

Extremist speech online and in the Finnish news media

Leena Malkki, Daniel Sallamaa, Juha Saarinen, Sami Eerola

Translated from Finnish by Juha Saarinen

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Abstract This study examines expressions of extremist ideologies and beliefs in the Finnish-language media environment. It approaches the topic from two angles by looking at 1) online speech that approves of the use of violence or dehumanizes other people and 2) the national news media's handling of violent extremism and the ideologies and beliefs connected to the phenomenon.

The study demonstrates that speech that approves of the use of violence and dehumanizes others can be found on public, Finnish-language online platforms. It is most prevalent in far-right and anti-immigration online discussions yet also features in far-left discussions, albeit to a lesser degree. Online speech that pertains to the incel and school shooting subcultures is similarly an intermittent occurrence in the material studied. Finnish-language jihadist speech has, on the other hand, been increasingly rare on public online platforms after measures targeting such material were tightened.

The news media reports on violent extremism in the aftermath of attacks and other such events in particular. It focuses on the events and reactions to them while directing lesser coverage towards the ideologies and beliefs that may underpin them. While the news coverage is largely in line with the standards and norms of reporting on the topic, possibilities for further improvement were also identified.

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Keywords violent extremism, social media, news coverage, extremist movements, far right, far left, jihadism, school shootings, research, research activities

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Ekstremistinen puhe verkossa ja uutismediassa

Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 2021:72

Julkaisija Valtioneuvoston kanslia

Tekijä/t Leena Malkki, Daniel Sallamaa, Juha Saarinen, Sami Eerola

Kieli englanti **Sivumäärä** 98

Tiivistelmä Tutkimuksessa käsitellään ekstremististen aatemaailmojen ilmenemistä suomenkielisessä mediaympäristössä kahdesta näkökulmasta: 1) Millaista väkivallan hyväksyvää tai toisia ihmisiä epäinhimillistä puhetta suomenkielisessä verkkoympäristössä esiintyy ja 2) miten väkivaltaista ekstremististä toimintaa ja aatemaailmoja käsitellään suomenkielisessä valtakunnallisessa uutismediassa.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että väkivallan hyväksyvää ja epäinhimillistä puhetta esiintyy avoimilla suomenkielisillä alustoilla. Eniten sitä löydettiin äärioikeistolaisista ja maahanmuuttovastaisista keskusteluista, mutta sitä esiintyy jonkin verran myös ääriivasemmistolaisissa keskusteluissa. Myös incel- ja koulusurma-alakulttuureihin liittyvää aineistoa löytyy ajoittain. Avointa suomenkielistä jihadistista aineistoa on ollut hyvin vähän vastatoimien kiristymisen jälkeen.

Väkivaltaisesta ekstremismistä uutisoidaan varsinkin iskujen yms. tapahtumien jälkeen. Päähuomio kohdistuu tapahtumiin ja niihin reagointiin, kun taas taustalla olevien aatemaailmojen käsittely jää vähäisemmäksi. Uutisointi noudattaa valtaosin hyviä käytäntöjä. Raportissa annetaan myös ehdotuksia uutisoinnin kehittämiseksi.

Klausuuli Tämä julkaisu on toteutettu osana valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimussuunnitelman toimeenpanoa. (tietokayttoon.fi) Julkaisun sisällöstä vastaavat tiedon tuottajat, eikä tekstisisältö välttämättä edusta valtioneuvoston näkemystä.

Asiasanat väkivaltainen ekstremismi, sosiaalinen media, uutisointi, ääriiliikkeet, äärioikeistolaisuus, ääriivasemmistolaisuus, jihadismi, koulusurmat, tutkimus, tutkimustoiminta

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Extremiskt material online och i nyhetsmedia

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Författare Leena Malkki, Daniel Sallamaa, Juha Saarinen, Sami Eerola

Språk engelska **Sidantal** 98

Referat I denna studie undersöks extremistiska ideologier och föreställningar sådana de kommer till uttryck i det finskspråkiga medielandskapet. Ämnet behandlas från två olika utgångspunkter: 1) Våldsbejakande material online som dehumaniserar andra människor och 2) nationella nyhetsmediernas hantering av våldsbejakande extremism och ideologier och föreställningar kopplade till detta fenomen.

Studien visar att våldsbejakande material som dehumaniserar andra människor återfinns på offentliga finskspråkiga onlineplattformar. Denna typ av utsagor är vanligast i nätdiskussioner i högerextrema och invandrar- och invandringsfientliga fora men förekommer också, om än i mindre utsträckning, i nätdiskussioner i fora knutna till den yttersta vänstern. Material och utspel online kopplade till incelkulturen liksom till skolskjutningar förekommer periodvis i det genomgångna materialet. Däremot har finskspråkiga jihadistiska texter blivit allt ovanligare på offentliga onlineplattformar efter det att åtgärder riktade mot sådant material skärpts.

Nyhetsmedierna rapporterar främst om våldsbejakande extremism i anslutning till attacker och liknande händelser. Rapporteringen fokuserar på händelserna som sådana och reaktionerna på dem snarare än på de bakomliggande ideologierna och föreställningarna. Mediebevakningen ligger i huvudsak i linje med vedertagen standard och gängse normer för rapportering om denna typ av ämnen men det finns samtidigt utrymme för förbättring inom vissa områden.

Klausul Den här publikation är en del i genomförandet av statsrådets utrednings- och forskningsplan. (tietokaytoon.fi) De som producerar informationen ansvarar för innehållet i publikationen. Textinnehållet återspeglar inte nödvändigtvis statsrådets ståndpunkt.

Nyckelord våldsbejakande extremism, sociala medier, nyhetsbevakning, extremistiska rörelser, högerextremism, vänsterextremism, jihadism, skolskjutningar, forskning, orskningsverksamhet

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1 Introduction

In recent years, many Western countries have expressed concern over the increasing volume of online extremist content that seeks to dehumanise its targets and justify violence against them.¹ This type of speech has been created and distributed primarily by political and religious extremists and their supporters. During the peak years of the conflict in Syria and Iraq (2014–2016), the rapidly growing volume of jihadist content online, produced in various European languages, has been of particular concern. Recently, these concerns have broadened to include far-right extremist content.

The increasing volume of extremist content online is considered problematic because easy access to such material is believed to facilitate radicalisation that results in acts of violence even if such processes are rarely the product of solely consuming online content. Extremist content is easy to access online. The virtual environment offers numerous possibilities for sharing material – especially in visual form – and interacting with members and supporters of extremist groups regardless of geographical boundaries. These online interactions form the basis of virtual communities that – in turn – are perceived to function as echo chambers that strengthen and justify the views shared among their memberships. Such dynamics have had a significant facilitative effect on the mobilisation of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq, particularly between 2012 and 2016.

There are concerns that the increasing volume of extremist content online will eventually impact public discourse, and the escalation and polarisation of views expressed in the public sphere are considered symptomatic of this. Should extremist views become more common, they could move from the margins to the mainstream of public discussion and thus become normalised. This may lead political discourse and policies to directions that do not coincide with the fundamental values of liberal democracy. Such concerns are often expressed in relation to far-right and anti-immigration discourses.

How the accessibility of extremist content affects radicalisation and support for extremist actors and how extremist views become normalised and mainstream are

¹ The characteristics of extremist content will be discussed in greater detail in the beginning of the next section.

complex processes that are challenging to understand. This is especially true in today's mediatised society with its complex communication environment.²

The purpose of this report is to produce knowledge on the two areas intertwined in this complex entity. It is divided into two parts.

The first part deals with extremist speech present in the Finnish-language online environment. It introduces the main ideologies connected to extremist speech and relevant online discussions. The same ideologies are also the primary focus of Finnish efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE). The report will survey the type of content present in the Finnish-language online environment that dehumanises other people and justifies violence, specifically content linked to broader political ideologies. It is important to keep in mind that most online fora and platforms examined in this study are not extremist in and of themselves even though extremist content may occasionally be posted in or uploaded to them, and the examined websites are by no means the only places in the Finnish-language online environment where such content is present. Indeed, the primary objective of the study is to identify different types of arguments promoting extremism and not to extensively map their presence online. Also, the study does not provide any policy recommendations, seeking only to increase knowledge on the phenomenon.

The second part examines how the phenomenon is covered by Finnish-language news media, providing an overview of how violent extremism, and particularly extremist ideologies, were approached in the news coverage between 2019 and 2020. As violent extremism is familiar to many people solely through media coverage, media coverage of relevant ideologies is therefore bound to affect what the public knows about the phenomenon and which questions and themes attract broader attention. Even though national news media no longer functions as a gatekeeper to the extent it once did, editorial choices can still have a significant impact on how much – and what kind of – publicity extremist content and activism attracts. Thus, national news media still plays an important role in how extremist discourse garners broader acceptance. At the end of the second part, the report discusses the challenges related to news coverage on violent extremism and proposes potential areas for improvement in the future.

² In this report, mediatisation refers to how the media has, on the one hand, emerged as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions have to accommodate; and on the other hand, the media has simultaneously become an integrated part of other societal institutions such as politics, work, family, and religion as more and more of these institutional activities are performed. See Stig Hjarvard, "The mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change", *Nordicom Review* 29/2 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0181>.

This research project was funded by and conducted under the Finnish Government Plan for Analysis, Assessment and Research and therefore responds to a knowledge gap identified by the governmental authorities. It was commissioned and undertaken with the purpose of supporting CVE efforts by producing knowledge on the phenomenon, as it is essential to be well-versed in extremist ideologies and the ways in which violence is justified and incited in order to counter their arguments. Hopefully the study will also aid in further defining targets and priorities for local CVE efforts. Indeed, it is hardly beneficial if all heated criticism of the current societal state of affairs is viewed as suspicious let alone extremist. The study's findings are also useful to those working in the Finnish media, from editors-in-chief and managing editors in charge of editorial guidelines to reporters.

The research was conducted at the Centre for European Studies at the University of Helsinki between April 2020 and February 2021. The report was written by Leena Malkki, Daniel Sallamaa, and Juha Saarinen as well as Sami Eerola, who worked as a research assistant for the project. In the first part, which focuses on extremist content, the section on the far right was written by Eerola, Malkki, and Sallamaa. The section on jihadist content was written by Saarinen, and the section on the far left by Sallamaa. The sections on the subcultures that have formed around the incel and school shooting subcultures were written by Malkki and partly based on research carried out by Eerola. The second part, which focuses on news media, was written by Malkki and Sallamaa. Sallamaa was primarily responsible for analysis focusing on the far right, and Malkki was responsible for the other sections. In addition, the second part was aided by work done by research assistants Aune Sanz, who collected the majority of the data analysed, and Mea Lakso, who helped in collating it. The research team would also like to thank Johanna Sumiala, Katja Valaskivi, Salla-Maaria Laaksonen, and Karin Creutz for their helpful input during the research process.

The research project's steering group was chaired by Head of Development Tarja Mankkinen (Ministry of the Interior), and its other members were Project Manager Milla Aaltonen (Ministry of Justice), Senior Specialist Mika Junninen (Ministry of Justice), Senior Coordinator Eeva Koivunen (Ministry of the Interior), Senior Advisor Marja Pulkkinen (Ministry of Education and Culture), and Senior Advisor Olli Ruohomäki (Ministry for Foreign Affairs). The research group would like to express their gratitude to all members of the steering group for their smooth and constructive cooperation throughout the project.

2 Extremist speech in the Finnish-language online environment

CONTENT WARNING

The chapter (beginning from subsection 2.4) contain several examples of extremist speech that accepts and incites violence and dehumanises others. All of the examples have been collected from openly accessible websites.

The first part of this report focuses on extremist speech in the Finnish-language online environment. Hence, the object of analysis is speech that expresses favourable views about the use of violence, incites to violence, or dehumanises other people or individuals (for a more detailed definition, see below). As there are numerous uncompromising, intransigent, and precipitous views expressed online on a daily basis, it is necessary to stress that this study does not intend to create a comprehensive picture of all dehumanising and pro-violence online content.

Instead, the report focuses on content that is tied to broader world views and ideologies. This means speech that accepts violence or dehumanises others based on broader political and religious ideologies that provide views and explanations about how the surrounding society is, how it should be, and what needs to happen for that to occur. The paper also examines conversations within these discourses that are critical of the use of violence.

A key development forming the backdrop for the report is the evolution of extremist subcultures and the increase of online content connected to them. The pre-existing literature has demonstrated that there is a significant amount of extremist content online – including content promoting violence – that is shared by extremist actors in multiple languages. Furthermore, people from all around the world follow and take part in these types of discussions on a broad range of online platforms. The objective of this report is to produce knowledge of how extremist ideologies and world views, and content promoting violence appear in the Finnish-language online environment.

The report focuses on openly accessible Finnish-language content, i.e. content that can be accessed and read by anyone. This is because the goal has been to examine the types of discussions that can be found online without registration to restricted or closed platforms and without accessing the dark web. Indeed, openly accessible

content is the most easily found and potentially the most widely consumed type of material. There are also numerous discussions on various closed sites and platforms that undoubtedly contain favourable views on and glorification of violence – most likely in a more direct and serious fashion than on the websites examined in this study.

Extremist content is typically connected to broader political ideologies. Hence, it is necessary to understand these ideologies in order to understand the traditions and narratives from which they draw. That means *this report also examines political discussions and ideologies that are not extremist in and of themselves* but are used in conversations seeking to build justification for the use of violence. It is important to note that the *mention of a political view, ideology, term, actor, thinker, or platform in this report does not indicate that it is considered extremist.*

The target of the study is speech, i.e. what kind of content is accessible and readable online. The vast majority of the comments and conversations examined in this report were written either pseudonymously or anonymously. The identities of those behind these comments would be an interesting topic of study, but that is not the objective of this report. Instead, this report approaches speech fitting the criteria outlined above from a reader's perspective and examines the kind of content that is readily accessible online. Furthermore, the study does not examine the relationship between speech and action (i.e. how likely it is that speech leads to violence and under what kind of circumstances) nor past violent incidents themselves.

Based on the pre-existing literature, it is possible to argue that speech promoting violence and dehumanising others does have a role in the radicalisation processes that lead to acts of violence, be they in the context of individual mobilisation or broader societal polarisation.³ At the same time, it is important to highlight that this kind of speech does not invariably lead to acts of political or religious violence. Expressing views that promote violence or dehumanise others is not a reliable indicator that the individuals or actors that do so are willing or capable of not just “talking the talk” but also “walking the walk”.

³ For example, see Donald Holbrook & John Horgan, “Terrorism and Ideology: Cracking the Nut”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13/6 (2019), <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/perspectives-on-terrorism/archives/2019#volume-xiii-issue-6>; Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Bélanger & Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Narratives, and Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Kurt Braddock, *Weaponized Words: The Strategic Role of Persuasion in Violent Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Leena Malkki, *Mitä tiedämme terrorismista* (Helsinki: Otava, 2020), chapters 5 & 6.

It should also be noted that the analysis is limited to speech produced by extraparliamentary actors. Thus, the study excludes views expressed by members of parliament, city and municipal councils, and employees of political parties – although some of the people holding these positions have occasionally publicly expressed views that have contained extremist characteristics.

2.1 Research Material

This research analyses – in accordance with the requirements identified in the commission of the study – online content predominantly in the context of three different ideological online milieus and discourses: a) far right and anti-immigration; b) left-wing anarchism, anti-fascism,⁴ and communism; and c) jihadism. Furthermore, it examines speech endorsing violence and dehumanising others in two further contexts: online milieus and subcultures connected to the school shooting and incel phenomena. The study focuses on content posted online between March 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020.

There are very few websites and platforms in the Finnish-language online environment that are both openly accessible and explicitly extremist. Instead, the conversations examined in this report take place on openly accessible sites and platforms containing diverse discussions that cover a broad range of topics. The sites and platforms examined in this study are not the only places online where speech accepting violence and dehumanising others is present. Similar views can be found elsewhere online, including discussion forums, alternative media, and online discussions in the comment section of news articles published in the websites of national news media.

The research material pertaining to the far right and opposition to immigration has been collected from Hommaforum, Ylilauta, and the Kansallinen Vastarinta website of the Nordic Resistance Movement's Finnish branch. Hommaforum is the oldest and still active anti-immigration online discussion forum in Finland, and it is a key platform for far-right and anti-immigration conversations. Ylilauta is one of Finland's most popular message boards, and the largest image board in the Finnish-language online environment. Far-right content (text and visual) is shared on Ylilauta in a way similar to how it is shared on international image boards such as 4chan and 8chan. In fact,

⁴ Anti-fascist discourse refers to discussions on the online platforms examined in this report (see below), not conversations where views opposing fascism have been expressed in general.

when it comes to the spread of visual⁵ far-right content in the Finnish-language online environment, Ylilauta is a key website. Lastly, the Kansallinen Vastarinta website, maintained by the Nordic Resistance Movement, is an active platform where national socialist online narratives are created and distributed.

Left-wing anarchist and anti-fascist research material has been collected from the Takku.net website, the website and Facebook pages of Varisverkosto, and the Punk in Finland online discussion forum. The study also includes content collected from sites in the communist online milieu, including the Facebook page and the website of the Proletaarit community. The collected material includes both articles and online conversations. Some of the latter were initially written in other languages and then translated to Finnish. Takku.net is a left-wing anarchist and anti-fascist website where articles and conversations about acts of violence and the Finnish far right, among other relevant topics, have been published. Punk in Finland is a website more loosely connected to anti-fascism and functions as a platform for the exchange of ideas among individuals who support the ideology. The discussion forum includes a section where the Finnish far right has been followed and commented on for several years. Varisverkosto is a central anti-fascist network in Finland, and it has published a significant volume of material dealing with its own ideology and that of its ideological opponents. The Proletaarit community is a more recently formed communist actor that has also published a great deal of online content focusing on ideology.

The study sought online conversations glorifying school shootings and those connected to the incel subculture primarily from Ylilauta. In addition to conversations glorifying school shootings, explicit threats of school shootings have also been posted on the website. Ylilauta is known to host content hostile to women and connected to the incel sub-culture. The study also mapped, albeit to a lesser extent, the comment sections of YouTube videos that deal with school shootings.

There is a vast volume of content on the websites mentioned above, and most of it is not relevant to this report. The analysed material was identified on these sites by, for example, searching with relevant keywords on Google and in the social media content database of Mohawk Analytics. Initially, the keywords used in these searches consisted of vocabulary that, based on previous literature, was known to appear in conversations about violence and adversaries within the ideological context. The study specifically mapped conversations about acts of political and religious violence, as this is one of the most common contexts in which the justification for violence is

⁵ Visual material, e.g. memes, are recognised in the pre-existing literature as a key form of digital communication for spreading far-right narratives online. See e.g. Maik Fielitz & Nick Thurston (ed.), *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right. Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019).

discussed. The list of keywords used was supplemented by analysing the results of earlier keyword searches and by finding recurring terminology. The research strategies used to gather material varied to some extent due to the differing characteristics and structures of various websites.

In recent years, content justifying and inciting violence has been, for the most part, actively removed from the online environment. The platforms examined in this study are moderated to varying degrees, including in the context of the material relevant to this study. For example, whereas Hommaforum is heavily moderated, the moderation guidelines on Ylilauta appear to be significantly laxer – although content is often also removed from Ylilauta for various reasons, including the glorification of violence.

Some of the threads and comments included in the research material were deleted from the websites in the months after the data collection began. Threads in the “Sekalainen” (miscellaneous) section of Ylilauta in particular were deleted in large numbers, including some material that was included in this study. Any material explicitly quoted in this report was either still available when this report was originally published or similar posts can still be found on the same platforms. The reasons behind the removal of the content are not known to the research group, but it does not appear to be the case that the removals were systematically aimed at removing extremist content as it is defined here. Content similar to that removed remained largely untouched in other sections of the platforms, and new similar content was posted in more recent threads.

The analysis in the context of jihadism was conducted in a different manner, as there was a limited amount of online content available in Finnish, and the openly accessible content known by the authors to have existed in the past was mostly removed before the research project began. Furthermore, it has been established that individuals interested in jihadist ideology often seek out international online platforms, the access to which is increasingly restricted. Indeed, surveillance by governmental authorities and the increasingly restrictive measures adopted by the companies running these platforms have resulted in jihadist content being created and shared in closed and encrypted instant messaging applications such as Telegram.⁶ Hence, in the context of jihadism, this study focuses on describing the messages and narratives targeting Western audiences.

⁶ Leena Malkki & Matti Pohjonen, *Jihadist Online Communication and Finland*. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 2019:29 (Ministry of the Interior, 2019), <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-324-300-2>.

2.2 Definition of extremist content

The definition of extremist content in this report relies on the extremist media index developed by Donald Holbrook (see Table 1). The index was developed to facilitate the systematic classification and analysis of media material. The main purpose of this study has been to look for material that fits category 3 of Holbrook's index. It should be noted that extremist speech is understood here as speech that condones violence or dehumanises other people.⁷ Thus, the categorisation is not based on the distance between such views and visions and those that are considered mainstream.

This definition is close to how violent extremism is understood in Finnish CVE policies. According to the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Extremism, violent extremism means "using, threatening with, instigating, encouraging or justifying violence based on ideological grounds".⁸ The same document states that "the ideology of all violent extremist movements is based on the idea that people and groups of people are in a different position depending on the human dignity they have".⁹

Violence is understood in this study to include both acts of violence against people and damage to property (arson, sabotage, vandalism, etc.), and while it follows the understanding in previous research, it does not entirely correspond to how violence is understood in the examined discussions and conversations; in some of them, only acts that target humans are perceived as violence. While violence against material property is one of the forms of activism that CVE policies aim to prevent, this does not mean that such acts are considered fully comparable to attacks against people.

⁷ Othering, i.e. dividing people into "us" and "them", is a key feature in human thought. It is not dehumanising nor extremist in itself. The focus here is on speech in which "they" are presented as of lesser human value and justified targets of violence.

⁸ National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019–2023: Government Resolution 19 December 2019. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 2020:3 (Ministry of the Interior, 2020), https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162200/SM_2020_3.pdf, 20.

⁹ National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019–2023, 12.

Table 1. Classification of media material and the definition of extremist material (adapted from Holbrook's extremist media index)¹⁰

Category	Definition
1 – Moderate	General religious, political, philosophical, or historical material discussing news stories and containing no endorsement of violence or hatred towards identified communities. Generally moderate content along the lines found in mainstream religious/political texts and news media output.
2 – Fringe	Content is religiously or ideologically conservative and isolationist, politically radical and confrontational, but without any justifications conveyed for violence in present-day scenarios. Anger and hostility might be expressed towards a given group of people (people of different religions, immigrants) but without denying their dignity or portraying them as legitimate targets of violence.
3 – Extreme	Justifying or glorifying violence as a means to achieve objectives, especially serious and potentially life-threatening violence. Also, glorification of deceased fighters with the idea that their actions are a suitable example in modern times. Material that dehumanises groups of people and communities (e.g. based on race, sexuality, or country of origin).
Extremist – level 3:1	Serious violence is only justified and encouraged as part of broader armed conflict or in general without further description or specification; justifying or encouraging violence against property.
Extremist – level 3:2	Serious violence justified and encouraged against civilians, but without any detail.
Extremist – level 3:3a	Serious violence justified and encouraged against civilians so that it includes more specific claims regarding the target, the mode of attack, etc.
Extremist – level 3:3b	Same as 3a, but specific and directly applicable details offered, such as bomb-making instructions.

¹⁰ Donald Holbrook, "Designing and Applying an 'Extremism Media Index'", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9/5 (2015), The categories in the table follow Holbrook's classification. Some of the definitions have been slightly amended for the purposes of this analysis.

2.3 Key findings

Online content that endorses violence and dehumanises others was found, to a certain extent, in all the online milieus examined. Overall, violence is justified by arguments that are fundamentally similar in nature, for example, by framing it as self-defence or by arguing that other, non-violent means are simply insufficient.

Transnational ideological currents and discourses are strongly present in the Finnish-language online environment. While the discussions often focus on events in other countries (e.g. Syria and Iraq, the United States, and Sweden), Finland is not perceived as an island untouched by broader international trends. Instead, the discussions repeatedly describe Finland as a country “behind the curve” on the development of societal problems and polarisation and a place where violence is not as acute an issue as elsewhere.

There are clear differences, however, between ideological currents in terms of the kind of content endorsing violence and dehumanising others that is found in the Finnish-language research material. It should be noted that this report does not seek to measure the volume of such content, so it is difficult to say anything definitive about its prevalence on different platforms. Such comparisons are made all the more difficult by the diverse nature of the online platforms examined. Nevertheless, observations made during the data collection process allow for some tentative remarks. The greatest amount of content endorsing violence or dehumanising others was found in far-right and anti-immigration discussions. Harsh views about adversaries were also repeatedly found in far-left discussions.¹¹

Clear differences can, however, be observed between ideological tendencies in terms of the kind of dehumanising and violence-endorsing content found in the material. In far-right discussions, fantasies about using violence against ideological enemies are clearly more graphic – occasionally even containing sadistic features – than in the far-left material on action against adversaries. There is also a difference in the types of violence discussed. In far-right discussions, violence is almost invariably against civilians, whereas far-left discussions focus more often on violence targeting property or armed forces in the context of a military conflict.

It is also important to note that speech *objecting* to the use of violence is present in the research material collected from both far-right and far-left platforms. While ideologically motivated acts of violence that have taken place are endorsed or sometimes praised, they are also repeatedly criticised on the websites examined.

¹¹ The term far-left is used in this report to refer to far-left anarchist, anti-fascist, and communist discussions.

However, differences can be seen in how these criticisms are justified and rationalised. In far-left discussions, the moral rationale for using violence is challenged more often than in far-right discussions, where acts of violence are mostly objected to by questioning their tactical utility.

The study also found some extremist content related to the subcultures that have formed around the school shooting and incel phenomena. Their quantity was, however, significantly lower than that of far-right content in particular. This type of content was found mostly on Ylilauta, although it was also being actively removed from the site.

There is some overlap between the material concerning the far-right milieu and the incel subculture. This is unsurprising, as similar observations have been made in previous studies.¹² The quantity of openly accessible jihadist content in the Finnish-language online environment still appears to be low.

In terms of where the studied material falls on the extremist media content index, most of it fits the criteria of levels 3:1 and 3:2. Also, a significant portion of the collected material endorses or justifies violence rather than openly inciting others to it. Comments inciting the immediate use of violence, as well as statements whose authors demonstrate personal interest in perpetrating acts of violence, are also occasionally found in far-right discussions in particular. It was noted during the research that the harshest far-right comments justifying or inciting violence could be most easily found on Ylilauta. It appears that such content is continuously removed from the discussion board, but moderation is only partly successful and often delayed – at least during the period analysed in this research project.

¹² E.g. Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware & Ezra Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43/7(2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459>.

2.4 Far-right and anti-immigration material online

The far right is an umbrella term currently used in social science to refer to actors, broad movements, and ideologies that are stricter in terms of sociocultural views than traditional right-wing parties. The far right is distinguished from the more moderate right by nativism and authoritarianism.¹³ The actors under the umbrella term are further divided into the radical right and the extreme right, the first of whom seek to advance their goals within the framework of democracy despite opposing several key principles of liberal democracy. The extreme right, in contrast, wants to overthrow the democratic system as a whole and considers the use of violence acceptable in pursuit of this objective.¹⁴

The far right typically perceives the existence of significant differences between groups of people based on race, culture, or religion. These differences are considered to be insurmountable and central to the functioning of society. According to the far right, states should be inhabited by only one cultural, ethnic, or racial group, and these should not be mixed.¹⁵ Whether far-right actors emphasise cultural, ethnic, or racial aspects, however, depends on the far-right ideology to which they most closely align.

The European far right evolved into its current form during the 2000s. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and other acts of jihadist violence, the economic collapse of 2008, and the arrival of an unprecedented number of asylum-seekers to Europe in 2015–2016 influenced the process and increased support for the far right.¹⁶ The contemporary far right is not only a diverse field with respect to ideology and means of activism, but also a strongly transnational phenomenon in terms of both ideology and social networks. The transnational dimension is clearly visible in the Finnish-language

¹³ Tore Bjørgo & Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses*. ICCT Policy Brief (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019), DOI: [10.19165/2019.1.08](https://doi.org/10.19165/2019.1.08), 2–3. On the definitions of the political right and far right, see also e.g. Donald Holbrook & Max Taylor, "Introduction" in Max Taylor, P. M. Currie & Donald Holbrook (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1–5; Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right. The Significance of a Political Distinction*, translated by Allan Cameron (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Bjørgo & Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*, 2–3; Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019), 15.

¹⁵ E.g. Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 25–29.

¹⁶ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 22. On the evolution of the European far right – and groups within it – in the 2000s, see also Manuela Caiani, Donatella della Porta & Claudius Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Caterina Froio, Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Giorgia Bulli & Matteo Albanese, *CasaPound Italy: Contemporary Extreme-Right Politics* (Routledge, 2020); Heléne Löw, *Nazismen i Sverige 2000–2014* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2015).

material gathered for this study, which, for example, often includes discussions about events and developments in other countries.

Main ideological currents of the contemporary far right

In the literature, the contemporary far right is divided into three subcurrents that differ in their views about the key factors that set groups of people apart from each other. These subcurrents are cultural nationalism, ethnonationalism, and racial nationalism.¹⁷ In practice, however, these subcurrents are not completely independent and distinct but are often combined in varying ways in the views expressed by movements, groups, and individuals. There are views in the Finnish-language online discussions that resonate with all these subcurrents.

A central premise of cultural nationalism is that a shared culture is the key force that unites and sustains the nation. According to this view, for example, one can become Finnish or Dutch by assimilating, i.e. by adopting the culture of one's country of residence.¹⁸

Not all manifestations of cultural nationalism are part of the far right. The most important form of cultural nationalism in the context of this study is counter-jihadism. It perceives Islam as a fundamental threat to the West and believes that the political and cultural elite of Western countries are either consciously contributing to its advancement in the region or are unable to counter it.¹⁹ Counter-jihadism also frames itself as a part of the tradition of classical liberalism, the central values of which are universal human rights. Its critics, however, have pointed out that, for example, the movement promotes the rights of sexual minorities mainly to increase prejudice against Muslims.²⁰

¹⁷ Bjørge & Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*, 3–5.

¹⁸ See e.g. Bjørge & Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*, 3–4.

¹⁹ Daniel Sallamaa, *Ulkoparlamentaarin äärioikeistoliikehdintä ja maahanmuuttovastaisuus 2010-luvun Suomessa*. Valtiotieteellisen tiedekunnan julkaisuja 97 (Helsinki: Eurooppa-tutkimuksen keskus, Helsingin yliopisto, 2018), 17.

²⁰ Sallamaa, *Ulkoparlamentaarin äärioikeistoliikehdintä*, 18; Toby Archer, "Breivik's Mindset: The Counterjihad and the New Transatlantic Anti-Muslim Right", in Taylor, Currie & Holbrook (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, 176–177. On the relationship between activism opposing Islam and liberalism, see Lars Erik Berntzen, *The Anti-Islamic Movement – Far Right and Liberal?* (Florence: European University Institute, 2018). On European counter-jihadist groups and actors, see also Joel Busher, "Grassroots Activism in the English Defence League: Discourse and Public (Dis)order", in Taylor, Currie & Holbrook (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*; Cato Hemmingby & Tore Bjørge, *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process. Anders B. Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Anti-Islamic views similar to counter-jihadism are quite common, especially among right-wing populist and radical parties and social movements in the West. In Finland, counter-jihadist thought can be found both in parliamentary politics and in extraparliamentary activism and the online environment. In the context of social movements, the Finnish Defence League is the clearest example.²¹ Anti-Islamic ideas that resonate with counter-jihadism are also not particularly hard to find on social media or in the comment sections of news media. Counter-jihadist influences are particularly evident on Hommaforum.

At this point, however, it is important to note that counter-jihadist or anti-Islamic thought more broadly is not automatically extremist, nor does it automatically incite violence. Indeed, the most relevant parts of counter-jihadism for this study are its more rigorous forms in which Muslims are treated as a monolithic mass and a threat against which it is perceived permissible to use violence. Similarly, counter-jihadist views that incite violence or justify its use against so-called cultural Marxists – the political and cultural elite allegedly contributing to the advancement of Islam in the West – are relevant to this study.

In addition to counter-jihadist views, a wealth of ethnonationalist speech and argumentation are also present on Hommaforum. According to a survey conducted on the forum in autumn 2019, approximately half of its users support the ideology.²² The key premise of ethnonationalism is that humanity is divided into ethnic groups that are defined by distinctive cultures, customs, and traits. Race-biological argumentation is also part of the movement's way of dividing people into different ethnicities, although the weight given to it varies between different ethnonationalist groups.²³ According to ethnonationalism, different ethnicities should live in their own nation-states so that the diversity of peoples can be maintained. The movement and its representatives therefore oppose not only immigration but also multiculturalism. They also demand that all or at least the majority of people with immigrant backgrounds residing in Western countries be removed from the area. The "Great Replacement" theory reminiscent of counter-jihadist thought – i.e. that the Western social elite consciously seek to replace the region's autochthonous population with immigrants – is strongly visible among ethnonationalists.²⁴

²¹ Sallamaa, *Ulkoparlamentaarin äärioikeistoliikehäntä*, 16–20.

²² "Äänestys: Etnonationalismi, kyllä vai ei?" *Hommaforum*, 29 October 2019, <https://hommaforum.org/index.php/topic,129465.0.htm>.

²³ Bjørge & Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*, 4.

²⁴ Bjørge & Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*. On contemporary ethnonationalism in Europe, see also José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, IN.: Notre Dame University Press, 2018). Autochthonous population (kantaväestö) and autochthonous Finns (kantasuomalaiset) are terms used in Finnish to refer to non-immigrant population.

Whereas counter-jihadism was a significant ideological subcurrent among the Western far right in the early 2000s, ethnonationalism has become more prominent in recent years. Ethnonationalist thought enjoys support among some Finnish organisations, especially among the central figures of Suomen Sisu and the former Finns Party youth organisation. In addition to Honnaforum, ethnonationalist-inspired comments are also easy to find in discussion threads on Ylilauta.

The third ideological subcurrent within the far right is racial nationalism, which, as its name implies, sees race as the most important factor setting groups of people apart from each other and calls for the maintaining of racial purity. Racial nationalism is a totalitarian, anti-democratic, anti-humanist, and anti-Jewish branch of far-right thought. One of the forms that is particularly relevant to this study is national socialism.²⁵

National socialism, also known as neo-Nazism today, was the state ideology of Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The basic pillars of the ideology – antisemitism, race biology, and the goal of “breeding” one’s own people to become genetically flawless – have remained unchanged. Antisemitism in particular is much more strongly emphasised in national socialism than, for example, in ethnonationalism. National socialists believe that Jews control the world through financial institutions and the media and seek to undermine the alleged cohesion of the white race through their dominance and by supporting immigration, equality, and mixed marriages.²⁶

The regional objectives of national socialists vary between actors. Where Nazi Germany sought to conquer most of Eastern Europe and included a global dimension in its objectives, some of the current groups aspire to control more limited areas, such as the Nordic countries or north-western United States.²⁷ National socialism is more international in its orientation than ethnonationalism, as it emphasises administrative areas for wider groups of people – races – rather than ethnic nation-states. Furthermore, contemporary national socialist actors see the use of violence as a

²⁵ Bjørge & Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*, 4–5. On the history of the National Socialist ideology and content, see e.g. Neil Gregor, *Nazism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jouko Jokisalo, *Kansallissosialismin ideologia* (Kuopio: Snellman-instituutti, 1995); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890–1935* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1985); Brad Whitsel, “Ideological Mutation and Millennial Belief in the American Neo-Nazi Movement”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24/2 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1080/105761001117722>; Paul Jackson, “Dreaming of a National Socialist World: The World Union of National Socialists (wuns) and the Recurring Vision of Transnational Neo-Nazism”, *Fascism* 8/2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00802003>.

²⁶ On these elements within the ideology of the Nordic Resistance Movement, for instance, see Sallamaa, *Ulkoparlamentaarin äärioikeistoliikehdintä*, 42.

²⁷ Sallamaa, *Ulkoparlamentaarin äärioikeistoliikehdintä*, 42–43, 46.

necessary or even inevitable way to achieve their objectives, as the notion of a future race war forms a part of their ideology.²⁸

Within national socialism, a branch of strategic thought known as accelerationism or Siege culture has been gaining ground since the second half of the 2010s. Its key feature is the attempt to accelerate the collapse of states and incite a race war through political violence in order to establish a new national socialist society on the ruins of the old system.²⁹ Accelerationist doctrine is based on a circular letter titled Siege that was edited by long-time neo-Nazi James Mason in the 1980s. It was compiled into a manifesto with the same title in 1992. The strategy outlined by Mason relies on attacks by individuals and small terrorist cells acting on the principle of leaderless resistance.³⁰

Racial nationalism has been present and continues to be present in Finland in the form of several different groups. The most obvious national socialist organisation was the Finnish branch of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM, Pohjoismainen vastarintaliike), which was abolished in autumn 2020. The ideology is also visible in groups established as an extension of the NRM, such as Towards Freedom! (Kohti Vapautta!, KV!). There are also signs of accelerationist neo-Nazism within the National Socialist Youth (Kansallissosialistinuoret) organization, founded in 2019, and supporters of the ideology can be found on Ylilauta and closed Telegram channels, the latter of which were excluded from this study.³¹ Racial nationalist thought is common among the Soldiers of Odin membership, and related material is regularly published on Ylilauta.³²

As mentioned earlier, it should be noted that the boundaries between cultural nationalism, ethnonationalism, and racial nationalism are somewhat blurred. Antisemitism, for example, is not limited to the national socialist or racial nationalist far

²⁸ Bjørge & Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism*, 4–5.

²⁹ Tommi Kotonen & Daniel Sallamaa, "Pohjoismaisen Vastarintaliikkeen kieltäminen ja sen seuraukset", *Politiikasta*, 10.11.2020, <https://politiikasta.fi/pohjoismaisen-vastarintaliikkeen-kieltaminen-ja-sen-seuraukset/>; Jacob Ware, *Siege: The Atomwaffen Division and Rising Far-Right Terrorism in the United States*, ICCT Policy Brief (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. 2019), <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/07/ICCT-Ware-Siege-July2019.pdf>, 6–7; James Mason's *Siege: Ties to Extremists*, Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/james-mason-siege-ties-to-extremists.pdf>, 1–2.

³⁰ James Mason's *Siege*, 1–2; Ware, *Siege*, 6.

³¹ Antero Eerola, "Näin uusnatsit värväävät taas alaikäisiä Suomessa – Toimintakieltoja kierretään lasten omalla natsikerholla" *Seura*, 22 June 2020, <https://seura.fi/asiat/tutkivat/nain-uusnatsit-varvaavat-taas-alaikaisia-suomessa/>.

³² On Soldiers of Odin, e.g. Sallamaa, *Ulkoparlamentaarin äärioikeistoliikehdintä*, 34.

right more broadly, but is also found in discussions that seem to rely primarily on ethnonationalist ideas. Although overt antisemitism was not previously allowed, for example, on Hommaforum, blatant antisemitic writings were ignored by its moderators during the period covered by the study.³³ The differences between cultural nationalism, ethnonationalism, and racial nationalism are generally not very clear and distinct on social media, but rather tend to be strongly intertwined.

Speech dehumanising others and justifying violence

Far-right ideology is generally deeply othering and widely based on the idea that not all people are equal or have the same rights. However, this does not automatically mean that the ideology contains the dehumanisation of others or the endorsement of violence. There are different views within the far-right milieu about what kinds of societal changes should take place and what means should be used to exert political influence. Much of the Finnish-language discussions studied in this report can be characterised as radical right, pushing for more limited political changes rather than overthrowing the current societal order. However, there are also comments and writings that support the latter objective.

Disparaging comments (of various degrees) about those who the far right considers to be adversaries are common in the examined material. Such speech targets, among others, immigrants; ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities; the political left; liberals and the more moderate radical right; policy makers; police; government officials; people with disabilities; journalists; researchers; feminists; and women in general.

Such comments also frequently contain explicitly dehumanising features. Opponents of the far right are described in the material as, for example, human filth and snakes. Dehumanising animalistic characterisations are also common in the material on specific groups opposed by the far right. Jews are often referred to as rats, and those with immigrant backgrounds and non-native Finns are called – among other things, people with a “colour disability” and sub-humans. Likewise, some of the examined material equates immigrants with animals and animal organisms by referring to these groups of humans as “alien species”. Representatives of the political left are also dehumanised in the material by denying that they are human. While such language is not invariably used when talking about the far right’s opponents, it is common enough, especially on Ylilauta, to be considered a part of the conversational culture.

³³ E.g. “Pedofiilipropagandaa sukupuolentutkimuksen peruskurssilla” *Hommaforum*, 18 May 2020, <https://hommaforum.org/index.php?topic=130354.0>.

The possibility of violence is clearly present in the discussions. In a large number of the Finnish-language, extraparliamentary far-right discussions, it is assumed that the evolution of the societal situation will inevitably lead to some sort of violence. The dividing line is expected to run between the autochthonous (see note 24) population defending their own people or race on the one hand and immigrants and the “cultural Marxists” and “tolerants” who support them on the other. Most threads suggest that a full-scale violent confrontation is believed to be looming in Finland, often only in the distant future, but some discussants expect the situation to escalate in the near future. However, violence against autochthonous population is believed to have already happened or be happening. Violent crimes committed by or suspected of being committed by migrants in particular are broadly and repeatedly addressed in the gathered material. Lamentations on how Finns and, more generally, Western whites seem to be so indifferent and apathetic that they do not defend themselves are also common.

The study found a considerable number of comments endorsing or justifying violence. The expressed views on violence are not congruent, but instead include a variety of attitudes towards violence and how it can be used. The next section reviews the most frequently used justifications and arguments for violence. Most comments on the use of violence identified in this study see it as justified or at least understandable. This is especially prevalent in discussions on Ylilauta. However, on Honnaforum, posts glorifying violence or, in particular, inciting violence are viewed much less positively, and the threshold for removing such content appears to be significantly lower. On the website of the Nordic Resistance Movement, there were fewer discussions on violence, although the organisation has a permissive stance on its use. Comments that encourage violence on the page usually go unanswered.

Generic positive comments on the use of violence – General comments expressing a desire for violence against a specific target are common in the material. Usually, the target is a group of people, such as leftists, the dark-skinned, police, or politicians. However, these comments do not include broader discussions on what kind of violence would be permissible or in what circumstances, nor do they provide a rationale for why violence should be used. Such comments are present especially in the material on Ylilauta and can be considered a part of the website’s internal culture. Given that Ylilauta is known for colourful commentary and so-called shitposting,³⁴ one may rightly ask if the writers are serious about what they had written. On the other hand, such comments are also clearly connected with the far-right-friendly value system that is equally characteristic of Ylilauta.

³⁴ Shitposting means publishing provoking material that is meant to shock, amuse, or annoy.

Examples of the comments in Ylilauta:

>I hope we get a new Hitler soon.

This entirely unironically

We need rain to clean up the filth on the streets.

niggers, tolerants, jews and muslims must be destroyed to the point extinction

NIGGERS INTO THE OVEN EVERYWHERE

Expressing understanding of occurred acts of violence – Attitudes that accept or understand the use of violence are visible in how far-right acts of violence that have occurred are discussed in the material. As mentioned above, while not all commentators express an understanding of violent acts, many others do. These acts are also commonly perceived to have been caused by current policies. Some commentators feel that far-right terrorism should not be seen as unexpected because of the amount of immigration to Western countries and violence against Westerners:

When the population of a country is changed to another, before long someone will snap. Now it was someone who was already unstable. It is pointless to imagine that population replacement takes place without bloodshed. It is likely that there will soon be a civil war in the countries undergoing a cycle of population replacement, as according to the laws of biology, no population will subjugate and disappear voluntarily in the end. Violence is not generally acceptable in any war nor is the perpetrated act. But where the "far right" or individual lunatics would be a disease, they are more a symptom of current policies which - consciously or not – aim at replacing one population with another. (Hommaforum)

Years of unilateral terrorism targeting the autochthonous population cannot fail to provoke reactions. The limit will be reached at some point. That is obvious as day. Whatever this particular case may be about. Tolerant crazies do not realise what they are creating the preconditions for. (Hommaforum)

Comments occasionally include the belittling of attacks. One example of this is the following comment from Ylilauta in relation to the connections between image boards and far-right attacks:

Mass immigration policies have caused a million times more deaths and suffering than white terrorists. Tolerants, those who are in charge of open borders and mass immigration policies, are practically terrorists. White nationalists and national socialists want to prevent the emergence of ethnic

conflicts by keeping ethnic groups in their own territories. Tolerants want to mix different groups with each other, which leads to conflicts.

Justification of violence as self-defence – Acts of violence targeting various minority groups, the far right's political opponents, and representatives of the ruling political system are repeatedly framed in the material as a response to the targets' aggressive activities. When immigration is defined as the occupation of foreign races and white genocide, it becomes possible to view violence against minorities as self-defence. Also, violence against other actors perceived as political enemies is justified by the rhetoric of self-defence. For instance, violent attacks against anti-fascists are glorified on Ylilauta as self-defence:

It is pleasing to watch as patriotic boots pound the anarchist shit without human value like a broken football. This is how this genetic waste should be dealt with wherever they turn up to terrorize people who gather legally.

On the other hand, right-wing liberals are also presented as justified targets of self-defensive violence because of their activities related to immigration:

What is supposed to be appropriately discussed here? The left and neoliberal traitors like the Coalition Party want to bring an endless stream of immigrants to Finland, thus practically driving the demographic marginalization of our people in our own country. Their justification for this policy which is against the interests of our people is completely irrelevant, they have already betrayed our people and deserve to die as a result of that treason. (Ylilauta)

Reflections on civil war – The examined material contains a wealth of reflections on civil war between different groups of people. Such violent internal conflict is often referred to as a "race war", as the confrontation is believed to take place between white autochthonous Finns or Westerners who oppose immigration and multiculturalism on one side and the dark-skinned, Arabs, Jews, and autochthonous Finns and Westerners who support them on the other. Expectations that the outbreak of violence is inevitable are most pronounced in the discussions on civil/race war. Whereas war is sometimes framed as a threat, it is equally often perceived as downright desirable or at least as a necessary remedy to the status quo.

Such views find their roots partly in the expectations and beliefs about future conflict present within the transnational far-right milieu. The following is an example of a meme agitating race war on Ylilauta:



Views about the timing of such an internal upheaval vary. Some participants to the discussions situate the conflict in the distant future or do not speculate on its exact timing. Such reflections were posted after far-right attacks in the West. For example:

Started the race war too early, 10-20 years from now he will be celebrated as a hero and carried in a gold chair out of prison. (Ylilauta, in connection with the Christchurch attack)

In a way, this prepares ground for a full-fledged civil war. Mass immigration provokes counter-reactions, which in turn provoke the left and, for example, Islamists to reciprocal violence. With this, Germany is moving towards a cycle of violence, which begins with mass immigration. (Hommaforum, in connection with the Hanau attack)

On the other hand, some of the discussants believe that the outbreak of civil war might be much closer. Sweden and the United States, for example, are commonly believed to be significantly closer than Finland to the outbreak of such a conflict. For example, in early summer 2020, there were discussions on Ylilauta on whether the

protests and unrest that followed George Floyd's death in the United States were an indication that race war was about to break out in the country. Some commentators argued that various chains of events might trigger civil war or that civil war could be triggered quite quickly and unexpectedly. One of the commentators on Ylilauta stated:

The purge may begin at any point, triggered by an economic collapse, the coronavirus, or a terrorist attack. Must be prepared.

Indeed, the importance of preparing for a future conflict is emphasised several times in the examined material. Among other things, there are several postings in the material from Ylilauta in which the text "study, exercise, prepare" is attached to a picture of a man in the forest who is recognisably dressed in Finnish military equipment and has a modern copy of the insignia of the Civil Guard on his sleeve:



Another type of civil war-related posting is comments fantasising about violence against the enemy:

Jews and traitors will be killed once the purge is up and running. Of course, confessions and evidence are taken from them first.

In an Ylilauta thread on when the race war might start, the following comment was made about women dating men with immigrant backgrounds:

I'm hoping for a civil war so that I can, without consequences, get my weapon from the forest stash and start firing on fat sows running around with attention-getting-coloured hair and their bearded baby grooms. Oh, that happy day.

Similar comments are also made on Ylilauta in connection with – among other things – other ethnic minorities and those perceived as political enemies. Below is an example of a discussion on the Black Lives Matter demonstration in Finland in the summer of 2020:

Fuck, civil war should break out in this bullshit country so we can, once and for all, get rid of these lying politicians, Muslims, niggers, and tolerants.

There are also disparaging comments about the fact that Finns, Europeans, or more broadly, whites do not seem willing to take up the fight. An example of this is the following response to a comment criticising the Christchurch attack:

One of the problems of this race is useless bullshitting and belittling other's activities while sitting at home on a couch. (Kansallinen Vastarinta)

Another example is a comment on a video that shows conscripts guiding asylum-seekers arriving in Finland:

Ugh, fuck what animals those niggers. when will a charismatic leader rise in Finland and this immigration is put to a halt. this nigger invasion will get worse year after year, someone should equip us to carry out a small purge. why are European such fucking pussies. every week we get to read from the magazines how immigrants do immigrant stuff. (Ylilauta)

Civil war-related material is occasionally accompanied by reflections on a far-right revolution. For example, excerpts from a text examining the preconditions of revolution in great detail have been posted on Ylilauta. The text was originally published in Magneettimedia.

The primary enemy is the country's political mafia, the bureaucracy, and the mainstream mass media serving these. Naturally, hostilities would arise in a conflict situation with certain immigrant groups, as those in power would recruit them into their ranks ... Well-armed and well-trained units of revolutionaries could achieve victorious battles. An example of the victory of the revolutionaries is the Cuban Revolution, in which revolutionary forces overthrew the regime of Cuban dictator and US lackey Fulgencio Batista and brought Fidel Castro, the leader of the movement, to power on July 26 ... How would police forces react to

a possible revolution? Would some of them join the subversives? Naturally, the power and number of revolutionaries should be very massive. For example, could one expect the Russian, Finnish, and Swedish revolutionaries to cooperate?

Committing violent attacks here and now – In addition to a civil war or revolution in the distant future, the material gathered contains reflections on carrying out far-right terrorist attacks here and now. Examples of such comments are particularly common on Ylilauta. These include statements about how the race war has already begun and that all far-right acts of terror are justified against enemies who are carrying out military attacks of their own. In other words, ethnic minorities are not recognised as civilians but rather as foreign fighters who must be destroyed.

Hopes for attacks to come are also expressed in an indirect fashion, such as by sharing images of Adolf Hitler and stating that brave men would be needed again. Sometimes previous acts of violence are brought up and their effects highlighted. For example, the material from Ylilauta includes several posts in which a picture of the murder of Governor General Nikolai Bobrikov is accompanied by reminders that a single individual who commits a similar act can achieve much more than a million online discussants together. Direct incitement to violence is also occasionally found on Ylilauta. The following comment appears in a discussion on a newspaper article about the relationship between a white Finnish woman and a foreign man:

Burn refugee centres this weekend!

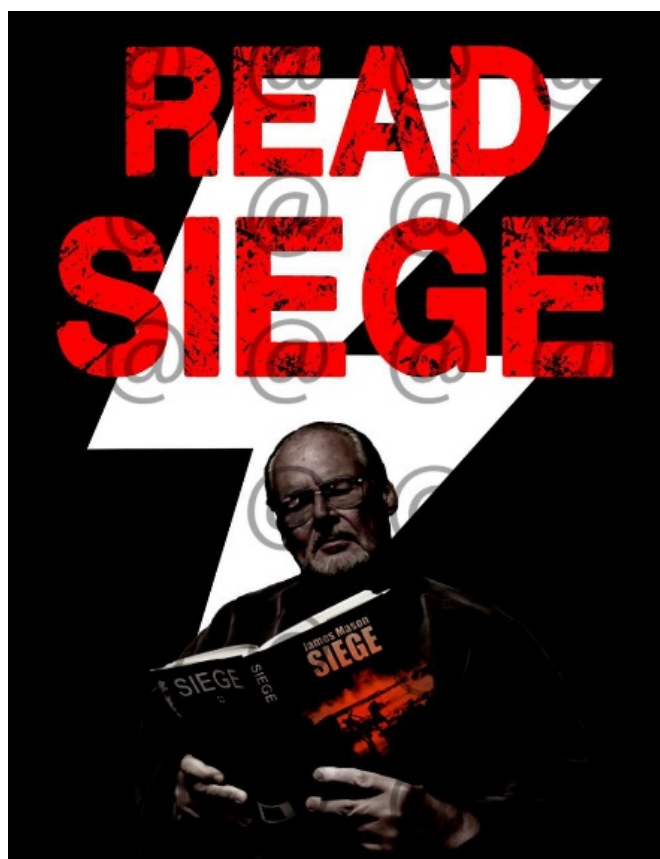
Some commentators on Ylilauta also express dreams of carrying out violent attacks themselves, such as the following in the context of criticism of the political elite:

I would like to commit an attack against these abscesses. I urge everyone to consider the same. And greetings to Supo,³⁵ yes, it's me in my sound mind who writes this. Fucking whores, traitors, mongrels, and devils. Satan's minions, greedy, smug sadists. Fuck, when the day comes, I will laugh, the elite will not. Trust me.

The examined platforms also contain comments glorifying far-right terrorism that are more general in nature, such as images of an armed accelerationist terrorist – conforming to the aesthetics of Marvel comics – published on Ylilauta with the accompanying text, “The need for purge is critical”. The material also contains examples of propaganda created by actual accelerationist groups, such as the

³⁵ Supo refers to the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service.

Atomwaffen Division. This material is most commonly present in the form of music videos that combine rap lyrics about killing blacks and Jews with images of Atomwaffen Division members practicing guerrilla warfare in the woods and abandoned buildings. In some videos, network activists introduce their ideology and threaten to “destroy the modern world”. The material also includes messages encouraging people to read James Mason’s *Siege*:



Imagery of other far-right terrorists, such as Anders Behring Breivik (first picture below), Brenton Tarrant (second picture below), and Dylann Roof, who attacked a South Carolina church favoured by African-American community in 2015, is also present in the material, occasionally accompanied by various slogans. Breivik’s picture, for example, has been published with a comment on attacking refugee centres:



Some of the material focuses on mocking the victims of such acts of violence. The material published on Ylilauta includes a picture of Tarrant stylised as a female anime character who fires at kebab skewers with a submachine gun. Kebabs are a reference to the anti-Muslim song “Karadžić, Lead Your Serbs” composed during the break-up wars of Yugoslavia and distributed on YouTube and far-right forums under the more humorous name “Remove Kebab”. Tarrant also played the song during his attack.

Considering violence as unnecessary and harmful – When violence against opponents is discussed in the material, it is usually accompanied by comments showing at least some level of acceptance towards it. Violence is also occasionally criticised, however, most typically in discussions on recent far-right terrorist attacks. On Hommaforum in particular, terrorist acts typically do not receive widespread acceptance; instead, they are considered despicable or harmful. For example, in a discussion on Hommaforum on the attack in Christchurch, the possibility that the act could lead to a deepening cycle of violence is brought up.

Such an act or acts are just waiting to happen. Now that the genie is out of the bottle, we will watch with horror whether counter-terrorist attacks and some kind of a cycle of revenge against Muslims begins. And what follows from that again ... In Egypt, Muslims have repeatedly been shooting at Coptic churches in the middle of an Easter ceremony or other prayer services. This barely exceeds the news threshold today. Last Easter an attack on one church claimed 40 people if I remember correctly. (Hommaforum)

Another typical argument against acts of violence is that they are ineffective. Some claim that violence directly undermines the popularity of opposition to immigration and leads to retaliation by the authorities against representatives of the ideology. Such is the case in the following example, posted following the attack in Hanau, Germany, in February 2020:

Violence is always the wrong way to try to influence things. Now this suppoust-to-be-Nazi [sic] will be used eternally as an example of how the far right is rising and the Nazis are crawling out of their holes. All that is said about criticizing unrestricted immigration is pure Nazism. (Hommaforum)

Some comments criticising the use of violence do not deal so much with violence itself, but rather with how it is targeted. One commentator on Kansallinen Vastarinta states the following about the Christchurch terrorist attack:

The enemy nests in globalism and Zionism. If you want to hurt, then the blow must be directed at the beast that lurks in the shadows of power. The beast itself and its lackeys.

What is noteworthy in the material condemning violence is that violence is usually rejected as a poor tactical move. Fewer comments provide moral arguments against violence.

2.5 Left-wing anarchist, anti-fascist, and communist material online

Anarchist material online

Anarchism is an ideology that seeks a society free from all hierarchies of power – including the state itself. The ideology began to assume a more coherent and structured form in the 19th century, and it encompasses a whole range of different subcurrents, including anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, and anarcho-feminism.³⁶ In the context of this study, anarchism refers explicitly to the leftist subcurrents of the ideology, although anarchism is also occasionally seen as including right-wing subcurrents, such as national anarchism, which deviate from the mainstream of the ideology.³⁷

In anarchist ideology, the image of the enemy consists of various forces that maintain hierarchies of power. Along with fascism and the far right, anarchists consider the state and its institutions, such as the police and the military, to be their opponents. Similarly, anarchists consider capitalism – which they argue maintains social hierarchies of power – as their opponent, and strong statements against voting are also made within the anarchist movement.³⁸

The question of the use of violence is seen as dividing anarchism into three schools of thought. Alongside so-called anarcho-pacifists, who emphasise peaceful forms of action, some proponents of the ideology accept the destruction of material property but reject causing harm to people. A third group consists of those anarchists who also

³⁶ Randy Borum & Chuck Tilby, "Anarchist Direct Actions: A Challenge for Law Enforcement", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28/3 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100590928106>, 202; Ariel Koch, "Trends in Anti-Fascist and Anarchist Recruitment and Mobilization", *Journal for Deradicalization* 14 (2018), <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/134/115>, 10; Colin Ward, *Anarchism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–3.

³⁷ Graham D. Macklin, "Co-opting the counter culture: Troy Southgate and the National Revolutionary Faction", *Patterns of Prejudice* 39/3 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220500198292>.

³⁸ Ward, *Anarchism*, 4; Peter Gelderloos, "Fascists are the Tools of the State", *The Anarchist Library* (2007), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/peter-gelderloos-fascists-are-the-tools-of-the-state>; Mark Rupert, "Anti-Capitalist Convergence? Anarchism, Socialism, and the Global Justice Movement", in Manfred Steger (ed.), *Rethinking Globalism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 125; ziq, "Do Anarchists Vote in State Elections?" *The Anarchist Library* (2018), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ziq-do-anarchists-vote-in-state-elections>.

accept the use of violence against people.³⁹ Some pro-violence anarchist ideologues emphasise that violence should only be resorted to in self-defence and to as limited an extent as possible. Yet spontaneous violence, including terrorism, also forms a part of the history of anarchist activism.⁴⁰

In their discussions on societal change, contemporary anarchists present various arguments for using violence against the system and its representatives. According to so-called insurrectionist anarchists, anarchism does not seek to reform the state-based societal system but rather to abolish it. Thus, the current societal order cannot be reformed peacefully but must be torn down in its entirety for a new one free of power hierarchies to emerge. Anarchists in favour of using violence see it as necessary in this process, as the powerful will not relinquish their status voluntarily, so it must be taken by force.⁴¹ The use of violence against the societal system and its representatives is further justified by the argument that structural violence perpetrated by the state is much more widespread and serious in nature than the anarchists' violence against the system.⁴² The destruction of material property is justified in a similar fashion.⁴³

Various views on the usefulness and moral justification of the use of violence have also been expressed by domestic anarchists in Finland. Although the popularity of

³⁹ Francesco Marone, "The rise of insurrectionary anarchist terrorism in Italy", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 8/3 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2015.1038288>, 195.

⁴⁰ Federico Ferretti, "Organisation and formal activism: insights from the anarchist tradition", *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 36/ 11/12 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-11-2015-0127>, 732; Ward, *Anarchism*, 3; Koch, "Trends in Anti-Fascist and Anarchist Recruitment and Mobilization", 35–36; Marone, "The rise of insurrectionary anarchist terrorism in Italy", 198–205. American researcher David C. Rapoport characterises acts of anarchist violence between 1880–1920 as the first of four transnational waves of terrorism, but anarchist acts of violence have also occurred after this period. Specifically, the insurrectionist subcurrent within anarchism has been connected to serious acts of violence, and individuals supporting the ideological subcurrent have committed several attacks in the 2000s in Greece and Italy, among other countries. David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism", in Steven M. Chermak & Joshua D. Freilich (eds.), *Transnational Terrorism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁴¹ José Pedro Zúquete, "World War A: Contemporary anarchists and extreme left perpetrators", in Michael Fredholm (ed.), *Understanding Lone Actor Terrorism: Past Experience, Future Outlook, and Response Strategies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 50; Borum & Tilby, "Anarchist Direct Actions", 204.

⁴² Zúquete, "World War A", 49.

⁴³ Zúquete, "World War A", 52.

actual insurrectionism has remained limited, the use of violence has not been a taboo to Finnish anarchists.⁴⁴

Speech dehumanising others and justifying violence

The anarchist material analysed in this study was collected from the Takku.net website and includes both articles published on the website and readers' comments on them. In addition to critical examinations of fascism and the far right, material published on the website includes disparaging comments on the Turkish leadership and its policies and accuses the police of protecting and favouring far-right actors over left-wing ones. In addition to the external enemies of anarchism, some of the articles examine the internal contradictions of the political left and the anarchist movement and deal with various forms of activism in a critical tone.

The unequivocal dehumanisation of the anarchist movement's enemies is a relatively minor feature in the collected material, even though various texts construct a strong image of the police as the enemy, characterising it as an instrument of the state's fascist policies, among other things. The material nevertheless also contains examples of explicitly dehumanising speech. Some of the examples compare the examined subjects to animals. Police officers are, for example, characterised as pigs on several occasions, and neo-Nazis and politicians are compared to human excrement.

The material also contains characterisations that strongly other their subjects but do not fulfil the criteria of dehumanising speech. For example, the phrase "All cops are bastards" appears in the material several times.

Discussions on the use of violence are, in turn, linked to a number of broader contexts and debates, which are described below.

Violence in the conflict in Syria and Iraq – Reflections on violence most frequently appear in discussions on the Rojava Federation in Northeastern Syria. The societal model of Rojava – based on so-called democratic confederalism – was a source of ideological inspiration to anarchists, anti-fascists, and other members of the political

⁴⁴ Anton Monti & Pontus Purokuru, *Suoraa toimintaa! Autonomiset liikkeet Suomessa 1986–2016* (Helsinki: Into, 2016), 23, 272–277; Leena Malkki & Daniel Sallamaa, "To Call or Not to Call It Terrorism: Public Debate on Ideologically-motivated Acts of Violence in Finland, 1991–2015", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30/5 (2018); Mari Kuukkanen, *Anarkistien keinot ja päämäärät. Tutkimus suomalaisesta anarkistiliikkeestä 2010-luvun alussa* (Helsingin yliopisto, 2018).

left in the 2010s, and Finns have also taken part in the federation's fight against ISIS and the Turkish military.⁴⁵

Indeed, much of the anarchist material praising or justifying violence refers to the struggle that the Kurdish-led forces of Northern Syria and the Western left-wing anarchists fighting as part of them have waged against ISIS and Turkey. Many articles praise the military contribution of the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG; People's Defence Units), the Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (YPJ; Women's Self-Defence Forces) and the Syrian Democratic Forces Coalition (SDF) to crushing ISIS and its caliphate. Among others, the Italian anarchist Lorenzo Orsetti – who died in the conflict zone in the spring of 2019 – is given as an example of readiness for self-sacrifice and martyrdom in the fight against jihadists. Rojava's armed resistance against the attack launched by Turkey in the fall of 2019 is similarly viewed in a positive light and characterised as self-defence.

It is important to remember that the material discussed above deals with the fight against ISIS by an organised armed group or the armed resistance against Turkey's attack on Northeastern Syria, not with political violence targeting civilians. Similarly, it should be remembered that the Kurdish-led forces' operations against ISIS have had the broad support of an international coalition and that their contribution to the liberation of the territories occupied by the terrorist organisation is considered to be significant.⁴⁶

On the other hand, the material also contains some discussions on the plans of Kurdish armed groups to attack Turkish population centres in response to the country's attack on Northeast Syria. Although the attack plans do not receive the unreserved support of the users of Takku.net, some of those who comment on the topic see attacks on military sites in Turkey and the infrastructure of the Turkish state as justified. The material also includes visual symbols of the Partiya Karkerên

⁴⁵ Ariel Koch, "Trends in Anti-Fascist and Anarchist Recruitment and Mobilization", 33; Huseyin Rasit, "Decentralist vanguards: women's autonomous power and left convergence in Rojava", *Globalizations* 17/5 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1722498>; Sami Sillanpää, "Syyriassa aatteen tiellä", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 28 April 2019, <https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000006084834.html>.

⁴⁶ E.g. James E. Jeffrey, "Part 3: The Future of Anti-ISIS Coalition", *Wilson Center*, 22 December 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/part-3-future-anti-isis-coalition>; Raymond Hinnebusch, "Proxy Wars and Spheres of Influence in Post-ISIS Syria", in *EMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2020* (Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2020), 78.

Kurdistan (PKK; Kurdistan Workers' Party), which the European Union has designated as a terrorist organisation.⁴⁷

Violence as a morally justified act in the prevailing situation – Arguments for the moral justification of violence are strongly present in the material commenting on the fight against ISIS and Turkey. Justification is based on descriptions of the monstrous nature of the adversaries (Turkey and ISIS) and their actions, as well as the justness of Rojava's objectives. It also contains glorifying descriptions of the fighters of the SDF, YPG, and YPJ. This narrative is also seen elsewhere in the material, although outside the Middle Eastern context, the reflections on violence are more fragmented and linked to several topics characterised by opposition to the prevailing social order and the far right in particular. Concerning violence against the state and its various institutions, the material deals with – among other things – a left-wing anarchist who committed a suicide attack against the Russian Federal Security Service's (FSB) Arkhangelsk office in the autumn of 2018. In the material, he is hailed as a hero and his deed as an attempt to achieve freedom through suffering:

Revolutionaries perceive life differently. We believe that life is only meaningful if it embodies our highest values, such as freedom and equality. A person must live according to their own conscience and in harmony with their true ideals and beliefs, even if it means suffering or the loss of life.

The notion of noble, higher values such as love and a longing for freedom as factors underlying violence can also be observed in the material dealing with an incendiary attack that an American anarchist carried out against a detention centre of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency in the summer of 2019:

... love is what I nevertheless think about the most. No one commits such acts and sacrifices without that compelling desire in their heart. And that's the thing that inspires and encourages me the most.

Violence as a necessary and/or effective means of accomplishing change – The examined material also contains some argumentation in favour of the necessity of violence. Some of the statements published on Takku.net emphasise that the current societal system and the institutions that maintain its hierarchy of values cannot be overthrown by means of democracy but must be defeated through direct action. The use of force against fascist actors is also occasionally considered a necessity, with the gathered material including a handful of statements arguing for the effectiveness

⁴⁷ The European Union (EU), the United States, and Turkey have classified PKK as a terrorist organisation, even though the issue has been debated within the EU.

of violence. The use of force is seen as hampering the far right's public activism, and the destruction of physical infrastructure is sometimes framed as an effective means of environmental protest.

Pacifism does not defeat fascists no matter how big the tsunami [sic]. Sorry now, but let's be realistic here. Have we learned nothing from history?

and

An easy example: did the Hambach mine come to a complete halt for several days because of hunger strikes? The answer is obviously no. Destroying physical infrastructure is simply often the most effective way, although other forms of protest are certainly needed as well. Ideally, the two would certainly support each other, but I no longer think that will happen in the future when non-violent civil disobedience and making demands on politicians are hyped. Is this the best we can do?

Individual comments accepting violence – In addition to the contexts described above, the material from Takku.net also contains more sporadic comments in favour of or inciting violence. These statements can best be characterised as outbursts targeting different enemy groups or institutions. Some of the material incites the burning of prisons, committing attacks against targets connected to the Turkish state, and targeting the police with lethal violence.

Violence as inappropriate, ineffective, or immoral – There is also content published on Takku.net that opposes the use of violent means. Part of this argumentation focuses on the possible consequences of violence. The material gathered for this study shows that the use of violence is often perceived to damage one's reputation and produce a backlash from the authorities. The examined material reveals that some see the use of force as ineffective and resorting to it as having contributed to the collapse of previous anarchist movements. Part of the argument against violence, on the other hand, focuses on the issue of morality – glorifying violence and targeting civilians is perceived to be repulsive and morally wrong:

If insurrectionists cannot even convince the anarchist milieu that their strategy is working, then it is worthwhile to either think about better arguments or to rethink that strategy. Personally, I think that the idea of "easily-repeatable acts of sabotage" as a model of action that somehow spreads mathematically and brings the opponent to its knees has not been proven to work.

and

... the rise of insurrectionism, illegality, and other craziness mainly contributed to the collapse of the entire [anarchist] movement.

and

Some subcurrents of anarchism are starting to resemble religious cults with their martyrs.

Anti-fascist material online

Anti-fascism is, as its name implies, an ideology that opposes fascism. It emerged as a response to the rise of fascism in interwar Europe, especially in Italy and Germany.⁴⁸ The enemy image of contemporary anti-fascism, however, covers a much broader spectrum of phenomena than those political currents identified as fascism or far right. Contemporary anti-fascists also oppose patriarchy and homophobia, as well as capitalism, which is seen as accelerating class struggle and opening opportunities for the advance of fascism.⁴⁹

Anti-fascists fight their enemies in several ways, such as by conducting research into fascist and far-right movements and by seeking to reveal the identities of those involved to the general public.⁵⁰ In addition to peaceful forms of activism, however, some anti-fascists use violence against their opponents. Representatives of the movement often defend the use of violence by noting that public debate, policymakers, and state institutions such as the police have repeatedly proven themselves incapable of preventing the rise of fascism. Anti-fascists also emphasise the allegedly defensive nature of their violence and that the use of force against the far right has, in the past, significantly hampered its public activism.⁵¹

The roots of contemporary anti-fascism in Finland date back to the early 1990s, but the movement experienced a resurgence in the 2010s. According to Monti and Purokuru, the acts of violence perpetrated by the Finnish Resistance Movement (later the Finnish branch of the Nordic Resistance Movement) from 2010–2012, as well as the view that the Finnish police were reluctant to intervene against the group, sparked

⁴⁸ Nigel Copsey, "Militant Antifascism: An Alternative (Historical) Reading", *Society* 55/3 (2018), DOI: 10.1007/s12115-018-0245-y, 243–244.

⁴⁹ Mark Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-fascist Handbook* (Melville House, 2017), 130, 159.

⁵⁰ Bray, *Antifa*, 86.

⁵¹ Bray, *Antifa*, 129–30, 169.

anti-fascist activity of a more organised nature. The most significant of current antifascist actors in Finland, Varisverkosto,⁵² was established in 2014.⁵³

Speech dehumanising others and justifying violence

The antifascist material examined in this study was collected from Varisverkosto's website and Facebook page, as well as from the Punk in Finland discussion forum.⁵⁴ Anti-racism and anti-discrimination are ideological features characteristic of these websites, and the far right in particular is discussed in a very negative tone on both. The collected material also paints a negative image of the state of Turkey, whose cooperation with Islamists and acts of hostility against Rojava are repeatedly condemned. In addition to the parties mentioned above, discussions on both websites paint a relatively critical view of the police.

However, the material published by Varisverkosto itself features only a few examples of speech that unequivocally dehumanises its enemies, even though the network characterises certain far-right figures as filthy, among other things. Indeed, rather than dehumanise, the network seeks to ridicule its opponents, and some of the texts it has published openly mock the adversities faced by the far right.

A greater amount of dehumanising material can be found in the more informal discussions on Varisverkosto's Facebook pages and the Punk in Finland forum. Individuals belonging to the Finnish far right have been described on these pages as human excrement and waste and compared to animals. The police are also described on several occasions as pigs and filth. While some characterisations of the adversary do not meet the criteria of actual dehumanisation, they nonetheless underscore its repulsiveness. Neo-Nazis, for example are compared to child molesters in the examined material.

Similarly, most of the material concerning the use of violence is found in the more informal discussions on Varisverkosto's Facebook pages and on Punk in Finland and is strongly connected to the context of the domestic far right and opposition to it. In the case of Punk in Finland, this is inevitable due to the way in which the examined material was delimited,⁵⁵ yet a corresponding emphasis can be observed in the

⁵² The name roughly translates into "The Crow Network".

⁵³ Monti & Purokuru, *Suoraa toimintaa!*, 29–30, 294–299.

⁵⁴ The material collected from the Punk in Finland website contains message threads on the clashes between the Finnish far right and its opponents. Most of this material was gathered from the website's "Syvä pääty" ("Deep end") subforum. The clashes took place between March 2019 and June 2020.

⁵⁵ See previous footnote.

material collected from the Facebook pages of Varisverkosto. Possible justifications for the use of violence against the far right are vigorously debated in the material, especially in the wake of the disturbances and clashes that took place in the spring of 2019 during Finland's parliamentary elections and the European Parliament elections. Although these incidents included physical violations of a lesser nature, violence was also used. The use of force and its possible justifications are also discussed in the context of other acts of violence against the far right and in discussions on the publicity of the far right's activities.

The far right's own activism provokes violence – The perception that the actions and ideology of the far right have provoked the violence against it is strongly present in the more informal discussions on Varisverkosto's Facebook pages and the Punk in Finland forum. The discussants in favour of violence against the far right state that the movement's ideology, which promotes inequality between different groups, produces a backlash from those seen as inferior and their allies, and that some Finnish far-right figures have practically begged for violence through their own provocative actions.

As a former victim of bullying, when you look at that bully, he has all the manners of a quintessential bully. I always enjoy it when someone in this herd of bullies gets painfully hurt.

and

...there was ABSOLUTELY NO confusion before the drunken racists came to "observe" i.e. to provoke with their cameras and shouts. What fucking assholes, I guess one can only hope that they get hit even harder the next time.

Violence as a necessary and effective means of opposing the far right – The narrative that violence against the far right is necessary and effective also stands out, particularly in the discussions on Varisverkosto's Facebook pages. Dialogue or the pursuit of dialogue with the far right, such discussions state, is ineffective, and the authorities or those in power cannot be trusted to intervene effectively in the movement's activities. The discussions further argue that violence against the far right has produced the desired result in other parts of the world and that sometimes it is necessary to respond to violence in kind. Such comments may include the view that those in power have not intervened in the unconstitutional activities of the far right in any way, making it necessary for the citizens themselves to take action.

Violence as self-defence – Violence and material damage targeting the far right are also framed as self-defence in discussions on Varisverkosto's Facebook pages. This narrative emphasises that the suppression of fascist rhetoric is always self-defence

and that the freedom with which minority-oppressing groups are allowed to operate in contemporary Finnish society leaves minorities no choice but to proactively defend themselves.

Individual comments that accept the use of violence – There are also comments in the examined material that simply praise the use of violence against the far right without going into greater detail about its rationale or justification. Cases in which the opponents of the far right have caused material damage or physical injuries to representatives of the movement receive praise on both Varisverkosto's Facebook pages and on Punk in Finland, and some of the discussants express hope that the inflicted injuries will be as painful as possible. A few individuals also discuss plans to participate in the payment of possible fines handed to the perpetrators.

Belittling violence against the far right – Some of the examined material belittles violence against the far right while not openly endorsing it. Attacks on members of the movement are described as insignificant in severity and public discussion on them as a misguided move that may increase sympathy for the far right. Violence against the far right is also perceived to have received too much publicity in relation to its seriousness:

...hasn't the pain suffered by Nasus⁵⁶ [Nazis] been dealt with enough in public discussion – I would guess that compared to the number of such cases and far-right individuals in general, quite a lot, in fact.

Violence against the far right as wrong or ineffective – It should be emphasised that – just as is the case in the anarchist discussions – the anti-fascist material includes a considerable amount of reasoning against the use of violence. The view that violence against the far right only strengthens it is relatively well represented in the material. Some of the discussants note that violent resistance only reinforces the ideological conviction of those active in the far right and offers them the role of a martyr. Others believe that action against the domestic far right will feed its potential success in the parliamentary elections. The view that only non-violent resistance is acceptable, as violence feeds violence, is also emphasised in the discussions. Other narratives opposing the use of violence include statements that anti-far-right violence makes its perpetrators reminiscent of the far right, and that the use of force against the far right should be left to the police. Certain far-right figures are also characterised as physically so insignificant or of such an unsound mind that it would be unfair to target them.

⁵⁶ "Nasu" means piglet, yet the word is sometimes used colloquially as a substitute for the term "Nazi".

Don't throw bottles and such, ok? That dick scores pity points for that.

and

One should leave the throwing of punches to the authorities.

Violence in the conflict in Syria and Iraq – Outside the context of the far right, material on violence also appears in articles and comments on Rojava. Indeed, those statements by Varisverkosto itself that most explicitly endorse the use of serious violence are related to Northeastern Syria's Kurdish-led forces' fight against ISIS and the Turkish army. The network has published texts that praise the activities of the YPG, YPJ, SDF, and the willing self-sacrifice of the aforementioned anarchist fighter Orsetti. The material published by the network also occasionally features the visual symbols of the PKK.

Communist online material

Communism is a left-wing ideology that assumed a structured form in the 19th century, with Karl Marx considered its most significant ideologue. Marx, who wrote the *Communist Manifesto* together with Friedrich Engels, theorised that history progresses through conflicts and that the most important of these conflicts concern relations between social classes. According to Marx, capitalism creates contradictions between the owning class and the working class, and these contradictions form the prerequisite for the revolution of the latter. Revolution, in turn, leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the formation of socialist society. The long-term development of the means of production then produces a shift from a socialist society to communism. In the stateless and classless ideal society that communists pursue, the means of production would be publicly owned, making it possible to satisfy all the material needs of the citizenry.⁵⁷

The enemy image of communism covers a wide range of actors. In addition to fascism, the far right, the institutions that maintain capitalist social order, and the capitalist class itself, competing leftist ideologies such as social democracy are often seen as hampering the realisation of communism.⁵⁸ There has also been considerable friction between different subcurrents of communism throughout history.

⁵⁷ Leslie Holmes, *Communism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–6.

⁵⁸ Holmes, *Communism*; Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence 1929–1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

The differing views of Trotskyists and Stalinists on the global scale of constructing socialism and the disagreements between the Soviet Union and China over the dismantling of Stalinism in the 1950s are just a few examples of communism's internal struggles.⁵⁹

Although the perceptions of communist theoreticians regarding the use of violence in the pursuit of an ideal society have varied, many have seen violent means as a possible instrument in the class struggle. Indeed, some of the key figures of the ideology, such as Vladimir Lenin, have been very supportive of revolutionary violence.⁶⁰ In communism, violence has been perceived not only as a practical means of striving for an ideal society and as an inevitable by-product of history's progression towards that objective, but also as a way of instilling the ideology into the proletariat. Franz Fanon, for example, stated that violence against the ruling class is a means of building the revolutionary consciousness of the oppressed.⁶¹ The possibility of violence has also been a part of Finnish communism. The Finnish Communist Party set violent revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat as its objective in 1918. Although the party later softened its position and stated in its 1969 programme that it would seek a transition to socialism through peaceful reform, the glorification of violence continued to thrive among the Taistoist student movement, even if its representatives did not eventually commit acts of bloodshed.⁶²

Speech dehumanising others and justifying violence

Most of the communist material examined in the study was collected from the Finnish Proletaarit (Proletarians) community's website and Facebook page. The material also includes individual discussions on the Takku.net website in which people who support the communist theory of society participate. The material studied is often very harsh in tone. The Proletaarit community's negative attitude towards the far right and fascism

⁵⁹ Holmes, *Communism*, 10–12, 112; Erik van Ree, "Socialism in One Country: A Reassessment", *Studies in East-European Thought* 50 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1008651325136>.

⁶⁰ Raphael Cohen-Almagor, "Foundations of violence, terror and war in the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3/2 (1991), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559108427101>; Joan Witte, "Violence in Lenin's thought and practice: The spark and the conflagration", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5/3 (1993), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559308427223>.

⁶¹ Christopher J. Finlay, "Violence and Revolutionary Subjectivity: Marx to Žižek", *European Journal of Political Theory* 5/4 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885106067277>, 376–377, 385.

⁶² Joni Krekola, "'Kauhea joskin on puhdistustyömme...' Skp ja väkivalta", in Ulla Aatsinki & Johanna Valenius (eds.), *Ruumiita ja mustelmia: Näkökulmia väkivallan historiaan*. Väki voimakas 17 (Työväen Historian ja Perinteen Tutkimuksen Seura, 2004), <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10224/4763>, 132–133.

is unconditional, and the material published on the website reveals a very critical view of the bourgeoisie and the more moderate political left.

Speech that unequivocally dehumanises others is less prominent, though not completely non-existent, in the communist material. Most of this speech was found in more informal debates on the social media or in discussions commenting on official statements. In the material studied, the political right is compared to human excrement and filth, among other things, and social democratic politicians are occasionally characterised as akin to haemorrhoids, for example.

Some of the dehumanising expressions are related to fauna or other natural organisms. The wealthy, the bourgeoisie, and other representatives of the capitalist economic system perceived as the internal enemies of the working class, such as scabs (strike breakers), are compared to different animals. The material also includes descriptions of the perceived enemies of the working class that do not meet the criteria of actual dehumanisation but nonetheless emphasise the monstrous nature of the target of criticism.

The reflections on the use of violence found in the communist material relate to several different topics. Sometimes they are connected to discussions on statements that right-wing figures have made on labour and market policies, as well as the views of such figures on national defence. The discussions on industrial action also include a few examples of speech considering the use violence. Occasionally, reflections on the use of violence are connected to discussions about the history of communism and the confrontations between communists and the political right. The material touches upon World War II on several occasions.

Speech that openly incites or justifies violence is – on the whole – scant yet not entirely non-existent in the communist online material.

Violence as liberating in nature and morally just – One of the narratives in the material concerns the liberating and morally just nature of left-wing violence, although it should be noted that this narrative is linked to discussions on the war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and the war crimes of Finnish Waffen-SS men on the Eastern Front. The discussion states that the political left justifies violence aimed at liberating workers, slaves, and the oppressed, whereas the political right strives to keep these groups subjugated.

Violence as a necessity – Another narrative that stands out in the material is the necessity of violence. For example, defeating the far right is seen as requiring the use of force. The image below of the Normandy landing is taken from the Proletaarit

community's Facebook page. The community itself has commented on the picture with the question, "Couldn't this have been resolved through dialogue?"



Caption: Top: 75 YEARS AGO: Violent anti-fascists ganged up and attacked nationalist-minded ethnonationalists. Bottom: WHERE'S THE TOLERANCE???

The material also contains expressions of the view that a working-class revolution requires the violent overthrow of the old system rather than an attempt to reform it peacefully.

Individual comments accepting the use of violence – Some of the material that incites or justifies violence consists of outbursts against individuals or groups of people. These outbursts do not form an actual narrative on the justification of violence against such actors. They are often reactions to media or social media statements made by prominent financial figures and right-wing politicians that caused a stir among the political left. The discussants express hope that these individuals would commit suicide or lose their lives in an armed conflict. The material occasionally also speculates about the possibility of targeting the abovementioned parties with more spontaneous violence, and there are a few statements on how the last time the Finnish bourgeoisie was treated fairly was during the Finnish Civil War of 1918.

2.6 Online material connected to the incel subculture

The term incel comes from the words *involuntary celibate*. The incel phenomenon is mainly a subculture and virtual community that was formed on Internet discussion forums over the last 20 years.⁶³ The roots of the phenomenon go back to 1997 and a website titled Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project. Initially, the site attracted both men and women who felt they had difficulties finding a suitable partner and forming a relationship, and it functioned as a virtual peer-support community. Since then, the phenomenon has evolved and taken darker, misogynistic tones, becoming almost exclusively a subculture and virtual phenomenon for men. Incel-like discussion threads can be found on numerous English-language online platforms, including Reddit, where incel-minded subreddits were taken down in 2017 and 2019.

The worldview of contemporary incels is built upon the belief that the relationships between men and women are defined by a societal hierarchy of power based on physical appearance. Because of sexual liberation, sex and romantic partnerships are no longer distributed equally between all men. Women's right to choose has led to a situation in which most women pair with men who match the current ideals of physical beauty. These men are referred to as "Chads" in the subculture. Consequently, average men – referred to as normies – who are in the middle of the hierarchy and those at the bottom – referred to as incels – are left without sex and relationships. Although incels consider themselves to be at the bottom of the hierarchy, they also perceive themselves as superior to others, as they are more cognisant of their status and situation. According to an expression from the film *The Matrix*, they have taken the "red pill" that has revealed the true nature of society and do not any longer partake in the illusions of the "blue pill" like everyone else.

Incels consider women to be vain and shallow and thus blame them for the existence of the current hierarchy. At the top of the female hierarchy are those women who best coincide with the ideals of physical beauty. These women are referred to as "Stacys". Instead of Stacys, the main targets of incels' hatred are women referred to as "Beckys", who – against their position in the hierarchy – prefer Chads. According to

⁶³ The description of the incel subculture is based on the following sources, among others: Hoffman, Ware & Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence"; Moonshot, *Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology* (2020), <https://moonshotve.com/incels-symbols-and-terminology>; Jim Taylor, "The Woman Who Founded the 'Incel' Movement", *BBC*, 30 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45284455>.

the incels' view, Beckys are obligated to have sex and form relationships with normie and incel men.

Within the online incel community, there is a broad range of conversations about how to deal with the current state of affairs. In English-language online conversations, discussions on the physical qualities of men and women are abundant. Incels have a plethora of opinions on what type of chin, shoulders, arms, or hair men should have to rank higher in the hierarchy. In fact, many incels within the community give advice to others on how to fix their looks, such as through plastic surgery or physical exercise. There are also plenty of conversations about how the "rules" of society should be amended so that sexual attention from women can be equally distributed. One proposed solution is the return of conservative values and a patriarchal society, i.e. returning women to be under the control of their fathers and husbands. Another dimension in these conversations deals with different means of forcing women into having sex with "inferior" men, including the social acceptance of rape.

Some incels feel that nothing can be done to improve their lot in life and sink into nihilistic fatalism, which they call "taking the black pill". In their view, the only available options are mass murder or suicide. In recent years, a few men who consider themselves incels have committed acts of violence targeting random individuals. The first attack of this type occurred in Isla Vista, California in 2014. The attacker is considered a paragon and almost a saint within the incel community.

This study mapped incel-related discussions within the Finnish-language online environment by analysing relevant content found on Ylilauta. The message board contained several relevant threads. The themes and vocabulary present in the discussions strongly mirror those found in discussions in English. Most threads deal with loneliness, depression, and sexual frustration. In these threads, incels offer peer support and advice on how to increase the odds of finding a partner. A broad range of comments showing hostility towards women is also common in these threads.

Pre-existing literature examining English-language platforms observed confluence between worldviews and online communities of incels and members of the far right.⁶⁴ Both draw from the same "manosphere" subculture and share similar conservative values. Far-right and anti-immigration views are also commonly expressed in incel discussions in Finnish. For example, those who post in incel-related discussions have expressed the view that their odds of finding a partner are negatively affected by the increase in immigrant men and the increasing pickiness of women accelerated by apps such as Tinder. Some of the users consider the "distortions of the mating

⁶⁴ See e.g. Hoffman, Ware & Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence".

market” as an existential problem in which autochthonous Finnish women cause – either knowingly or unwittingly – the extinction of the Finnish, white heterosexual man. Anti-immigration attitudes are also expressed through *schadenfreude*, which is the feeling of pleasure experienced as a result of another’s misfortune, felt by an incel when autochthonous Finnish women are murdered by ex-partners with immigrant backgrounds.

Comments inciting violence were mostly found in discussions and threads dealing with suicide. Some discussants suggested that, rather than committing suicide, incels should undertake acts of revenge targeting “whores” and Chads because the lack of sex has resulted in self-destructive thoughts. A small minority of participants in relevant conversations express having “taken the black pill”, i.e. adopted a completely nihilistic worldview, which they want to spread before killing themselves. Usually these efforts manifest themselves in sharing memes that argue that the wrong shape of jaws or eyes are to blame for lack of sex and loneliness. Messages expressing stark views and inciting violence are occasionally posted to Ylilauta, but these are actively removed by the moderators.

It is worth noting that comments opposing and disparaging incels also occur in relevant discussions on Ylilauta. Particularly, black pill-related conversations are often met with criticism. Occasionally, discussants remind others that Ylilauta is also read by underage users.

2.7 Online material connected to the school shooting subculture

Analysing school shootings in a study on extremist speech may seem strange at first. There is, however, a distinct subculture and online community around them that emerged around instances of the phenomenon in the 2000s. This subculture shares a view of society that has been iterated in the videos, manifestos, and social media accounts of school shooters, especially in the material that explains the motives behind their acts. According to previous research, at least three types of individuals are active in this subculture. Some are interested in committing school shootings, but the majority are simply interested in the phenomenon or they glorify school shooters

without any intent to join them. A third group consists of young people who feel they can relate to the worldview of school shooters.⁶⁵

While there is a long history of school shootings, the subculture surrounding the phenomenon did not form until after 1999. A key event in its emergence was the school shooting in Columbine, Colorado, in the United States in April 1999. The shooting committed by two of the school's students, 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold, attracted massive media attention that – in combination with a documentary made by Michael Moore – gave it international notoriety.

The Columbine shooters' reputation was further strengthened by videos of the incident and writings left behind by both Harris and Klebold. A subculture began to form around this corpus on various online platforms, with YouTube playing a particularly important role. The online community connected to this subculture has since produced other school shooters. In Finland, these include the school shooters of Jokela (2007) and Kauhajoki (2008), who perceive themselves to be a part of this community. Within this online community, school shooters are revered as heroes and martyrs.

The subculture contains a diverse range of cultural influences, many of which date back to and originate from the Columbine school shootings. Members imitate school shooters by listening to the music they are known to have liked, such as KMFDM, Rammstein, and Nine Inch Nails. The most popular movie among community members is *Natural Born Killers*, of which Harris and Klebold were such big fans that they called themselves NBK. The subculture also has its own visual style. Popular clothes include long black trench coats and T-shirts with slogans relevant to the subculture printed on the front, and slicked back hair are also popular. Some members emulate school shooters that wore military-style clothes by sporting camouflage-patterned clothes and tactical belts.

⁶⁵ Jenni Raitanen & Atte Oksanen, "Global Online Subculture Surrounding School Shootings", *American Behavioral Scientist* 62/2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218755835>. On the school shooting subculture and online community, see e.g. Nathalie E. Paton, "Media Participation of School Shooters and Their Fans: Navigating Between Self-Distinction and Imitation to Achieve Individuation", in Glenn Muschert & Johanna Sumiala (eds.), *School Shootings: Mediatized Violence in a Global Age*. Studies in Media and Communications, vol. 7 (Bingley: Emerald, 2012); Nils Böckler & Thorsten Seeger, "Revolution of the Dispossessed: School Shooters and Their Devotees on the Web", in Nils Böckler, Thorsten Seeger, Peter Sitzer & Wilhelm Heitmeyer (eds.), *School shootings: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention* (New York: Springer, 2013); Atte Oksanen, James Hawdon & Pekka Räsänen, "Glamorizing Rampage Online: School Shooting Fan Communities on YouTube", *Technology in Society* 39 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2014.08.001>.

Several school shooters since Columbine have published videos and manifestos that they clearly expected to be found by the community. Connections to earlier acts have been made by imitating the way earlier shootings – particularly Columbine – were committed and by copying the aesthetic style of previous shooters. Manifestos and videos contain recurring political vocabulary and similar views of society that have become part of the subculture. In the Finnish context, the most clear-cut representation of this is the “Natural Selector’s Manifesto” written by the Jokela school shooter.

The manifestos of school shooters typically contain a recurring view that most humans are following the herd, not thinking for themselves, and solely desire the products of a consumer society. School shooters usually perceive themselves to be a part of an enlightened minority who can see through the facade of modern society. At the same time, they feel misunderstood, mistreated, and marginalised against their will. In their accounts, school shootings are framed as acts of revenge and natural selection targeting the inferior and the weak. Even though these acts take place at school, they are not solely against the schools themselves but rather towards society as a whole. Their manifestos and videos also show the glorification of hatred and aggression. School shooters have expressed the hope that their actions inspire other marginalised individuals to commit similar acts. The subculture also contains admiration for far-right figures (particularly Adolf Hitler) and others who have committed mass killings.⁶⁶

Members of the school shooting online community in Finland include admirers of school shooters, those interested in the phenomenon, and even school shooters themselves. The people behind the attacks in Jokela, Kauhajoki, and Kuopio belonged to this group, as well as a number of others who made plans to commit similar acts.⁶⁷ The identities of those belonging to this online community are difficult to confirm, but there is evidence indicating that individuals who have or currently reside in Finland have commented on YouTube videos about school shootings.

The subculture is present on Ylilauta, where members participate in threads on acts of violence. Threats to schools have been made on the platform, some of which have led to court proceedings. One such case was brought to trial in August 2019 in which a

⁶⁶ Leena Malkki, “Political Elements in post-Columbine School Shootings in Europe and North America”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26/1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.849933>; Leena Malkki, “Amok – private oder politische Gewalt? School Shootings und die Grenzen der Einzeltäterthese”, *Mittelweg* 36/4–5 (2020).

⁶⁷ Tämä käy ilmi tekoja koskevista esitutkintapöytäkirjoista. Suunniteltuihin tekoihin lukeutuu myös Helsingin yliopistossa tehtäväksi kaavailtu isku, ks. Leena Malkki, “Target: University of Helsinki”, *Politiikasta* 28 June 2014 (<http://politiikasta.fi/artikkeli/target-university-helsinki>).

man – who was underage at the time – had written on the message board that he was planning a “school massage” to be carried out the next day. Another post included an image of the school he intended to target.⁶⁸ “Massage” is an oft-used term for school and other mass shootings in Finnish-language online discussions.

Although content relating to school shootings is actively removed from Ylilauta, the platform regularly contains material in which the Columbine school shooters or school shootings are glorified. This study found a thread on the message board where videos glorifying school shootings were posted. The posted videos contained images of real or simulated school shootings with songs about school shootings or intentionally upbeat songs playing in the background. Occasionally, members post messages reminiscing about school shooters, such as the Jokela school shooter, and discuss their personal history. These conversations include controversial commentary typical of the platform, including comments disparaging school shooters. However, school shooters often receive sympathy based on the perception that they were mistreated, and thus their acts are the fault of the bullies. Pictures of the Jokela and Columbine school shooters, which were originally shared by the perpetrators themselves, are occasionally posted in these threads.

There are occasional overlaps in the discussions on school shootings and the incel phenomenon. For example, some threads ponder whether some past school shooters were also incels. Those posting messages about the difficulties of finding a girlfriend sometimes insinuate, often through images, that they identify with school shooters. Similar to the incel subculture, it is clear that many of those who actively post on the message board are familiar with the school shooting subculture. However, the number of school shooting related posts encouraging or glorifying violence is low.

⁶⁸ Petri Elonheimo, “Vaasalaisteini kirjoitteli nettifoorumilla “kouluhieromisesta” – poliisi korjasi välittömästi talteen”, *Iltalehdi* 1 August 2019.

2.8 Jihadist worldview

Jihadism is a violent and extremist ideology based on religion and a subcurrent of violent Islamism.⁶⁹ Jihadists share a unique approach to religion and politics that differentiates them from other kinds of violent Islamists.⁷⁰

The jihadist ideology is formed around a broad and ever-growing corpus of content created by theologians, ideologues, and other thinkers. This corpus is the foundation of jihadists' belief system, worldview, values, norms, objectives, and modus operandi.⁷¹ Jihadism, however, is not only an ideology but also a movement and subculture that includes poetry, fashion, music, and dream interpretation.⁷²

A strong collective identity and a global community of believers has formed around the jihadist ideology.⁷³ Those who share this identity perceive and identify themselves first and foremost as Muslims representing an authentic, pure, and original form of Islam⁷⁴ and as members of the global jihadist movement.⁷⁵ The best-known jihadist armed groups within the movement are al-Qaeda and ISIS and their various local branches.

The roots of jihadism and the jihadist movements date back to the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the foreign fighter mobilisation to the conflict zone in the latter half of the 1980s and early 1990s.⁷⁶ Initially, the movement was mostly present in Afghanistan. From there, it spread to other Muslim-majority countries and conflict

⁶⁹ Magnus Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism: A Practical Introduction*. RAN Centre of Excellence, RAN Factbook (2019), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_factbook_islamist_extremism_december_2019_en.pdf, 5.

⁷⁰ Cole Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms: Understanding A Movement", a Hoover Institution Essay (2018), https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/jihadism_on_its_own_terms_pdf.pdf, 6.

⁷¹ Assaf Moghadam; *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 71.

⁷² See e.g. Thomas Hegghammer (ed.), *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁷³ See e.g. Assaf Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology", *CTC Sentinel* 1/3 (2008); Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 73.

⁷⁴ On the Salafist movement and Salafi-jihadist theology, see Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: Hurst & Co, 2016), 6–16.

⁷⁵ Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms", 2.

⁷⁶ See e.g. Thomas Hegghammer, *The Caravan: Abdallah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Mustafa Hamid & Leah Farrall, *The Arabs at War in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Co, 2015).

zones, particularly in the Middle East. While the phenomenon is still primarily in these areas, the movement has been attracting Muslims, including converts, living in Western countries since the early 2000s.⁷⁷

Jihadism has also attracted interest in Finland.⁷⁸ The Finnish jihadist milieu differs from many other milieus in Western Europe and Muslim majority countries, as there has been very little openly accessible content in Finnish. After the restrictions on jihadist content online – particularly after 2016 – Finnish-language content has been nearly non-existent. Indeed, the local dimension of jihadism in Finland in this context has been generally weak, and the significance of Finnish-language content appears to have been limited.⁷⁹ Instead, individuals in Finland interested in the ideology and engaging in jihadist activities appear to follow jihadist communications on various international platforms and in several languages.

The primary objective of jihadist armed groups is to form a proto-state that is ruled in accordance with the jihadists' interpretation of Islam. In the cases of ISIS and al-Qaeda, this meant the re-establishment of the caliphate.⁸⁰ As jihadism – especially in the context of these two actors – is not particularly nationally oriented, it is necessary to examine the phenomenon in a broader context. This section will examine jihadism's core beliefs, how it justifies and incites violence, and its narratives targeting Western audiences.

Core beliefs

Theologically speaking, jihadism is based on Salafism, a minority current within Sunni Islam. The basic premise of Salafism is to practice Islam in a way that is identical to the first three generations of Muslims. Salafism believes in progression through

⁷⁷ See e.g. Guido Steinberg, *German Jihad: On the Internationalization of Islamist Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Sam Mullins, *'Home-Grown' Jihad: Understanding Islamist Terrorism in the US and UK* (London: Imperial College Press, 2016); Bart Schuurman, Peter Grol & Scott Flower, "Converts and Islamist Terrorism: An Introduction", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague* 7, no. 3 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2016.2.03>.

⁷⁸ Leena Malkki & Juha Saarinen, *Jihadism in Finland*. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 2019:31 (Ministry of the Interior, 2019), <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-324-302-68>.

⁷⁹ Leena Malkki & Matti Pohjonen, *Jihadist Online Communication and Finland*. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior 2019:29 (Ministry of the Interior, 2019), <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-324-300-2>.

⁸⁰ ISIS (which changed its name to Islamic State, IS) achieved this objective in June, 2014 when it proclaimed the caliphate re-established in the areas under its control in Syria and Iraq. Its first Caliph and the long-serving leader of the group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, died in October 2019. Although the areas under ISIS's control have been liberated, al-Baghdadi's successor still claims the title of the Caliph.

regression, i.e. Salafists strive to reintroduce Muslims to a way of practising Islam that they consider to be original, pure, and through which all Muslims can live a perfect life and achieve salvation. The Salafi interpretation of Islam is rigidly dogmatic and literal. Salafis also demand unwavering commitment to preserving dogmatic purity.⁸¹ Indeed, Salafists largely reject interpretations of Islam that developed since the first three generations and perceive them as innovations and external cultural influences corruptive to the faith.⁸² All Salafists, including jihadists, perceive God's divine authority as the only religiously legitimate source for legislation.⁸³

Not all Salafists are jihadists, however. In fact, jihadists form a minority within the Salafist movement. Like other Salafists, jihadists believe they are the only sect within Islam who practices their faith the way it is supposed to be and who will ultimately be saved.⁸⁴ While not all jihadists are Salafists, practically all key jihadist groups and leaders have held a Salafist interpretation of Islam.⁸⁵ This is why jihadism is sometimes referred to as Salafi-jihadism.⁸⁶

In terms of practicing Islam, jihadists differ significantly from other types of Salafists. Unlike the others, jihadists have an unwavering commitment to jihad, which they define as a violent struggle against the enemies of Islam and a religious duty for all Muslims.⁸⁷ Traditionally, jihadists have considered participation in violent struggle as an important – if not the most important – way to practice their faith, as its purpose is to simultaneously defend and promote Islam.⁸⁸ Jihadism also has an eschatological dimension, as jihadists consider participation in jihad to be an obligation until the Day

⁸¹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 7.

⁸² Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 6. On Salafism more broadly, see Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst & Co, 2009).

⁸³ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 9.

⁸⁴ In Salafi and jihadist literature, this group is referred to as the victorious group (*al-taifa al-mansoura*) or the chosen sect (*al-firqa al-najiya*). Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 7.

⁸⁵ On al-Qaeda's theology, see Bernard Haykel (translator), "Al-Qaeda's Creed and Path", in Meijer *Global Salafism*, 51–56. On ISIS's theology, see Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi (translator), "This is our Aqeeda and This is our Manhaj: Islam 101 according to the Islamic State", *Pundicity* 27 October 2015, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/10/this-is-our-aqeeda-and-this-is-our-manhaj-islam>].

⁸⁶ See e.g. Moghadam, "The Salafi Jihad as a Religious Ideology"; Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*; Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*.

⁸⁷ Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms", 8. However, traditionally jihadist actors have defined participation in armed struggle as an obligation to men only, whereas women's obligation is to support their men as well as giving birth and raising new generations of warriors.

⁸⁸ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 37.

of Judgment, when the forces of good and evil – faith and disbelief – will come together to take part in a final battle.⁸⁹

Jihadists reject and violently oppose state-based international order and individual nation-states, which they regard as inherently heretical units usurping God's sovereignty.⁹⁰ Thus, the scope of jihadists' violent activism and ambitions is global and not limited to individual countries or conflict zones.

A key feature of jihadism is a strong and clear distinction between the in-group and out-groups. As is the case with other extremist ideologies, the difficulties and crises facing the in-group are believed to be caused by various out-groups.⁹¹ The in-group consists of only those who share the jihadist ideology, and all others are members of the out-groups. The authenticity of the in-group's faith is emphasised, whereas members of the out-groups are presented to be of lesser value (for instance, due to impurity⁹²), disbelievers, and inherently hostile toward Islam and the global community of Muslims (as defined by the jihadists).⁹³

The identified out-groups in jihadism can be divided into two categories. The first category consists of those who are entirely external to Islam and who threaten Islam and the community of believers from the outside. These include Western countries (often referred to as crusaders and crusader states by jihadists) and their non-believing citizens, who wage a global war against Islam and Muslims through the US-led "Pax Americana" global order.⁹⁴ This category also includes Israel and Jewish communities around the world, which jihadists refer to as Zionists. The second category consists of those who threaten Islam and the Muslim community from within. As jihadists have a single-minded obsession with Islam's purity, they have traditionally defined members of these out-groups as heretics, apostates, idolaters, and hypocrites who have abandoned the true Islam.⁹⁵ This category includes Islamists, including

⁸⁹ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 9.

⁹⁰ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 8–12.

⁹¹ Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 71–73.

⁹² In jihadists' terminology concerning impurity, animalistic references, particularly animals considered impure in Islam, e.g. dog and pig, recur.

⁹³ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 6; Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 71. As the global jihadist movement developed in Western countries, many activists – particularly those connected to ISIS – have adopted expressions influenced by Western culture or other ideologies, e.g. Coconut Muslim, which refers to a Muslim residing in a Western country who is outwardly Muslim but inwardly white.

⁹⁴ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 7.

⁹⁵ Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology".

violent Islamist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, and particularly members of the Muslim Brotherhood who jihadists view as apostates.⁹⁶

The jihadists consider those Muslims who do not share their interpretation and practice of Islam to have abandoned the faith and are thus legitimate targets for violence. Some jihadists go even further and argue that Muslims have an obligation to target those who have left Islam.⁹⁷ Those who do not share the jihadists' interpretation of Islam, however, can become part of the in-group through conversion. In fact, converts to Islam tend to be overrepresented in the phenomenon, particularly in many Western countries.⁹⁸

The distinction between the in-group and out-groups also informs how members of the in-group are expected to behave toward each other as well as outsiders. In-group members are expected to be loyal and obedient towards other in-group members and disloyal – or even hateful – to outgroup members while keeping themselves separate from them.⁹⁹ In Western countries, this often means existing in self-contained communities of true believers and withdrawing from the surrounding societies that jihadists often believe to be morally decrepit and corrupt, in addition to being full of dangers and temptations that may lead true believers to diverge from their righteous path.

Justifying and inciting violence

As argued above, armed struggle plays a key role in jihadist ideology and praxis. The key actors in promoting the ideology are armed groups active in various conflict zones, particularly al-Qaeda and ISIS.¹⁰⁰ Both of these groups have local affiliates and allies around the Islamic world in addition to global networks of supporters and activists. Both have also systematically sought to motivate, inspire, recruit, and support members, cells, and small groups within this network to carry out attacks and

⁹⁶ As Cole Bunzel, for example, has noted, jihadists consider Islamists to be heretics, largely due to their leniency towards heretical Muslims (e.g. Sufis and Shias) and Muslim rulers and their eagerness to take part in the political system of their respective countries. Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms", 6.

⁹⁷ Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology".

⁹⁸ J. M. Berger, *Extremism*. The MIT Press Essential Knowledge series (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2018), 34; Schuurman, Grol & Flower, "Converts and Islamist Terrorism".

⁹⁹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 140–141; Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History* (London: Hurst & Co, 2016), 13–14; and Petter Nesser, "Military Interventions, Jihadi Networks, and Terrorist Entrepreneurs: How the Islamic State Terror Wave Rose So High in Europe", *CTC Sentinel* 12/3 (2019).

non-violent support activities promoting the agendas of various jihadist groups and the ideology more broadly.

The list of targets of jihadists' violence is long and wide. It includes states, their security forces, and their civilians, including Muslims deemed disbelievers or apostates. Even those who the jihadists deem as true believers may be considered justified collateral damage if it is deemed necessary for the continuation of jihad. Theologically, jihadists define their violence to be defensive in nature, although the use of acts of political violence – particularly outside conflict zones – by jihadists is often strategically and tactically offensive in nature.¹⁰¹ These violent acts are justified by selectively quoting from Islam's holy scriptures of the Quran, Sunnah, and Hadiths.¹⁰²

The jihadist movement, however, is not a monolithic entity. Rather, it has historically been riddled with internal divisions, and distinct subcurrents within the movement can be identified.¹⁰³ Often, these divisions have emerged from jihadist groups developing and justifying new forms and targets of violence to overcome challenges and issues within their immediate operating environments. There are many disagreements within the global jihadist movement as to who is a justified target for violence and under what conditions. Violence directed at Sunni Muslims or claiming their lives as collateral damage has been particularly contentious within the movement – as exhibited in the conflict between al-Qaeda and ISIS.¹⁰⁴ Violence targeting non-Muslims, however, results in significantly less controversy among jihadists.

Content created by key jihadist thinkers and actors contains recurring ways of justifying violence and motivating the movement's members and supporters to commit acts of violence. Broadly speaking, there are three key framing narratives through which jihadists construct justification and meaning for their violence.

The diagnostic frame – The first is a diagnostic frame that explains the current state of the world. It describes the social, political, and economic challenges and problems facing the in-group and offers explanations for the causes. The frame identifies the parties who are to blame for the situation and describes how these actors are weakening the well-being of the in-group in addition to threatening the prerequisites of

¹⁰¹ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 67.

¹⁰² Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 17.

¹⁰³ See e.g. Assaf Moghadam & Brian Fishman (eds.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms", 9–10.

the in-group's continued existence and future success. Thus, the diagnostic frame forms a worldview in which the use of violence is justified and necessary.

In jihadist communications, a common argument is that Islam has been growing weaker militarily, politically, religiously, culturally, and economically for centuries.¹⁰⁵ This trend is claimed to have been caused by, among other factors, the fact that Muslims have turned their back on what jihadists consider to be authentic Islam, which jihadists also argue has been corrupted by different dogmatic innovations and cultural influences external to the faith. Jihadists often compare the current state of affairs for Islam and the global community of believers to pre-Islamic times dominated by ignorance and misery.

Jihadists also argue that during the first three generations, Muslims enjoyed human rights, success, and happiness, and Islam was able to expand to the areas surrounding the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁰⁶ Jihadists believe that the early Muslims' piety and commitment to practicing the authentic original faith led to Islam's triumph and rapid expansion to North Africa and Central Asia.¹⁰⁷

Jihadists also believe that Islam and the global Muslim community's status and importance have diminished as they are the target of a sustained existential, cultural, political, and military attack.¹⁰⁸ This attack is spearheaded by the United States, its crusade state allies, and Zionists (Israel) under the guise of "Pax Americana" world order – the same parties that are responsible for the setbacks the Muslim community have experienced.¹⁰⁹ Many local conflicts occurring around the globe (e.g. Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen) are framed as a part of this global attack.¹¹⁰

To amplify this narrative, jihadists often describe – in great and vivid detail – the actions targeting the Muslim population in conflict zones, including occupation, sexual violence and rape targeting Muslim women, executions of minors and the elderly, desecrations of Mosques and the Quran, and extraction of natural resources that,

¹⁰⁵ Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology".

¹⁰⁶ Kurt Braddock, "The Impact of Jihadist Terrorist Narratives and How to Counter Them: A Research Synthesis", in Anthony Richards, Devorah Margolin & Nicolò Scremin (eds.), *Jihadist Terror: New Threats, New Responses* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 15–16.

¹⁰⁷ Braddock, "The Impact of Jihadist Terrorist Narratives", 15.

¹⁰⁸ Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 71–72; Braddock, "The Impact of Jihadist Terrorist Narratives", 16.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement: Anwar al-Awlaki's Western Jihad* (Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 2020), 270.

¹¹⁰ Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 73.

according to the jihadists, belong to Muslims.¹¹¹ As mobile broadband, smart devices, and social media have become more common, jihadist communications have shifted from describing these events in text format to showing them in a visual or audio–visual format. This has made it easier to elicit powerful emotional responses in targeted audiences.¹¹²

Jihadists also argue that those Muslims who do not share their interpretation of Islam are cooperating with the crusaders and Zionists to subjugate Muslims.¹¹³ They also claim that the rulers of Muslim-majority countries, who they argue are illegitimate apostates and tyrants, cannot defend and protect local Muslim populations or ensure their well-being, and thus are enemies of Islam and the jihadists themselves.¹¹⁴

In general terms, jihadists perceive Western countries to be morally decrepit and hypocritical. To the majority of their citizens, Western countries may be liberal democracies, but jihadists argue that they persecute and subjugate the Muslims who reside in them and do not let them practice their faith in peace. In the jihadist worldview, the maltreatment of Muslims residing in Western countries means that Islam is not only under attack in the Islamic world, but also in the West.¹¹⁵ Concrete examples of this attack include veil bans targeting Muslim women, publications of cartoons mocking the prophet Mohammed, evolving counterterrorism legislation, police actions targeting Muslims, Islamophobia, and anti-Muslim discrimination. In its foreign policy, the “crusader” West is seen by jihadists as aggressive, oppressive, and repressive.¹¹⁶

The prognostic frame – The second key framing narrative is prognostic, explaining and rationalising why violence is the only suitable response to the perceived challenges. In jihadism, the use of violence is not only defined as religiously legitimate but also as strategically necessary.¹¹⁷ Only through violent action by those deemed to

¹¹¹ Thomas Hegghammer, “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighter: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad”, *International Security* 35/3 (2010/2011), 73, 53–94.

¹¹² Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 11.

¹¹³ In addition to the main enemies described above, individual theologians, ideologues, and theoreticians have formulated a broader list of enemies that may include – depending on the context – multinational corporations, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations. Ks. Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 72–74.

¹¹⁴ Braddock, “The Impact of Jihadist Terrorist Narratives”, 16; Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 71–72.

¹¹⁵ Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement*, 72.

¹¹⁶ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 10.

¹¹⁷ Berger, *Extremism*, 46, 76.

be true believers can the course of Islam's history be changed from centuries of oppression and humiliation to restoring its global significance and status.¹¹⁸ Through collective violence, Muslims are empowered, and the humiliation, suffering, subjugation, and oppression they have experienced are transformed into pride, honour, and the inevitable victory promised by Allah.¹¹⁹

Violence is rationalised as necessary because the threat facing Islam and the global community of believers is deemed so serious and the enemies so hostile and untrustworthy that other options simply cannot work.¹²⁰ Jihadists also claim that only they can defend Muslims. Their faith, piety, and steadfastness will bring the inevitable victory, and the injustices experienced by the Muslim community will be avenged.¹²¹

Jihadists argue that, in addition to wide-scale and continuous violence targeting the enemies of Islam, the only way to secure the well-being and success of the Muslim community is to return to a literal and dogmatically rigid interpretation and practice of Islam and to replace Western-backed secular tyrants with a system of governance based on sharia law, eventually re-establishing the caliphate.¹²² Both al-Qaeda and ISIS have emphasised in their communications that the re-establishment of the caliphate can only occur through violent struggle.¹²³ The same argument was made in ISIS messaging after the loss of its proclaimed caliphate in 2019 that ISIS framed as a temporary setback and a divine tribulation to test the faithful.¹²⁴

Participation in the violent struggle is not only claimed to be necessary to achieve the objectives identified above; it is also defined as the personal religious duty of each and every Muslim.¹²⁵ In fact, participating in this struggle is considered to be one, if not the most, important way to practice the faith,¹²⁶ the apex of which is achieving martyrdom.¹²⁷ Those who cannot participate in a violent struggle are encouraged to participate by supporting jihadists' efforts in other ways, e.g. by raising funds or by

¹¹⁸ Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology"; Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 72–73.

¹¹⁹ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 11.

¹²⁰ Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighter", 73.

¹²¹ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 12.

¹²² Braddock, "The Impact of Jihadist Terrorist Narratives", 15.

¹²³ Braddock, "The Impact of Jihadist Terrorist Narratives", 16; Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 12.

¹²⁴ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 12.

¹²⁵ Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*, 72.

¹²⁶ See e.g. Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology"; Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*.

¹²⁷ Moghadam, "The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology"; Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement*, 270.

creating and distributing propaganda.¹²⁸ In contrast, those Muslims who do not support jihadists in their struggle “in the path of Allah” are not viewed as true Muslims but rather as apostates who have turned their backs on their faith and who deserve to be punished.¹²⁹

The motivational frame – The last of the key framing narratives is designed to inspire and motivate those who have internalised the jihadist ideology, identity, and worldview to act in support of the movement, especially through violent acts.¹³⁰

One way jihadists seek to motivate engagement in jihadist activities is to present it as an empowering act that can give direction and meaning while offering relief from the shame, guilt, and loss of honour caused by constant oppression and subjugation, restoring pride.¹³¹ Another way is to highlight that anyone and everyone can participate in jihadist activism and achieve rank and status through it.¹³² Jihadist often emphasise that engagement in jihadist activities is not only meant for warriors in far-away conflict zones but is an obligation for all, and it can occur anywhere at any given time.¹³³ They also highlight how engagement in these activities can take many forms and evolve over time.¹³⁴ Thus, participation can mean committing terrorist attacks in Western countries, travelling to a conflict zone abroad to become a foreign fighter, or non-violent participation through producing and distributing jihadist content or fundraising.¹³⁵

A recurring theme in the context of motivational frames is that engagement in jihadist activities is presented as a path to redemption and salvation. Jihadists promise membership in the only sect within Islam that practices the faith as intended and will ultimately be saved.¹³⁶ Indeed, jihadists assert that violent struggle “in the path of Allah” will redeem all past sins. Furthermore, they state that participation in activities that are considered to be sinful (e.g. drug dealing and committing financial frauds) is no longer sinful if the activities are done to benefit Islam and the global Muslim community. In the context of achieving salvation, jihadists emphasise how everyone who achieves martyrdom through violent struggle is automatically accepted into

¹²⁸ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 11; Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement*, 269.

¹²⁹ Braddock, "The Impact of Jihadist Terrorist Narratives", 16.

¹³⁰ Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement*, 9.

¹³¹ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 12.

¹³² Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*.

¹³³ Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement*, 268.

¹³⁴ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 12.

¹³⁵ Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement*, 269.

¹³⁶ Ranstorp, *Islamist Extremism*, 12.

Paradise, are spared from the Torment of the Grave, and can intervene on behalf of their loved ones on the Day of Judgment.

Another motivational argument asserts that Muslims are obligated to choose a side between the camps of Islam and disbelief. This is done, for instance, by reminding target audiences that Muslims are obligated to show loyalty and solidarity toward one another while distancing and hating others. For Muslims residing in Western countries, this has traditionally meant withdrawal from the surrounding, morally corrupt society that is also presumed to be hostile towards Muslims. Stricter interpretations present two options: emigration to areas where Muslims are surrounded by true believers or participation in the violent struggle against the disbelievers locally (this may also include non-violent means). Neutrality or inaction is seen as an act of disbelief and treason toward the global Muslim community.¹³⁷

Communication targeting Western audiences

During the last seven years, jihadism in Western countries has been predominantly connected to the conflict in Syria and Iraq and ISIS,¹³⁸ although al-Qaeda is still considered by European security officials to be a relevant actor and threat.¹³⁹ Al-Qaeda's appeal, however, has been weak compared to ISIS during most of the recent decade,¹⁴⁰ and its efforts to target audiences residing in Western countries with its messaging have been modest. ISIS, however, has exhibited remarkable cognisance of the modern media environment, more so than virtually any other jihadist group previously. ISIS has sought to create a diverse and complex communications apparatus in which messages and formats are intertwined in a way that maximises the size of the spread of its messaging to a diverse range of targeted audiences and the emotional resonance within them.¹⁴¹ During its peak years (2013–2016), ISIS

¹³⁷ Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement*, 158.

¹³⁸ See e.g. Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone & Eva Entenmann, *Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West* (Milano: Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2017).

¹³⁹ Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020* (European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2020), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>, 33; Raffaello Pantucci, "A View from the CT Foxhole: Gilles de Kerchove, European Union Counter-Terrorism Coordinator", *CTC Sentinel* 13/8 (2020).

¹⁴⁰ Asfandyar Mir & Colin Clarke, "Al Qaeda's Franchise Reboot", *Foreign Affairs*, 9 September 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2020-09-09/al-qaedas-franchise-reboot>.

¹⁴¹ Haroro Ingram, "The Strategic Logic of Islamic State's Full-Spectrum Propaganda", in Stephane Baele, Katherine Boyd & Travis Coan (eds.), *ISIS Propaganda: A Full-Spectrum Extremist Message* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 20–21.

produced an unprecedented volume of culturally and ideologically tailored content to countless target audiences globally in several formats and languages.¹⁴² The group expertly used its communications strategy to amplify its recruitment.¹⁴³ In addition to content created by the group itself, content was actively produced by a legion of activists within its global support networks that supported the group itself as well as the foreign fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join its ranks.

ISIS media production has not only been unprecedented in terms of volume and quality, but also in the diversity of communication formats used. For its many and varied target audiences, the group has produced newspapers, magazines, movies, YouTube videos, radio broadcasts, books, poetry, and a cappella hymns (anashid).¹⁴⁴ Producing this content in many languages has been important to ISIS as it aids the group in its efforts to form, sustain, and strengthen an image as a global actor with global ambitions. Solely for target audiences in Western countries, ISIS produces a significant amount of content in English, German, and French as well as smaller quantities in other languages.

In terms of content, the messaging produced by ISIS has considerably overlapped with earlier content made by other jihadist groups. Its communications as a whole have been significantly more visually and thematically consistent and uniform,¹⁴⁵ containing many distinct themes. One theme emphasises the group's cruelty and military prowess (toward its enemies) to highlight its strength and determination. Another theme deals with the grievances and injustices experienced by Sunni Muslims. In addition to these darker themes, there have been lighter themes that highlight the perceived positive aspects of the group's ambitions and activities. For instance, one theme portrays everyday life in the group's caliphate as the fulfilment of a religious utopia of righteous Muslims. Another theme deals with the sense of global belonging of Muslims, and the third one examines mercy as a mechanism of salvation.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² See e.g. Baele, Boyd & Coan (eds.), *ISIS Propaganda*.

¹⁴³ J.M. Berger, "Tailored Online Interventions: The Islamic State's Recruitment Strategy", *CTC Sentinel* 8/10 (2015).

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Hegghammer, "Afterword: The Uniqueness of the Islamic State", in Baele, Boyd & Coan (eds.), *ISIS Propaganda*, 267–269.

¹⁴⁵ Hegghammer, *The Caravan*, 268.

¹⁴⁶ Charlie Winter, *The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy* (Quilliam Foundation, 2015).

The thematic content emphasised in ISIS communications has shifted with changes in the group's immediate operating environment and strategic needs.¹⁴⁷ As ISIS began to suffer repeated setbacks and defeats in Syria and Iraq, the visibility of themes dealing with feelings of belonging and solidarity, the religious utopia of the caliphate,¹⁴⁸ and mercy have become less prominent in its communications. Instead, themes covering the tribulations facing true believers and ISIS cruelty and violence – particularly in the context of international terrorism – have been emphasised.¹⁴⁹ This has meant a return to a similar pattern of communications as during the Islamic State of Iraq years (2006–2013). A similar thematic shift can be observed in the official statements of the group's senior figures.¹⁵⁰

The capacity of ISIS to produce content and reach its intended target audiences has suffered significant setbacks. However, during its peak years, an enormous volume of content was created and distributed widely online, leaving a legacy through which the group's "virtual caliphate" still remains and expands in various virtual environments. The foundation for this legacy was laid during the peak years of 2013–2016 when the group and its supporters could distribute content fairly openly on various social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and several smaller platforms. The most significant period for this type of activity was between 2013 and 2014, which is considered to be the golden era of the "jihadisphere".

Since 2014, there has been a systematic effort to remove jihadist content online. Consequently, distributing jihadist content on openly accessible sites and platforms has become significantly more challenging. However, there still appears to be considerable demand for jihadist content despite the setbacks experienced by ISIS.

Facilitated in large part by the setbacks suffered by ISIS, the centre of gravity in jihadist communications in a Western context appears to be shifting from Syria and Iraq to Europe – at least temporarily. During the next few years, jihadist content will likely be produced by activists and networks within the local jihadist milieus, particularly in Germany, France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Much of the content will be

¹⁴⁷ See e.g. Haroro Ingram, "Islamic State's English-Language Magazines, 2014–2017: Trends & Implications for CT-CVE Strategic Communications", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 8, no. 15 (2018), <http://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2018.1.03>.

¹⁴⁸ ISIS, however, has emphasised in its communications that the loss of the caliphate is a temporary tribulation and that its victory is inevitable. Colin Clarke & Haroro Ingram, "Defeating the Nostalgia Narrative", *The RAND Blog*, 19 April 2018, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/04/defeating-the-isis-nostalgia-narrative.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Ingram, "Islamic State's English-Language Magazines".

¹⁵⁰ See e.g. Haroro Ingram, Craig Whiteside & Charlie Winter, *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020).

distributed locally, and some will spread throughout Europe and possibly the world. New activists – keyboard warriors, firebrand preachers, and ideologues – with the desire, capacity, and cultural knowledge to produce tailored and resonant content and to reach different target audiences are likely to emerge. It is also possible that jihadist communications will entail more external cultural influences and subcultures, including a broad range of visual imagery and symbolism ranging from memes to hip-hop and emojis to “shit-posting”.¹⁵¹ Shared culture and language (e.g. vocabulary, imagery, and communication style) can make it easier to communicate the finer points of the ideology to targeted audiences and shape their views and beliefs.¹⁵²

Producing culturally resonant content has been a key element in how jihadism has evolved in Western countries. As Thomas Hegghammer noted, many individuals residing in Western countries who become interested in jihadism have consumed huge amounts of jihadist content online before seeking to become more familiar with the ideology or engaged in jihadist activities either independently or as a part of an armed group.¹⁵³

Although jihadist content is available in multiple languages, many peripheral countries within the broader European jihadist milieu – such as Finland – have not developed visible, openly accessible, and dynamic virtual communities in their own languages. Many of the individuals who reside in Finland and are interested in and connected to the phenomenon in one way or another appear to participate in online conversations in English or other languages, as such material is more readily accessible. It is possible, if not likely, that individuals from Finland participate in the creation of jihadist content in other languages. The jihadist online milieu is strongly transnational, and the local dimension of jihadist communications in Finland has traditionally been limited. For instance, openly accessible content does not contain texts or visual messaging in which Finland or people residing in Finland are explicitly identified as enemies. Finland is occasionally mentioned in jihadist content but usually only as one of many Western countries. If there is any content online specifically tailored to a Finnish target audience, it is highly likely to be low in quantity and located in closed environments with restricted access.

¹⁵¹ On these type of activists in the context of the foreign fighter mobilisation to Syria, see e.g. Joseph Carter, Shiraz Maher & Peter Neumann, *#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks* (ICSR, 2014), <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Influence-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf>.

¹⁵² Baele, Boyd & Coan (eds.), *Isis Propaganda*, 3; Neil Krishan Aggarwal, *Media Persuasion in the Islamic State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 21–22.

¹⁵³ Andrew Anthony, “The Art of Making a Jihadist”, *The Guardian*, 23 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/23/the-culture-that-makes-a-jihadi-thomas-hegghammer-interview-poetry-militancy>.

3 National news reporting of violent extremist ideologies

In addition to the content disseminated on social media, the societal significance of extremist ideologies also depends on how they will be discussed, reproduced, and shared outside these online platforms. In this context, coverage in news media plays a central role. Therefore, the second part of this report analyses how violent extremism and its associated ideologies are generally covered in the national news media of Finland. The role of the national media is particularly central here, as its reach is so wide.

News media is by no means the only channel or powerful actor in the public debate. Among others, communications by governmental authorities, political parties, and non-governmental organisations have their own important roles. For example, media affiliated with political parties influence which phenomena receive public attention, how they are framed, and which interpretations become mainstream.

It should be emphasised that news reporting on violence-endorsing and dehumanising speech that draws public attention to it should not be automatically considered undesirable. In fact, covering these views can be seen as an integral part of the basic functions of journalism in a liberal democracy. The publicity received by extremist ideologies is not unequivocally undesirable from the perspective of preventing violent extremism either. It is not only pertinent how *much* extremist ideologies and activities are covered publicly but also *how* they are covered. Next, the report will focus on describing the features of news coverage on the topic of extremist ideologies, followed by reflections on the role of the news media and violent extremism in light of earlier research.

3.1 Material

A small portion of the news coverage on extremist views and ideologies deals with them as their main topic, while there is clearly a larger number of articles that tangentially touch on the topic in various contexts. Mentions in news articles are rarely related to any particular posts or online platforms but often refer more broadly to the existence of these types of views. For example, discussions on the online platforms

analysed in the first part of this report are seldom directly referenced in the news coverage.¹⁵⁴

Thus, analysing news coverage on extremism and extremist thought requires a broader approach. This includes looking at how those broader ideologies and world views which extremist thought and activity also draw from, are covered in the news media. To achieve this objective, the research group built an extensive dataset containing news coverage of the topic from over a period of almost two years (March 1, 2019–December 31, 2020). The dataset includes news coverage from the most important national news media (Helsingin Sanomat, Iltta-Sanomat, Iltalehti, and YLE's website).

The analysed material was collected using a set of keywords related to violence-endorsing and dehumanising speech and the ideologies connected to them, as well as keywords commonly found in the news coverage of extremist actors and extremist thought.¹⁵⁵ The search results were manually reviewed, and articles with no connection to the examined phenomenon were excluded.

News articles without any connection to Finland or Western countries were also excluded from the dataset. In the context of ISIS and al-Qaeda, for example, articles focusing exclusively on the situation in various conflict zones outside of Europe were excluded. It is important to note that the material did not include news coverage of extremist speech in party politics unless there was a clear and explicit link to the extraparliamentary context. It should also be noted, however, that during the period examined in this report, a number of articles dealing with parliamentarians' speeches accepting violence and dehumanising others were also published.

¹⁵⁴ The material contains a total of 93 mentions related to these online platforms, 26 of which are connected to extremist speech. Furthermore, there are 16 mentions related to extremist speech or (borderline illegal) extraparliamentary activities in other ways. Thematically, these mentions deal mostly with far-right and anti-immigration speech. Ylilauta is mentioned most often.

¹⁵⁵ The keywords (in Finnish) used were akselerationismi, Al-Hol, Al-Naba, Al-Qaida/Al-Qaeda, anarkismi, Antifa, antifasismi, antisemitismi, Atomwaffen, Charlie Hebdo, Christchurch, Columbine, Daytonin isku, ekstremismi, El Pason isku, etnonationalismi, fasismi, fasismin vastainen, Feuerkrieg, Hallen isku, Hanaun isku, Hommaforum, incel, ISIS + Adnani/Bagdadi/Baghdadi, Isis + corona/COVID-19/korona, Isis + Dabiq/Rumiyah, Isis + Suomi, islamismi, itsenäisyyspäivä, jihadismi, juutalaisvastainen, Kansallismielisten liitto, kansallissosialismi, Kohti vapautta, koulu + uhka, kouluampuminen, kouluhyökkäys, kouluisku, koulusurma, koulu-uhkaus, Partisaani, poliittinen väkivalta, Proletariaatit, Punk in Finland, PVL, Ranska + isku, Soldiers of Odin, synagoga, takku.net, Turun puukotus/isku, uusnatsi, Varisverkosto, vastarinta.com, vastarintaliike, Wienin isku, Ylilauta, ääriajattelu, ääri-islam, ääriiliike, äärioikeisto, ääriryhmä, ääriivasemmisto. Searches were performed using each media's own search function and the Mohawk Analytics media database.

In its entirety, the dataset contained a total of 1824 articles. Of these, 475 were published in Helsingin Sanomat, 410 in Iltalehti, 444 in Ilta-Sanomat, and 495 on YLE's website.

The articles in the dataset that deal with extremist speech for more than a passing sentence or mention were selected for a more detailed analysis. This included articles covering extremist speech or the ideologies behind it, the communications of extremist actors, the availability of extremist material online, extremist symbols, or the ideological motives and background of relevant actors. Articles dealing with countering radicalisation were also included. About one-third of the articles fulfilled these criteria. The dataset was divided into sub-sections based on ideology and then further processed using a data-driven thematic analysis.¹⁵⁶

3.2 Key findings

The analysis indicated that extremist actors and extremist thought were covered in a significant number of news articles in 2019–2020. On average, 19 articles per week were published on the topic. This means that there were almost five articles per week in each of the national news media analysed in this report, indicating that extremism and extremist thought receives significant attention in the Finnish-language national news media.

Most of the news coverage focused on the far right. Likewise, jihadism has received extensive attention. It is pertinent to note that the dataset does not include all news coverage on jihadism but only articles that have a connection to the Western context. This means that it includes, for example, news coverage of the Syrian–Iraq conflict only if it deals with Western foreign fighters or Western citizens in the al-Hol camp, etc. In Table 1, the number of articles is divided by ideological current. If several ideological currents are covered in the article, classification has been made according to the current that receives the most attention within it.

¹⁵⁶ News coverage on the incel subculture was not analysed separately in the report. Only a handful of news articles about the phenomenon were found, and most were connected to the far right. News articles focusing explicitly on the incel phenomenon were connected to attacks in North America with suspected incel-type motives. These articles discuss the key beliefs of the incels as well as the extent to which the phenomenon is observable in Finland (implying that it also exists here).

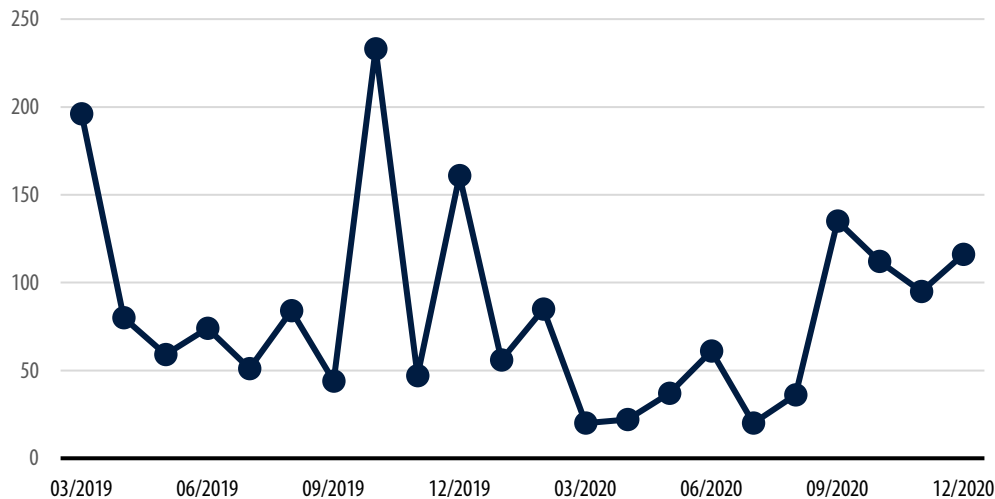
Table 2. Number of articles divided by media and primary topic (entire dataset, N = 1824)

	HS	IL	IS	YLE	Total
Far-right	242	141	195	208	786
Leftist anarchism and anti-fascism	22	16	8	13	59
Jihadism	124	173	159	136	592
School shootings	59	73	71	101	304
Incel	4	0	1	2	7
General articles ¹⁵⁷	24	7	10	35	76

Overall, the news coverage of these subjects is characterised by reactivity. The articles focus heavily on the aftermath of certain events that received significant public attention. Indeed, the largest peaks are connected to the aftermaths of the mosque attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019, and the school attack in Kuopio in October 2019. Additional peaks include other attacks in Europe, the al-Hol camp issue, and domestic far-right activities.

Most of the news coverage deals with what has happened, how others have reacted to it, and what should be done in the future. Such articles explain in detail the course of events and reports on the statements made by various parties. The ideologies connected to these events, however, receive less attention. In fact, in most articles, these ideologies are not examined at all, and when the ideological aspects are addressed, it is usually limited to a few sentences. However, there are a few longer articles in which issues related to extremist thought are the key focus. Because the total number of articles is also large, it can be concluded that extremist thought receives a fair amount of public attention. At the same time, the coverage given to ideological aspects is, in many respects, so shallow that the picture conveyed of the phenomenon remains superficial.

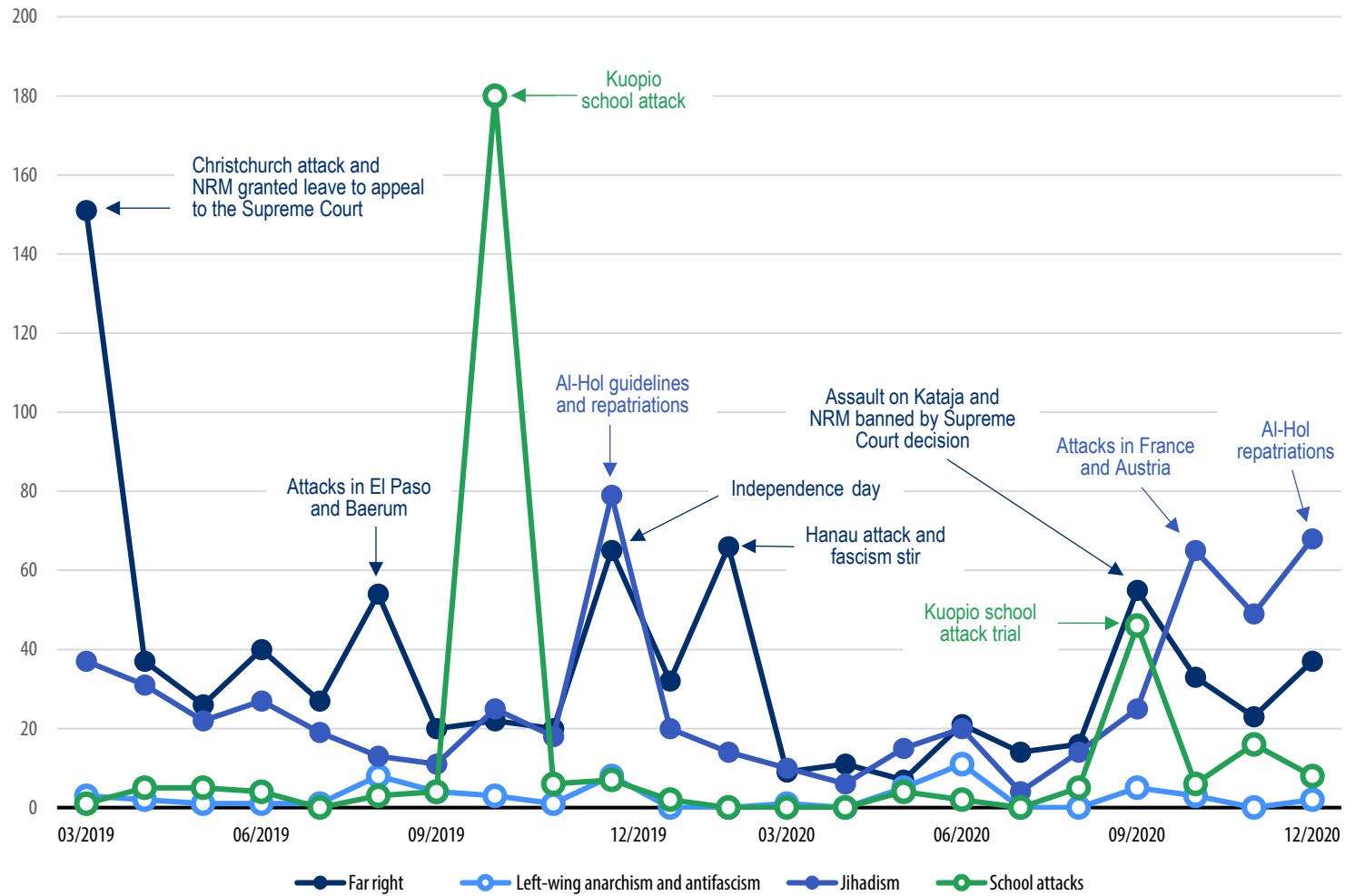
¹⁵⁷ This refers to articles that deal with extremist speech on a general level without making reference to any ideological current (or deal equally with several currents).

Figure 1. The number of articles published per month (entire dataset, N = 1824)

The tone of the news coverage is largely negative. In general, there is very little content that could be considered as glorifying extremist thought or violent activism. News articles focusing on jihadism are strongly dominated by the security threats associated with the phenomenon and the portrayal of the ISIS's activities as brutal and extreme. The negative tone is evident in the coverage of the far right. When it comes to school shootings, the tone has been two-fold: On the one hand, the act is considered reprehensible, but the perceived difficulties behind the act are covered in a more empathetic manner. In the coverage of left-wing anarchist and anti-fascist activities, the tone is generally more neutral, especially in articles that profile the individuals involved in them.

The analysis found that news coverage largely follows widely shared best practices in reporting on terrorism and extremist violence. For example, in the news coverage of the school attack in Kuopio, most of the attention was focused on rescue operations and the course of events rather than on the perpetrator; in others, images of the perpetrator and content from their social media accounts were not published, even when they were available. However, the dataset also includes articles that give detailed publicity to the content produced by the perpetrators of violent activities, such as individual manifestos. Some of the imagery published as part of the news coverage includes symbols related to extremism, screenshots of extremist actors' own videos, and images published online by foreign fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq.

Figure 2. Number of articles published per month per ideological current, categorised by primary focus. Refers to all material included in the analysis, excluding news coverage on the incel subculture and general-level articles.



The amount of attention given to ideology when explaining extremist activism and the motives of those who participate in it varies depending on the ideological current. In the case of jihadism, actions are most typically contextualised by describing the development of the broader jihadist movement. For individual extremists, this is done by going through what is known about their lives and experiences. This was also typical in coverage of school shootings. For those who participated in jihadist activities, the change in religious views is often mentioned, but the attention given to the content of those beliefs and the ideological dimension of the jihadist movement more broadly remains limited. When it comes to the far right, the ideological dimension gets more and diverse attention in the news coverage.

3.3 News coverage on the far right

The dataset contains a total of almost 800 news articles in which far-right activism or ideology is the focus. Not only is the news coverage of this ideology most abundant, but it is also the most diverse in terms of themes and approaches. This diversity applies to both news coverage of the far right in general and to the ways in which the articles deal with far-right ideologies and the communications related to them. Overall, far-right worldviews receive considerable attention in the news. While far-right ideologies are not typically the main topic of articles, many tangentially refer to them in one way or another. For these reasons, the section on far-right news coverage is broader than the others.

The large volume of news articles on the far right is most likely connected to the topicality of the subject and the many poignant events that have emphasised its significance. Another factor that has contributed is that a number of violent extremist attacks took place during the examined period. Ideology comes up frequently, typically in the context of motives for these attacks, as well as in the manifestos and videos published by the perpetrators. Because of the coverage of terrorist attacks, a significant proportion of the analysed articles is connected to developments abroad, although there are also several domestic events and developments that received significant attention in the media. The news coverage of these attacks clearly shows that they were not considered international news only. Indeed, the ideological elements of terrorist acts abroad are also seen as present in Finland, and the domestic situation is occasionally referred to in news coverage on attacks abroad.

The abundance of news coverage on the far right may also be explained by the fact that material on related ideologies is readily available on openly accessible online platforms in both Finnish and English, making it a fairly accessible topic. In this respect, the situation is fundamentally different from that of jihadist content in the examined period.

Far-right violence and its threat

News coverage related to far-right violence and threats of violence, as well as the aftermath of attacks (including trials), forms the most significant thematic category of analysed material, of which the terrorist attacks in 2019–2020 stand out. In particular, the attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019, in which a far-right terrorist equipped with firearms attacked two mosques, received considerable attention in the Finnish media. Other relatively widely reported cases were the terrorist attacks in El Paso, Texas, and Halle and Hanau, Germany, in 2019 and 2020, as well as an attempted attack on a mosque in Bærum, Norway, in August 2019.

The media content examining the attackers' ideological background forms a recurring element in the news coverage of the attacks, although it is not often an explicit focus despite the relatively large number of news articles on these attacks during the examined period. Typically, sections commenting on far-right ideologies are only a few paragraphs or sentences in length and are situated between sections commenting on the attack itself, its victims, rescue operations, and the reactions of the authorities.

Manifestos and other messages published by the far-right terrorists themselves are an important part of the news coverage of ideology, particularly in the context of the Christchurch attack. News articles focusing on the incident often reflect the views expressed by the terrorist in his manifesto on how the jihadist terrorist attack in Stockholm in spring 2017 and the sexual violence of people with an immigrant background against autochthonous European population – including incidents in Oulu, Finland – acted as catalysts for the act. The terrorists' allegations of the alleged marginalisation of the white population in the West through immigration (so-called white genocide) are also occasionally mentioned. The perpetrator is stated to have described himself as a racist, a supporter of white supremacy, and an ethnonationalist, and the act is described as an expression of the global hatred of Muslims. In the case of the El Paso attack, news stories occasionally highlight the attacker's allegation in his manifesto that Latin Americans were invading the United States, although it should be noted that the content of his manifesto is often also described as racist without repeating the perpetrator's actual message. The news articles covering the Halle and Hanau attacks, in turn, refer to the antisemitic and anti-immigrant views expressed by the perpetrators in their messages, as well as their views on the so-called "Great Replacement". In the case of the Hanau attack in particular, media stories also deal with the attacker's misconceptions about being persecuted by intelligence services.

The news coverage of the Christchurch and El Paso attacks – as well as the attempted attack in Norway – presents the admiration that the perpetrator expressed for earlier far-right terrorists. In the case of Christchurch, news articles refer to the

attacker's admiration for Anders Behring Breivik and Dylann Roof, 158 while in the articles covering the El Paso and Børsum incidents, the press highlights the perpetrator's admiration for the Christchurch terrorist. Indeed, experts interviewed by media representatives state that a subculture glorifying earlier terrorists and mass murderers can be found on image and message boards online and that the El Paso shooter, among others, published his manifesto through one such website.

The examined news articles are highly critical of the views expressed by the perpetrators, with some of the more opinionated pieces strongly condemning them. The articles report on politicians' exceedingly negative descriptions of the ideological world of the perpetrators, and, in the case of the Christchurch attack, Australian Senator Fraser Anning's views on Muslim immigration as a driving force behind the attack.

The attacks' ideological dimensions are also examined outside the perpetrators' messages. The notion of the mainstreaming of xenophobic views and its connection to far-right violence is featured in many news articles. In the context of the terrorist attacks in El Paso and Germany in particular, the impact of the use of language by former US President Donald Trump and the political party *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AfD) is considered. The attack in Halle also served as a trigger for articles that reflect broadly on antisemitism in Germany and elsewhere in Western countries. The view that antisemitism has increased is strongly present in these articles, and they also weigh the possible underlying factors behind this development.

News coverage of acts of violence abroad discusses, rather elaborately, how far-right ideologies are visible online and how easily ideological content supporting the far right spreads on social media. Many news articles bring forth the existence of a transnational virtual community that mainstreams and disseminates far-right material inciting violence and provides positive and validating responses to one's own ideas. In the coverage of the Christchurch attack, the focus is primarily on the online dissemination of the video of the attack, but some of the material also comments on how the perpetrator received ideological inspiration from online image boards and YouTube. The attacker's inclusion of memes in his manifesto and attack video and his appeal to supporters to create new memes based on the attack are also mentioned in the material. In the case of the El Paso attack, the focus is on image boards online and particularly the 8Chan online community through which the attacker published his

¹⁵⁸ Dylann Roof committed an attack motivated by far-right ideology in a church frequented by African-Americans located in Charleston, South Carolina in the United States in June 2015. See, e.g. Sophia Brown & Jonathan Matusitz, "U.S. Church Leaders' Responses to the Charleston Church Shooting: An Examination Based on Speech Act Theory", *Journal of Media and Religion* 18/1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2019.1642008>, 29.

manifesto. In an article published in August 2019, Helsingin Sanomat covers in great detail the nature of the discussion on 8Chan and other image boards, and the history of image board culture in general. Image boards are seen in the coverage as contributing to the spread of extremist views, and some media coverage calls for action against them (more on this below).

In addition to news articles focusing on individual terrorist acts, the coverage also includes articles that consider previous attacks abroad. For example, in an article published in June 2020, YLE reviews terrorist attacks around the world inspired by the Christchurch attack, interviewing an expert on the similarities between the worldviews of the far right and jihadists, among others.

Likewise, news coverage of accelerationist neo-Nazi networks includes the context of far-right terrorism, even though the stories on the subject are not always related to past attacks. For instance, in an article published in July 2020, Iltalehti deals extensively with the recruitment activities of The Base accelerationist network and describes the network's worldview, objectives, and the background of the people trying to become a part of it.

In the context of violence and attempted attacks in Finland, the news coverage includes the assault on Pekka Kataja (a municipal councillor of the Finns Party) in the summer of 2020, an attempt by an individual wearing a Soldiers of Odin jacket to assault Foreign Minister Timo Soini, and a lawsuit filed against a Latvian-born neo-Nazi residing in Finland for plans to attack foreigners on New Year's Eve 2018. In the context of the assault on Mr. Kataja, ideological factors are addressed in connection with the ideological backgrounds of Kansallismielisten liittouma (Alliance of Nationalists) and the Soldiers of Odin, as well as through the possible motives of the suspects, but the news coverage on the subject also considers the connections between the Finns Party and the far right and the intersection of these ideological worldviews. For example, an expert interviewed in a news article published by YLE in September 2020 states that the Finns Party and far-right extraparliamentary actors are united not only by similar views on immigration policy, but also by similar enemy images and a more general criticism of mainstream thought. In the context of the attempted assault on Foreign Minister Soini, news coverage sometimes tangentially refers to the ideology of the Soldiers of Odin, but it focuses more on the intimidation of politicians and hate speech on a general level, partly because the perpetrator's connection to the organisation could not be verified. In the case of the planned New Year's Eve 2018 attack, the defendant's thoughts on the segregation of cultural and religious groups and his admiration for national socialism are mentioned.

The material also includes a few articles that provide a more general discussion of far-right violence and its threat in Finland. For example, in an extensive article published

in June 2020, YLE examines the attacks and attempted attacks against Finnish politicians after the Second World War, and also considers the background of the far right's acts of violence. In addition to the far-right violence associated with Finland, occasional references to the domestic context are made in connection with terrorist attacks abroad. For instance, discussions of the Christchurch attacker's manifesto include the fact that the sexual offences in Oulu are mentioned in that text. Likewise, a discussion on the role of international image boards in far-right terrorism includes the fact that content glorifying political violence has been published on Finnish image boards. Similarly, an article dealing extensively with the incitement of violence online, published by Helsingin Sanomat in June 2019, discusses the visibility of the phenomenon in Finnish-language social media. Furthermore, the broader discussions about immigration in Finland are mentioned in connection with attacks abroad. For example, an article published by Helsingin Sanomat after the attack in El Paso considers the possible risk of violence related to an escalation of the Finnish immigration debate.

Other activities by extremist actors

Although the context of far-right violence dominates the news coverage related to ideology, a significant portion of the coverage also deals with extremist activism beyond acts of violence. The demonstration procession planned by Towards Freedom! (Kohti Vapautta!, KV!) – characterised as an extension of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) – for Finnish Independence Day 2019 forms the most recurring theme in this category. News coverage of the procession often tangentially refers to the legal grounds for banning the NRM, but the articles also examine the decision by the police to ban the procession in question and compare the visual symbolism of the NRM and KV!. News articles on the subject highlight the fact that the police had decided to ban the march in advance, as KV! was suspected of continuing the activities of the NRM and aiming to spread messages of racism, violence, and discrimination against foreigners and ethnic and sexual minorities. On Independence Day 2019, NRM members were able to march as part of a demonstration organised by the Soldiers of Odin, and many news articles later highlighted the fact that the procession was associated with slogans, insignia, and banners similar to those used by the NRM in previous years. In the coverage examining the symbolism of the NRM and KV!, articles also deal with the heart of Tursas symbol used by the latter, which is characterised as a swastika of sorts.

The ideology of the NRM is also covered in the context of its other activities, although some of these news articles also deal with the ideology of the organisation through the legal grounds that led to its banning. One example of this is an article published in May 2019 that addresses the authorities' suspicions that the NRM was seeking to continue its activism despite the decision to ban it.

The NRM and KV! are also linked to antisemitic activism through the vandalism of various Jewish targets. Although the organisations are not directly accused of these acts, they are linked in the news coverage by, for instance, stating that KV! burned the Israeli flag in Tampere on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and distributed its propaganda in Hamina before an act of vandalism targeted a Jewish cemetery. In the coverage of vandalism against the Israeli Embassy in Helsinki, suspicions are directed more explicitly towards the NRM. The growth of antisemitism in Finland and its background are also examined in the material in connection with vandalism. One example is an article published by Helsingin Sanomat in January 2020 in which Åbo Akademi University researchers state that far-right antisemitism is gaining momentum from growing populism, the appeal of white supremacy, and conspiracy theories connected to the Jewish people, and propagated by groups that share these views.

News articles focusing on the ideology of other extremist actors are relatively fragmented in the context of non-violent activities. Some of the articles covering the US presidential election in 2020 highlight the Proud Boys' views on chauvinism, Islam, Judaism, and the alleged threat to white men. The ideology and membership of the Soldiers of Odin, on the other hand, are extensively discussed in only one news article published during the examined period that focuses on a recently published photobook about the organisation.

Trials of non-violent offences

Trials and legal proceedings related to far-right extremist acts in the context of non-violent offences are also addressed in the news coverage. In particular, the legal process for the banning of the NRM is widely reported on during the period. The news coverage on the subject concerns both the appeal permission granted to the organisation by the Supreme Court (Korkein oikeus, KKO) in March 2019 and the final verdict, i.e. the KKO's disbandment decision in September 2020. Although the ideology of the NRM is often discussed briefly in the news coverage, some articles elaborate on the topic in more depth.

The media coverage focusing on the legal process has not provided the NRM with the publicity it sought for its ideology, as its ideology is often addressed through discussion of the lawsuit against the organisation and the verdicts passed by various courts. For example, the NRM's views on ethnic and sexual minorities are described in the coverage as hate speech and in violation of good manners, and the organisation's political objectives are considered contrary to fundamental democratic values and the Finnish Constitution. The legal grounds for banning the NRM also emerge in other contexts, such as in the news coverage of the demonstration by KV!

that was to take place on Independence Day 2019 and the court case for the disbanding of the motorcycle gang United Brotherhood.

The examined material also deals with other legal proceedings concerning the NRM. The decision of its members to carry Nazi Germany's swastika flags in their 2018 Independence Day demonstration and their demonstration in the spring of 2018 on the outskirts of Merilahti Comprehensive School led to charges being filed against the organisation. In the news coverage focusing on the subject, the public prosecutor describes the message of the swastika as targeting certain groups of people and being threatening and offensive from the perspective of legislation. The speech given by NRM members near Merilahti Comprehensive School is described as racist, slanderous, and offensive to immigrant student and youth groups. Thus, in these news articles, the ideology of the organisation is described in a very negative tone.

In addition to the NRM, the material also includes news about lawsuits against other extremist actors and activists. For example, convictions of British neo-Nazis and neo-Nazi organisations in other foreign countries are sometimes discussed, and their external and internal communications are presented in this context.

Countering far-right extremism

The news coverage also includes views on opposition to far-right actors and their ideologies. Violence and plots often act as impetus for this type of coverage. A significant portion of the articles dealing with the subject focus on measures to be taken online – primarily on social media. News articles in the aftermath of the Christchurch attack often highlight the pressure that politicians have exerted on social media companies to invest more heavily in removing extremist material from their platforms. Articles on the attack also report on measures taken by individual countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, to remove extremist online content. While the video of the Christchurch attack, filmed by the attacker and posted on Facebook, is often at the centre of this type of news coverage, it also includes a broader consideration of removing extremist content from social media. After the El Paso attack, media attention focuses on image boards. The coverage includes the demand by 8Chan founder and former owner Fredrick Brennan to close the image board, as well as news on the decisions made by network companies Cloudflare and Epik to discontinue providing services to 8Chan. However, experts interviewed in the context of the attack state that the closure of image boards would likely drive extremist discussions into new forums rather than shutting them down.

One of the themes of opposing far-right actors and ideologies offline is the duty of the Finnish police to intervene in the public display of the NRM's symbols and ideology if

such attempts are made after the court order to disband the organisation. Outside of the coverage of the KKO's judgments, the issue is often addressed in connection with the demonstration planned for Independence Day 2019. Countering far-right ideologies offline is also discussed in news coverage in the context of acts of violence and antisemitic vandalism, although some of the statements on the subject are quite general in nature. For example, value-based leadership, democracy, and a functioning rule of law are mentioned as a means of combating hatred and its transformation into violence. Furthermore, it is worth noting that countering far-right ideologies often intertwines with more general-level discussions on how to counter far-right extremism. Thus, it is often difficult to distinguish coverage that deals specifically with countering the ideology from that dealing with the fight against the phenomenon as a whole.

Articles focusing on deradicalisation programmes, such as exit activities and counter-radicalisation work in prisons, are scarce in the studied coverage, and they do not focus exclusively on the far right. These articles address the support that a variety of professionals provide to individuals wanting to disengage from extremism, as well as how extremist views are challenged in deradicalisation programmes.

More general news coverage of far-right ideologies and symbols

Although far-right ideologies and symbols are strongly visible in the coverage of violent attacks and the other activities of extremist actors, it should be noted that these topics have also been covered in other contexts. For example, ethnonationalism – an ideology that the perpetrator of the Christchurch attack supported – comes up in articles about a controversial tweet by a Finns Party Youth politician in the spring of 2019, which the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman saw as violating the prohibition of discrimination based on ethnic origin. The ideological content of ethnonationalism is also examined in the news in the context of the party conference organised by the Finns Party in the summer of 2019 and in a few broader articles unrelated to party politics. Similarly, fascism and its history are traced in articles prompted by a public statement issued by the second vice-president of the Finns Party Youth in February 2020, in which he described himself as an ethnonationalist, traditionalist, and fascist.

Antisemitism is also a theme in the more general news coverage on far-right ideologies. Although the topic is mainly discussed in connection with the acts of vandalism in Finland and the Halle terrorist attack, it is also discussed separately from such deeds. For example, in a column published in March 2019, *Ilta-Sanomat* deals extensively with antisemitism in Finland and elsewhere in the Western countries, as well as with the possible background factors contributing to it. It should be noted that, in addition to antisemitism on the far right, antisemitism originating from the far left and Europe's Muslim population is also discussed.

The news coverage also includes other articles on various ideological currents that are only partially related to the far right. Far-right ideologies come up, for example, in articles on conspiracy theories. An article published by the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation in April 2020 that deals extensively with the anatomy of conspiracy theories and their connection to the coronavirus epidemic links the subject to far-right and anti-immigration ideologies more broadly, stating that some supporters who share these views suspect the virus to be a mechanism for disguising the “Great Replacement”. Additionally, in articles focusing on the QAnon conspiracy theory and the similarities between the incel subculture and the far right, the main topic is only partially connected to far-right ideologies. Likewise, stories on hate speech often deal with the phenomenon more generally, although the material also includes news specifically related to insults and intimidation from far-right actors and activists.

Far-right symbols, especially the so-called OK hand signal, are the focus of news articles on several occasions. Although the subject is addressed in the news coverage of the Christchurch attack after the accused formed the OK hand signal during his imprisonment trial, many articles examine the symbol more broadly. For example, in an article published in September 2019, YLE states that the Anti-Defamation League classifies the OK sign as a symbol of hatred and refers to the organisation’s view that the far right uses the hand sign as a mechanism for trolling and a message to other far-right supporters in selfies published online. The background and meaning of the symbol are explained in even greater detail in an article published by Helsingin Sanomat a few days later in which the newspaper reports on how the users of the 4Chan image board set out to distribute it – partly as a joke – in 2017.

3.4 News coverage on jihadism

News coverage of jihadist activities and ideology is predominantly focused on the Syrian–Iraq conflict and ISIS. Much of this news coverage focuses on the presence of women and their children from Finland in the al-Hol camp in northeastern Syria in the aftermath of the liberation of Baghouz in March 2019 and the subsequent collapse of the caliphate proclaimed by ISIS. Nearly half of the analysed news articles are connected in some way to al-Hol. Furthermore, there are dozens of articles about Western foreign fighters who have travelled to Syria and Iraq, as well as the situation of ISIS and the group’s statements. Another topic that received considerable attention is (suspected) jihadist attacks and attempted attacks in Western countries. Over a quarter of the articles are connected to these attacks or the subsequent trials. The attacks in autumn 2020 in France and Austria received the most attention.

The ideology of ISIS and its supporters is the focus of only a handful of articles published during the examined period. The primary focus of the news coverage is clearly on events and reactions to them, as well as what kind of measures should be taken in the future. The relative lack of coverage on the objectives and ideology of ISIS is at least partly due to the fact that the Syrian–Iraq conflict has been ongoing for a long time, and the readership is assumed to be familiar with ISIS.

The jihadist worldview and online materials come up briefly but repeatedly in different contexts. These mentions typically emphasise fear, control, extreme conservatism, anger, extremism, and violence. ISIS is said to seek to subjugate all peoples and the establishment of an Islamic state and to consider everyone outside of it as enemies, including Shia Muslims. The group is called, for example, the “cult of death” or “empire of hatred”. These expressions reflect the tone of news coverage of its objectives and ideology. A few of the articles also list various rules of conduct imposed by ISIS. Contrastingly, the narratives of empowerment and salvation that feature prominently in the group’s communications are given less attention. Muslims who have a negative attitude towards ISIS, and sometimes also individuals who have left the group, are given a public voice to comment on the phenomenon, but more often it is journalists, authorities, politicians, and researchers who offer comments in the related news coverage.

Views on the al-Hol residents and women’s role in ISIS

Throughout the examined period, news coverage focusing on al-Hol largely deals with how Finland should act with respect to its citizens and their children residing in the camp. Different aspects related to their situation are discussed several times, largely based on identical arguments and observations. Ideological questions come up in this context mainly in connection to three topics: What do the women think about ISIS now, what is the role of women in ISIS, its ideology and objectives, and how does growing up under ISIS’s rule affect the children?

The worldviews of the women residing in the camp are a key issue because those worldviews could affect the kind of security threat the women may pose after returning to Finland. In the news coverage, it is repeatedly stated that ISIS is still supported by those residing in the camp, and some are waiting for the return of the caliphate. The caliphate proclaimed by the group is believed to have moved with the women to the camp and that some of them strictly enforce ISIS’s rules and teachings. Thus, what these women think about ISIS is a matter of great interest. Clues about their thinking were sought in interviews done in the camp by journalists from Helsingin Sanomat and YLE and in interviews by the international press in which women from Finland appeared. The women’s comments in these interviews, which were conducted under

controlled conditions, are brief and quite general. Their comments are reported in detail and compared to other interviews given at different times.

The focus is primarily on whether women continue to support ISIS. Their views are stated to vary: Some appear to have lost faith in the group, while others are waiting for the return of the caliphate. The news coverage does not delve deeper than this on their thoughts. The responses of the interviewees regarding the status of women and the violence perpetrated by ISIS are limited mainly to stating that it is justified and in accordance with Sharia law. Occasionally, the news coverage explores the possibility of encouraging those who have taken part in jihadist activities to renounce their activism and extremist worldviews. This typically resulted in stories on exit programmes supporting deradicalisation.

Due to the situation in al-Hol, ISIS's views on women and their roles receive significant attention in the articles analysed. The articles state repeatedly that, according to ISIS, women's place in jihad is at home, and their most important task is to give birth to and raise children. At the same time, it is emphasised that women's activities in this role are an integral part of ISIS's strategy. Women should raise their children according to the ideology of the group and thus prepare them to become the next generation of ISIS. The role of women as recruiters and creators of online propaganda is also highlighted, as is the fact that some women are known to have been involved in the enslavement of the Yezidis.

Similarly, the relationship of minors to ISIS's ideology is discussed repeatedly. Instead of the content of the group's ideology, the discussion is connected to its internalisation, i.e. how strongly and irreversibly the minors in the camps may internalise the group's views. In this context, it is mentioned that the ideological indoctrination of all children living under ISIS begins young, with boys receiving armed training at an early age. As indicators of the minors' ideological shift, it is reported how young people in the al-Hol camp shouted pro-ISIS slogans to journalists. The articles also examine how these young people can be helped to break away from the ideology and deal with traumatic experiences, concluding largely that much can be achieved.

In addition to the women and children from Finland who ended up in al-Hol, the news articles deal with the camp's residents who have travelled to the conflict zone from elsewhere in Europe. Many of the articles are quite brief and largely focus on reporting the prison sentences these individuals have received, although there are a few longer stories that deal with the worldviews of those who have travelled to the conflict zone, gathered through messages sent by them to their friends and families. These articles provide a more diverse picture of the religiosity of the people in the camp and how the decision to travel to the conflict zone arose from their desire to help their fellow believers and to live and practice their faith in peace in a state that, in

their view, is built upon the principles of the faith. However, only a few such articles have been published.

ISIS communications and pro-ISIS content online

The news coverage highlights the fact that jihadist online content – which was described in the first part of the report – has been and continues to be available and that this content has played a significant role in the activities of ISIS and in its recruitment. Some articles point out that despite having lost the territory it had conquered, ISIS's caliphate continues to exist virtually based on online material and discussions. Occasionally, the reasons for the appeal of this online propaganda are also discussed.

Recordings and statements released by ISIS continued to make headlines. However, compared to the group's peak years, such recordings and statements during the examined period are more modest in number. News coverage of ISIS's official communications is relatively limited and relies mainly on reporting from international news agencies or magazines. Some of the news articles analysed for this study examine the content of the recordings and statements, occasionally using direct quotes. Some of the articles also include screenshots from audio-visual content. After the loss of its territory, the content and tone of ISIS propaganda are said to have shifted from fervour and grandiosity to a calmer portrayal of everyday life and the creation of hope for the continuation of the struggle.

The single piece of ISIS communication that receives the most attention in the news coverage is the video released in April 2019 in which the previous leader of the organisation – Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi – appeared for the first time in more than five years. There are also some articles about the COVID-19 instructions given by ISIS to its supporters in its al-Naba publication. These articles summarise the instructions and include the group's view that COVID-19 is a divinely ordained plague and revenge on those seen by the group as its enemies, including the West.

Even though the news articles mention that jihadist material is still online and that many ISIS supporters are producing it independently from the group, the social media material produced by supporters over the past two years is rarely addressed in the news coverage. One of the few articles dealing with the topic was published by Iltalehti. The article is based on a news story by Swedish magazine Expressen and focuses on pro-violence discussions on restricted pro-ISIS Facebook groups.

The news coverage also occasionally returns to jihadist online content published in previous years by both ISIS and its supporters. This is most typically done in news

articles focusing on the phases of ISIS operations or on individuals who have travelled to Syria. Older online material is addressed in a few news articles from early April 2019, in connection with the publication of a report commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior. Some of these articles extensively examine the contents, visuals, and narratives of online propaganda.

As may be expected, the most frequently mentioned individual posts and publications in the news coverage are social media content created or published by women from Finland and their appearance in ISIS communications. This is the case with an article published in ISIS's Dabiq magazine in 2016 in which a woman named Umm Khalid al-Finlandiyyah talks about how she converted to Islam and called for attacks in Europe. The illustration of the story features the Church Square Temple. A Twitter account called Umm Irhab, which was active in previous years and belonged to a woman from Finland, and an article published in ISIS's Rumiyah magazine – the author of which is said to be Umm Musa Al-Finlandiyyah – are mentioned several times. All three women eventually ended up in al-Hol camp.

The news coverage of online material includes several short direct quotations from jihadists. There is also occasionally images and screenshots of earlier content produced by ISIS and its supporters. Some of these are screenshots of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Furthermore, images uploaded by members of ISIS on social media of themselves working in the ranks of the group have also been published. The imagery published in the news coverage includes screenshots of the propaganda published by the group in previous years that highlight the ongoing violent struggle, as well as videos of executions carried out by the group and its members. The black and white flag of ISIS appears several times in the images, typically carried by a group member. While the content of ISIS's online propaganda is revealed in the news coverage directly through these quotes and images, the number of articles that feature such content is small.

Finnish-language content is less frequently analysed in the news articles, which is probably due to its scarcity. The contents of Finnish-language material on ISIS are most extensively discussed in an article published by *Ilta-Sanomat* in April 2019 that reviews the writings of "Fatima", a female convert who was active in Finnish women's networks and has travelled to Syria and returned, in an Islamic discussion forum. The article lists her views on acceptable and unacceptable behaviours for Muslims, which are quite clearly based on a strict and literal interpretation of Islam. In this context, the news article quotes messages in which she justifies violent struggle and presents it as a duty of every Muslim. It is also reported that the rigid Salafist doctrines spread by Finnish converts in online discussion forums have led some converts to renounce their faith.

Attacks in Western countries

A large part of coverage of attacks committed in the West comes from the latter half of 2020, when several attacks believed to be jihadism-inspired took place within a short period of time in France and Austria. The trial of an attack on Charlie Hebdo five years earlier, which began in early September 2020, also receive attention in the media. Some other attacks and attempted attacks are mentioned but receive little attention.

In the news coverage of attacks, issues relating to ideology receive scant attention. The primary focus is on the course of events during the attacks, eyewitness accounts, and reactions to the attack. One of the things dealt with immediately after the attack is the motive. The examination of potential motives, however, is almost entirely limited to whether the perpetrator was radicalised or not, i.e. whether the act had a political or religious motive. The acts are contextualised mainly by examining the respective personal histories and connections of the perpetrators while addressing their ideological views and contextualising them to the broader ideological currents is rare.

In determining attackers' motives, the news coverage largely draws on official statements and online content posted by the respective perpetrators on social media. As an indication of religious motives, the news coverage may mention, for example, what kind of social media updates or posts the attackers had made shortly before their attacks or in the past. Such information is available for most of the attacks from 2019–2020. However, such social media content is examined superficially, and articles do not usually include material produced by ISIS or the perpetrator, e.g. screenshots of social media updates or images of the perpetrator. One exception to this is the news coverage of the murder of a French teacher in autumn 2020. Social media posts and incitement to violence became a topic of broader discussion when it became apparent that the perpetrator was motivated by online incitement.

Connections between violent attacks and broader religious movements are sometimes drawn in news coverage focusing on the countermeasures that followed the attacks. For instance, after the attacks in Austria and France, the training of imams, closure of radical mosques, and attempts to remove terrorist content from the network are mentioned. In the context of the incidents in France, ideological issues are dealt with much more broadly than in connection to attacks elsewhere. The deeper contextualisation reflects the fact that the interpretation of freedom of expression and the role of religion in French society became widely debated in France and elsewhere. In the coverage discussing countermeasures, concerns about whether violent extremism might become associated exclusively with Islamism are occasionally expressed.

3.5 News coverage on school shootings

The relatively high number of news articles in the dataset on school shootings is almost entirely due to the Kuopio school attack in October 2019 and the subsequent trial a year later. Most of the news articles analysed in this report are connected to these two events. There are also a few superficial news articles about school shootings in the United States and previous school attacks in Finland. Another recurring topic in brief news articles is attack threats against schools. As stated in the news coverage, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI, Keskusrikospoliisi) receives information about dozens of such threats in Finland every year. However, only the most serious cases come to the attention of the NBI, and threats with varying severity and credibility are reported to the local police daily.¹⁵⁹ The severity of the threats ranges from “prank threats” to actual plans to commit school attacks. In the analysed news coverage, a dozen school threats – some of which occurred before the analysed period – are mentioned. Thus, most of the school threats were unreported in the news media included in this report.

The news coverage of the school attack in Kuopio focuses heavily on rescue operations after the attack, examining the course of events, eyewitness accounts, and subsequent practical arrangements. The question of motive comes up immediately, but its examination in the news coverage remains limited as the perpetrator left no manifesto or social media updates explaining the motives for his act. Instead, the news reports contextualise the attack through the perpetrator's personal history and seek to illuminate the perpetrator's background – including his character and experiences in school – by interviewing former schoolmates. One of the key questions in these news reports is whether he was bullied at school.

The review of a perpetrator's personal history appears to be guided by the already well-established perspective that school attacks are the result of the perpetrator's psychosocial issues. Particular attention is paid to school bullying, social exclusion, and mental health issues. These causes are usually perceived as both individual and societal problems, specifically in terms of poor student welfare and youth mental health services, as well as the lack of (timely) health care interventions targeting struggling youth. School attacks are also occasionally associated with the Finnish culture of silence, where boys in particular are taught that difficult things and feelings need to be endured rather than discussed.

¹⁵⁹ Lari Malmberg, ”’Huomenna koulussa pamahtaa’ – Itä-Uudenmaan poliisin mukana kouluja uhkaillaan lähes päivittäin, vitsien seuraukset vakavia”, *Helsingin Sanomat* 8 April 2019; Verna Vuoripuro, ”Keskusrikospoliisi: ’Koulu-uhkausten tekijöitä ajaa usein jonkinlainen vääryyden kokemus ja katkeruus muita ihmisiä kohtaan’”, *Helsingin Sanomat* 1 October 2019.

Once the trial on the school attack in Kuopio began, it became possible to examine the perpetrator's views. The news articles extensively focus on what the perpetrator said regarding the reasons for and background of his actions in interrogations and in the courtroom. Previous school attacks are said to have been both an impetus and a model for the attack. The perpetrator is said to have learned about previous school shootings through YouTube videos and to have identified with the perpetrators of those attacks. He was reportedly driven by his desire to take revenge and the bitterness over his life not having gone as well as it had for others. The perpetrator is also reported to have been aware that his act would receive significant attention and instil fear as well as a sense of insecurity. In terms of how the act itself was carried out, it is said that he was especially influenced by the Kauhajoki school shooting and the school attack in Trollhättan, Sweden, in 2015.

In the news coverage on the causes of school attacks, however, the role of worldviews and ideology remains limited. The interest of perpetrators of previous school shootings is mentioned in the coverage, especially in connection with the Kuopio school attack trial, but no further attention is given to the topic. The news articles occasionally mention that the perpetrators get admiration and encouragement online, but the subculture and virtual community that have formed around school shootings received limited attention. The Columbine shooting has clearly not been forgotten, as the incident is sporadically mentioned, but the subculture inspired by it, with its own symbols, ideas, and role models, received little attention. The topic is discussed more extensively in only one article, which talks about the cultural script of school killings based on Atte Oksanen's research. The topic is also tangentially addressed by examining the connection between school shootings and prevailing models of masculinity and the associated violent problem-solving models. In the context of school shootings that have taken place in the United States, contextualisation is typically linked to gun legislation.

There are characteristics in media coverage that tend to reinforce the school shooting subculture's own perceptions of the perpetrators of the attacks as well as the significance of the attacks. Indeed, the explanations given for school shootings in the news coverage resonate significantly with the explanations for school shootings by the perpetrators themselves as well as their admirers. In these explanations, perpetrators are considered mistreated victims whose suffering has been caused by the actions of others. The school shooting subculture also often considers the perpetrators of school shootings to be more aware or smarter than others.

Media news coverage is believed to inadvertently reinforce these views by emphasising how the attacks connect to the difficulties experienced by the perpetrators. The perception of school shooters as victims is also conveyed by the fact that news articles repeatedly state that no one should experience school bullying

or be marginalised. These observations are valid, as research supports the importance of experiences of social exclusion and incompetence as background factors of school shootings (while the role of bullying is more ambiguous).

When addressing the causes of school shootings, however, it is beneficial to be aware that mainstream media coverage also serves as significant raw material and an amplifier for the views expressed within the school shootings subculture. Bullying has been the subject of much of the news on school shootings as well as a key part of the school shooting subculture's own accounts and justification for school shootings.¹⁶⁰

3.6 News coverage of left-wing anarchism and anti-fascism

The Finnish news coverage in the examined period focusing on left-wing anarchism and anti-fascist activity was very limited, especially regarding ideas and activities that are extremist in character. During this period, there were no reported acts of violence based on such a worldview that received widespread attention. In news coverage on the threat of political violence, usually based on official reports, left-wing anarchism and anti-fascism play a minor role, if they are even mentioned. This is probably because the threat of violence associated with them is clearly not considered significant.

Most of the news articles on anti-fascist or left-wing anarchist violence – or the threat of violence – are related to attacks or unrest occurring during demonstrations abroad. Most of the covered incidents took place in the United States, but a significant portion of the news coverage of the US protests in the summer of 2020 makes no direct reference to left-wing anarchists, the Antifa movement, or anti-fascism in general. In addition to the events in the United States, the articles also report on demonstrations in Paris that turned into riots in which members of the so-called Black Bloc are said to have been involved. In the context of Finland, there are mentions of some squatting incidents and the “Helsinki without Nazis” demonstrations, which have been largely peaceful in recent years.¹⁶¹ The news articles also mention an assault on a person

¹⁶⁰ On school bullying and school shooting narratives, see Jenni Raitanen, Sveinung Sandberg & Atte Oksanen, “The Bullying-School Shooting Nexus: Bridging Master Narratives of Mass Violence with Personal Narratives of Social Exclusion”, *Deviant Behavior* 40/1 (2019), 96–109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2017.1411044>.

¹⁶¹ The study did not include news coverage of Elokapina (Extinction Rebellion Finland), as environmental activism is not among the phenomena considered here.

who took part in far-right activities in 2019. This incident was suspected of being an anti-fascist act but was not reported as such.

The worldview and objectives behind left-wing anarchism and anti-fascism are briefly mentioned in articles covering illegal or violent activity. They are discussed in more detail in only a few articles profiling activists who have been involved in illegal activities or a woman who left Finland for the YPJ – a Kurdish armed group for women. Anarchist and anti-fascist activities and thinking also get some attention through reporting on non-violent and lawful activism.

The amount of news coverage that leftist ideas receive is somewhat affected by the fact that the protests and other activism connected to Rojava are not linked to the leftist worldview but are presented primarily as Kurdish people's activities against, among other things, Turkish hostilities. As a result, almost no news articles about it came up with the keywords used. As the first part of this study demonstrated, the Rojava issue is important to many people involved in left-wing anarchist activities, and many are involved in activities that support it in Finland. Furthermore, most of the domestic activities connected to Rojava have been non-violent, although there have been disturbances during some demonstrations.

3.7 Challenges in news coverage and questions for further discussion

At the beginning of Section 3, it was stated that the societal impact of extremist speech and action depends in part on how they are covered in the news media. At the same time, it was argued that the media attention given to extremism could not be perceived as purely negative. In the context of preventing violent extremism, authorities may have expectations of how extremist thought and action should be dealt with in the news media. However, it is not constructive to evaluate media coverage solely from this perspective. Indeed, the news media has many important roles in a liberal democracy, and it is at least equally as important to note those in this context.

News coverage of violent extremism and the principles and objectives of journalism

Extremist actors and violent extremism are difficult topics for the media in many ways. The challenges of covering the phenomenon go largely back to the question of how the role of the media and the principles of reporting should be applied and prioritised

when dealing with actors who are anti-democratic or involved in violent activities. Indeed, some of the tasks and principles of news media provide support for the idea that violent extremism should be extensively covered in the media, while other principles speak for restraint and careful editorial consideration.

Truthful reporting on issues of social significance is considered a key mission of the media in liberal democracies. When choosing topics for news coverage, the media should make decisions solely based on journalistic considerations, independent of those in power, and in the interests of citizens and their right to know. Thus, the news media has a significant impact on which issues receive wider public attention and become subjects of public debate. The media also functions as an important meeting place for the discussion of different views and perspectives.¹⁶²

Because violent extremism is a societally significant issue, it would be difficult to justify ignoring it in the news. The coverage of extremist actors and ideologies in the media can be seen as serving citizens by providing an opportunity to understand a diverse range of societal phenomena. News coverage can also be justified by the fact that it is the role of the media to shine a light on a wide range of societal voices. The inclusion of anti-democratic voices is also justified by the fact that it allows these ideas to be debated and opposed. Their inclusion has also been justified on the journalistic principle that everyone involved has the right to be heard and that this principle should also apply to extremist activities.¹⁶³

Numerous factors also speak in favour of caution when reporting on extremist and anti-democratic ideologies and actors. One factor is that treating these ideologies and actors as you would any other political force may normalise them. Simultaneously, the marginal perspectives may get disproportionate visibility. The importance of critical contextualisation is also often emphasised. In other words, critical questions are necessary when dealing with anti-democratic or extremist ideologies or actors. There

¹⁶² Brian McNair, "Journalism and Democracy", in Karin Wahl-Jorgensen & Thomas Hanitzsch (eds.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (Routledge, 2008); Clifford G. Christians, Theodore L. Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng & Robert A. White, *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009). Public service, autonomy and objectivity are important core values among Finnish journalists, see e.g. Reeta Pöyhtäri, Jari Väliaverronen & Laura Ahva, "Suomalaisen journalistin itseymmärrys muutosten keskellä", *Media & viestintä* 39/1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.23983/mv.61434>. See also Julkisen sanan neuvosto, "Journalistin ohjeet ja liite", https://www.jsn.fi/journalistin_ohjeet/.

¹⁶³ E.g. Anna Grøndahl Larsen, "Newsworthy Actors, Illegitimate Voices: Journalistic Strategies in Dealing with Voices Deemed Anti-Democratic and Violent", *Journalism* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918760865>.

is also the danger that anti-democratic and extremist actors may take advantage of uncritical media coverage for their own communications.¹⁶⁴

Another argument favouring restraint is that giving media attention to extremist actors can help them achieve their objectives. The most clear-cut example of this is news coverage of terrorist attacks.¹⁶⁵ Often, the explicit purpose of terrorist acts is to capture the media's attention, thereby influencing the attitudes and behaviour of the wider public. While newsrooms are usually well aware of this, not reporting the attacks would be out of line with journalistic principles. Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of an attack, the demand for validated information is high as rumours circulate. Failure of the news media to cover the attacks leaves room for speculation. Thus, coverage of attacks is almost inevitably a balancing act between objectives and principles that are difficult to reconcile. Additionally, commercial interests often affect editorial considerations, creating pressure to reach the widest possible readership. The emotional and dramatic stories – which terrorism repeatedly offers – attract and generate a significant number of “clicks”.

Another point often brought up when editorial decisions are assessed is the potential societal impact of the news coverage. The impact of news coverage is occasionally assessed in relation to the sustainability of democracy. For instance, it is feared that widespread reporting of terrorist attacks may encourage further attempts by extremists to attract publicity through violent attacks. Excessive news coverage may also lead to a disproportionate fear of terrorism among the population. Uncritical support for the parties and politicians in power is shunned and instead the role of the media is seen as the watchdog of the powerful. At the same time, it is considered important that the media strengthens rather than weakens the foundations of a democratic society. This is another reason why the coverage of anti-democratic and violent ideologies and actors is perceived to require careful consideration.

The media's relationship with the state, however, is more complex than just acting as a watchdog of the powerful. News coverage sometimes involves cooperation with the state, typically in matters related to national security. For example, the news media may publish or withhold the publication of something at the behest of the authorities.

¹⁶⁴ Larsen, “Newsworthy Actors”.

¹⁶⁵ On terrorism and media, see e.g. Brigitte Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Lanham & Blymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Cristina Archetti, *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media: A Communication Approach* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Heather Davis Epkins, “Covering Acts of Terrorism”, in Piers Robinson, Philip Seib & Romy Fröhlich (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Media, Conflict and Security* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017). Cf. Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflicts* (Berkshire & New York: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2006), chapter 8.

In the aftermath of terrorist attacks, the media may decide not to report where security authorities are conducting operations to find those responsible for the attack or to publish images of the suspected perpetrators. This type of cooperation may or may not conflict with the autonomy of the media.¹⁶⁶

News coverage of terrorism, however, has also been criticised for adopting the perspective of the state and its security too strongly and at the expense of other perspectives. This may manifest, for example, as relying heavily on official sources to the neglect of other sources. News coverage may also directly adopt state-deployed terminology and official interpretations of the events. Threats related to terrorism may be framed through the lens of national security, while the effects of terrorism and counterterrorism on various sections of the population remain unaddressed. This kind of state-centric news coverage is typical, especially in the immediate aftermath of an attack.¹⁶⁷

There appears to be a consensus that reporting on violent extremism is important but requires restraint and case-by-case consideration. Research on journalism, however, suggests that there is a range of views among journalists on how extremist actors and ideologies should be covered. This is hardly surprising, as finding a balance between various journalistic principles in the coverage of violent extremism is not easy.

Questions for further consideration

From this examination of the news coverage of violent extremism in the Finnish media, it can be seen that, in many respects, it is proportionate and responsible. However, there are also questions that merit further consideration.

Has the volume of news coverage been, in all respects, proportionate to the societal significance of the events and phenomena? As demonstrated earlier, news coverage of violent extremism has been heavily centred on certain events. Some of these events have received limited attention, while others have received excessive attention. In retrospect, the level of attention given to high-profile events does not appear easily justified, as is the case with the news coverage of events related to the al-Hol refugee camp. The topic has been of widespread public interest, but the volume and, to some extent, the content of the news coverage on it do not appear to fully correspond with its significance and the level of threat associated with the issue.

¹⁶⁶ See Christians et al., *Normative Theories of the Media*, chapter 9.

¹⁶⁷ Research on this topic has been compiled by e.g. Zohar Kampf, "News-Media and Terrorism: Changing Relationship, Changing Definitions", *Sociology Compass* 8/1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12099>.

Similarly, news coverage of the Christchurch attack was remarkably abundant. It may also be worth considering whether the news coverage associated with the Independence Day demonstrations, which lasted for several days before and after the event, or the Nordic Resistance Movement was fully justified.

When it comes to far-right attacks, the abundant news coverage is also problematic because it focuses attention on content created by the perpetrators themselves, such as manifestos. Even though the tone of reporting is critical, the fact that they are given significant publicity through news coverage should not be ignored.

Some news coverage gives the impression that journalists are uneasy about the extent to which far-right thought is given visibility. This is particularly evident in editorial articles following news covering ethnonationalism. Editorial articles also include reflections on how the motives of mass shooters should be reported. News articles put forth expert views on, among other things, how news coverage of far-right symbols may facilitate internet trolling and how reducing the visibility of conspiracy theories is perhaps the most effective way to counter them. Thus, it appears that journalists are aware of the problems of reporting on the far right and other ideologies that may incite violence, but the editorial lines are not always consistent.

Are there sufficiently clear and comprehensive editorial guidelines on how content produced by those involved in violent extremism should be reported on? There is considerable variance in the coverage of the perpetrators of terrorist attacks and the material produced by them. For some attacks, images and social media posts of the perpetrators have not been published, even though they are available. In others, the perpetrator's manifesto is extensively discussed or images containing extremist symbols and the visual content produced by extremist actors are published. The publication of such content may be justified, but an analysis of the news coverage as a whole indicates that the guidelines should be clearer and more comprehensive so that journalists covering the phenomenon can rely on them to make tough choices. This was emphasised in an earlier study that established that the way a manifesto is covered depends on the journalist who is responsible for the article.¹⁶⁸

Would a broader contextualisation of violent extremism be useful, especially when it comes to the ideologies and views of those involved? The purpose of news coverage is to provide answers to the questions of what, where, when, and who. It is also expected to address the question of why, i.e. to explain and contextualise what has happened. Regarding coverage of terrorist attacks, previous research indicates that

¹⁶⁸ Saara Tammi, *"We are, well, in a shitty situation": Journalists' perceptions of the role and responsibility of the media in terrorism reporting*. Master's thesis, University of Helsinki, 2020.

journalists appear to think that contextualising terrorist attacks is not being done as often as it should be, especially in the period between attacks.¹⁶⁹ This analysis of the news coverage of extremist activity supports this notion in that much of the coverage focuses on answering “what” rather than “why”. However, it is important to remember that the subject of this analysis was primarily news articles, which may not be the most appropriate type of media for broad, contextualising coverage.¹⁷⁰

Violent extremism can be contextualised in many ways, with ideology being the most important in terms of the subject of this report. There is quite a lot of variation in the analysed articles in terms of how much contextualisation they include. The material connected to the far right includes the most contextualisation and links the development of far-right ideology with broader social developments. As a whole the news articles convey the widely shared notion that far-right ideologies are becoming more mainstream, the extremist speech associated with them is common on social media, and that the far-right content on social media appears to encourage mainstream racism and xenophobia, which is further fuelled by the acceptance of such views by political parties and other political actors. In addition, some of the news coverage conveys the idea that far-right ideology is advancing shrouded in humour. Indeed, understanding the role of humour as part of far-right logic is important, and some researchers have claimed that comical far-right content contributes to the normalisation of the worldview in the online environment.¹⁷¹

In the coverage of jihadist activity and thought, ideology is given little attention or contextualisation. This may be influenced by the fact that jihadism is a more distant and inaccessible phenomenon than the activities of the far right and school attacks, and the Finnish-language media journalist community may lack extensive knowledge of the topic (although there are also several journalists who have extensively covered the topic). This may be a result of the availability of content. For example, identifying and following jihadist content online is challenging due to countermeasures and language barriers. The media’s focus away from jihadist ideology may also be because of the widely adopted perception that radicalisation is primarily influenced by an individual’s social and psychological vulnerabilities, which distracts from considerations that emphasise the role of ideology and morality.

The news media may also be discouraged from dealing with issues related to jihadist ideology because of the justified criticism of the Western media that it received for its

¹⁶⁹ Tammi, “*We are, well, in a shitty situation*”.

¹⁷⁰ Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflicts*.

¹⁷¹ Luke Munn, “Alt-right Pipeline: Individual journeys to extremism online”, *First Monday* 24/6 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v24i6.10108>.

coverage of jihadist terrorism in the first decade of the 21st century, particularly on the relationship between terrorism and Islam. In light of these experiences, journalists may believe that it is safer to focus on events and ignore issues of ideology and faith. News coverage is not made any easier by the fact that terrorism, radicalisation, and Islam are contentious topics through which conflicts in identity politics are actively pursued.

Even considering all this, it might be appropriate to ponder whether it would be justified to give more attention to the jihadist worldview and whether that could be done in a way that avoids the problems that characterised news coverage of jihadist attacks in the early 2000s. Not addressing the ideological world of jihadists may create a vacuum that will gladly be filled by those who are happy to talk about jihadist ideology from their own point of view. Fully understanding jihadism as a phenomenon is impossible without paying attention to the ideology of its supporters.

How could a more in-depth familiarisation of extremist worldviews be of benefit to reporting on it? The material analysed here conveys the impression that journalists' knowledge of extremist ideologies and related narratives is somewhat uneven. More in-depth familiarity with these ideologies and narratives would be beneficial to the news coverage because an increase in factual information or knowledge on extremist ideologies and narratives would help journalists and news media avoid unintentionally reinforcing or justifying them.

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