rex searched the apartment of a 33-year-old in Chemnitz and confiscated neo-Nazi propaganda material. The man is suspected of having created and spread far-right extremism contents in occasion of the March 2017 protests held in Chemnitz.
- **December 2019:** Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer bans the far-right extremist group "Combat 18". Immediately after, security forces launch a large operation against members of the group in Thuringia, North Rhine-Westphalia and 4 other federal states. Several apartments were searched, and propaganda material and weapons seized.
- **October 2019:** In Halle, an attacker kills two and tries to storm a synagogue, broadcasting the assault live online. He later admits a far-right, anti-Semitic motive for the attack.
- **June 2019:** Walter Lübcke, a pro-migrant politician, is shot in the head at close range and found dead in his garden. A suspect with far-right links later confesses to the murder.
- **July 2016:** An 18-year-old shoots dead nine people at a shopping mall in Munich before killing himself. Bavarian authorities later classify the attack as "politically motivated", saying the teen had "radical right-wing and racist views".

The Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV) 2018 Annual Report on the Protection of the Constitution reports that right-wing politically motivated crimes recorded as having an extremist background were 19,409. Among these, 1,088 were violent crimes, a data in slight increase compared to 2017 statistics⁴.

In this context, it is interesting to note that data referring to 2018 showed that xenophobia continued to be the main motive for right-wing extremist violence. The rise in right-wing extremist offences motivated by anti-Semitism was also noticeable, the report states. Most of these offences were incitement and illegal propaganda activities, but the number of violent crimes also saw a major increase of 71.4 per cent (2018: 48, 2017: 28). Xenophobic offences also increased by 19.7 per cent in comparison to 2017. In particular, the BfV reported a total of 7,701 xenophobic offenses, 821 of which violent and motivated by right-wing background. On the other side, offences linked to anti-Islamic sentiments (910 in total), saw a decrease of 15 per cent from the previous year⁵.

⁴ Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), *Brief summary 2018 Report on the Protection of the Constitution* (Berlin, 2019), p.7.

⁵ Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), *Politisch Motivierte Kriminalität im Jahr 2018*. (Berlin, 2019), pp. 5-6

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution estimates that 24,100 far-right extremists are currently active in Germany, an increase of around 100 since its last estimate⁶. Based on the evaluation's findings that 12,700 – more than half – are defined as “violence-oriented” and pose a threat, Interior Minister Seehofer warned after the Halle shooting that more attacks could happen “at any moment”⁷.

In parallel to the increase in right-wing extremist attacks, police reports from September 2019 indicate a peak of arms possession among German far-right extremists. The assessment is based on the incremental number of weapons confiscated from Neo-Nazis, which included handguns, rifles, and explosives. In 2018, a total of 1,091 firearms have been confiscated from far-right extremists, an increase of 61 per cent compared to 2017⁸.

Furthermore, on January 16, 2019, authorities confiscated more than 100 weapons in raids in several parts of Germany on suspected members of a far-right group calling itself the “National Socialist Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Deutschland”⁹. The seized weapons included air guns, swords, machetes, and knives. The group's members are suspected of glorifying Nazism and of recruiting members online.

Finally, ESISC in 2019 and until February 2020, has reported 68 serious incidents related to neo-Nazi groups or far-right extremism, against 35 similar incidents reported in 2018. This further confirms the trend of an increasingly worrying rise in far-right extremism in Germany as already underlined by the above-mentioned data.

Xenophobic attacks in 2019

Similar to the rising trend established by the BfV's data in 2018, 2019 saw a multitude of xenophobic and racist attacks. As previously stated, xenophobia represents in Germany the main trigger behind far-right extremist violence and the link between the two phenomena is fundamental in understanding the current situation.

Following a relatively non-violent first half the year, which mostly featured right-wing demonstrations across the country, ESISC reported on several xenophobic attacks in the second semester of 2019, starting with June 5, when a 27-year-old man, after shouting anti-Muslim slurs, stabbed a 16-year-old on a tram in Bremen.

A month later, on July 22, a 26-year-old Eritrean man was shot and seriously wounded in a small town near Frankfurt, in an alleged racist attack. The shooter fired from his vehicle and was found by the police a few hours later, having committed suicide, in his car. The incident was labelled as a racist crime since investigators found evidence of affiliation with extreme right-wing movements in the shooter's apartment.

On September 14, a wheelchair-bound Libyan migrant was attacked in an alleged far-right hate crime in Chemnitz. According to Chemnitz police spokesman Andrzej Rydzik, the 31-year-old was assaulted by a group of people, including one who yelled anti-immigrant epithets and punched the victim in the face. The 22-year-old alleged assailant had previous records for assaults and far-right crimes.

One of the latest incidents, on October 15, 2019, concerned a right-wing extremist known to the police, who was arrested in Neuhausen, Munich, for an anti-Semitic attack on a group of

⁶ BMI, *Brief summary 2018*, p.10.

⁷ ZDF, *Terroranschlag in Halle - Seehofer: "Mit Anschlag muss jederzeit gerechnet werden*, 2019 <<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/heute/nach-anschlag-in-halle-innenminister-seehofer-zum-schutz-von-juden-in-deutschland-100.html>> [accessed 27 October 2019].

⁸ Jorg Luyken, 'Alarming' rise in far-Right weapons seizures prompts Germany to beef up police power', *Telegraph*, 2019 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/09/29/alarming-rise-far-right-weapons-seizures-prompts-germany-beef/>> [accessed 27 October 2019].

⁹ ESISC WTW Database; Justin Huggler, 'Weapons seized in police raids on "German Ku Klux Klan"', *Telegraph*, 2019 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/17/weapons-seized-police-raids-german-ku-klux-klan/>> [accessed 27 October 2019].

teenagers. The 38-year-old attacked the group with 2 wooden sticks, called them "Jews" and threatened that they would be "gassed to death". The police had to use irritant gas to take the man down while he allegedly shouted, "Heil Hitler!" and "Sieg Heil!".

Targeting politicians

Not only migrants, Islamists, or Jews were targets of far-right attacks, but also politicians expressing favourable positions on migration and refugee policies. On June 2, Walter Lübcke, president of the regional council of Kassel was found shot dead in his garden. Lübcke was well known for advocating for migrants' rights and supporting the government's pro-migrant policies in 2015. Investigators arrested his shooter, Stephan Ernst, a 45-year-old neo-Nazi, who declared that he acted alone and confessed a political motive.

Several politicians who defended pro-migration ideas received death threats, among them the German-Turkish politician Haluk Yildiz who leads the pro-immigration Alliance for Innovation and Justice (BIG). Yildiz said he had received Islamophobic letters and death threats wrapped in xenophobic insults in May 2019, in the run-up to European Parliament elections.

On September 23, general secretary Uli Grötsch of the Social Democrats (SPD) received his second anonymous death threat from a right-wing extremist by email. The anonymous writer called for action and referred to the murder of politician Lübcke with "Kill Uli Grötsch! A shot in the back of the neck, like Lübcke!"

On October 2019, 6 people were detained after a criminal police operation raided 10 houses in connection with threatening far-right emails in several regions. According to authorities, the emails were sent to mosques, political parties, media, and migrant reception centers over 2 weeks in July and contained threats of bomb attacks. The authors of the totally 23 investigated emails signed off as "Volksfront," "Combat 18" or "Blood and Honor" – all far-right radical groups. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution quotes "Volksfront" (People's Front) in its 2018 Annual Report as the German designation of the DHKP-C, which is, however, a banned Marxist-Leninist extremist organisation. Although difficult to identify, recent research by ESISC suggests, that it could also be associated with the US-originated white supremacist organization "Volksfront" or "Volksfront International", which had chapters in several European countries. Most likely, however, those who signed the letter only took inspiration from this group as it officially disbanded in 2012¹⁰. "Blood and Honor" and "Combat 18" are both neo-Nazi groups active in several federal states in Germany which – according to ESISC research – maintain a vast network of communication channels on Telegram¹¹. Combat 18 has been repeatedly linked to the murder of politician Lübcke.

Right-wing political activism

The current right-wing activism in Germany is most visible in the form of regular demonstrations across the country. The nationwide demonstrations influenced by right-wing extremism in 2018 reported a total number of 57,950 participants¹². This number was largely due to demonstrations in Chemnitz in response to the murder of a German national on 26 August 2018, which was suspected to be committed by a group of asylum-seekers. Beyond that, right-wing demonstrations continued to be prevalent in many cities in 2019, even after the deadly attack in Halle, which could indicate a feeling of approval among certain sectors of the society.

¹⁰ Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), *Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2018* (Berlin, 2019), p.255.

¹¹ BuzzFeed, *So organisieren sich Rechtsextreme seit Wochen in neuen Telegram-Gruppen*, 2019 <<https://www.buzzfeed.com/de/pascalemueller/rechtsextreme-telegram-chat-organisation-npd>> [accessed 5 October 2019].

¹² BMI, *Brief summary 2018*, pp.11-12.

Traditional gathering events for right-wing sympathizers are organised by the German “Rechtsrock” (right-wing rock) music scene. As indicated by the BKA, some supporters of these rock groups take on right-wing extremist themes, such as the protection of their own “territory” from foreigners, a consistent leitmotiv in their song lyrics. Their concerts, 270 reported in 2018, are also attended by a considerable number of de facto right-wing extremists. According to the report of the Protection of the Constitution, the BKA assesses that at these music events a substantial threat regarding recruitment processes and linking among right-wing extremists exist. This is why authorities have several times prevented major music events of this kind, (e.g. the “Rock against foreign domination” in Thuringia). In particular, according to the BKA, these musical dimension increases the risk of enlarging the international connections and networks of far-right.¹³

As many of the biggest rock concerts have been prohibited by authorities for being a potential risk for public safety, events have been played out in smaller circles by way of semi-private Lieder evenings. ESISC monitored several right-wing rock bands fan’s chats present on Telegram and observed that some of these smaller events are aimed at socializing and connecting with like-minded right-wing extremists in a more private and “safe” environment. As a case in point, in addition to sharing videos and music, which are in some cases banned from Youtube for hate speech and discrimination, several of the Telegram channels monitored - such as the official one of the right-wing rock band ‘Germanium’ or the one of the neo-Nazi band and clothing brand ‘Lunikoff/Hermannslandversand’ - also publicise right-wing demonstrations in their posts.

Finally, other events which have been found to attract high numbers of right-wing extremists and provide them with a conducive environment to spread their network, conduct recruitment activities and discuss their ideas, are martial arts events. One of the biggest events of this kind linked to the far-right extremist milieu is the “Battle of the Nibelungs”. The annual martial art tournament, organised by far-right party NPD member and alleged leader the German cell of neo-Nazi group Combat 18 Thorsten Heise, was launched in 2013¹⁴. In 2018, it was held in Ostritz, Saxony, and attracted about 850 visitors from Germany and other European countries such as France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Czech Republic, and Ukraine.

In support of the claim that these events are predominantly targeting right-wing extremists, German officials have banned last year’s event planned in Ostritz for October 12, stating, that the event had no sporting character but was primarily intended for “right-wing extremist combat training”. Furthermore, the court argued that the fighting techniques could be applied against Germany’s police force¹⁵.

It is suspected by the BfV that far-right extremists view martial arts disciplines as a potential resource in a future action against “the system” and promote them as preparation for the inevitable “political fight”¹⁶. Several sources also report that these events serve right-wing extremist groups for the recruitment of new members¹⁷.

¹³ BMI, *Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2018*, pp.63-64.

¹⁴ EXIF, ‘COMBAT 18’ Reunion, 2018 <<https://exif-recherche.org/?p=4399>> [accessed 10 November 2019].

¹⁵ Sächsische Zeitung, *Das war's für den "Kampf der Nibelungen"*, 2019 <<https://www.saechsische.de/das-wars-fuer-den-kampf-der-nibelungen-5128240.html>> [accessed 7 November 2019].

¹⁶ BMI, *Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2018*, p.48.

¹⁷ Robert Claus, *Der extrem rechte Kampfsportboom*; Ibrahim Naber, *Bundesregierung nimmt Nazi-Event in Ostritz ins Visier*, 2019 <<https://www.welt.de/politik/article201278776/Kampf-der-Nibelungen-Hilfe-die-Neonazis-kommen.html>> [accessed 28 October 2019].

- RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM ONLINE

Stephan Balliet, the Halle shooter, is suspected of having self-radicalised, as according to German newspaper Bild, he lived isolated with his mother, and spent most of his time online where he got in contact with far-right radical subcultures.

As per his manifesto, Balliet first posted the link of the live stream video on his Twitch channel to Meguca, a message board loosely affiliated with 4chan's anime board. Even though according to Twitch, the gunman only had a live audience of 5, approximately 2,200 people watched the recording in the 30 minutes before the video was removed from the platform. At that point, the video was already shared on numerous far-right communication channels. ESISC tracked down the 2 original Telegram channels from which the video was forwarded to approximately 15,625 other accounts within the day of the attack.

Similarly, the letter and the videos of the perpetrator of the attack in Hanau were circulated on 80 far-right extremists and white supremacists' Telegram chats and channels monitored by ESISC.

These factors mark a notable trend – that online right-wing networks play a substantial role in attracting and supporting right-wing extremist ideologies. White supremacists and right-wing extremists are publishing volumes of propaganda advocating terrorism online. Following both the Halle and Hanau attacks, far-right communities online glorified the incident, calling the attacker a "Saint," the same title often given to the Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant. In some message boards and encrypted chats, the alleged "Saints" were also criticized for not killing more people.

A similar reaction in Germany was witnessed after the murder of pro-migrant politician Walter Lübcke, with right-wing supporters equally hailing the attack online, posting hateful comments about immigration on social media. German police opened a criminal investigation after German broadcaster ARD filmed and published a video of far-right protesters speaking approvingly of the murder of the politician and calling Lübcke a "traitor to the nation"¹⁸.

Members of the German right-wing extremist scene and sympathizers make intensive use of the Internet, for instance, to advertise their campaigns, mobilize support for events or plan activities. Extremists are mainly active in social networks, messaging applications and video platforms, which are used to communicate openly or in private groups and to disseminate propaganda contents¹⁹. A clear example of the potential of this online propaganda comes from the YouTube channel "Der Volkslehrer" (The People's Teacher), which had more than 60,000 subscribers and defended both conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic positions. The account was blocked in April 2019 due to violations of YouTube's policy regarding hate speech, however, it was re-established as a channel on Telegram, where it currently counts about 12,000 subscribers.

Right-wing terrorists who are formed online and then radicalise constitute a new category. According to studies, individuals who fall into this category are mostly men between the ages of 18 and 30 who spend a lot of time online, consuming violent video games and self-radicalizing by absorbing conspiracy theories and developing a hatred for Jews, migrants or women. All characteristics listed above match with the profile of the Halle attack perpetrator and partially with the profile of the attacker in Hanau.

However, the internet and in particular social media and messaging apps, are allowing for right-wing extremists to forge new links not only at a national level but also on transnational one. Globally, right-wing extremism communication channels are sharing ideas and contents but also encouraging attacks and promoting violence. An example of the current scale of the

¹⁸ Reuters, *German police investigate after far-right supporters praise politician's murder*, 2019 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-crime-far-right/german-police-investigate-after-far-right-supporters-praise-politicians-murder-idUSKCN1U01N4>> [accessed 28 October 2019].

¹⁹ BMI, *Brief summary 2018*, p.13.

problem can be found in the number of tweets mentioning the “Great Replacement” theory, which nearly tripled in 4 years from just over 120,000 in 2014 to just over 330,000 in 2018²⁰.

Another example is provided by the figure of Brenton Harrison Tarrant, the perpetrator of the Christchurch attack, who not only reportedly drew inspiration from the American far-right scene but was also - like the American right-wing terrorists Robert Bowers and Cesar Sayoc - part of an international online network of extremists. All 3 posted their manifestos online, similarly to the terrorist responsible for the killing of 22 people at the Walmart in El Paso.

Telegram: Far-right’s preferred communication platform

With the start of the second semester of 2019, ESISC has observed, that many German right-wing groups moved from their previous platforms on YouTube or Facebook to new online spaces, such as Telegram. This development comes amid a hard-line change in YouTube’s hate speech policy introduced on June 5, and Facebook’s adherence to Germany’s Network Enforcement Act, which imposes intermediary liability for social media networks with over 2 million registered users to remove content which is “manifestly unlawful” such as, under German law, incitement to hatred²¹. Consequently, several accounts and groups on Facebook, YouTube and even Twitter, promoting Nazi or right-wing extremist ideas, saw their posts removed or were banned for their contents ultimately leading to their relocation on other platforms. According to ESISC’s monitoring activities, far-right extremists are still using platforms such as YouTube and Facebook but are now shovelling their old community base bit by bit to Telegram.

Telegram represents today the main messaging tool far-right groups use to vehiculate their ideas, organize themselves and recruit. Currently, ESISC is monitoring more than 170 far-right extremists, white supremacists and neo-Nazis chats and channels on Telegram. Of these 170, 45 are German.

The messaging application provides these extremists with a safe place where they can plan demonstrations, discuss and disseminate conspiracy theories, post contents, fake news and even raise money for their common cause. Proven to be used by Islamist terrorists to plan large-scale attacks, such as the November 2015 Paris attacks and 2016 Brussels bombings, Telegram offers full end-to-end encryption of messages before sending them so that only senders and recipients can read them²². This allows for the publishing of extremist content without fear of consequences. This capacity, at disposal to act outside the law, is a salient reason why actors like terrorists, right-wing radicals, but also pedo-pornographers prefer Telegram as a content-sharing tool.

Another attractive feature that illustrates Telegram’ suitability for extremist actors, is the possibility to create both secret and open channels, which can only be found through targeted searching of the chat name. Nevertheless, most far-right chat groups are open to subscribers, which helps to increase their popularity.

ESISC has been monitoring far-right German extremism activities on Telegram and identified - by examining publicly visible channels and posts in these chats and channels - main actors, content and potential reach. The monitoring activity has focused on the one side, on constitutionally recognised political actors linked or close to right-wing extremist views and ideas, such as AfD and NPD groups, politicians and sympathizers.

²⁰ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), *The great Replacement: The violent consequences of mainstreamed extremism* (London, 2019), p.5.

²¹ Jacob McHangama and Joelle Fiss, ‘Germany’s Online Crackdowns Inspire the World’s Dictators’, *Foreign Policy*, 2019 <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/06/germany-online-crackdowns-inspired-the-worlds-dictators-russia-venezuela-india/>> [accessed 7 November 2019].

²² Mia Bloom, ‘Telegram and online addiction to terrorist propaganda’, *Minerva Research Initiative*, 2019 <https://minerva.defense.gov/Owl-In-the-Olive-Tree/Owl_View/Article/1859857/telegram-and-online-addiction-to-terrorist-propaganda/> [accessed 10 November 2019].

On the other hand, closer attention was put on extremist activities recognized to be more prone to turn to violent means and aims, such as well-known neo-Nazi personalities, organized right-wing extremists with contacts in the far-right martial arts and music scenes as well as channels under the name of banned organizations. Examples of right-wing radical movements apt to violence and present on Telegram include the Identitäre Bewegung (Identitarian movement), a far-right movement whose leader, Martin Sellner, was earlier in 2019 recipient of a controversial donation by the Christchurch shooter Tarrant, and which aggregates some 64 regional channels with 30 to 100 subscribers each.

Another example for right-wing extremists' use of Telegram is the Atomwaffen Division and its splinter group Feuerkrieg Division. Atomwaffen Division (AWD), a neo-Nazi group founded in the United States, recently announced the creation of its new cell in Germany and was allegedly responsible for recent threatening letters to German Green Party members Cem Özdemir and Claudia Roth. While the public Telegram channel of AWD merely consists of a collection of videos promoting the group's Nazi ideology, the channel of Feuerkrieg Division (FKD), with about 1000 subscribers, regularly posts FKD propaganda and shows its growing influence through pictures of leaflets disseminated by its members around the world. Additionally, the FKD utilises the channel for encouraging new members to join its German cell through targeted posts that include an email address and an appeal "to get together with your fellow local NS and train/prepare for the Boogaloo" (an expression used by extremists to refer to an impending civil war).

Based on the findings of this research and monitoring activity, German far-right channels/chats on Telegram can be subdivided into categories:

- Image channels, which post racist right-wing extremist content in the form of pictures, videos, music, or short extracts from banned Nazi books and works.
- Informative or news channels, controlled by admins who only post educational content on right-wing events and demonstrations, especially used by politicians, political groups, non-political movements or famous right-wing personalities like Martin Sellner or founder of the far-right movement Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (PEGIDA: Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident), Lutz Bachmann.
- Discussion channels, where groups actively debate the "situation" in Germany, referring to the threat of a "population replacement", the "importance of the white race", and other radical ideas. This kind of channels appears to be the most active, as members set up regional chat groups, such as the infamous "THING" groups which were exposed in June for planning out violent attacks on Telegram. Regional groups discuss locations to meet, share tips on actions and underground concerts or organize fundraising for events.

Many of the monitored right-wing Telegram channels/chats also discuss weaponry, including the building of guns with 3D printers and homemade methods. It is therefore not surprising to see also a 3D weapon involved in the Halle attack. An example of the virality of such gun-making instructions posted on groups was examined by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)'s Hatewatch blog. It has been found that posted instructions by a user on how to build a "slap gun" (a makeshift replacement for a shotgun) were viewed by over 2,000 Telegram users within 48 hours²³.

Other German right-wing groups examined by ESISC on Telegram, such as 'Patrioten Hamburg', a regional chat of the Identitarian Movement, go as far as discussing the potential killing of migrants and inciting to "active confrontation". Different users in the group discussed which

²³ Michael Edison Hayden, 'Far-Right Extremists Are Calling for Terrorism on the Messaging App Telegram', *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2019 <<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/06/27/far-right-extremists-are-calling-terrorism-messaging-app-telegram>> [accessed 2 October 2019].

weapons would be best to be armed with, referring to knives, swords or giving suggestion on how to access the dark web for weapons.

Telegram is not only being used by German right-wing extremists; ESISC has compiled a list of 367 Telegram far-right extremists, neo-Nazi and white supremacists' channels of different national backgrounds to illustrate how the messaging platform is home to the internet's most radical far-right communities²⁴. In these hundreds of openly accessible and active channels users can find content glorifying or advocating for violence and spreading far-right and white supremacist ideas.

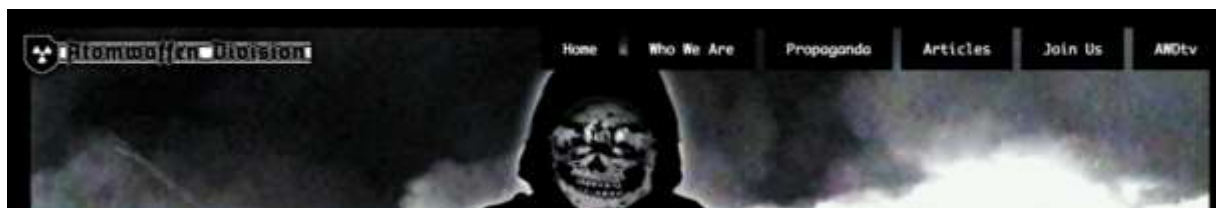
Considering the vast quantity and exhaustive extremist material on the monitored channels on Telegram, it can be argued that banning moderate far-right activists on platforms like Facebook and YouTube was to an extent counterproductive. Even though the presence of right-wing ideologists on popular platforms and their resultant reach is diminished, a consequence of this so-called "Deplatforming" is the creation of active communities on smaller and hidden platforms where white supremacy ideologies have become even more dangerous²⁵.

While Telegram offers a safe alternative to Facebook exiles, a similar community of banned YouTubers are now active on BitChute, a video hosting service without content policy, but also on Hoop, another messaging application.

The enhanced accessibility of the new platforms is likely to facilitate the spread of right-wing extremism and increase the connections between different local groups, therefore contributing to enhancing the transnational dimension of the phenomenon.

The Darknet alternative

Recently, ESISC has observed another trend. Some prominent far-right channels have been moving out of Telegram and encouraged their subscribers to move to the Darknet where they can find public email addresses of subscribers to far-right chats and channels and contact them by using PGP keys, an encryption program that provides cryptographic privacy and authentication for data communication. They are now recalling that Telegram is only a "temporary home" and they need a viable backup for communicating and networking online, adding that they will be forced "to leave the Clearnet sooner or later".



Homepage of AtomWaffen Division group's active page on the Darknet.

ESISC has been monitoring this trend and identified the AtomWaffen Division group's active page on the Darknet. As previously specified, this group (Atomwaffen means "atomic weapons" in German) is a neo-Nazi terrorist network formed in 2015 and based in the United States; it has since expanded across the country and also expanded into the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and the Baltic states. The group is part of the alt-right movement but is considered

²⁴ An alternative but similar list can be found at: Privatebin, *367 Current neo-Nazi & Alt-Right Telegram channels*, 2019 <<https://privatebin.net/?6de8f2a4b05c6e4d#7hkGEpsNXgN4UfSGZnE-yXLoHCabK7MgNGP9AGzMgZRYz>> [accessed 12 October 2019].

²⁵ Jason Koebler, 'Deplatforming works!', *Vice*, 2018 <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bjbp9d/do-social-media-bans-work> [accessed 9 November 2019]; Robert Claus, R., *Der extrem rechte Kampfsportboom* 2018 <<http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/279552/der-extrem-rechte-kampfsportboom/>> [accessed 10 October 2019].

extreme even within that movement. It is listed as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC).



In order to join Atomwaffen Division, you must undergo an application process which consists of this application and a further interview process. The process will be different for everyone. By filling out this form, you are only a prospect. As a prospect, you can and will be dismissed at our discretion.

Application Form available on AtomWaffen Division group's active page on the Darknet.

The AtomWaffen official page found on the darknet provides propaganda articles and videos; an application form in the recruiting section is also available online with specific questions related to the candidate, like name, birthday, PGP key, ethnic background, political views, motivations to join the group etc.

The Darknet alternative, which is already known as a place for these groups to develop and communicate, is likely to become a viable option for far-right and neo-Nazis groups to attract more people and spread propaganda, as it makes it much harder for the authorities to track them down. However, the propaganda material would be less accessible to the general public given that the access conditions are more complex.

- TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Right-wing violent extremists in Germany have historically shied away from attracting public attention to themselves or their attacks. Any form of public communication connected to violent acts by right-wing extremists has been extraordinarily rare in Germany²⁶. However, the analysed attacks in Hanau and Halle signal a new trend of globalisation for right-wing extremism. While right-wing extremist and violent extremist groups have long been very well connected internationally, their main target audience usually was their home nation²⁷. With the increasing use of live streaming, English-language manifestos, and social media platforms and messaging applications as the main facilitator of personal networks, right-wing extremism is shifting more toward a global stage.

The rise of right-wing extremism in Germany is indeed part of a worldwide, transnational phenomenon. Before the attack in Hanau, the last year saw the Christchurch attack, the Poway shooting, the El Paso shooting, the Pittsburgh shooting and the Halle attack. Each of the attacks, claiming a total of 88 victims, is connected to the idea of an "invasion", "great replacement", or "white genocide". Most of these attacks were punctually referenced by following attackers in their manifestos, in a vicious circle created to inspire emulations and copy-cat actions.

The trend of targeting migrants, Muslims or Jewish people, the live streaming, and the drafting of a manifesto, indicate the existence if not of a global strategy – at the very least – of a guidebook and of a connected network that unfolds from right-wing online forums, gaming platforms, Telegram groups, and even Facebook, YouTube and the Darkweb.

In recent years far-right extremist, neo-Nazi and white supremacy groups have been on the rise across Europe and elsewhere posing a transnational challenge and forming global networks that reach from Australia, New Zealand, Ukraine to western Europe, South Africa and the US.

A growing transnational phenomenon

In 2018, far-right terrorist attacks accounted for 17.2 per cent of terrorist incidents in the West. By contrast, attacks by Islamist groups accounted for 6.8 per cent of attacks, and attacks not attributed to any group accounted for 62.8 per cent of incidents in the West. The total number of far-right incidents has risen 320 per cent in the past five years, with 38 attacks recorded in 2018, compared to nine in 2013²⁸.

At the same time, white supremacists and far-right extremists appear to be strengthening transnational networks and even imitating the tactics, techniques, narratives and procedures of groups like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. These networks share approaches to recruitment, financing, and propaganda, with Ukraine emerging as a hub in the broader network of transnational far-right and white supremacy extremism, attracting foreign recruits from all over the world. According to the Soufan Group, more than 17,000 people from 50 countries have travelled to fight in Eastern Ukraine contributing to both Ukrainian nationalist and pro-Russian separatist sides, using the experience in the conflict as a training ground for further action in Europe and the US, while at the same time strengthening transnational links²⁹.

The rapid expanse of social media further facilitates radicalization and recruitment within the right-wing extremist domain. Spaces in which radicalized individuals can communicate and share content enable the development of a worldwide, rapidly expanding network.

²⁶ A primary example of this phenomenon is the German "National Socialist Underground" (NSU) terror group, which assassinated ten victims and conducted various bombings and bank robberies over its 13-years long existence.

²⁷ Daniel Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century* (United Kingdom, 2016), Routledge.

²⁸ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2019* (Sidney, 2019), p. 46.

²⁹ The Soufan Group, *Intel Brief: The Transnational Nature of Violent White Supremacy Extremism* (New York, 2019)

The attacks analysed highlighted the magnitude of an online community ready to spread contents published by the attackers and therefore reinforcing the threat of online radicalization. Individuals or small groups are increasingly radicalized online, where they can access a global network of like-minded.

As mentioned above, in Germany Telegram is now used by both legitimate political entities such as the AfD and illegitimate right-wing extremists to disseminate xenophobic ideas and violent contents. The risk of further radicalisation in these channels is high, and German authorities have been slow to respond to the threat coming from these new means of communication. While internet forums such as 8chan, now operating under the name 8kun, prove to incite lone wolf attacks such as the one in Halle, Telegram functions increasingly more like a recruitment platform for already established right-wing extremist groups and movements, as evidenced by Feuerkrieg Division's online behaviour. The German case suggests that violent attacks and terrorist actions emanating from these environments will prove difficult to thwart.

Finally, as we have seen in this analysis, the globalization of right-wing extremism is even more evident when closely analysing several of the high-profile attacks conducted over the past year. The attackers themselves have been lionized as heroes, martyrs, "saints," "commanders," and other honorifics. Right-wing extremists rely on a diverse set of techniques to radicalize potential recruits spreading from the worldwide music scene, fringe websites like Gab or 8chan to messaging applications and the dark web. Many adherents to right-wing extremism hold millenarian and apocalyptic beliefs about an imminent race war, with some ardent believers in the "end of time" and influenced by elements of an extremist and misinterpreted Christian identity. Among other core beliefs are violent anti-Semitism and anti-Islam feelings which pervade a broad range of groups espousing anti-government sentiments³⁰.

A diverse European phenomenon

The evidence and research presented in this analysis suggest that these groups will likely persist and grow, driven by ongoing conflicts, the racist and Islamophobic rhetoric of populist politicians worldwide and growing migration.

However, it is also important to underline how right-wing extremism is far from monolithic and is especially diverse in Europe, where the movement is characterized by a range of entities and often seeks shelter in a broad tent of fringe politics and underground movements. Furthermore, while European nationalist movements have largely been analysed through the frame of national or domestic contexts, many of these nationalist movements have distinctly and strikingly global aspects³¹. The British government is acutely aware of the threat posed by white supremacist extremists, which authorities have labelled the "fastest growing threat" of terrorist violence in that country since 2017³². Germany has struggled to root out neo-Nazi sympathizers in its security forces and government agencies and, as we have seen, has experienced a sharp increase in right-wing extremist attacks in latest years together with an increase in xenophobic offences and crimes.

In conclusion, the present analysis has shown that German right-wing extremism is not only growing but also has international links. It is in reason of this international and transnational character that right-wing extremism in Germany, Europe and elsewhere cannot be dealt with just at a local level but will necessitate a transnational approach and an international perspective.

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³⁰ The Soufan Center, *WHITE SUPREMACY EXTREMISM: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement*, (New York, September 2019), p. 32.

³¹ Miller-Idriss, Cynthia, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2017), p.133.

³² Kuras, Peter. "Germany Has a Neo-Nazi Epidemic," *Foreign Policy*, July 2, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/19-2019/07/02/germany-has-a-neo-nazi-terror-epidemic/>