

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Taking stock of far-right terrorism through manifestos: Glorification of identity

Çenker Korhan Demir¹  and Ömer Çona² 

¹Department of Political Science and International Relations, Hasan Kalyoncu University, Gaziantep, Türkiye and

²Independent Researcher, Ankara, Türkiye

Corresponding author: Çenker Korhan Demir; Email: ckorhan.demir@hku.edu.tr

(Received 24 May 2023; revised 17 January 2024; accepted 30 January 2024)

Abstract

This research delves into the identity construction and violence justification within the context of far-right lone-actor terrorism, particularly motivated by white supremacist ideologies. Employing a qualitative analysis of manifestos compiled by five lone-actor terrorists, this study adopts a model to unveil the nuanced processes behind the justification of violence and glorification of collective identities. The model has been formed for the purpose of the study, drawing from social identity and identity fusion approaches, including steps such as group alignment, exclusion, threat, virtue, and celebration. The analysis of these manifestos illuminates a progression through each phase of the violent act, meticulously crafted through textual expression. Central to the terrorists' objectives is the creation of a rhetorical platform aimed at fomenting violence against non-white, ethnic, and religious groups. Their motivation arises from the perceived threat of the 'white race' being supplanted by immigrant communities across various social, political, and economic domains. This justification of violence hinges on the portrayal of themselves as protectors of the majority society, pitted against these minority groups. Strikingly, the terrorists celebrate their actions by commemorating past white supremacists who employed violence against marginalised communities.

Keywords: extremism; far-right; identity; terrorism; violence

Introduction

Far-right extremist violence and terrorist attacks have witnessed a significant surge over the past two decades. In 2019 alone, the United States witnessed 17 different terrorist incidents, claiming the lives of 42 individuals. Notably, 90 per cent of the extremist-related murders in 2019 were linked to right-wing extremists.¹ In 2021, a significant majority of the murders (90 per cent) were committed by right-wing extremists, predominantly associated with white supremacy.² It is worth noting that between 1954 and 2000, 'white racist/rightist' terrorism accounted for 31.2% of recorded events and 51.6% of terrorist-related fatalities.³ Additionally, since the events of 9/11, right-wing extremists have inflicted more casualties than Islamist extremists.⁴

The history of far-right extremism extends beyond the United States, with significant waves of such attacks occurring in Europe. These waves were notably observed in France during the 1960s,

¹Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism, 'Murder and extremism in the United States in 2019', New York (2020), available at: {www.adl.org/resources/report/murder-and-extremism-united-states-2019}.

²Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism, 'Murder and extremism in the United States in 2021', New York (2022), available at: {www.adl.org/resources/report/murder-and-extremism-united-states-2021}.

³Christopher Hewitt, *Understanding Terrorism in America: From the Klan to al Qaeda* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 15.

⁴Tore Bjørge and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, 'Extreme-right violence and terrorism: Concepts, patterns, and responses', ICCT Policy Brief, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague (2019), p. 2.

Italy in the 1970s, and Germany in the 1990s.⁵ One of the most devastating far-right terrorist attacks took place in Norway in 2011 when Anders Breivik perpetrated an incident resulting in the tragic loss of 77 lives. A report in 2019 has highlighted a staggering 320 per cent increase in attacks carried out by individuals affiliated with these extremist ideologies over the past five years.⁶

Scholarly attention in this field has been steadily increasing, encompassing various aspects of far-right terrorism. These focal points include the establishment of a conceptual framework to comprehend far-right ideologies,⁷ addressing the methodological challenges encountered in studying far-right terrorism,⁸ exploring the impact of internet-based technologies and their contagion effect,⁹ and delving into the root causes of far-right terrorism.¹⁰ Particularly since 9/11, the research on far-right extremism has predominantly concentrated on the processes of radicalisation, with a specific emphasis on how these processes shape identities, ultimately justifying acts of terrorism and violence.¹¹

One of the primary challenges in this field of study is conceptual ambiguity. Initially, Mudde's definition of 'far-right' attempts to encompass this complexity by incorporating both radical and extreme-right elements. He identifies common traits such as authoritarianism, nativism, and populism within this broad spectrum.¹² Within this broad spectrum, 'radical far-right ideologies' maintain a semblance of democratic principles while advocating for the replacement of liberal elites. In contrast, 'extreme far-right ideologies' fundamentally reject democratic values and legitimise violence against what they perceive as the 'enemies of the people.'¹³ As such, the term

⁵Daniel Koehler, 'Right-wing extremism and terrorism in Europe: Current developments and issues for the future', *Prism*, 6:2 (2016), pp. 84–105.

⁶Institute for Economics & Peace, 'Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the impact of terrorism', Sydney (November 2019), pp. 44–51, available at: {visionofhumanity.org/reports}.

⁷See, for example, Bjørge and Ravndal, 'Extreme-right violence and terrorism'; Tahir Abbas, 'Ethnicity and politics in contextualising far right and Islamist extremism', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 11:3 (2017), pp. 54–61; John M. Berger, 'The dangerous spread of extremist manifestos', *The Atlantic* (26 February 2019), available at {www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/christopher-hasson-was-inspired-breivik-manifesto/583567/}; Yasmine Ahmed and Orla Lynch, 'Terrorism Studies and the far right: The state of play', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 47:2 (2024), pp. 199–219; Daniel Koehler, 'Recent trends in German right-wing violence and terrorism: What are the contextual factors behind "hive terrorism"?', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12:6 (2018), pp. 72–88; Daniel Koehler and Peter Popella, 'Mapping far-right chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism efforts in the West: Characteristics of plots and perpetrators for future threat assessment', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32:8 (2020), pp. 1666–90.

⁸See, for example, Ahmed and Lynch, 'Terrorism Studies'; Lee Jarvis, 'Critical Terrorism Studies and the far-right: Beyond problems and solutions?', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15:1 (2022), pp. 13–37; Harmonie Toros, 'Better researchers, better people? The dangers of empathetic research on the extreme right', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15:1 (2022), pp. 225–31.

⁹See, for example, Stephane J. Baele, Lewys Brace, and Travis G. Coan, 'Uncovering the far-right online ecosystem: An analytical framework and research agenda', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 46:9 (2023), pp. 1599–623; Thomas J. Holt, Joshua D. Freilich, and Steven M. Chermak, 'Examining the online expression of ideology among far-right extremist forum users', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34:2 (2022), pp. 364–84; Thomas James Vaughan Williams and Calli Tzani, 'How does language influence the radicalisation process? A systematic review of research exploring online extremist communication and discussion', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2022), DOI: [10.1080/19434472.2022.2104910](https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2022.2104910); Daniela Peterka-Benton and Bond Benton, 'Online radicalization case study of a mass shooting: The Payton Gendron manifesto', *Journal for Deradicalization*, 35 (2023), pp. 1–31.

¹⁰See, for example, Abbas, 'Ethnicity and politics'; Sara Doering and Garth Davies, 'The contextual nature of right-wing terrorism across nations', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 33:5 (2019), pp. 1071–93.

¹¹See, for example, Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, 'Social psychology, terrorism, and identity: A preliminary re-examination of theory, culture, self, and society', *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 23 (2005), pp. 485–506; Randy Borum, 'Psychological vulnerabilities and propensities for involvement in violent extremism', *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 32 (2014), pp. 286–305; Bertjan Doosje, Fathali M. Moghaddam, Arie W. Kruglanski, et al., 'Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 11 (2016), pp. 79–84; Christopher Dean, 'The role of identity in committing acts of violent extremism – and in desisting from them', *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 27 (2017), pp. 281–5; Neil Ferguson and James W. McAuley, 'Dedicated to the cause: Identity development and violent extremism', *European Psychologist*, 26:1 (2021), pp. 6–14.

¹²Cas Mudde, 'The far right and European elections', *Current History*, 113:761 (2014), pp. 98–103.

¹³Mudde, 'The far right'; Bjørge and Ravndal, 'Extreme-right violence', p. 2.

'far-right' inherently encompasses a wide array of ideologies and actions, while 'extreme-right' serves as a more specific designation within this intricate landscape.

While 'extremism' and 'terrorism' are sometimes used interchangeably, they have distinctive characteristics. Extremism involves the belief that success for one's in-group requires hostile actions against an out-group, which may include verbal abuse and violence.¹⁴ Terrorism, on the other hand, involves symbolic acts that use or threaten violence to influence political behaviour.¹⁵ Terrorism can be considered a subset of militant extremism,¹⁶ characterised by systemic and organised violence for political objectives.¹⁷ Therefore, 'far-right terrorism' is a term that encompasses the ideology behind violent far-right attacks in this context.

One of the enduring challenges in the field of terrorism studies is rooted in methodological difficulties, a common concern within the discipline. As a number of scholars have already complained, the field's over-reliance on secondary sources¹⁸ due to the fact that access to and production of information on terrorism is more difficult than in other social science disciplines. It is therefore indicative of widespread problems in data collection and analysis that much research is impressionistic and superficial and consists of assertive generalisations lacking evidence.¹⁹ In the realm of far-right studies, a revealing study examining 1,846 articles published in three prominent journals (*Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *Critical Terrorism Studies*) from 2001 to 2018 disclosed that merely 39 per cent of these articles included a methodology section, and only six utilised primary data. This underscores the pervasive issues in data collection and analysis within the field.²⁰

However, there has been a recent trend towards studies that specifically focus on primary sources, such as manifestos, since 2019. For instance, Ehsan and Stott employed qualitative analysis techniques to examine the manifestos of Tarrant, Earnest, and Crusius, aiming to uncover the theoretical motivation behind their attacks.²¹ Kupper et al. conducted qualitative content analysis of far-right terrorism and identified a complex online ecosystem that encourages copycat behaviour leading to violence.²² Ware explored how manifestos from white supremacist terrorists interact within the context of identity, shedding light on the dynamics at play.²³ Branscomb analysed the manifestos of five far-right terrorists from a rhetorical perspective, offering insights into their communication strategies.²⁴

Moreover, several studies have delved into the language used in these manifestos. In their study, Ebner et al. identified that linguistic proxies for identity fusion, when combined with mediating and moderating variables such as existential threat narratives, violence-condoning group norms,

¹⁴John M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), p. 44.

¹⁵Thomas Perry Thornton, 'Terror as a weapon of political agitation', in Henry Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War: Problems and Approaches* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 41–63.

¹⁶Gerard Saucier, Laura Geuy Akers, Seraphine Shen-Miller, Goran Knežević, and Lazar Stankov, 'Patterns of thinking in militant extremism', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4:3 (2009), pp. 256–71.

¹⁷Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1–19.

¹⁸Andrew Silke, 'The devil you know: Continuing problems with research on terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13:4 (2001), pp. 1–14; Bart Schuurman and Quirine Eijkman, 'Moving terrorism research forward: The crucial role of primary sources', *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague*, 4:2 (2013), pp. 1–13.

¹⁹Alex Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories & Literature* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1988).

²⁰Ahmed and Lynch, 'Terrorism Studies'.

²¹Rakib Ehsan and Paul Stott, *Far-Right Terrorist Manifestos: A Critical Analysis* (London: Henry Jackson Society, 2020), available at {henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/HJS-Terrorist-Manifesto-Report-WEB.pdf}.

²²Julia Kupper, Tanya Karoli Christensen, Dakota Wing, et al., 'The contagion and copycat effect in transnational far-right terrorism: An analysis of language evidence', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 16:4 (2022), pp. 4–26.

²³Jacob Ware, 'Testament to murder: The violent far-right's increasing use of terrorist manifestos', ICCT Policy Brief (March 2020), available at {www.icct.nl/publication/testament-murder-violent-far-rights-increasing-use-terrorist-manifestos}.

²⁴Richard Branscomb, 'Making manifest: White supremacist violence and the ethics of alethurgy', *Journal for the History of Rhetoric*, 24:2 (2021), pp. 140–70.

and dehumanising vocabulary, can be reliably detected.²⁵ Siggery et al. identified three language typologies (instigator, planner, conspiracy) within terrorist manifestos.²⁶ Ebner et al. argued that linguistic markers associated with a propensity for extreme violence can be identified in online groups.²⁷ Peterka-Benton and Benton examined how content consumed online can be correlated to rationales for violent action through the manifesto of Payton Gendron.²⁸

This study focuses on lone-actor terrorist attacks driven by far-right white supremacist ideologies. It explores the role of identity in far-right terrorism and the influence of manifestos in shaping aggressive identities and justifying violence. While previous research has examined collective identities among far-right extremists, there remains a gap in understanding how these identities are justified through manifestos, even though violence justification is a significant aspect of these documents.²⁹ Therefore, the central research question of this study is: 'How do far-right terrorists portray their collective identity and justify acts of violence against out-groups in their manifestos?' The research aims to address this gap by illuminating the dynamics of far-right terrorism.

The study commences with a review of the literature on white supremacy, delving into theoretical assumptions that underpin the intricate relationship between far-right identity and violence. Subsequently, the manifestos undergo qualitative analysis techniques, and the findings are comprehensively discussed.

White supremacy in today's far-right extremism

White supremacy, a form of far-right extremism, has deep historical roots dating from National Socialism to the 19th-century white supremacist movement in North America. This ideological movement persists in contemporary racist and xenophobic political cultures, exerting influence in both Europe and America.³⁰ Advocates of white supremacy and those who endorse hatred and violence against non-white individuals have historically been loosely affiliated and dispersed groups. A crucial common denominator among them, despite differing beliefs and theories, is their identification with Christianity.³¹

The white supremacist movement, while fragmented, continues to expand. It comprises an unexpected mix of white nationalists, specific white Christian evangelicals, racists, anti-government militias, misogynists, and anti-globalists.³² White nationalism primarily seeks to establish a white identity, while white supremacy promotes the idea of white racial superiority and dominance over other races. Although the history of the white supremacist movement dates back further,³³ its contemporary influence stems from conspiracy theories such as 'The Great Replacement' and 'White Genocide'. This movement includes those who argue that it is imperative to accelerate an 'impending race war' by launching terrorist attacks.³⁴

A key narrative within this movement is the fear of 'white extinction'. Today's Western far-right is often defined by this concept, with white supremacists believing that the white population is

²⁵ Julia Ebner, Christopher Kavanagh, and Harvey Whitehouse, 'Is there a language of terrorists? A comparative manifesto analysis', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2022), DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2022.2109244](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2109244).

²⁶ Alice Siggery, Daniel Hunt, and Calli Tzani, 'Language profile of lone actor terrorist manifestos: A mixed methods analysis', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 15:3 (2023), pp. 390–408.

²⁷ Julia Ebner, Christopher Kavanagh, and Harvey Whitehouse, 'Assessing violence risk among far-right extremists: A new role for natural language processing', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2023), DOI: [10.1080/09546553.2023.2236222](https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2023.2236222).

²⁸ Peterka-Benton and Benton, 'Online radicalization'.

²⁹ Peterka-Benton and Benton, 'Online radicalization'.

³⁰ Chetan Bhatt, 'White extinction: Metaphysical elements of contemporary Western fascism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 38:1 (2021), pp. 27–52.

³¹ Tanya Telfair Sharpe, 'The Identity Christian movement: Ideology of domestic terrorism', *Journal of Black Studies*, 30:4 (2000), pp. 604–23.

³² Kumar Ramakrishna, 'Tarrant's last laugh? The spectre of white supremacist penetration of Western security forces', Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, (September 2020), p. 2, available at www.hsdl.org/c/view?docid=851639.

³³ Fran Shor, 'The long life of US institutionalized white supremacist terror', *Critical Sociology*, 46:1 (2020), pp. 5–18.

³⁴ Ebner et al., 'Assessing violence risk'.

shrinking due to non-white immigration.³⁵ They are particularly concerned about racial mixing and vehemently oppose interracial marriages. This hatred extends to multiculturalism and those who support it, fuelling xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiments and providing a foundation for acts of violence.

Construction of far-right identity to justify violent extremism

The scholarly literature consistently underscores the crucial role of identity in terrorism and violent extremism.³⁶ It is argued that three common psychological vulnerabilities can render individuals more receptive, a state referred to as ‘cognitive opening’,³⁷ to alternative worldviews: the need for personal meaning and identity; the need for belonging; and perceptions of injustice or humiliation.³⁸

These vulnerabilities are closely tied to the processes of radicalisation as proposed by various scholars.³⁹ Radicalisation often begins with a sense of perceived injustice and frustration, prompting individuals to seek ways to address these grievances. When peaceful solutions prove elusive, individuals experiencing frustration may redirect their emotions towards groups typically categorised as outsiders or the ‘other’.⁴⁰ This radicalisation tends to manifest itself in collective or individual action when individuals are motivated to act on behalf of their affiliated group due to their associated grievances and identities.

Given the significant role that interactions among the three dimensions of identity – cultural, social, and personal – play in determining the likelihood of engagement in terrorism,⁴¹ studies on identity offer valuable insights into the underlying justification mechanisms of far-right terrorism. Notably, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Identity Fusion Theory (IFT) explore this relationship.

According to SIT, social group membership and the importance attributed to this affiliation shape one’s social identity.⁴² Individuals who characterise themselves based on social identity may depersonalise, prioritising group membership over individual peculiarities.⁴³ This phenomenon can contribute to inter-group prejudice and conflict and serve as a strategy for navigating complex social situations.⁴⁴

Social dominance, an attitudinal orientation asserting the superiority of the in-group over out-groups, deepens social categories. It legitimises myths related to nationality, race, ethnicity, class, estate, descent, religion, or clan.⁴⁵ These cognitions may include the division of the world into simplistic ‘us’ and ‘them’ categories, followed by the depersonalisation, demonisation, and dehumanisation of other human beings.⁴⁶ By conveniently attributing any suffering to out-groups, social

³⁵ Bhatt, ‘White extinction’, pp. 28, 32.

³⁶ Arena and Arrigo, ‘Social psychology’.

³⁷ Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 20–4.

³⁸ Borum, ‘Psychological vulnerabilities’.

³⁹ Fathali M. Moghaddam, ‘The staircase to terrorism’, *American Psychologist*, 6:2 (2005), pp. 161–9; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, ‘Mechanisms of political radicalisation: Pathways toward terrorism’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:3 (2008), pp. 415–33; Peter R. Neumann, ‘The trouble with radicalization’, *International Affairs*, 89:4 (2013), pp. 873–93; Matteo Vergani, Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar, and Greg Barton, ‘The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull, and personal. A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent extremism’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 43:10 (2020), pp. 1–32.

⁴⁰ Moghaddam, ‘The staircase to terrorism’.

⁴¹ Schwartz et al., ‘Terrorism: An identity theory perspective’.

⁴² Henri Tajfel and John Turner, ‘An integrative theory of intergroup conflict’, in William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (eds), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), pp. 33–47.

⁴³ William B. Swann, Jolanda Jetten, Angel Gomez, Harvey Whitehouse, and Brock Bastian, ‘When group membership gets personal: A theory of identity fusion’, *Psychological Review*, 119:3 (2012), pp. 441–56 (p. 442).

⁴⁴ Naomi Ellemers and S. Alexander Haslam, ‘Social identity theory’, in Paul A. M. Van Lange, Arie W. Kruglanski, and E. Tory Higgins (eds), *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology* (London: Sage, 2012), pp. 379–98.

⁴⁵ Felicia Pratto, Jim Sidanius, and Shana Levin, ‘Social dominance theory and the dynamics of intergroup relations: Taking stock and looking forward’, *European Review of Social Psychology*, 17:1 (2006), pp. 271–320.

⁴⁶ Saucier et al., ‘Patterns of thinking in militant extremism’.

categorisation may make it easier for the in-group to assign blame to outsiders as the primary cause of a perceived existential threat.

IFT expands the discussion by proposing that people may experience a visceral feeling of oneness with a group, blurring the boundaries between personal and social identities without compromising the integrity of either construct. Unlike SIT, IFT highlights that actions can represent both personal and social identities. Because of their deep affiliation with the group, highly fused individuals may be driven to accomplish as much for the group as they would for themselves.⁴⁷

IFT suggests that extreme behaviour may result from a combination of contextual triggers, personal self-views, and social self-views.⁴⁸ Building upon IFT, the devoted actor model suggests that individuals must be unconditionally committed to the group's sacred or fundamental values in addition to their fusion.⁴⁹ Whitehouse furthers this line of thinking by developing the 'fusion-plus-threat' model to comprehend the phenomenon of suicide terrorism.⁵⁰ This model, which argues that identity fusion can only require sacrifice with the perception of existential threat and the existence of norms that condone violence, was supported by two recent studies by Ebner and colleagues examining manifestos to predict terrorist attacks.⁵¹

In the context of far-right lone actor terrorism, it is crucial to note that these individuals do not operate as members of extremist groups or terrorist organisations. They carry out violent acts, construct their identities, and seek justifications by themselves, even though their beliefs often align with the core ideologies advocated by white supremacists. This phenomenon raises the concept of a willingness to sacrifice oneself to advance the interests of vast, anonymous 'imagined communities',⁵² which has been described as 'extended fusion'.⁵³

Moreover, it is argued that psychological or social uncertainty may influence an individual's decision to engage in violent behaviours. Schwartz et al. describe this phenomenon as 'identity diffusion', characterised by the absence of personally meaningful identity commitments and confusion in establishing such commitments.⁵⁴ When individuals feel uncertain about societal conditions, they may struggle to control their behaviour. Self-uncertainty can be effectively reduced by categorising oneself and others as members of a group. Group identification resolves self-uncertainty and alleviates associated anxiety because groups provide a clearly defined and directive sense of self. In the case of more extreme groups, such as terrorist organisations, their rigorous structure and strong leadership may make violent behaviours more appealing to uncertain individuals.⁵⁵

Furthermore, according to Reicher et al., the inhumane violent acts motivated by collective hate can be understood through a five-step process: identification, exclusion, threat, virtue, and celebration.⁵⁶ This model serves the purpose of comprehending the development of identity-driven collective violence. It commences with the formation of a cohesive in-group and the categorical exclusion of specific social groups. Subsequently, it progresses by extolling the distinctive virtues of the in-group and framing the out-group as a threat to in-group identity. Finally, it culminates in the punishment of members of out-groups, ostensibly to protect the sacred in-group identity.

⁴⁷Swann et al., 'When group membership gets personal', pp. 442–3.

⁴⁸Swann et al., 'When group membership gets personal', p. 451.

⁴⁹Scott Atran, Hammad Sheikh, and Ángel Gómez, 'For cause and comrade: Devoted actors and willingness to fight', *Clidynamics*, 5:1 (2014), pp. 41–57.

⁵⁰Harvey Whitehouse, 'Dying for the group: Towards a general theory of extreme self-sacrifice', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 41 (2018), pp. 1–62.

⁵¹Ebner et al., 'Is there a language of terrorists?'. Ebner et al., 'Assessing violence risk'.

⁵²Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁵³Swann et al., 'When group membership gets personal'.

⁵⁴Schwartz et al., 'Terrorism: An identity theory perspective'.

⁵⁵Michael A. Hogg, 'From uncertainty to extremism: Social categorization and identity processes', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23:5 (2014), pp. 338–42.

⁵⁶Stephen Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam, and Rakshi Rath, 'Making a virtue of evil: A five-step social identity model of the development of collective hate', *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2:3 (2008), pp. 1313–44.

In their manifestos, white extremist attackers depict outgroups as ‘rape and murder suspects’ or ‘socially corrupted’, aiming to rationalise violence against immigrants.⁵⁷ They argue that eliminating the perceived deviant segments of the population, deemed a threat to the life and order of society, is imperative for the survival of the remaining population – drawing an analogy to sacrificing a part of the body to preserve its life.⁵⁸ Consequently, violence against groups perceived as threatening the ‘defensible population’ is justified within a biopolitical framework.⁵⁹ This classification of society as ‘those who must live and die’ reflects a eugenic mechanism where the elimination of excluded groups becomes necessary to uphold the purity of the race.⁶⁰

In other words, since the designation of the out-group as a threat is a crucial component, its destruction is necessary for the preservation of in-group identity. This situation embraces the eradication of the outgroup as necessary to the defence of virtue.⁶¹ As such, terrorists who defend group identity celebrate their actions by showing how self-sacrificing they are against outside threats, and on the other hand, they reveal the virtues of their cause. It has been pointed out that during the transition from far-right radicalisation to terrorist activism, attackers often rationalise the violence they perpetrate by approving the violence suffered by their victims.⁶²

Methodology

The social identity model emphasises the construction of identities to justify and even assert violence as a right.⁶³ It has been proposed to elucidate inhumane collective violence and the development of aggressive identity against out-groups. However, far-right terrorism and extremist violence have been mostly elucidated by the ‘identity fusion’ theory, which substantiates better prediction than social identity models.⁶⁴ To adapt Reicher et al.’s model to the context of far-right lone actor terrorism, several adjustments have been made. Notably, the initial step of the model, originally referred to as ‘identification’, has been improved and relabelled as ‘group alignment’. This adjustment has been introduced to encompass elements of both the social identity and identity fusion approaches, making it more suitable for understanding the dynamics of far-right terrorism.

As a result of this modification, the model proposed in this study comprises the following sequential steps: group alignment, exclusion, threat, virtue, and celebration. This adapted model forms the overarching framework for analysing far-right lone-actor terrorism by examining manifestos written or composed by the terrorists themselves. The primary objective is to gain insight into their perspectives, shedding light on how far-right terrorists construct and glorify their identities while simultaneously justifying acts of violence.

The grounded theory approach, which is predicated on the idea that there should be some underlying patterns and connections among the studied concerns, is employed through the study. Although it refers both to a method of inquiry and to the product of inquiry,⁶⁵ the former meaning

⁵⁷ Branscomb, ‘Making manifest’, p. 158; Kristy Champion, ‘Australian right wing extremist ideology: Exploring narratives of nostalgia and nemesis’, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 14:3 (2019), pp. 208–26.

⁵⁸ Lauren Wilcox, *Bodies of Violence: Theorizing Embodied Subjects in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 26, 27.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).

⁶⁰ Achille Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, *Public Culture*, 15:1 (2003), p. 11–40. The *eugenics* refers to normalisation practices in the Foucaultian means, whereby undesirable individuals are eliminated in order to bring order to society.

⁶¹ Reicher et al., ‘Making a virtue of evil’.

⁶² Peter Simi, Bryan F. Bubolz, and Ann Hardman. ‘Military experience, identity discrepancies, and far right terrorism: an exploratory analysis’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 36:8 (2013), pp. 654–71.

⁶³ Reicher et al., ‘Making a virtue of evil’.

⁶⁴ Angel Gomez, Matthew L. Brooks, Michael D. Buhrmester, et al., ‘On the nature of identity fusion: Insights into the construct and a new measure’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100:5 (2011), pp. 918–33; Swann et al., ‘When group membership gets personal’; Whitehouse, ‘Dying for the group’; Ebner et al., ‘Is there a language of terrorists?’

⁶⁵ Kathy Charmaz, ‘Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing Social Justice Studies’, in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (New York: Sage, 2005), pp. 507–535.

has been adapted in this research to explore commonalities by drawing comparisons between various social contexts.

The case study technique is used in this study to expose the features of far-right terrorism by considering violent attacks carried out by Brenton Tarrant, Patrick Crusius, Dylann Roof, John Earnest, and Payton Gendron. One of the reasons to select these cases is that violent acts aimed at distinctive social groups as seen by Tarrant's targeting of Muslim immigrants, Crusius's of Hispanics, Earnest's of Jews, and Roof and Gendron's targeting of African Americans. The second is the temporal span of the attacks, from 2015 to 2022, which highlights the proximity of time and encourages analytical coherence. Furthermore, as Macklin points out, the manifestos of the five terrorists may be linked in a 'chain reaction of global right-wing terrorism'.⁶⁶ In fact, Kupper et al. have drawn attention to the development of an interconnected far-right ecosystem based on the texts of several far-right terrorists.⁶⁷ Finally, all attackers released their own manifestos, accessible from open sources, to advertise their motivations and provide primary data from which to explore their ideas.

Given that terrorism is typically seen as a means of communication, the manifesto serves as a tool for the actor to convey the message to the wider populace or adherents.⁶⁸ It may also offer opportunities such as making their cause known, justifying,⁶⁹ making an impact, and recruiting.⁷⁰ Although releasing a manifesto is not a practice unique to a particular terrorist actor, it has been observed that in the last decade, white supremacist/far-right terrorists in particular have resorted to this genre via the Internet just before their actions. In fact, it has been discovered that there is an average time gap of 1 hour and 43 minutes between the posting of a manifesto online and the occurrence of the lone-actor terrorist attack.⁷¹

In particular, from the publication of the voluminous text of the Norwegian assailant Breivik outlining the motives behind his murderous rampage in Utøya, far-right attackers have attempted to promote their ideas by using this form of communication after being attracted by its rhetorical potency.⁷² Manifestos, by revealing the ideologies and justifications behind attacks, have the potential to inspire new acts of violence, foster transnational ties within the far-right movement, and incite potential aggressors through the celebration of violence. They are a useful instrument for communicating as well as for fostering and bolstering ideological comradeship.⁷³ Deciphering the manifestos' underlying messages is thus considered an essential intellectual endeavour to take stock of far-right terrorism.

Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge certain limitations in drawing conclusions from the manifestos. Manifestos carry the risk of presenting a deliberately curated perspective, shaping how we perceive the world according to the terrorists' intentions. The selective presentation of information in manifestos allows terrorists to manipulate their public image and adhere to a particular narrative, possibly omitting critical details or distorting facts to suit their agenda. Specifically, these manifestos may lack extensive details about the motives behind violent actions and the intricacies of planning. Moreover, the authenticity of manifestos can be questionable, with the potential for fabrication or post-facto alterations by external actors. Therefore, gaining a nuanced understanding of the motivations driving terrorism, particularly in the context of the far-right extremism examined in this study, necessitates more comprehensive and complementary analyses that extend

⁶⁶Graham Macklin, 'The El Paso terrorist attack: The chain reaction of global right-wing terror', *CTC Sentinel*, 12:11 (2019), pp. 1–10.

⁶⁷Kupper et al., 'The contagion and copycat effect'.

⁶⁸Ronald Crelinsten, *Terrorism, Democracy, and Human Security: A Communication Model* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), p. 19.

⁶⁹Siggery et al., 'Language profile of lone actor terrorist manifestos'.

⁷⁰Walter Laqueur, *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings and Manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and Other Terrorists from around the World and throughout the Ages* (New York: Reed Press, 2004).

⁷¹Thomas James Vaughan Williams, Calli Tzani, and Maria Ioannou, 'Foreshadowing terror: Exploring the time of online manifestos prior to lone wolf attacks', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2023), DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2023.2205973](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2205973).

⁷²Berger, 'The dangerous spread of extremist manifestos'.

⁷³Berger, 'The dangerous spread of extremist manifestos'.

beyond manifestos. It is crucial to recognise that this study, while shedding light on how acts of violence are justified in the words of the perpetrators, does not aim for such an exhaustive purpose.

The content analysis method has been employed to derive verifiable and reliable inferences from texts, understanding the contexts in which they are used.⁷⁴ This qualitative analysis approach enables the identification, classification/categorisation, and comprehension of concealed characteristics and patterns. The content of five far-right terrorist manifestos was investigated using the MaxQda software program, specifically designed for content analysis. Initially, words appearing fewer than three times were excluded. Subsequently, 10 or more most frequently used words in each manifesto were selected. Following this, codes such as ‘group alignment’, ‘exclusion’, ‘threat’, ‘virtue’, and ‘celebration’ were applied based on the commonly used words. Finally, an analytical framework was proposed to account for the construction of identity and the justification of violence in far-right terrorism.

Results

Descriptive findings

Roof murdered nine African Americans at the Charleston Church in South Carolina, USA, on 17 June 2015. Afterwards, a website named ‘lastrhodesian.com’ registered to his name was discovered. A manifesto of five pages was found on the website, purportedly belonging to Roof,⁷⁵ divided into sections titled ‘Blacks’, ‘Jews’, ‘Hispanics’, ‘East Asians’, ‘Patriotism’, and ‘An Explanation’. **Table 1** below states the common themes in the manifesto. The main complaints centre on the diminished socio-cultural privileges and rights enjoyed by white people relative to the growing ‘black’ population.

Table 1. Top 10 terms used by Dylann Roof.

| Codes | Related words | Frequency |
|----------|---|-----------|
| white | white(s) | 53 |
| ‘black’ | ‘black(s)’, ‘negro(es)’, ‘nigger(s)’ ^a | 38 |
| race | racial, race(s) | 23 |
| people | people(s) | 20 |
| Jew | Jew(s), Jewish | 11 |
| American | American(s), America | 10 |
| culture | culture(s) | 8 |
| Hispanic | Hispanic(s) | 8 |
| problem | problem, issue | 8 |
| history | history, historical | 8 |

^aThe disturbing words found in this table and thereafter have been used in quotation marks without making any changes in order to reflect the ideologies of the manifestos and their creators. However, it is important to note that we do not endorse or approve of these words.

Tarrant’s manifesto titled ‘The Great Replacement’,⁷⁶ spans 74 pages and was shared on the online message board ‘8chan’ prior to the attack that claimed the lives of 51 people in Christchurch, New Zealand on 15 March 2019. Additionally, he live-streamed his terrorist act on Facebook, a disturbing example of the gamification of mass violence.⁷⁷ **Table 2** below shows the most uttered words by frequency in the manifesto and derived codes. The dominant theme of the text is the

⁷⁴Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (London: Sage, 2004), p. 18.

⁷⁵Dylann Roof, ‘The last Rhodesian’ (2015), available at media.thestate.com/static/roofmanifesto.pdf.

⁷⁶Brenton Tarrant, ‘The Great Replacement’ (2019), available at img-prod.ilmfoglio.it/userUpload/The_Great_Replacementconvertito.pdf.

⁷⁷Tarrant is often regarded as a copycat of Breivik. See Florian Hartleb, *Lone Wolves: The New Terrorism of Right-Wing Single Actors* (Cham: Springer, 2020), p. 132.

forced demographic and socio-cultural displacement of whites in Western countries.⁷⁸ The despair over the extinction of whites in the text leads Tarrant to suggest that it is imperative to drive other races out of Europe by violence, through mass murder, which includes migrant children.⁷⁹

Table 2. Top 10 terms used by Brenton Tarrant.

| Codes | Related words | Frequency |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| people | people(s) | 171 |
| European | Europe, European(s) | 98 |
| attack | attacks, attacking, attacker(s) | 95 |
| culture | culture(s), cultural(ly) | 74 |
| nation | nation(s), national | 68 |
| invader | invade, invading, invader(s) | 57 |
| racial | race | 54 |
| land | land(s) | 47 |
| ethnic | ethnicity, ethnicities, ethnically | 44 |
| replacement | replace, replacing, replaced | 40 |

Earnest carried out an attack that killed one worshipper and injured three others at the Poway Synagogue in California, USA, on the Jewish Sabbath of Passover on 27 April 2019. Earnest, who published an anti-Semitic and racist letter⁸⁰ on '8chan' shortly before the attack, referred to the actions of previous white supremacist far-right terrorists. Table 3 reveals the terms used by him. His manifesto is founded on a conservative Christian viewpoint to combat a purported global plot by Jews to carry out the extermination of white people, notably in the United States.

Table 3. Top 10 terms used by John Timothy Earnest.

| Codes | Related words | Frequency |
|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Jew | Jew(s), Jewry | 46 |
| race | race(s) | 33 |
| God | God, Bible, spirit | 23 |
| Tarrant | Brenton Tarrant | 19 |
| Christian | Christ(ian) | 16 |
| people | people(s), man, family | 15 |
| hate | hate(s) | 14 |
| white | White(s) | 14 |
| European | European(s) | 13 |
| blood | blood, ancestor, descendant | 11 |

Crusius killed 23 people in a store in El Paso, Texas, USA, on 3 August 2019. Before the attack, he posted a white supremacist and anti-immigrant manifesto on '8chan'.⁸¹ Table 4 below accounts for the terms used in his manifesto. The increasing rates of the Hispanic population bringing about a significant change in the demographic, political, and socio-economic landscape was used as a

⁷⁸Ehsan and Stott, *Far-Right Terrorist Manifestos*, p. 6.

⁷⁹Bhatt, 'White extinction', p. 47.

⁸⁰John Timothy Earnest, 'An open letter' (2019), available at {<https://bcsh.bard.edu/files/2019/06/Earnest-Manifesto-042719.pdf>}.

⁸¹Patrick Crusius, 'The inconvenient truth' (2019), available at {<https://randallpacker.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Inconvenient-Truth.pdf>}.

pretext for his attack. In much of his manifesto, he accused political parties of enabling immigration policies because of the availability of cheap labour and associated racial and ethnic concerns with the failures he noticed in employment and environmental policies.

Table 4. Top 10 terms used by Patrick Crusius.

| Codes | Related words | Frequency |
|-------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| America | American(s) | 29 |
| gun | armor, AK-47, bullet | 21 |
| immigration | immigrant(s), migrant(s) | 17 |
| job | job(s) | 13 |
| country | country(ies) | 12 |
| people | people(s) | 12 |
| Hispanic | Hispanic(s) | 11 |
| attack | attackers, attack(s), attacking | 10 |
| corporation | corporation(s) | 10 |
| invader | invader(s), invade | 7 |

Gendron killed 10 African Americans and seriously injured three others in a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, USA, on 14 May 2022. Gendron broadcast the massacre live on Twitch, as did the Christchurch attacker. He prepared a 180-page long manifesto⁸² with the theme of ‘mass migration’ before the action. His manifesto, which was posted on ‘Google Docs’ two days prior to the attacks, is very similar to that of Tarrant, as is the way the attack was committed. The words frequently used by Gendron are listed in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Top 10 terms used by Payton Gendron.

| Codes | Related words | Frequency |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| gun | armor(s), arm(s), bullet | 335 |
| people | people(s) | 184 |
| white | white(s) | 124 |
| Jew | Jew(s), Jewish | 101 |
| European | Europe, European(s) | 94 |
| attack | attack(s), attacker(s) | 90 |
| ‘black’ | ‘black(s)’, ‘negro(es)’ | 88 |
| race | race(s), racial | 77 |
| culture | cultural, culture(s) | 58 |
| ethnic | ethnic, ethnical(ly), ethnicity | 58 |
| replacement | replace, replacer(s) | 53 |
| invader | invader(s), invade, occupy, occupiers | 44 |
| immigration | immigrant(s), migrant(s) | 32 |

Qualitative analysis

The primary objective of terrorism is to instil fear, intimidate, provoke, and destabilise a target population or conflict party.⁸³ This deliberate form of political violence is chosen when

⁸² Payton Gendron. ‘You wait for a signal while your people wait for you’ (2022), available at <https://www.hoplophobia.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/PG-Manifesto.pdf>.

⁸³ Alex Schmid, ‘The revised academic consensus definition of terrorism’, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 6:2 (2012), pp. 158–9.

peaceful alternatives prove ineffective or are unavailable.⁸⁴ White extremist terrorists, through their manifestos, attempt to justify their actions within a specific political framework. They believe that resorting to violence is necessary for achieving their goals when non-violent means are deemed insufficient in addressing social and political issues.⁸⁵ While various factors may influence their actions, these manifestos serve as public justifications for the attacks.⁸⁶ This analysis focuses on the concept of 'identity' to establish a meaningful link between the act of publishing manifestos and the act of violence. As will be shown in the manifesto analysis, identity emerges as one of the most significant motives for the violent acts and manifestos of white supremacist attackers. As far as we understand from the manifestos, the attackers try to solve problems related to migration, security, unemployment, politics, and population issues by glorifying the identity field they belong to. This suggests that identity, serving as a triggering factor mobilising the attackers, also represents a political agenda for them.

Following the proposed method which depicts the act of inhuman violence driven by communal hatred, Table 6 has been created using phrases extracted from the manifestos of the terrorists under the themes of group alignment, exclusion, threat, virtue, and celebration. In the qualitative analysis of the manifesto texts, the codes of group alignment and exclusion and virtue and celebration were combined to categorise the examples more appropriately. The order of the words beneath the themes hinges on how intensively they appear in texts.

Group alignment and exclusion: Constructing identity and justifying violence

The analysis of the texts demonstrates how the steps of identification and exclusion generated the cohesive in-group identity or the sense of it. The words 'people', 'society', and 'population' are among the most frequently used words, as can be seen from the word frequency statistics above (Tables 1–5). This finding suggests that the terrorists attribute their acts to the society in which they live.

Indeed, according to Reicher et al.,⁸⁷ how the in-group is defined is more crucial than the hatred produced towards the out-group. As such, the main arguments of the manifestos have been built on white identity, which is utilised as an operational background for mass violence against other peoples.⁸⁸ It is noteworthy that words related to white identity such as 'culture', 'nation', 'race', 'ethnicity', and 'European' are among the top 10 most frequently mentioned themes in the manifestos. The frequency of words associated with 'culture' in Roof's and Tarrant's texts, the references to 'Europeanness' in Earnest's and Tarrant's, the emphasis on 'Americanism' in Crusius's, and finally the words 'culture' and 'ethnicity' that culminated in Gendron's and Tarrant's manifestos are reflections of the white supremacists' conceive of society.

Because the far-righters see Europe as a cultural and racial 'homeland' in urgent need of protection,⁸⁹ a shared whiteness, European heritage, and refuge in collective culture are the main themes that are emphasised through the manifestos. Earnest extols his European ancestry⁹⁰, Gendron⁹¹ and Tarrant⁹² refer to their European roots in terms of cultural identity, and Roof frequently underlines 'Europe is the homeland of whites' and recalls the various contributions of the white

⁸⁴ Martha Crenshaw, 'The causes of terrorism', *Comparative Politics*, 13:4 (1981), pp. 379–99; Martha Crenshaw, 'The logic of terrorism: Terrorist behaviour as a product of strategic choice', in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism* (Washington: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), pp. 7–24.

⁸⁵ Ware, 'Testament to murder', p. 7.

⁸⁶ Peterka-Benton and Benton, 'Online radicalization', p. 7.

⁸⁷ Reicher et al., 'Making a virtue of evil'.

⁸⁸ Branscomb, 'Making manifest', pp. 141–2.

⁸⁹ Ware, 'Testament to murder', p. 6.

⁹⁰ Earnest, 'An open letter'.

⁹¹ Gendron, 'You wait for'.

⁹² Tarrant, 'The Great Replacement'.

Table 6. The content analysis of the manifestos

| Group alignment | Exclusion | Threat | Virtue | Celebration |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| people | Jew(s) | invader(s) | victory | great(est) act |
| white(s) | 'black(s)' | traitor(s) | cause | truth |
| nation | enemy (ies) | corrupt | protect | revolution(ary) |
| European(s) | media | violent | prevent | inspire |
| race | problem(s) | degenerate | serve | conquer |
| culture | (im)migrant | rape(r) | preservation | bles(s)ed |
| ethnic | foreign | murder(s) | sacrifice | honor(able) |
| land(s) | minority (ies) | coward(ice/s) | partisan | virtuous(ly) |
| population | corporation(s) | crime | bles(s) | Knight Justiciar |
| history | non-white | evil | defend | glory |
| society | Muslim | stupid | brave(ry) | superior |
| God | Hispanic(s) | doom | privilege | beautiful |
| Europe | politician(s) | thief | unique | |
| fertility | Marxist | nest | duty | |
| family | 'niggers' | scum | special | |
| country | LGBT | genocidal | magnificent | |
| American(s) | parasitic | occupier(s) | incorruptible | |
| blood | | terrorist | paragon | |
| America | | hypocrites | triumphant | |
| Christian | | inferior(ity) | faultless | |
| ancestor | | tyrannical | ingenuity | |
| jobs | | ugly | | |
| innocent | | sinful | | |
| descendant | | deceitful | | |
| intelligent | | cursed | | |
| smart | | squalid | | |
| brother(s) | | slick | | |
| friend(s) | | obnoxious | | |
| | | Satan | | |
| | | demon | | |

race to universal civilisation.⁹³ Tarrant demonstrates his identification with his European identity by stating that 'the origin of my language is European, my culture is European, my political beliefs are European, my beliefs are European, my identity is European, and, most importantly, my blood is European.'⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that Earnest said 'it is unlawful and cowardly to stand on the side lines as the European people are genocided around you.'⁹⁵ From this vantage point, the terrorists portrayed themselves as the protectors of the white race and the continent of Europe against myriad perceived threats. Thus, the terrorists sought to incorporate themselves into a broader historical

⁹³Roof, 'The last Rhodesian', p. 1.

⁹⁴Tarrant, 'The Great Replacement', p. 24.

⁹⁵Earnest, 'An open letter', p. 2.

account of European history.⁹⁶ This rhetoric of familial bonds and shared blood⁹⁷ further solidifies the fusion of identity between these individuals and their specific social community. So, the expression of kinship feelings towards the ingroup becomes a primary means of defending the group against threats from outside.⁹⁸

Furthermore, the attackers consider 'whiteness' as a group label that they believe is more strongly associated with Christianity. Therefore, white Muslims and Jews are not considered to be 'white'.⁹⁹ In this regard, Roof maintains that even if he identifies Jews as 'white', these individuals should be barred due to their belief system, and that the majority-white Hispanic community ought to be seen as the enemy.¹⁰⁰ Tarrant contends that Westerners loathe Muslims more than any other 'invaders'. He frequently brought up the clash between Islam and Christianity throughout history and voiced worry that, due to Muslims' high fertility rates, white people would be displaced.¹⁰¹

Moreover, 'whiteness' is associated with the emphasis on white supremacy and can be understood through the historical cycle of inclusion–exclusion that refers to the European and imperial trajectory of white identity. In fact, whiteness as a point of intersection between historical privilege and identity in manifestos is a kind of 'habitus' in which the 'other' is judged.¹⁰² Thus, ethnocentric discourses are instrumentalised to glorify white identity, introduce notions of threat, and romanticise a nostalgic and imaginary past that extremists seek a return to.¹⁰³ Rather than being a hopeful rhetoric about whiteness, the repetition of such discourses by white nationalists was characterised by Shor as a sanctuary in an imaginary past.¹⁰⁴

Threat

Word frequencies also confirm that the attackers frequently mention the ethno-religious group they are targeting in their manifestos. As a matter of fact, in Gendron's manifesto, 'black people' were mentioned 88 times, and 38 times in Roof's; Jews 46 times in Earnest's manifesto; and Hispanics 11 times in Crusius's. The second group that Roof holds the most grudges against is Jews. Earnest expresses his hostility towards Muslims by confessing to setting fire to a mosque after Tarrant's capture.¹⁰⁵ Crusius, on the other hand, draws a broad frame of traitors from politicians to business circles and blames those who support policies that encourage immigration.¹⁰⁶ Besides Muslims, the groups that need to be eliminated in Tarrant's manifesto are anti-white politicians, treacherous media, and corporations, 'poisonous Marxists' and non-governmental organisations.¹⁰⁷

While defining group identity and categorically excluding those outside through words are the first steps towards acts of hatred and violence, Reicher et al. have pointed out that more is needed than this. The third step at this point is to present the out-group as a threat and danger to the in-group, because there are many groups outside of the in-group identity, but this does not make them a direct threat to 'us'. In this case, the other must pose a threat to the group identity not only by its existence but also ethnically, religiously, politically, economically, or socially.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁶ Earnest, 'An open letter', p. 6.

⁹⁷ Ebner et al., 'Is there a language of terrorists?'

⁹⁸ Ebner et al., 'Assessing violence risk'.

⁹⁹ Daniel Byman, 'Counterterrorism and modern white supremacy', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2021), DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2021.1956100](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.1956100).

¹⁰⁰ Roof, 'The last Rhodesian', p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Tarrant, 'The Great Replacement', p. 28, 43.

¹⁰² Nasar Meer, 'The wreckage of white supremacy', *Identities*, 26:5 (2019), pp. 501–9.

¹⁰³ Campion, 'Australian right wing', p. 208.

¹⁰⁴ Shor, 'White supremacist terror', p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Earnest, 'An open letter', p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Crusius, 'The inconvenient truth', p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Tarrant, 'The Great Replacement', pp. 44, 63.

¹⁰⁸ Reicher et al., 'Making a virtue of evil', p. 1331.

The manifestos prominently feature the idea that whites hold superior status, privileges, and rights when compared to non-whites. Within their manifestos, these terrorists regard social inequality against non-whites as something natural or even justified, rooted in racial beliefs. Notably, they perceive 'black', 'Latin', and non-European populations as genetically inferior to 'whites'.¹⁰⁹ Roof, for example, goes as far as labelling 'blacks' as 'stupid, wild, and deceitful'. Throughout his manifesto, Roof provides alleged evidence to support his claim that whites are superior to 'blacks'.¹¹⁰ Further, Crusius centres the theme of his manifesto around the notion that Hispanics are gradually displacing the socio-economic status of the American white population.¹¹¹

Therefore, terrorists use the most derogatory language in their manifestos to justify violence against the 'other'. Identifying the enemies with various images of animals and referring to them with metaphors to dehumanise makes it easier to make them an object of threat, while showing the violence to be directed at them as a kind of defensive act. In this context, it was revealed that each shooter sought to justify the violence against the ethnic and religious groups they targeted with various pejorative discourses.

Roof described 'blacks' as 'stupid' and 'wild',¹¹² and he argued that they exhibit aggressive behaviour since they have low IQs and cannot control their impulses.¹¹³ Gendron labelled 'blacks' as 'occupiers' and 'invaders'; Earnest, on the other hand, after alluding to the Jews as 'liars, ugly, sinful, cursed, corrupt, cruel, and genocidal', states that he is 'honored to be the one who sent these vile anti-humans to the pit of fire, where they will remain eternally'.¹¹⁴

This tone of racism can be heard in several of the terms used to describe immigrants in the manifestos, such as 'invade', 'occupation', 'invasion', and 'occupy', because, as Bauman argues, the other, as a necessary and abstract category, must be constantly redefined and given meaning for certain identities to legitimise themselves. This necessity makes the redefinition of the other even more essential, especially in times of crisis. Because the majority, whose legitimacy has been shaken, can fix itself through an intense construction of otherness. In this sense, it can be said that the relationship between the 'us' constituting the majority and the 'other' constituting the minority always operates with a sort of weeding or gardener reflex. Thanks to the otherness created by such an act of selection, boundaries are drawn that determine 'who belongs to the society in question and who does not'.¹¹⁵

This sense of collective identity serves to construct the 'other' discursively while drawing boundaries separating 'us' from 'them'.¹¹⁶ Recall that Campbell has revealed that the expression of difference and otherness is a strict functional requirement of identity.¹¹⁷ Similarly, exclusionary, and dehumanising beliefs and derogatory ideas based on race, ethnicity, and religion are discursive practices at the centre of far-right ideology.¹¹⁸

This rhetoric of hostility, which is an important motivation for the actions of terrorists, is based on the discourse strategy that Teun van Dijk summarises as 'contingently presenting oneself' and 'describing the other with negative representations'.¹¹⁹ Because the 'other' is what is needed for the

¹⁰⁹ Byman, 'Counterterrorism and modern white supremacy', p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Roof, 'The last Rhodesian', pp. 1, 2.

¹¹¹ Crusius, 'The inconvenient truth'.

¹¹² Roof, 'The last Rhodesian', pp. 1, 3.

¹¹³ It is important to note that such degrading and dehumanising descriptions are a continuation of the tradition of racialisation inherited from colonialism.

¹¹⁴ Gendron, 'You wait for', pp. 2, 3; Earnest, 'An open letter', p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

¹¹⁶ Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, 'Uneasy alliances: A look at the right-wing extremist movement in Canada', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 39:9 (2016), pp. 819–41.

¹¹⁷ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Cynthia Miller-Idriss, 'White supremacist extremism and the far right in the U.S.' (2021), available at <https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/cynthia-miller-idriss-white-supremacist-extremism-far-right-us>.

¹¹⁹ Teun van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2011).

consistency, solidarity, and security of the identity we belong to. Therefore, otherness is always portrayed in demonic terms, as it refers to the alienation that taints the pure unity of the soul.¹²⁰

Moreover, for white supremacist far-rights, such exclusionary beliefs represent more than just biased attitudes toward a different group, because they are strongly attached to the idea of an existential threat to a dominant group and are highly sensitive to emotional calls to take action to defend and protect the homeland, which they see as the ‘sacred national space’.¹²¹ Roof underlines this state of urgency by saying that ‘we shouldn’t wait any longer to take drastic measures’.¹²² Earnest sees the extinction of the white race as an existential threat, and in his appeal to other white supremacists like himself, he is quite confident that they would attack the enemies after reading his manifesto. Crusius, on the other hand, expresses that it is a great shame not to take action to defend the ‘white identity’ and claims that he took action to protect his country.¹²³ Similarly, Tarrant argues that failure to act is to admit defeat. He finds the answer to the question, ‘Why does no one do anything to protect the whites?’ by saying, ‘Why am I not doing anything?’¹²⁴ As can be seen from the frequently repeated words such as attack, gun, and armour, terrorists find the answers to these questions by resorting to violence.

Frequently used words such as ‘invasion’, ‘replacement’, and ‘migration’ and associated terms in the manifestos correspond to the fear of extinction that whites will experience due to the global northward migration movements of non-whites and declining white birth rates. Endorsing the French writer Renaud Camus’s infamous theory of the ‘The Great Replacement’, this idea is presented in the terrorists’ manifestos as a global conspiracy by Jews, Marxist politicians, and various groups supporting immigrants. For example, Crusius admitted that he had not considered planning an attack against the Hispanic community before reading this theory.¹²⁵ The anti-Semitic ideas that Earnest reiterates throughout his manifesto clearly demonstrate his belief in the existence of a global Jewish conspiracy.¹²⁶ As far as we learned from Roof’s manifesto, he coincided with similar conspiratorial discourses in his research on white supremacist/extremist right-wing platforms and was driven to extremism.¹²⁷ While Tarrant often refers to the ‘Eurabia’ and ‘The Great Replacement’ theories and their originators, he attributes this conspiratorial rhetoric to the claim that immigrant Muslims have high birth rates and to the idea that whites will inevitably be displaced in Europe.¹²⁸

Conspiracies may provide coherent explanations for challenging issues, and they provide powerful tools for understanding how the world works. In-group members, particularly those in the early stages of radicalisation, turn to conspiracy theories to make sense of the uncertainty when faced with the deterioration of the status quo,¹²⁹ because in these circumstances, conspiracy theories are not only a means of making it easier to find scapegoats but also a means of calling for the maintenance of an allegedly threatened order.¹³⁰ Moreover, extremist ideologues place conspiracy theories at the centre of a constructed out-group identity. Problems affecting the in-group are contextualised by attributing them to the deliberate actions of the out-group. That is, the problems of the in-group stem from the actions of the out-group.¹³¹

¹²⁰ Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 65.

¹²¹ Miller-Idriss, ‘White supremacist extremism’.

¹²² Roof, ‘The last Rhodesian’, p. 3.

¹²³ Earnest, ‘An open letter’, p. 6.

¹²⁴ Tarrant, ‘The Great Replacement’, p. 11.

¹²⁵ Crusius, ‘The inconvenient truth’, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Earnest, ‘An open letter’.

¹²⁷ Roof, ‘The last Rhodesian’, p. 5.

¹²⁸ Tarrant, ‘The Great Replacement’.

¹²⁹ Berger, *Extremism*.

¹³⁰ Florian Hartleb, *Lone Wolves: The New Terrorism of Right-wing Single Actors* (Cham: Springer, 2020), p. 137.

¹³¹ Berger, *Extremism*, p. 100.

Virtue and celebration

The manifestos reveal that terrorists crafted a martyrdom narrative, asserting the necessity of taking action to defend the nation's or social group's heritage. Through this narrative, the terrorists seek to convince the masses of the indispensability of resorting to violence, championing a worldview marked by racism, masculinity,¹³² and ethnic nationalism.¹³³ Furthermore, the aggressors consistently underscore narratives predicting an unavoidable war and the conviction that political avenues for change are bound to falter.¹³⁴

In this context, it is not surprising that the terrorists portray themselves as the heroes of an oppressed class and the guardians of the societies to which they belong. While Roof states, 'even if my life is worth less than a speck of dirt, I want to use it for the good of society',¹³⁵ Gendron expresses that he carries out his actions for the sake of his friends, family, people, culture, and race, largely quoting from Tarrant. Tarrant's sentence 'I am only a White man who wants to protect and serve my community, my people, my culture and my race' points out from an ethnic framework that the action is taken in the name of society without any need for further interpretation.¹³⁶ Right along with Tarrant, Earnest tries to appeal to society to make the truth about himself known. Earnest justifies his actions with the phrase 'to have the honor and privilege of defending one's race in times of greatest need to inspire others'.¹³⁷ At the end of his manifesto, Crusius attributes to himself an ethos of redemption, with the words 'I am honored to lead the fight to save my country from destruction'.¹³⁸ The manifesto writers, therefore, see themselves as heroes who sacrificed themselves to save the future of a 'pure and homogeneous' white race and to realise a kind of 'Renaissance'.¹³⁹

These arguments are associated with 'virtue and celebration', conceptualised by Reicher et al. as 'eulogizing inhumanity as the defence of virtue' and which is the last step of the process leading to violence.¹⁴⁰ The attackers romanticised their actions by commemorating former white supremacists who used violence against the others they excluded. Along with the manifestos, Harwood points out that Tarrant and Breivik are still blessed and glorified on far-right platforms on the Internet.¹⁴¹ Thus, white supremacists celebrate their own and their violent predecessors' actions as moral and virtuous behaviour. In other words, inhuman action is portrayed as a sacred and legitimate action in the eyes of white supremacists. At that point, it is also noteworthy that Gendron stated that he 'hoped to provide self-motivation for people to celebrate this event' as the reason for broadcasting the attack live.¹⁴²

For example, Earnest stated that he was 'blessed by God for having a magnificent bloodline', that 'he could die in honor to stop Jews evil against his bloodline', that 'God understood what he did', that his attack will inspire his brave followers, and that 'their sacrifice will always be remembered'.¹⁴³ Roof stated that 'someone needs to show that courage' to bless the action he will undertake.¹⁴⁴

¹³²In particular, they link the erosion of traditional male roles and the deterioration of homogeneous identity and promote hyper-masculine violence as a 'defence strategy' in response to these perceived threats. Right-wing extremist groups often use this 'protector narrative' to target propaganda and recruitment strategies at certain men, responding to their fears of powerlessness and replacement. See Aleksandra Dier and Gretchen Baldwin, 'Masculinities and violent extremism', International Peace Institute and UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (June 2022), p. 7.

¹³³Branscomb, 'Making manifest'.

¹³⁴Ebner et al., 'Assesing violence', p. 10.

¹³⁵Roof, 'The last Rhodesian', p. 5.

¹³⁶Gendron, 'You wait for', p. 3; Tarrant, 'The Great Replacement', p. 5.

¹³⁷Earnest, 'An open letter', p. 2.

¹³⁸Crusius, 'The inconvenient truth', p. 5.

¹³⁹Per-Erik Nilsson, 'Manifestos of white nationalist ethno-soldiers', *Critical Research on Religion*, 10:2 (2022), pp. 221–35.

¹⁴⁰Reicher et al., 'Making a virtue of evil'.

¹⁴¹Max Harwood, 'Living death: Imagined history and the Tarrant manifesto', *Emotions: History, Culture, Society*, 5:1 (2021), pp. 25–50.

¹⁴²Gendron, 'You wait for', p. 18.

¹⁴³Earnest, 'An open letter', pp. 1, 2.

¹⁴⁴Roof, 'The last Rhodesian', pp. 3, 5.

Crusius stated that ‘his attack was carried out in the name of protecting his society and he was honored by this action to save his country from destruction.’¹⁴⁵

On the other hand, as emphasised in the manifestos, various triggering factors¹⁴⁶ play a role in motivating individuals to resort to violence. For example, Roof found the punishment given to George Zimmerman, who shot and killed an African American youth named Trayvon Martin, unfair. This experience led him to have an emotional breakdown, where he believed that whites were victimised in many such incidents. Similarly, Tarrant claims that he was living an ‘ordinary’ life until the turning point when he was deeply affected by the death of Swedish child Ebba Akerlund, who was killed in a terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2017. Tarrant’s grudge against the immigrant population he encountered during his European travels, especially in France, further motivated him to take action. Earnest stated that while he was a student at nursing school, after Brenton Tarrant’s actions, he was inspired to defend the white race against Jews. Gendron mentioned that he was influenced by far-right ideas based on conspiracy theories, such as those found on picture message-sharing sites such as 4chan, which he admitted to spending a lot of time on during the global pandemic. Most significantly, he took the attackers who carried out racist attacks before him, such as Tarrant, Roof, Earnest, and Breivik, as examples. Additionally, Crusius stated that he fell into despair and could not remain indifferent to it any longer, citing the increasing Hispanic population in the area where he lived.

Discussion

This study seeks to examine the factors contributing to the legitimisation of violence, instead of asserting definitive claims about the factors that lead to political violence. Through qualitative analysis, the study delves into the underlying factors of far-right terrorism by scrutinising the manifestos of five selected lone-actor terrorists. Employing a five-step process, the analysis aims to understand how these individuals construct identity and justify acts of violence against groups perceived as a threat to their collective identity.

A critical factor for engaging in collective violence is a high level of identification and fusion with the in-group. As individuals perceive the out-group as a competitor for resources or power, the motivation for violent behaviour to protect their group intensifies. Highly identified group members may even consider violent actions against the out-group as virtuous. This process hinges on viewing evil as virtue, where violent extremists genuinely believe that their actions are righteous. This belief crystallises when the out-group is perceived as a threat to the in-group – whether in terms of existence, job security, values, or way of life. Once the out-group is established as a threat, it undergoes dehumanisation, and its destruction becomes a perceived virtuous act of self-defence.

Accordingly, in their manifestos, terrorists first put forward the ‘white identity’ as an object of reference to be protected from the out-group. Those who were left out of this circle of identity ought to be eliminated through violence on the grounds that they posed a threat to the object of reference, and the aggressors felt the need to legitimise these actions by celebrating them in their texts in virtuous and praiseworthy terms. Thus, the framework of resorting to inhumane acts of violence in the name of protecting collective identity was found to be a useful tool to explain the way in which the attackers justified their acts of violence in the manifestos.

The findings underscore the significant role of manifestos as ideological tools that contribute to the popularity of terrorist attacks. Notably, there is a growing trend among lone-actor terrorists, particularly those aligned with extreme far-right ideologies, to produce and share manifestos before carrying out attacks. The analysis suggests that terrorists draw on conspiracy theories embedded in their identity and ideology to justify their actions, providing a motivational framework for inciting violence. The conspiratorial discourses within manifestos construct narratives that depict the

¹⁴⁵Crusius, ‘The inconvenient truth’, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶Crenshaw, ‘The causes of terrorism’.

victimisation of collective identity while ascribing negative values to out-groups. This construction fosters a widespread sense of anger and victimisation, mobilising attackers to target specific groups. Consequently, manifestos serve as instruments for propagating ethnocentric discourses, making it easier to convince individuals to commit violent acts. Moreover, these texts are identified as potential catalysts for future aggressors by rationalising and essentialising inhumane acts of violence against out-groups.

The final observation highlights the role of online manifesto distribution in fuelling the growth of white nationalist movements globally. The swift dissemination of manifestos and live footage of attacks across social media platforms, visual message boards, and video-sharing sites amplifies interactions among extremists. This seamless connectivity enables manifestos to quickly reach diverse audiences within networked hate communities, potentially inspiring like-minded attackers to adopt similar tactics. As a result, future research should delve into the effects of online-published manifestos on the radicalisation process.

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to thank the editor and anonymous referees who kindly reviewed the earlier version of this manuscript and provided valuable suggestions and comments.

Funding statement. None

Competing interests. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Cenker Korhan Demir, PhD is Professor of International Relations at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Hasan Kalyoncu University in Gaziantep, Türkiye. Dr Demir received his PhD from the National Defence University, Ankara. His main research interests are international security, terrorism, radicalisation, insurgency, strategy, and war studies.

Ömer Çona is an independent researcher with a PhD in International Security and Terrorism. He specialises in Critical Security and Terrorism Studies. He received his PhD from the National Defence University (Ankara) with his dissertation entitled 'The USA's War on Terror Strategy from the Perspective of Critical Terrorism Studies'. He is interested in academic sub-fields such as Critical Terrorism Studies, Critical Security Studies, Critical Military Studies, War on Terror, Popular Geopolitics, and Representations of Terrorism in Popular Culture.