

**POLICE**

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**CONCLUSION PAPER**

*RAN POL online meeting 'Online guided tour for police officers on right-wing extremism and accelerationism: how can the police be prepared online and offline?' 26 and 30 June 2023, Online via Teams (#622)*

# Online guided tour for police officers on right-wing extremism and accelerationism: How can the police be prepared online and offline?

## Short summary

Police officers and experts from different European countries came together to examine the landscape of right-wing extremism (RWE) and accelerationism and to exchange their experiences and approaches. They particularly addressed the role of the police in the online sphere, the challenges they encounter, and the methods of monitoring and intervention. The key outcomes were the following:

- More precise definitions of various forms of right-wing terrorism are needed, as the term 'right-wing extremism' is too broad for the wide range of different narratives, risks, audiences and communication methods.
- The separation between online and offline is not absolute; they are interconnected aspects of one world. The police require better tools, legislation and capacity to effectively address both realms.
- The police should contribute to enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, fostering resilience, and actively engaging in online monitoring and interventions. Police can contribute by raising sense of urgency, expertise and authority.
- Community-oriented policing will remain a crucial element in the work of police. Thus, this concept needs to be fully integrated into police strategies and explicitly emphasised.

## Highlights of the discussion

The first day of the meeting focused on examining the landscape of RWE and accelerationism. The primary objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various forms, threats, groups and platforms associated with this particular type of extremism. The exploration began with two presentations delivered by experts, which were followed by group discussions.

Cathrine Thorleifsson, Head of the Norwegian Government's Commission on Extremism and a researcher at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, delivered an insightful presentation on the online 4chan culture. This digital space serves as a breeding ground and a source of inspiration for post-organisational leaderless terrorism embodied by lone attackers, following in the footsteps of individuals like Anders Behring Breivik and Brenton Tarrant. Key points from her presentation include:

- Users, also known as 'anons', engage in a 'play frame' of exploratory behaviour within the 4chan culture, which combines cyber fascism with trolling, shitposting and meta-messaging.
- The 4chan culture exhibits hybrid and fluid fascism, amplifying and reinforcing intersectional anti-Semitism and Islamophobia through memes and repetitive messages. The ideology and form of these messages and narratives are continuously evolving and reaching a wider audience.
- The online realm of RWE showcases extensive innovation in technology, communication and content distribution. However, the distinction between 'online and offline' is blurred; they are inherently interconnected aspects of one overarching reality.
- The 4chan culture normalises racist content and glorifies violence through mimetic irony. This culture also promotes heroic masculinity and misogynistic content.

Ali Hedayat, a researcher from the federal criminal police in Germany, shared exclusive results of the BKA Research and Development Project titled 'Controlling Propaganda Online'. This project was co-funded by the Internal Security Fund of the EU. The study focused on the longitudinal monitoring of open source intelligence (OSINT) online extremist content, aiming to inform measures that target the prevention of radicalisation among vulnerable groups.

Through an extended period of monitoring, they examined how social media platforms were being used and the diverse forms of content shared, including videos, images and rap music. The identified themes within this content encompassed culture, migration, media and freedom of speech, as well as conspiracy theories like the Great Reset. A notable challenge highlighted in the findings is the presence of anti-Semitic codes and conspiracy theories propagated by socially acceptable figures, including Kanye West, Xavier Naidoo and German gangsta rappers.

During the discussion, RWE appeared to have a multifaceted nature. This examination encompassed its ideological foundations and its various manifestations, both online and offline, across different countries. The primary takeaway from the discussion was that a more precise and nuanced definition is required to understand RWE due to its complexity and the diversity within its individuals, groups, ideologies and operational methods. This complexity arises from several factors, alongside the issue of mental health:

- There is a significant link between RWE, organised crime and football hooligans, resulting in powerful combinations of online and offline activities. These connections go beyond hooligans with white supremacy tendencies and involve networks that combine these elements.
- The impact of the online 'Siege Culture' is notable, affecting both young and older individuals and shaping their beliefs and actions.
- The influence of international and North American sovereign citizen movements adds to the complexity of the phenomenon.

- Right-wing narratives are increasingly gaining traction and becoming more mainstream in public debates, media and even parliaments.
- The motivations behind RWE are diverse, ranging from heroic masculinity and hate to feelings of injustice and opposing the government.

## Recommendations

On the second day of the meeting, the focus was on exchanging insights regarding the current role of police in addressing RWE and how the activities of extremists are being monitored in various countries. After the exchanges and discussions, participants engaged in small group discussions to formulate recommendations for police based on the insights gathered from both days of the meeting. The key recommendations were the following:

- As mentioned above, it is essential to establish clear and shared definitions for the different forms of RWE. It is very often '*right-wing extremism + something else*'. This something else could be: other ideology, grievances, psycho-social issues, mental issues, or esoteric, religious, historical or personal motives). This can help in better understanding the nature of the specific phenomenon and facilitate data comparison and analysis, especially in a European context. This means that instead of focusing solely on violent right-wing extremism (VRWE), consideration should be given to the wider context and the motives that may contribute to VRWE, like misogynistic or anti-government sentiments.
- Offline and online activities of RWE should be addressed together. Be aware that actions posted online can have huge implications offline that require better tools, legislation and capacity to effectively address both realms. Police feel limited by privacy regulations, and ask for better digital tools and more capacity and time, both for specialists and other teams.
- Dealing with the complexity of RWE requires securing necessary resources, including funding and manpower to support the police approaches: hiring trained staff, working with mental health specialists and acquiring necessary software and online tools.
- Online monitoring and engaging with (potential) extremist groups online can help to establish a presence online and build trust with vulnerable individuals in these communities. This should be done by regular officers, specialised units like the Norwegian Internet Patrol and by multi-agency partners. Police and others lag in online presence and activity.
- Countering hate and extremist narratives online can be challenging because it is not easy to remove this content. Therefore, it is important to strengthen efforts and make it possible to identify these narratives and counter them through targeted campaigns that promote alternative narratives and critical thinking skills.
- Community policing remains crucial, including strong collaboration and communication with stakeholders, schools, and vulnerable and targeted communities.
- As there is an overlap between VRWE and extremism with anti-government and anti-institution narratives, there is a need to work on the breeding ground and grievances. Fostering trust in the government, police and other institutions can help to prevent right-wing extremist groups from gaining momentum and recruiting vulnerable individuals. This requires a high level of transparency and strong communications with the public by the government, police and other institutions.
- Law enforcement should also address the underlying causes that lead individuals to join right-wing extremist groups and towards radicalisation. Police can contribute to the prevention of violent extremism (PVE), as in other types of crime prevention, by being aware of, and addressing, grievances, mental health issues and identity crises in order for their interventions to be effective. Police, for instance locally connected community police, cannot do this alone and must operate in multi-agency PVE.

- Exposure to white supremacy propaganda and the dissemination of extremist, misogynistic and hateful content and heroic status for terrorists on social media and other platforms should be limited. This is a joint responsibility and effort by the Internet Industry and law enforcement, for instance in the Europol Safer Internet days with the notice and takedown operations.
- Detecting early signs of radicalisation remains crucial, which means that law enforcement officers need to be trained to recognise the new signs, trends and slogans of RWE, enabling them to intervene at an early stage.
- Building resilience is vital in preventing vulnerability to right-wing extremist ideologies. This means providing care and support for individuals dealing with personal circumstances, grief and mental health issues. It also requires the engagement of specialists and partners to redirect these individuals towards alternative narratives, steering them away from extremist ideologies. The role of police in these multi-agency efforts is in raising awareness, contributing expertise and intelligence, and adding the repressive element as a push factor. For Jihadist radicalisation police proved to play this role; for VRWE radicalisation it could be intensified.

- Increased capacity: The focus on enforcing laws and being responsive will require a larger workforce to handle confrontations and react with force when necessary. However, it is important to balance recruitment numbers with maintaining high standards to avoid compromising public trust and minimising incidents of misconduct.
- Police need, and recommend, safety measures for officers, as the police face more and more negative attitudes and distrust, resulting in officers being doxed, targeted and exposed to backlash and even violence.
- The police should be aware of challenges posed by overcoming public distrust and controlling the negative narrative.
- The police need to keep pace with evolving ideologies and societal changes to effectively respond to emerging challenges.
- Maintaining independence from political influences is crucial to ensure the effectiveness and integrity of the police. This would also foster trust in the police and law enforcement agencies.

## Follow-up

Europol or other European platforms can organise a session to examine the different forms of RWE and the ideologies and motives that can impact the landscape of RWE.

## Relevant reading

- RAN (2021): [Between extremism and freedom of expression: Dealing with non-violent right-wing extremist actors](#)
- Project Based Collaboration (PBC) on Violent Right-Wing Extremism (VRWE) (2021): [Working definition for violent right-wing extremism \(VRWE\)](#)
- RAN (2021): [Contemporary manifestations of violent right-wing extremism in the EU: An overview of P/CVE practices](#)
- RAN (2021): [Conspiracy theories and right-wing extremism – Insights and recommendations for P/CVE](#)
- RAN (2020): [Violent right-wing extremism in focus](#)
- Counter Extremism Project (2020): [Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures](#)
- Richardson, J. (2020): [CARR Guide to Online Radical-Right Symbols, Slogans and Slurs](#)  
The Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) reports on the principal symbols, slang, coded references and terminology used online by radical-right extremists today.