

# SPOTLIGHT

JAN 2022

## The Lone Actor Challenge

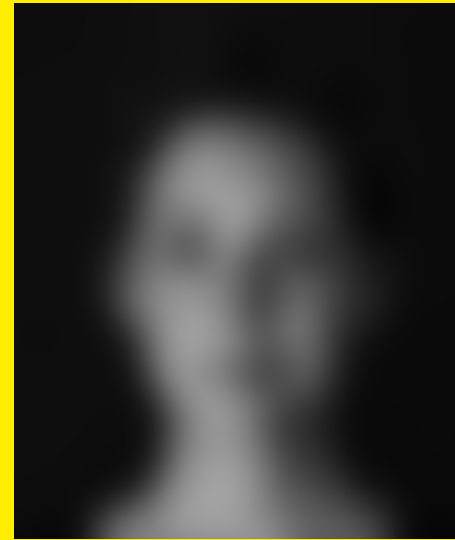
**10** YEARS OF  
RAN



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**EDITORIAL**

As RAN Practitioners enters into a new year, Europe continues to straddle the ongoing battle between keeping societies and communities as open as possible, against the continual threat and disruption posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For P/CVE practitioners, their work in engaging vulnerable individuals both online and in communities remains ever difficult.

In this environment, RAN practitioners must continue to be aware of evolving and emerging P/CVE threats. In 2021, Europe found itself facing a surge in conspiracy narratives and disinformation, the Taliban's return in Afghanistan and the growing threat of both violent left and right wing extremism. In amongst these threats, Lone Actor incidents have also regained media attention, with attacks in Kongsberg, Norway and Leigh-On-Sea, the United Kingdom, two prominent examples that have highlighted the ongoing need to understand and address the Lone Actor threat.

Whilst not a new phenomenon, what these incidents have shown is the ability of individuals, who are not affiliated to any group and operating alone, to evade security structures. However, whilst these individuals were definitively 'lone' in carrying out the attack, it can be argued that they were part of a process that was anything but isolated. Indeed, their radicalisation had taken place in an online ecosystem, that whilst is not an organised cell with command and control points or individuals, is actually far more organised than many think.

With this in mind, RAN practitioners must be more cognisant than ever of the characteristics that define the online environments in which Lone Actors operate in. To this end, the collection of articles and content in this month's Spotlight aims to provide a basis for this understanding, with a strong focus on how practitioners are able to navigate a highly challenging space for intervention work.

As always, we want to hear from you! If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for an article, interview or feature, please get in touch with the RAN Practitioners communications team at [ran@radaradvies.nl](mailto:ran@radaradvies.nl)

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# Interview: The Lone Actor Threat



**Cathrine  
THORLEIFSSON**

**This interview is taken from an upcoming RAN thematic Special Report that specifically looks at the evolving Lone Actor challenge for EU member states.**

**In the paper that you recently wrote for RAN on Lone Actors in digital environments, you wrote about the post organisational reality around Lone Actors, what do you mean by this?**

It means that subcultures online can be equally important in inspiring terrorism and political violence as organisations can be in the physical world. Of course there are offline drivers as well, it means that young digital natives these days are socialising and therefore being radicalised online primarily.

And when we talk about these digital spaces where a lot of young people find themselves, do you think the lack of content moderation and anonymity on these platforms make it impossible for practitioners to intervene? Is there any effective way you've uncovered for practitioners to intervene?

I think the most important CVE advice would be to build democratic resilience offline. We are living in a digital era and we are all digital citizens. Because some of these spaces are beyond law, beyond the nation state, it's important to equip young citizens and also older citizens with digital literacy skills. Critical literacy is also really important to identify conspiracy narratives, identify dehumanising hatred and also calls for violence.

**You also wrote in the report about the importance of memes to this culture. Could you give some specific examples of just how widespread this is?**

Well that is the language being used in these digital environments. It's a very visual culture that is important to the processes of belonging that is crucial to radicalisation and successful propaganda circulation. One example would be a common meme around 'Pepe The Frog' or the anti-semitic happy merchants meme, which is being used in processes of imitation. The Lone Actor terrorist attacks I wrote about in the report, that occurred in 2019, were inspired by this subculture but actually the perpetrators added to the culture by including their own memes and imitating such memetic culture during the attacks, which is all about imitating past mass casualties and atrocities.



**It can be such an obscure, online incubator space. How challenging is it then for practitioners to operate in these spaces?**

It's very challenging for frontline practitioners because this is a rapidly changing space. There's a lot of research being done into digital subcultures at the moment and what we're starting to know is that the effective structures online can be more important online than ideology/ies. And we also know that the online communities need to be approached as real-life communities are. So there's lots of helpful research being done into how prospective Lone Actors struggle to embed themselves in group contexts and that Lone Actors are unrepresented when it comes to mental illness diagnosis for instance. So practitioners need to approach this field looking at both an ideology that is gasified and following these emotional structures whilst also including a public mental health aspect in PVE and CVE programming.

**I can imagine that there are a lot of practitioners wondering what sort of headline recommendations would you make to practitioners heading into 2022?**

We recommended in the report to begin ups killing young male practitioners who are fluent in this digital culture, in the gaming culture, to work with their peers in detecting this as there is a generational gap both in terms of digital literacy and in terms of the visual symbols that are being used. I think it's also really important to understand the role of masculinity, and aggrieved masculinity, and 'heroic' masculinity in these spaces. Practitioners are encouraged to look at how these processes are intensely gendered, using these gender lens and perspective in their PE and CVE programming.

**Cathrine Thorleifsson** is a researcher at the Centre for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo, Norway. She earned a PhD in Anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2012, and from 2014-2017 she was a postdoctoral fellow at the ERC-funded project Overheating: the three crises of globalization. She is the author of *Nationalism and the Politics of Fear in Israel: Race and Identity on the Border with Lebanon* (2015).

**“It's very challenging for frontline practitioners because this is a rapidly changing space. There's a lot of research being done into digital subcultures at the moment and what we're starting to know is that the effective structures online can be more important online than ideology/ies.”**

A short film, produced by RAN Practitioners, provides a thematic overview of the evolving Lone Actor threat. We hear from four voices, including academic experts in the field and a RAN Working Group Leads, who offer different perspectives on the challenge facing EU Member States today. You can view the film in full [here](#).



A paper, produced by RAN Practitioners in 2021, 'Lone Actors in Digital Environments', aims to provide an overview of digital environments that facilitate the development of Lone Actors, drawing insights from qualitative research and monitoring of VRWE online subcultures. The paper concludes that online structures and subcultural milieus could be equally important for inspiring violence as connections to groups in the physical world. In order to understand this emerging trend, it is important to recognise the online communities that violent right-wing extremists (VRWE) use to produce a sense of belonging, spread dehumanising propaganda and promote acts of violence. You can read the paper in full [here](#).



# Lone Actors in Digital Environments



Authored by Cathrine Thorleifsson and Joey Düker, RAN External Experts

## LONE ACTORS IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

Table 2: Relevant Imageboards

### Imageboards

**4chan:** Anonymous imageboard which has been a central generator of internet culture, memes and slang since its inception<sup>33</sup>. It contains dozens of different boards focusing on all kinds of topics. 4chan's Politically Incorrect (or /pol/) discussion board has strong ties to VRWE ideology and has been referenced by mass shooters. However, it is important to note that while racist and antisemitic views are prevalent on /pol/, it contains other forms of content, too.

**8chan / 8kun:** Another anonymous imageboard. After certain content was banned on 4chan in 2014, 8chan saw an influx of users since it presented itself as the version more friendly in terms of free speech. The Christchurch, Poway and El Paso lone actors all announced their attacks on 8chan. After the El Paso attack, the site went down but was later rebranded as 8kun.

**Endchan:** Another anonymous imageboard, albeit less popular. The Bærum lone actor announced his attack on this board.

**Meguca:** An anonymous imageboard with a thematic focus on anime. The site was taken down after the Halle shooter uploaded his documents to this board.

Table 3: 2019 Right-Wing Terrorists with Known Online Presences

Location	Date	Terrorist <sup>34</sup> and Age at Time of Attack	Manifesto posted on	Livestream
Christchurch, New Zealand	15 March 2019	Brenton Tarrant (28)	8chan, /pol/	Facebook
Poway, USA	27 April 2019	John Earnest (19)	8chan, /pol/	Facebook (attempt)
El Paso, USA	3 August 2019	Patrick Crusius (21)	8chan, /pol/	
Bærum, Norway	10 August 2019	Philip Manshaus (21)	Endchan	Facebook (attempt)
Halle, Germany	9 October 2019	Stephan Balliet (27)	Meguca	Twitch

These 2019 right-wing lone actor terrorists are highlighted here because parts of their web-based socialisation appears to have occurred on "chan" forums where they also announced their attacks. Moreover, the ones following the Christchurch attack all appear to have been inspired by the Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant to some degree. Their engagement with the forums was not brief or superficial, but an evident embrace of a cyberculture they grew up with.

The Christchurch shooter posted frequently on 8chan<sup>35</sup>. A report by the Norwegian Police revealed that the Bærum shooter Philip Manshaus, who claimed to have been directly inspired by Tarrant, frequented 4chan and later 8kun<sup>36</sup>. Both Manshaus and the El Paso shooter Patrick Crusius told investigators they came to their views on the internet. Manshaus claimed that his neo-Nazi worldview was shaped by ideas he acquired

<sup>33</sup> Hine et al., "Kek, Cucks, and God Emperor Trump," 3.

<sup>34</sup> While we agree that it is advisable to not publicly name the terrorists in order to deny them infamy, this paper is addressed not at the general public but at first-line practitioners. They should be provided with the necessary tools to identify common narratives within (V)RWE online environments and the names of the terrorists are part of this. Thus, they will be named from here on out.

<sup>35</sup> Munn, "Algorithmic hate".

<sup>36</sup> Klungtveit, "Terror-novels, 8chan and Norwegian neo-Nazis".



# ARTICLE: Looking beyond the traditional threat: Alt-Jihadism



Institute of  
Strategic Dialogue  
Research Team

On the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) researchers have been tracking and monitoring Salafi-jihadists across social media platforms, who look to radicalise and influence lone actor attacks, for over a year. In doing so, ISD has identified a networked community of “alternative” support for groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, blending the aesthetics of “chan culture,” the alt-right, and extremist groups...



Whilst there is currently no specific lone actor threat related to this movement, it undoubtedly convergences with Islamist ideologies that have historically been heavily involved in Lone Actor radicalisation and indeed, it does not take a leap of imagination to see it developing similar in the future. Therefore, this 'alternative' online community, and their conversations, must continue to be monitored, and their emergence should be brought to the attention of P/CVE practitioners.

This community of supporters, whom ISD researchers are referring to as "alt-jihadists", specialises in producing and disseminating Salafi-jihadist content using familiar "chan culture" and alt-right meme characters such as Pepe the Frog, Wojack, Trollface and GigaChad.

ISD researchers tracked 150 9/11-memes in this mold across Instagram, Facebook, and niche platforms associated with gaming communities. These meme production communities designed and disseminated meme videos featuring a balaclava-clad Pepe the Frog piloting an airplane into the twin towers, while a dead pilot Wojack lay in the cockpit of the plane, followed by footage of the attacks, as well as a video of a GigaChad smiling confidently in the foreground as footage of the planes slamming into the towers played in the background.

As part of a recent series of reports released by ISD on Generation Z and the digital Salafi ecosystem online, researchers identified six alt-jihadist Facebook pages and groups, with a follower-base of 20,131, that were engaged in explicitly Salafi-jihadist meme discussions and production, mostly in Arabic and supportive of groups including Islamic State and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

These networks are also linked to encrypted channels connected to a younger generation of alt-jihadist graphic designers, remixing and creating 8-bit graphic videos in support of these same groups.

Tracking these communities, as well as their memes and meme videos, ISD researchers found pages and groups on Facebook dedicated to the production of "chan culture," alt-right and jihadist-themed memes and meme videos, under the guise of being pan-Islamist and "Wahabic."

While it may seem as if this loosely linked community of alt-jihadist meme producers is highly decentralised, researchers found that



Islamic State supporters had set up an “Islamic Emirate of Memeistan (IEM) Committee,” or in Arabic: “ةيمالسالانا سزيم ةرام! نم ةنجل” in order to “evaluate” their second annual meme contest for its best “memer.” Rules included no photos of leaders or stolen memes. The prize was a “certificate”.

This small community were engaged in seeding their memes in public spaces to gain further traction into mainstream meme pages and groups.

While these communities are still nascent and developing means by which they can coordinate across a range of platforms, they provide new insight into the convergence of what media scholar Lawrence Lessig called the “age-old cultural tradition of the ‘remix.’” With internet culture continually being influenced by both fringe and mainstream elements, young extremist group supporters, representing a range of different ideologies, are experimenting, and creating new content that blends cultural ideas, imagery, and language of other fringe internet groups.

This extends across a linguistic divide, where there is adoption of “chan culture” phrases such as “based,” “waifu,” “king,” and “libtard,” into Arabic by alt-jihadist content creators. These communities are building linkages with other alt- communities in Arabic, such as Baathists, and those supportive of fascist regimes, in which ISD researchers found the use of “chan culture” and alt-right aesthetics influencing the content and language of Arabic-speaking Nazi sympathisers.

These communities present a new challenge to moderation and “counter-narrative” efforts in their ability to both evade automated detection, based on the fact this is original content with little to no terror group branding, and withstand onslaughts of “counter” content.

Responding to these communities will require rethinking the modes and methods by which practitioners design and deploy their responses. What is clear from tracking and monitoring these emerging alt-jihadist communities is that the convergence between ideologies, as exemplified by Alt-Jihadism, will play a huge role in the future development of extremism and its prevention.

*Since 2006, ISD has been at the forefront of analysing and responding to extremism in all its forms. ISD partners with governments, cities, businesses and communities, working to deliver solutions at all levels of society, to empower those that can really impact change. ISD is headquartered in London with a global footprint that includes teams in Washington DC, Berlin, Beirut, Amman, Nairobi and Paris.*

**“These communities present a new challenge to moderation and “counter-narrative” efforts in their ability to both evade automated detection, based on the fact this is original content with little to no terror group branding, and withstand onslaughts of “counter” content.”**

# ARTICLE: **Lone Actors: Challenges for Practitioners in the Criminal Justice Field**



**Dr. Maria  
ALVANOU**

**Talking about countering extremist and terrorist violence today, we cannot avoid lone actors that pose challenges to authorities. Though the term “lone wolf” is often used without second thought by the media<sup>1</sup>, there are still several definitional issues for scholars. These regard the various grades of relationship/affiliation (or better absence of them) between the perpetrator and an organization functioning as an ideological umbrella and possibly wholly or in part—usually communicating online—directing the attack and/or training the attacker...**



**At a certain point, either because of thwarting the attack, or after the violent aftermath, it is the criminal justice system that will deal with lone actors. This means that a wide range of practitioners that RAN educates. e.g., police officers, medical experts, psychologists & psychotherapists, defense lawyers, prosecutors, judges will have to consider certain parameters of the phenomenon. The following are some points that need attention for such practitioners:**

### **i. Another approach to operational activity**

Terrorist activity can be understood (especially thinking older times) as controlled strongly and directly by organizations, functioning not just as “hot beds” of violent ideology, but also as operational hubs, designing and putting into action a concrete plan to be followed by militant members. The concept of the “lone actor” brings the individual actor in the center of attention and it has become the focus for CVE/PVE experts and the media, especially connected to Islamist terrorist networks, like Al Qaeda and Daesh. Despite that, lone actor operations are not an Islamist exclusivity, for example they regard also far-right violent activity (Thorleifsson & Düker, 2021). Thus, practitioners should be ready to recognize this operational phenomenon, without prejudice to a specific type/ideology of extremist/terrorist violence. Additionally, it can be argued that also perpetrators of active shooting incidents could/should be dealt in a relevant way (though belonging to a different violence category). The recent school attack in Michigan is an example (the case actually has been prosecuted by the local authorities as terrorism)<sup>2</sup> marking the beginning of a new criminal justice approach.

### **ii. Mental health of lone actors**

For the media and the public lone actors maybe considered “crazy”, but, although it is normal for extremist/terrorist violence not to be considered as acceptable behavior, there can be difficulties in establishing actual mental illness and a degree/type that could be influencing culpability. The case of Anders Breivik, who was first diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic and thus legally insane (causing reactions in Norwegian society) and then another expert team appointed by the Oslo district court found him to be nonpsychotic and sane during his criminal actions (Rahman et al, 2016) is indicative about the problems around diagnosing mental illness and the respective repercussions. Research has been contradictory. For example, some work has been rejecting

1. Regarding the use of the term by the media and problems arising from this, see <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/mar/30/myth-lone-wolf-terrorist>

2. For the school shooting and the decision to prosecute it under terrorism charges, see <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/terrorism-charge-michigan-school-shooting-mark-new-way-forward-experts-rcna7365>

3. Regulation (EU) 2021/784 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online (Text with EEA relevance), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/784/oj>

psychopathology in terrorism (e.g., Post 2007), consistent to the view that organizations strategically reject individuals they would not be able to operationally trust. Yet, other work highlights mental health issues especially in lone actors, e.g., McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) remind us of Ted Kaczynski suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. Practitioners should be alert not to fall into the trap of directly connecting violence with mental health issues or vice versa. Considering a priori individuals suffering from mental illness as violent and a menace to public security should be avoided, as discriminatory, prejudiced, and labelling behavior, leading to marginalization and finally making radicalization to violence easier. But also, failure to recognize mental health issues could be causing problems regarding the investigation procedure and the admissibility of evidence obtained (e.g., interviewing and accepting confession from a vulnerable, mentally challenged suspect who does not understand the legal procedure), as well as about the possible outcome of the trial, in case the defendant had no perception of reality during his/her actions. Practically, it is important for a range of practitioners (starting from police officers arresting and investigating suspects, to prosecutors pressing charges, lawyers preparing defense strategies and judges deciding about competency to stand in trial and admission of evidence) to be alert about the mental health condition of lone actor suspects/defendants. Moreover, to help authorities understand how vulnerabilities may have made brainwashing and indoctrination easier, practitioners may need to testify as experts e.g., psychotherapists who were treating a suspect/defendant and if confidentiality rules allow for that of course. For implementing disengagement projects, also considering possible mental health problems could be decisive, as addressing them could be a priority before anything else.

### **iii. Digital trails of radicalization to violence:**

Internet can make radicalization to violence easier, especially for lone actors. In the past this could mainly refer to websites (e.g., jihadi websites). However, today the role of social media and generally social networking should be considered pivotal and creating new dynamics. While the power of EU Member States competent authorities<sup>3</sup> to require from service providers to remove terrorist content or to disable access to terrorist content could be a useful tool, to monitor participation and contribution to social media groups, online discussion forums etc. can also prove useful.

For police practitioners, this means obtaining admissible to trial digital evidence proving radicalization to violence. Additionally, it can provide valuable information in order to establish “self-radicalization” or online instigation/incitement, which is essential for investigating, prosecuting, and convicting all the actors involved in an extremist/terrorist violence case exactly according to their involvement in the violent activity.

#### **iv. Special categories to consider: youth and women**

As youth is particularly active online and in social media, there is need in young lone actor cases to research and map the possible digital radicalization. Especially since the COVID -19 pandemic meant long term lockdowns, during which internet became the only socialization venue for millions of youngsters in isolation, exposing them in a variety of extreme ideologies and conspiracy theories (Basit 2021). At the same time, though women show extreme low representation in lone actor violence (Pantucci et al, 2015), we should scholarly research the reasons behind this gender gap. Moreover, it can be crucial for the outcome of a case for practitioners to avoid overlooking the possibility of female lone actors. Such awareness could also help in detecting and recognizing any different patterns in (online or offline) radicalization to violence.

#### **Concluding remarks**

Apart from the obvious CVE/PVE professionals belonging to law enforcement agencies, many more types of practitioners are called to deal with extremist/terrorist violence is the framework of the criminal justice system. Such violence is dealt in EU members states as an offence and any preventing and countering strategies cannot be but connected to this approach, thus all relevant practitioners should be trained to recognize operational methods and perform their duties accordingly. Lone actor violence can pose challenges that need research and education/training for practitioners to be able to identify the best way to perform their duties.

**“The Internet and digital environments can notoriously ease the pathway from radicalisation to violence, particularly for Lone Actors. Today, the role of social media and other digital platforms should be considered strongly by practitioners. Social media companies and companies behind digital platforms and video-sharing services should strive to remove terrorist content.”**

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**“Practically, it is important for a range of practitioners (starting from police officers arresting and investigating suspects, to prosecutors pressing charges, lawyers preparing defense strategies and judges assessing competence to stand in trial and admission of evidence) to be alert to mental health vulnerabilities within Lone Actor suspects and/or defendants. Moreover, to help authorities understand how vulnerabilities may have made brainwashing and indoctrination easier, practitioners may need to**

This paper, produced by RAN Practitioners in 2021, 'Returning to Extremism: An Overview on Terrorist Reoffending and Current Challenges', aims to provide recommendations for RAN practitioners working with violent extremist clients by discussing recidivism data, current challenges, risk and protective factors, and risk management strategies. Due to recent tragic terrorist attacks in Europe, the question of terrorist recidivism has come to the centre of attention in public and policy discourses. Although the data shows low recidivism rates in European countries, the impact of successful re-offenses are enormous and prompts the revision of existing practices. You can read the full paper [here](#).



# Returning to Extremism: An Overview on Terrorist Reoffending and Current Challenges



Authored by **Susanna Z. Papp**, RAN Expert Pool Member,  
and **Robert Örell**, RAN REHAB Co-leader

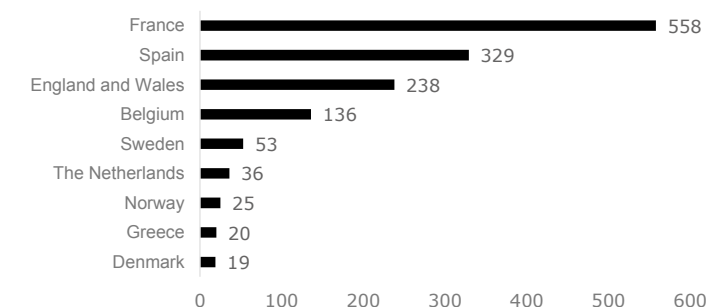
## RETURNING TO EXTREMISM

and deception, (3) the role of assessment tools, (4) information sharing and interagency collaboration, and (5) transition management. Key issues and challenges in each of the five areas are discussed, followed by recommendations and inspiring practices. Lastly, proactive and preparatory measures are presented in case the worst-case scenario takes place and a client reoffends. The paper finishes by presenting a summary of the recommendations.

### Characteristics and current challenges of the extremist prisoner population in Europe

The population of offenders who have been **convicted for terrorism-related crimes** has changed in the past decade in Europe. In addition, the majority of these inmates are expected to be released in the next two to five years.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is important to give an overview of the current extremist prison population in European countries. According to a recently published review by Basra and Neumann (2020) based on open-source databases, there are currently roughly about 1 500 prisoners in custody for terrorism-related offenses in the studied 9 European countries (Fig. 1.): 558 in France (93.5 % jihadists, 6.5 % Basque separatists), 329 in Spain (61.7 % Basque separatists, 38.3 % jihadists), 238 in England and Wales (76.8 % jihadists, 18.5 % right-wing extremists, 4.6 % other), 136 in Belgium, 53 in Sweden (with an additional 54 individuals held either on remand or released on probation), 36 in The Netherlands, 25 in Norway, 20 in Greece (85 % left-wing extremists, 15 % jihadists) and 19 in Denmark.

Figure 1. Number of convicted prisoners for terrorism-related offenses (Basra and Neumann, 2020)



When including those offenders who are monitored because of **suspicion of, or vulnerability to radicalisation**, this number exceeds 3000 in the reviewed 9 countries and Germany. The number of prisoners monitored for radicalisation in Germany is approximately 292.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Austria had 39 inmates (including 2 women and 11 young adults, and an additional 20 individuals on pre-trial detention) in 2020.

The **average length of sentence** in the reviewed countries<sup>13</sup> is between 4 and 16 years (4 in Denmark, 5.5 in Spain, 7.5 in the UK, and 16 in Greece), with a range from 6 months to 45 years. The **types of offence** vary according to each country's legislation, and may include attacking or attack planning, participating in or attempting foreign terrorist fighting, recruitment, leadership, providing financial or logistical support, distributing propaganda, as well as terrorist apologetics (e.g. writing a celebratory post on social media in the aftermath of a terrorist attack).<sup>14</sup> Regarding the **ideological background** of the perpetrators, 82 % of the prisoners are violent Islamist offenders, 7 % belong to violent right-wing extremist groups, while 10 % is

<sup>11</sup> Renard, 2020a

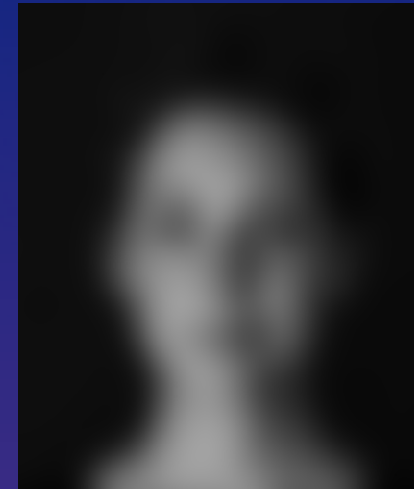
<sup>12</sup> Basra & Neumann, 2020

<sup>13</sup> The data provided in this section is from Basra & Neumann, 2020

<sup>14</sup> Renard, 2020a



# ARTICLE: A Practitioner's Guide to Tackling Extremist Digital Environments



Joey DÜKER

A recent paper I co-wrote with Cathrine Thorleifsson (C-REX, Norway) for the Radicalisation Awareness Network addresses the importance of digital environments for so-called Lone Actor terrorists. As a brief guide for practitioners, I will expand on the various roles that different platforms serve in this context, with a focus on the far right...

**For the purpose of this overview, it might be useful to distinguish between prominent right-wing extremist influencers and communities. Influencers seek attention and an audience, while communities offer their members spaces for cultural and social exchange. Specifically, far-right activists seek to influence public discourse and thus hope for a large audience, whereas far-right online communities are usually directed inwardly and help to solidify right-wing extremist views and values of their members.**

Mainstream social media platforms might be attractive to far-right influencers since they promise a potentially large audience. However, due to the enforcement of platform policies and deplatforming practices, right-wing extremist influencers and communities must adjust their communication strategies to avoid detection and deletion. Thus, less public online spaces can be more appealing to such actors.

At least in Germany, the semi-public platform Telegram appears to be the most important one for easy access to right-wing extremist content. Far-right channels spread racist memes, antisemitic conspiracy narratives or even instruction manuals on how to build weapons. In far-right groups, violent right-wing extremists are glorified and their “manifests” shared. Finding such content is shockingly easy. Once one identifies a Telegram channel or group – either via the app’s search function or by finding a link to the channel/group via a search engine – it is easy to find like-minded channels/groups. This is due to the fact that it is common practice to forward messages from other channels. By clicking through the forwarded messages shared in a channel, one can quickly find dozens of similar channels/groups within minutes.

Telegram is particularly attractive for communities with fringe opinions since they are often not tolerated elsewhere. However, those far-right activists trying to influence a large and young audience tend to utilize platforms popular with that target audience. These include Instagram, TikTok or YouTube, for instance, even though the right-wing extremist messaging might be more coded there.

Although networks of far-right actors exist on these particular platforms, their structures do not lend themselves to the establishment of communities quite as well as other online spaces,

**“These narratives, which are unverified or unproven explanations for social occurrences or developments, can be described as the representation and explanation of events that are defined as the result of deliberate actions by a small powerful elite, without any evidence.”**

such as imageboards. Here, small social bubbles with shared values and symbols established themselves over time. Since many of these forums are anonymous and usually lack strict content moderation, they allow right-wing extremist content to flourish. A heads-up for practitioners wishing to identify extremist content on imageboards: the layout of many popular imageboards makes searching for specific content, monitoring threads and collecting evidence rather tedious.

Depending on a practitioner's location, different alternative social media platforms might be of relevance, too. Due to their more lenient moderation efforts, platforms such as Gab or VK.com might host actors of interest to the practitioner. Similar to Telegram, far-right actors might also be more likely to speak more candidly and unfiltered, potentially revealing more of their ideological positions than they do on their mainstream social media accounts.

Lastly, it might be worthwhile to figure out whether fringe groups in the practitioner's country established their own platforms. These might be much smaller and less professionally designed than their mainstream counterparts but they might also host more explicit content. As with online forums hosted by right-wing extremist, practitioners should be particularly careful when creating research accounts on these fringe platforms since their data might not be stored as safely.

**Joey Düker** works for the online monitoring project de:hate of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in Germany. As part of the project's investigations, he has been monitoring and analysing right-wing extremist phenomena and hate speech within online environments for several years.





# HATE - A COURSE IN 3 LESSONS

## FEAR

Noun  
/fiə(r)/

The bad feeling that you have when you are in **danger** or when a particular thing frightens you.

An emotional state - more or less intense depending on the person and the circumstances - consisting of a sense of **insecurity, bewilderment and anxiety** in the face of a real or imaginary danger or in the face of a thing or fact that is or is believed to be harmful.

# COMMIT

FEATURE

COMMIT is a European project funded by the Internal Security Fund, within the Civil Society Empowerment Programme, coordinated by Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo Danilo Dolci, a non-profit organisation located in Palermo (Italy) born in 1958 from the experience and work of the pacifist Danilo Dolci. The mission of CSC is to promote the empowerment of the community with all its members, supporting the creative development of people and working towards a culture of peace and non-violence through education at all levels.



In this project, CSC works in cooperation with the University of Palermo (Italy) and other 4 organisations in Europe ([KMOP](#), Greece; [DIE BERATER](#), Austria; [TEXTGAIN](#), Belgium; [Radio la Benevolencija](#), The Netherlands).

**Project duration: 01/01/2020 – 30/06/2022**

Extremists, radicals & terrorists are populating the spaces where young people consume & share information, socialise & are socialised which makes them a highly vulnerable group to terrorist/ radical/extremist propaganda & recruitment attempts. Young people are therefore one of the main groups that would benefit from learning skills improving their capacity to detect propaganda, fake information & extremist content, and being trained about how to develop & disseminate positive messages among their peers that can be a real alternative to extremist content online. To help them resist indoctrination & radicalisation, their critical thinking & media literacy must be improved & the internalisation of democratic values supported. COMMIT does so via offline activities such as workshops and online communication on platforms usually used by the young.

Although online communication activities are not deradicalisation tools in themselves, they can be used as preventive tools, offering different perspectives on societal challenges and, directly/indirectly, challenging extremist ideas via counter & alternative narratives.

**COMMIT - Communication Campaign against extremism and radicalization** aims to prevent and dissuade vulnerable young people (13 – 25) in 4 partner countries from extremism, radicalism & terrorism providing them with skills relevant to co- create counter narratives challenging extremist online propaganda and alternative narratives promoting democratic values, tolerance & cooperation, and equipping them with competences needed to identify and resist susceptible online content of intolerance & violence (hate speech, fake news & populist propaganda that can act as a stepping stone to radicalisation).COMMIT adopts a trans-medial approach combining online campaigning & face to face activities (workshops, contest, events).

The project involves also University students of communication, media professionals, Civil Society Organisations, Internet companies, stakeholders to meet the new challenges linked to extremist propaganda online & radicalisation, training them in alternative & counter narratives and their use in prevention of radicalisation through a capacity building programme. The project added value is thus to address both sides of the communication spectrum: the senders (University students of communication as future media professionals, with the aim to change the narrative on the social media, offering different perspectives and combating populist propaganda and fake news, by training them on how to create alternative and counter-narratives for P/CVE), and the recipients (young people susceptible to sympathizing with extremist messages and groups, empowering them to resist to hate incitement, stimulating their critical thinking for a conscious use of the social media and active citizenship online).

Indeed, young people are involved as recipients but also creators: COMMIT combines in fact online activities with in presence trainings, workshops and events, with the main result of co-creating a communication campaign, from youth to youth. The COMMIT Campaign has been launched in July 2020 and it is actually on Facebook and Instagram, with a common European page and National pages.

The COMMIT campaign is called “HATE: A COURSE IN THREE LESSONS”.

The main goal is to raise awareness to the basic triggers used to incite us towards hate - with the aim of stimulating active bystandership to resist them.

The campaign is organised in 3 “lessons” as steps through the discovery of the roots of hatred, combining psychological literacy to media literacy, exercising the audience’s judgment for the Recognition of suspicious/non-suspicious elements in speech, and stimulating the feeling of agency, withstanding the “bystander effect”:

#### LESSON #1

Fear and Hate: an intimate relationship showing how hate speech, fake news and populist propaganda thrive on fear and loss of positive identity, an easy hook to hate and violence;

#### LESSON #2

In-grouping and scapegoating: how we love our enemies  
Reflecting on how fear and insecurity nurture the dynamic of “us vs. them” that justifies hatred and violence;

#### LESSON #3

Active bystandership: the magic bullet  
Inviting young people to consciously acting, attacking problems, not people!

COMMIT EUROPE

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

COMMIT Italy

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

COMMIT Austria

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

COMMIT Netherlands

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

COMMIT Greece

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

**“The campaign is organised in 3 “lessons” as steps through the discovery of the roots of hatred, combining psychological literacy to media literacy, exercising the audience’s judgment for the Recognition of suspicious/non-suspicious elements in speech, and stimulating the feeling of agency, withstanding the “bystander effect.”**

## Highlights: **RAN activity on Lone Actors**

To participate, get involved or simply find out more information about RAN Practitioners' work on Lone Actors, please find further information below.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the foreseen activities will take place online. The insights and outcomes gathered from these meetings will be published in the RAN Practitioners Update and on the RAN website. Stay tuned for updates on RAN social media channels.

For more information about RAN Practitioners activities please visit the Calendar on the RAN website [here](#).



### **C&N Working Group**

The working group will gather insights on the content of these narratives, its target audiences, the credible messengers and the varying ways of dissemination.

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### **REHAB Working Group**

The working group will gather insights on the content of these narratives, its target audiences, the credible messengers and the varying ways of dissemination.

[READ MORE](#)



### **Mental Health Working Group**

The working group will gather insights on the content of these narratives, its target audiences, the credible messengers and the varying ways of dissemination.

[READ MORE](#)

# LIBRARY: DISCOVER MORE

IF you would like to discover more about the topic of youth engagement you can get in touch with the RAN Staff, take a look at the [RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices](#) or read through some of the latest [RAN papers](#). We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

[RAN \(2021\)](#)

['Lone Actors as a Challenge for P/CVE'](#)

[RAN \(2021\)](#)

['Risk Assessment in Prison'](#)

[RAN \(2021\)](#)

['Cross-cutting thematic event - Lone Actors - Jointly taking stock of recent developments and combining knowledge'](#)

[RAN \(2021\)](#)

[Small Scale Meeting - Digital Terrorists and Lone Actors'](#)

[RAN \(2020\)](#)

['Lone Actors, Police and P/CVE'](#)





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