Populist conspiracy myths in far-right terrorist manifestos: A transnational perspective

Mythes populistes du complot dans les manifestes de terroristes d'extrême droite : une perspective transnationale

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TEXTE

Disclaimer: For the sake of the academic inquiry, this article cites terrorist manifestos including their violent language.

Introduction: Populist and extremist entanglements

1   In recent years, there has been a significant increase in far-right terrorist activities across the "Western" world.[1] The DC-based national security think thank Center for Strategic and International Studies reported that right-wing terrorism not only accounts for most terrorist attacks in the United States (US) but has also grown in quantity between 2014 and 2020. They observed that "the United States faces a growing terrorism problem that will likely worsen" (Jones *et al.* 2020). There is an increase of far-right extremist activities in many European countries: Swedish authorities reported increased racist violence, the French police reported in 2020 as much far-right violence as never before, figures of far-right crimes are

hitting the highest level in Germany since records began (Liger and Gutheil 2022: 75, 83, 85). While there are limitations to the available data as the data on far-right extremist violence is often incomplete and subject to interpretation, these trends suggest that there has been a rise in far-right extremism and violence in recent years.

2   The rise in far-right extremist violence takes place at the same with the rise of far-right populist parties. Building on Cas Mudde's division between "far right" and "extreme right" (Mudde 2019), I distinguish between far-right populists and far-right extremists by their approach to liberal democracy. While far-right populists are trying to gain power within a democratic framework and abolish liberal democracy after having been elected to power, far-right extremists believe in violence as a tool for achieving this goal. Although their methods are different, there is a serious overlap in their ideology and belief system. In the general social environment of increasing polarization of political discourse and the growing influence of social media, the rhetoric of far-right populist parties has in particular created a fertile ground for extremist ideology to flourish. Far-right populist parties' discourse has promoted the notion of a perceived threat posed by members of various outgroups ("Muslims", "immigrants", and so forth) and encouraged a sense of victimhood among members of the ingroup ("Christians", "European nation states" and so forth). Aristotle Kallis (2013) has shown how these far-right populist messages have reached beyond the mainstream into extremist scenes since far-right messages tend to target both a mainstream audience and people who can be qualified as extremists.

3   Not all far-right populist parties promote extremist views, and they regularly condemn acts of terrorism. Most supporters and members of these parties do not engage in violent or extremist behavior. However, this article will argue that the rise of far-right populist parties and the legitimization of their anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric has contributed to the normalization of far-right views and the radicalization of some individuals who may be more sensitive to extremist messages. Paul Wilkinson (1995) suggested that these far-right parties' racist and anti-immigrant propaganda were conducive to right-wing terrorism. studies have also raised awareness to the connection between the emergence of far-right

parties and the increase in far-right extremist activities (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018, Banteka 2019).

4   This article will contribute to the growing literature body on the link between the rise of far-right populism and the increase in far-right attacks. To shed light on this link, this paper will analyze some of the most common far-right conspiracy myths [2] as they are promoted by the far-right parties and compare those with the conspiracy myths in the terrorist manifestos. The article is comparing different types of texts in order to demonstrate the correlation: The paper will look at the writings by the far-right terrorists responsible for the 2011 Oslo and Utøya, Norway, 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand, 2019 Poway, California, 2019 El Paso, Texas, 2020 Hanau, Germany, 2022 Buffalo, New York, and attacks. It will contrast these primary sources with public statements by far-right populist politicians Gunnar Beck, Alexander Gauland, Björn Höcke and Martin Renner (Germany), Marine Le Pen (France), Malcolm Roberts (Australia), and Donald Trump (US). Given the troubling trend of incorporating far-right populist rhetoric into terrorist manifestos, this article demands serious consideration and necessitates concerted efforts to combat both virtual and real-life radicalization, alongside extremist speech and crimes targeting immigrants and minorities. In the following, this article will analyze some of the most common conspiracy myths used in such manifestos.

1. Conspiracy myths and dog-whistle politics

5   In the aftermath of the Holocaust, open expressions of antisemitism and racism have not been tolerated in Europe and the US. On the contrary, probably every single mainstream European and American leader has called for civic engagement against antisemitism and racism. But despite the general condemnation of these sentiments, prejudices against Jews, Muslims, and other minorities which have been part of European and American civilization for centuries (Langer 2020, Langer 2021a: 680), have not disappeared. The Anti-Defamation League's 2012 opinion survey in ten European countries revealed that pernicious antisemitic beliefs continue to be held by nearly one-third of those surveyed (ADL 2012). In 2023, they found the same

percentage of Americans supporting antisemitic views (ADL 2023). At the same time, even larger percentages of Europeans and American sign up for anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant views (Tazamal 2022, Sisemore and Elsheikh 2022).

6   To exploit the antisemitic and racist stereotypes that are still alive in European societies today, nationalist and populist politicians turn to dog-whistle politics. Political columnist William Safire (2008: 190) defined this communication strategy as "[t]he use of messages embedded in speeches that seem innocent to a general audience but resonate with a specific public attuned to receive them." The term uses the analogy of the dog whistle used by shepherds. The whistle's high-frequency sound is audible to dogs but not to sheep and humans. Dog-whistle politics uses antisemitic and racist coded words that recognized by antisemites and racists but might be glossed over by those unfamiliar with these resentments and conspiracy myths (Haney López 2014, Langer 2022a, Langer 2022b).

7   Far-right populists use dog-whistle politics rather than being explicitly antisemitic and/or racist firstly because the coded language allows them to avoid being immediately detected and condemned by the wider public. This is particularly important in the current political culture, where expressing explicit antisemitic and racist views can be met with strong social backlash. In most European countries, this can even have legal consequences as there are laws prohibiting antisemitic and racist speech (Gleiß and Laubenstein 2021). Another reason why the populist far-right turns to dog-whistling is to appeal to individuals who may not consider themselves antisemitic and/or racist but are nevertheless receptive to such conspiracist thinking.

8   These dog-whistle discourses of far-right populist parties and movements often involve a demonization of certain groups, most commonly immigrants and/or Muslims and present them as a threat to the "white" and/or "Christian" nation and its values (Langer 2021b). Drawing on a sense of victimhood, these discourses portray the "white" and/or "Christian" in-group as under threat of marginalization, displacement or extension. They also frequently involve a call for action against these perceived threats. While the dog-whistling does not include a call to act on the alleged conspiracy,

it implies it. This is where extremism comes into the picture: Dog-whistle populism with its divisive and paranoid rhetoric can create an environment in which extremist ideologies flourish – and lead of acts of violence. The terrorist manifestos released in the past years suggest that this populist dog-whistling has shaped the ideological basis for the extremists' violent actions.

2. Far-right terrorist manifestos

9   Far-right terrorists have been releasing manifestos or statements for several decades. One of the earliest manifestos is by David Lane, a white supremacist involved in several violent crimes in the 1980s and 1990s. Lane's manifesto, titled "88 Precepts," outlined his beliefs in white supremacy and racial separatism (Kaplan 2000: 167). Notably, the choice of the number 88 holds significance in far-right circles, as the eighth letter of the alphabet is "h," hence "88" symbolizes "Heil Hitler" (Miller-Idriss 2009: 104). Another significant example was the manifesto published by Anders Behring Breivik before he carried out the 2011 Norway attacks, which involved a car bombing in Oslo and a mass shooting on the island of Utøya, resulting in the deaths of 77 people, primarily targeting young participants in a left-wing youth camp (Bangstad 2012).

10   Just hours before the attacks, Breivik's manifesto was published online. Without the traditional media gatekeepers, it quickly spread through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. It was also shared, praised and promoted on far-right and white supremacist websites and forums like Stormfront, 4chan, 8chan (later known as 8kun) and Gab. Breivik (2011) titled his 1518-pages long document "2083: A European Declaration of Independence," which detailed his anti-Muslim and anti-multiculturalist views and served as a justification for his attacks. In his manifesto, Breivik reproduced the notion of "white Europeans" losing their lands to foreign "invaders'. Breivik (2011: 993, 1109) describes an allegedly ongoing "Islamic colonization of Europe through demographic warfare" facilitated by the "political and cultural elites" who are selling white Europeans "into Islamic slavery". In order to prevent this alleged sell-out and punish those responsible for it, Breivik (2011: 826) says that violence if necessary:

> We train to kill but that doesn't mean we love violence. We use violence only for self defence, as pre-emptive actions and as a last option. We cannot allow our politically correct elites to sell us, their people, into Muslim slavery. [...] We, the resistance movements, are dispersed all across Europe. The essence of our actions is to convince our enemy that there is nowhere to hide. We are coming for every single one of them, if not today then tomorrow, if not tomorrow then in 10, 30 or even 50 years.

11   By publishing manifestos, Breivik and other terrorists gain access to a platform to disseminate their beliefs and calls to violence to a wider audience. By articulating their motivations in writing, the terrorists may feel that they are making their violence more understandable. But, more importantly, these documents serve as propaganda that seeks to promote extremist views and encourages others to join their cause and carry on their legacy. In his manifesto, Breivik (2011: 1264) invites "all European patriots to actively target all members of patriotic related Facebook groups (and non-FB networks) and invite them as friends, then send this compendium to all members of these related groups."

12   In fact, Breivik's manifesto has been cited as a major influence by several far-right terrorists who have carried out attacks since 2011 (Macklin & Bjørgo, 2021). Apparently, the manifesto served as a blueprint for Brenton Tarrant, who opened fire at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 people and injuring dozens more. In his manifesto, Tarrant (2019: 24) states that Breivik was the "true inspiration" for his attacks. Similarly, Patrick Crusius, who targeted Latinx shoppers at a department store in El Paso, Texas, resulting in the deaths of 23 people and numerous injured, claimed to have been inspired "by the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto" (Crusius 2019: 1). Crusius (*ibid.*) added that before having read Tarrant's manifesto, he did not see Latinx people as his target. Payton S. Gendron, who killed ten Black people outside of a supermarket in Buffalo, New York in 2022, credited Crusius and Breivik as his inspiration and highlighted Tarrant's manifesto in his formation as a white nationalist (Gendron 2022: 13).

13   Publishing a manifesto seems to have become a standard among far-right terrorists in recent years. Apart from the above-mentioned

manifestos by Breivik, Tarrant, Crusius and Gendron, a number of far-right extremists released such documents. For instance, Dylan Roof, the perpetrator of the 2015 Charleston church shooting in South Carolina killing nine Black Americans, released his manifesto under the title "Last Rhodesian," expressing white supremacist and anti-black views and referencing previous acts of white supremacist violence. John Earnest (2019), who killed a Jewish woman in a synagogue in Poway, California, in 2019, published a manifesto entitled "An Open Letter," making use of antisemitic and white supremacist views and praising previous acts of far-right terrorism (Schiff and Justice 2023).

14   Many of these terrorists refer to far-right politicians to justify violence as a means of defending the perpetrator's perceived threatened identity and cultural heritage. In his compendium, Breivik (2011: 383, 1267) praised Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders as a "patriot" and recommended to follow the politician's Facebook page. The manifesto of the Christchurch shooter praises several far-right populist leaders. Tarrant (2019: 22) described Donald Trump as "a symbol of renewed white identity" and expressed his support for Brexit, which he perceived as "the British people firing back at mass immigration, cultural displacement and globalism." Crusius (2019: 1) endorsed the Republican Party, because "with Republicans, the process of mass immigration and citizenship can be greatly reduced." Breivik (2011: 1414) claims to have been a supporter of the Norwegian Progress Party, a right-wing party with representation in the Storting, before getting disillusioned with democracy. Nota bene, all these right-wing politicians and formations condemned far-right violence at one point. I believe that they do not bear any direct responsibility for these acts of terror. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that they all promoted conspiracy myths which the far-right terrorists see as justification for their actions. In the following, this article will review some of the most common myths in far-right discourses, which are shared both by the normalized far-right political movements and far-right extremist scene.

3. Populist conspiracy myths in terrorist manifestos

3.1. The Great Replacement myth

15   The perpetrator of the 2020 Hanau shootings in Germany, Tobias Rathjen (2020), who targeted Muslims and individuals of immigrant backgrounds, released a manifesto and a video statement promoting anti-immigrant conspiracy myths related to the so-called "Great Replacement." Rathjen (2020: 5, 7) believed that his *Volk* ("people") were "the best and the most beautiful," while Islam was "destructive." He saw his act of terrorism as part of a "war...against the generation of our people" (Rathjen 2020: 24) caused by the alleged displacement of populations. Popularized by the French writer Renaud Camus in his 2012 book *Le grand remplacement* ("The Great Replacement"), the Great Replacement myth (also known as Great Replacement Theory) alleges that white European populations are being systematically replaced by non-European immigrants, particularly Muslims, leading to the decline of Western civilization (Önnerfors 2021).

16   The Christchurch terrorist's manifesto also contains several explicit references to the "Great Replacement" myth (Ganor 2020: 5-12). Tarrant (2019: 4-5, 49) described "[m]illions of people pouring across our border ... to replace the White people who have failed to reproduce... This crisis of mass immigration and sub-replacement fertility is an assault on the European people that, if not combated, will ultimately result in the complete racial and cultural replacement of the European people." To prove his point, Tarrant (2019: 49) refers among others to London mayor Sadiq Khan, who was born to a Muhajir family, as a proof for the alleged replacement. Gendron (2022: 13) reproduces this notion in a more dramatic fashion:

> No longer would I just accept our replacement. No longer would I just accept our genocide. No longer will I willingly serve the people who are trying to end me and my race.

17   Indeed, among the most popular conspiracy myths one can identify in populist narratives and terrorist manifestos is the Great

Replacement. This far-right narrative suggests that there is a deliberate plot to replace white populations in Western countries with non-white immigrants. This myth reinforces other far-right extremist beliefs, including the idea that there is a global/Jewish conspiracy to undermine "Western" values and culture. This process is often labeled by the people who believe in it "white genocide" (Obaidi *et al.* 2022; Önnerfors 2021). For instance, Tarrant (2019: 6-7) defined "white genocide" as a combination of "the decline of fertility rates" among white Europeans and "mass migration" which will "disenfranchise us, subvert our nations, destroy our communities, destroy our ethnic binds, destroy our cultures, destroy our peoples."

18   In his manifesto, Rathjen (2020: 21-22) suggested that it was the *Schattenregierung* ("shadow government"), a mysterious entity more powerful than the US President, that was responsible the alleged replacement of white populations by non-white immigrants. Although Rathjen does not explicitly implicate Jews as members of this shadow government, the rhetoric surrounding such theories often contains antisemitic undertones and can contribute to the promotion of antisemitic sentiments within far-right circles. (Crawford and Keen 2020). Unlike Rathjen, John Earnest (2019: 1, 6) made it clear that "[e]very Jew is responsible for the meticulously planned genocide of the European race" and that immigrants of color "are useful puppets for the Jew in terms of replacing Whites." Earnest's statement reflects the antisemitic myth of Jewish control, attributing to Jews an alleged agenda to destroy or replace white populations. Furthermore, the terrorist's remark about immigrants of color being "useful puppets for the Jew" implies that non-white immigrants are merely tools manipulated by Jews to facilitate the replacement of white populations. This statement perpetuates the dehumanization of immigrants of color, portraying them as mere pawns in a larger conspiracy. Earnest (2019: 2) goes as far to tie his extremist views on Jews to the Simon of Trent antisemitic trope. This trope is a medieval blood libel accusation against the Jewish community, alleging the ritualistic murder of a Christian boy named Simon in Trento, Italy, in 1475, which has perpetuated harmful stereotypes and prejudices against Jews ever since (Teter 2020).

19 The myth of a "replacement" of white populations with people of color has been promoted by several prominent far-right politicians in both Europe and the US. In a 2018 speech, Marine Le Pen, a far-right French politician, argued, "Never in the history of mankind have we seen a society that organizes such an irreversible submersion of such unmanageable magnitude, which, in the long run, will lead to the disappearance of its culture and way of life through dilution or substitution" (Rastier 2019). In April 2019, during his campaign for the 2019 European Parliament election on behalf of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Heinz-Christian Strache asserted that the notion of "population replacement" posed a genuine threat to Austria. He emphasized that the goal was to prevent Austrians from becoming a minority within its own borders (Reuters 2019). Similar ideas find endorsement from Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary and leader of the far-right Fidesz party (Langer 2021b). Orbán often portrays the European Union's immigration policies as a threat to Hungarian cultural integrity and advocates for policies to boost the birth rate among native Hungarian populations while simultaneously limiting the influx of migrants whom he labeled as "invaders" (Norris 2023).

20 In the US, Donald Trump has made several comments that echo the Great Replacement myth during his 2016 campaign, when he claimed that Mexican immigrants were bringing crime into the US, echoing the Great Replacement narrative of the "invading" immigrant of color (Langer 2024). He also called for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" in response to terrorism, a view that reinforces the narrative of the Muslim invading enemy (Beydoun 2021). Moreover, during a rally in Minnesota in October 2020, Trump claimed that refugees were being resettled in Minnesota to change the demographics of the state and accused his Democratic opponent Joe Biden of being behind this plan (Choi 2020).

21 The Great Replacement myth has often been used to justify acts of violence, including mass shootings and other forms of terrorism, by claiming that such actions are necessary to protect the white race from extinction, as I have shown above. The far-right populist politicians quoted above, of course, do not endorse violence. Yet, both groups seem to agree on who is to blame for this alleged replacement: "the globalists."

3.2. Globalists

22 A generally accepted definition of "globalist" refers to someone who advocates for globalization, which is the process of increased interconnectedness and integration of economies, societies, and cultures on a global scale. Arising in the post-war debates of the 1940s in the US, globalists typically believe in the importance of international cooperation, which they see as a positive force for economic growth, development, and cultural exchange (Rosenboim 2017). But in a context of conspiracy myths, the term "globalist" is used pejoratively. Those who perpetuate the Great Replacement myth, often envision a secretive elite pulling the strings behind the scenes. This secretive elite is often described as "globalists" who are in a discursive opposition to "nationalists" or "patriots", which is the self-identification of the far-right.

23 The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany has been actively promoting the Great Replacement myth and connecting it to a manipulation of so-called globalists. The party's platform frequently references the idea of *Umvolkung* ("population replacement") in Germany. For instance, during the 2017 German federal election campaign, one of the AfD's campaign posters depicted a heavily pregnant white woman with the caption "New Germans? We'll make them ourselves!" (Waring 2019: 212). Within this narrative, there exists an alleged globalist conspiracy aimed at undermining the nation state, a notion widely promoted by AfD representatives. Thuringia AfD leader Björn Höcke has argued that "[p]eoples and cultures are worthless in the eyes of the globalists and, as possible powerful adversaries, are annoying troublemakers in their bizarre agenda," hereby asserting that the so-called globalists are trying to eliminate nation states (cited in Netzpolitik 2019). Party leader Alexander Gauland has expressed similar sentiments, suggesting a connection between the myths of population replacement and globalist efforts to erode national sovereignty:

> We are in a struggle against forces that sell their globalist program of nation dissolution, ethno-cultural unification and tradition annihilation as the humanity and goodness itself. We allow ourselves to be displaced in the service of the progress of humanity. We are to

> dissolve ourselves as a people and nation in a great whole. But we have no interest in becoming humanity. We want to remain Germans (cited in BfV 2019).

24   Gauland's quote articulates a common narrative in far-right rhetoric, which portrays globalization and the actions of so-called globalists as a threat to national identity and sovereignty. Gauland suggests that these forces are selling their agenda as representing humanity and goodness, but in reality, they seek to undermine traditional values, cultures, and national identities. Gauland's rhetoric positions the German nation as under siege, facing existential threats from external forces seeking to dismantle it. Emphasizing the desire to preserve and maintain German identity and culture separate from broader global trends, he reflects a sentiment of nationalism and isolationism.

25   Trump, too, prefers the term "globalist" to talk about this alleged conspiracy. For instance, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly, Trump (2019) asserted that "The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots." Trump (2020a) accused the previous administrations of "[o]ne cold-hearted globalist betrayal after another". At a protest for "Law and Order", Trump (2020b) noted that "For half a century — shipping your jobs to China. That's what they've been doing. … And selling you out to the rich, globalist Wall Street donors." Nota bene, establishing a link between globalists and Wall Street has been a common argument in antisemitic narratives for a century at least. In these narratives, Jews are portrayed as wielding disproportionate influence in finance and using this power to advance alleged globalist agendas (Achinger and Fine 2015: 4, Rensmann 2017: 410). Indeed, the antisemitic association of the banking system with the Jewish has become a common place in far-right thought. To quote Gendron (2022: 14): "Banks are run by the Jews, we should all know this by now."

26   Similarly to the above-mentioned populist politicians, extremists see globalists as responsible for the alleged Muslim threat to Europe. Breivik (2011: 1299) stated that "capitalist globalists will do everything in their power to prevent us from deporting the Muslims living in Europe." Breivik saw an economic interest beyond this alleged globalist conspiracy:

> The globalists (lead by the US) want to preserve Europe as a stable market for their products. It is in their interest to prevent us from becoming truly sovereign. In reality this is called slavery. They want to keep us as slaves. They will therefore do everything in their power from preventing us from uniting and as we already know; Western European countries will remain broken as long as there are large Muslim enclaves (mini-Pakistan's) in all major cities.

27   Tarrant (2019: 10, 81), too, saw the threat of "internationalist, globalist, anti-white" politicians and called Americans to engage in a civil war "overthrowing the global power structure and the Wests' egalitarian, individualist, globalist dominant culture." It is worth noting that the use of the term "globalist" in far-right extremist and populist circles is often associated with antisemitic conspiracy myths that suggest that Jews are part of a shadowy, international "cabal" that seeks to undermine the interests of the nation and the wider world. Often, these globalists are casted as individuals seeking to create a one-world government, also known as New World Order (NWO). Myths around a NWO have been propagated by far-right politicians for decades (Mudde 2007: 193-195). This narrative has its roots in centuries-old antisemitic tropes, such as the idea of a Jewish conspiracy to control the world and the idea that Jews form a "state within a state" (Langer 2020). At other times, certain individuals are mentioned instead of the abstract figure of the "globalist", such as the Rothschild family (Langer 2022a) or George Soros (Langer 2021b). The use of these tropes and applying them to Jewish figures reinforces the idea that Jews are behind a plot to control the world and serves to demonize and dehumanize Jews.

28   By using these coded words, the far-right can convey its extremist views to potential followers while avoiding direct accusations of antisemitism, which can be more easily detected and condemned. Indeed, some of these terrorists refuse to be called antisemites (Tarrant 2019: 20). Others take an even more deceptive approach by characterizing Judaism as a "friendly religion/ideology" (Breivik 2011: 1304) and advocating for the reconstruction of the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem as a shared Christian-Jewish place of worship (Breivik 2011: 1320). At the same time, both Breivik and Tarrant

emphasize that the Jews' genuine place is in Israel, thus, outside of Europe (*ibid.*).

29   While not all far-right terrorists mask their true attitudes towards Jews, the degree to which they openly express these sentiments varies. Breivik's and Tarrant's philosemitism stands in clear contrast with other perpetrators of far-right violence, such as Rathjen (2020: 6), who called for the destruction of the "people of … Israel", even though as part of a broader list of Middle Eastern peoples to be destroyed, rather than specifically targeting Jews. At the same time, Gendron (2022: 7) identified as an antisemite and whished "all JEWS to HELL! Go back to hell where you came from DEMON." Gendron (2022: 12), who is one of the most explicit of the terrorists case studies in this investigation, admits that the Jews are actually responsible for the alleged great replacement and does not use the term "globalist":

> Why attack immigrants when the Jews are the issue? Because they can be dealt with in time, but the high fertility replacers will destroy us now, it is a matter of survival we destroy them first.

30   Gendron's explicit acknowledgment of Jews as responsible for an alleged population replacement underscores the intertwining of antisemitism with the Great Replacement ideology, portraying Jews as the primary agents behind demographic shifts. Additionally, his rejection of the coded term "globalist" in favor of direct accusations against Jews further emphasizes the centrality of antisemitism within his worldview and extremist narrative.

3.3. Cultural Marxism

31   Another recurring enemy in the far-right manifestos is "cultural Marxism." The term originated in the 1920s among Marxist scholars like Antonio Gramsci, who argued that the socialist revolution failed due to its neglect of cultural values enabling capitalism. Gramsci believed that political change necessitated cultural transformation. This concept was later embraced by the Frankfurt School, a Marxist social theory institution founded during the interwar period. When Jewish members of the Frankfurt School fled Nazi Germany to the US, Americans ultraconservatives suggested that these "cultural

Marxists" were undermining traditional Christian values through promoting feminism, gay rights, and atheism (Busbridge *et al.* 2020: 4). In recent years, the term has enjoyed a growing popularity both among far-right extremists and populists and is used to describe a supposed plot to subvert "Western" values by promoting multiculturalism, political correctness, and other progressive ideals (Tuters 2018). Commenting on religious nonprofits helping refugees in Europe, Tarrant (2019: 70) asserted that "NGOs hide their true intentions behind a facade of religiosity," but...

> the people running the show are in fact far from religious themselves and more often than not are actually atheistic cultural marxists using naive Christian Europeans to both labour and fund their own attempt at class and racial warfare.

32   This excerpt from Tarrant's manifesto reflects a belief that individuals in positions of power, despite presenting themselves as religious, are actually atheists exploiting the goodwill of Christian Europeans, using them as unwitting participants in their agenda of perpetuating class and racial conflict. Tarrant (2019: 28-29) also suggested that the press and education system have "fallen to the long march through the institutions carried out by the marxists (sic)". Gendron (2022: 11) took over the same observation from Tarrant. But "cultural Marxism" is especially visible in Breivik's manifesto: according to my research, the expression "cultural Marxist" appears 453 times and "cultural Marxism" a further 88 times in his document. According to Breivik (2011: 1352), the "biggest threat to Europe is the cultural Marxist/multiculturalist political doctrine", which "involves destroying Christendom, the Church, our European cultures and identities and opening up our borders to Islamic colonization."

33   The "cultural Marxism" narrative often posits that Jews are using these "cultural Marxist" ideas to weaken and ultimately destroy "Western" civilization (Hanebrink 2018). For example, John Earnest (2019: 1) writes in his manifesto that "Every Jew is responsible [...] for cultural Marxism." By tying the concept of "cultural Marxism" to Jews, far-right extremists can leverage a long-standing conspiracy myth to promote their extremist agenda and incite violence against Jews: Allegations around the elite's so-called cultural Marxist agenda is very much in accordance with the fabrication of "Judeo-Bolshevism",

according to which Jews are left-wing and intent on destroying Christian and traditional values. Adherents to this conspiracy myth claim that there is a Jewish–communist takeover of the "Western" world. After the 1917 Soviet revolution, Polish Jews were accused by Catholic nationalists in the country of sympathizing with the communist revolution, hence the term *Zydokomuna* ('Judeo–Communism'). Indeed, several Eastern-European Jews expressed interest in left-wing ideas because they believed in Communism's promise of equality for all. These individual cases were often abused by antisemites to promote the idea of a "Judeo–Bolshevism" (Caumanns and Önnerfors 2020 : 447, Hanebrink 2018).

34   Apart from terrorists, many far-right populists have used the term "cultural Marxism" to criticize what they see as a progressive cultural agenda that seeks to undermine traditional values and institutions. They argue that this agenda is the result of a conspiracy by left-wing academics and intellectuals who have been influenced by Marxist ideas. The AfD has used the term cultural Marxism on several occasions, for instance when suggesting that it is a "cultural Marxist" agenda that is pushing Germans towards facing responsibility for Germany's colonial crimes (Ziai 2023). This rhetoric proved particularly advantageous for the party especially during Germany's center-left government tenure post-2021. AfD Member of the German Bundestag Martin Renner (2022: 3938) accused the center-left government of pushing a "cultural Marxist" agenda that goes against the interests of the majority of Germans:

> You and your politics have not only installed insurmountable ideological membranes in the realm of culture and media, but everywhere. These membranes are supposed to feign democratic freedom, but they are only permeable to a zeitgeist, the cultural Marxist spirit. Those who support the trigger themes of your eco-socialist, globalist […] policy will have their feeding troughs filled with taxpayers' horn of plenty, singing "hosanna! " In this way, you […] continue to work on a new society that the majority of citizens do not want.

35   In a similar vein, in a speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, AfD Member of European Parliament Gunnar Beck (2022) said that there is "a cultural war between an unholy alliance of

globalists, their gatekeepers and the cultural Marxist left versus traditional Europe." These statements by Beck and Renner also show the link between myths on globalists and cultural Marxists. Australian senator Malcolm Roberts (2017) from the far-right party One Nation accused the state government of harassing Christians and for having "the real aim" of "closing down Christianity," which is "part of the cultural Marxist march." Roberts (2019) also accused the Labor party of promoting "cultural Marxist" schools by promoting "sexual radicalism and anarchy", referring the party's declaration against the discrimination of queer students and faculty in religious schools. The "cultural Marxism" myth has gained traction also beyond the "Western" world, such as in Brazil, where Jair Bolsonaro's Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo infamously labelled climate change a "Marxist conspiracy" (Casarões and Flemes 2019).

Conclusion: Analyzing manifestos as a counter-terrorism strategy

36   As this paper has shown, far-right terrorist manifestos reproduce conspiracy myths perpetuated by normalized far-right political parties and individuals. The entanglement of far-right populism and extremism is intricately tied to language and rhetoric. Far-right populists employ narratives, demonizing and othering certain groups while promoting conspiratorial thinking and using coded language. This rhetoric normalizes extremist ideas and can also erode democratic norms and institutions by undermining trust in essential pillars of democracy, like the media when these are discredited as "fake news" or the judiciary when they are labeled as "biased" for reports and decisions that go against the far-right's political interests. The use of social media further amplifies the reach of these narratives, fostering echo chambers and potential radicalization. Countering this entanglement requires vigilant scrutiny of political discourse, media literacy promotion, and active efforts to counter extremist narratives to protect democratic societies from its corrosive effects.

37   Analyzing terrorist manifestos can provide insights into extremist groups, which can help in the development of more effective counter-terrorism strategies. I see various potential uses of this

knowledge derived from the manifestos: first of all, terrorist manifestos can provide insights into the extremist ideology of the group or individual responsible for the attack. By understanding the ideology and beliefs of the attacker, law enforcement agencies can develop more targeted strategies for countering and preventing future attacks. Manifestos can also provide information on the types of targets that the terrorists are likely to attack. For example, the Christchurch shooter's manifesto contained information about his plan to attack mosques. By analyzing the manifesto, authorities were able to identify other potential targets and take steps to prevent further attacks.

38   Apart from identifying potential targets, manifestos can help law enforcement agencies identify and track extremist groups, as well as individuals who may be at risk of radicalization. By analyzing the language and content of manifestos, authorities can develop a better understanding of the networks and support structures that exist within extremist groups. Once having identified these groups and the individuals who are at risk of radicalization, manifestos can be used to develop effective counter-narratives to extremist ideology. By analyzing the language and content of the manifesto, researchers and policymakers can identify the underlying grievances and social factors that lead individuals to embrace extremist ideologies and develop strategies for countering these narratives.

39   While analyzing these manifestos can be a key strategy of counterterrorism, I would like to point out that not all terrorists publish manifestos, and not all manifestos are easily accessible or comprehensible. Furthermore, even if a manifesto is available, it is often difficult to predict or prevent specific acts of violence. Preventing terrorism requires a multifaceted approach that includes addressing the underlying social factors that can lead individuals to embrace extremism, as well as developing effective law enforcement and intelligence strategies to detect and disrupt terrorist plots. It is also important to recognize the role of social media and online platforms in spreading extremist ideologies and facilitating radicalization. Efforts to counter online extremism encompass a range of strategies, including improving online content moderation, promoting digital literacy and critical thinking skills, and fostering strong partnerships between tech companies, law enforcement, and

civil society organizations (Langer 2023: 28-30). Manifesto analysis emerges as a valuable component within this broader strategy, crucial for confronting the multifaceted nature of the challenge posed by terrorism. By providing in-depth insights into the rhetoric and ideologies perpetuated by far-right extremists, this paper contributes to the development of effective counter-narratives and informs targeted interventions aimed at preventing radicalization and extremist violence.

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NOTES

1 By putting the term "Western" in inverted commas throughout the essay, I wish to express my discomfort with this term. Edward W. Said (1979) showed how the idea of a "Western civilization" created a binary between "the West" ("the Occident") and "the East" ("the Orient") and justified colonialism and imperialism by depicting "the West" as superior to "the East."

2 Throughout this paper, I avoid using the term "conspiracy theory," because these narratives are not theories as they cannot be verified. Instead, I will refer to them as "conspiracy myths".

RÉSUMÉS

English

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in the electoral success of far-right populist movements in various Western countries, coinciding with an alarming increase in far-right terrorist attacks. While far-right populists seek to attain power through democratic means, their rhetoric has inadvertently fostered an environment conducive to the growth of extremist ideologies. This article delves into the manifestos published by far-right extremists from the United States, Germany, Norway, and Australia, illuminating how these manifestos mirror and amplify the narratives espoused by far-right populists. Beyond sharing common conspiracy myths, these terrorists often reference one another and populist politicians in their manifestos, further showing the entanglement between far-right populism and extremism. This paper undertakes a discourse analysis of these terrorist manifestos, probing into how right-wing extremists make use of conspiracy myths promoted by the populist right-wing. As far-right terrorism increasingly threatens peaceful coexistence, it becomes imperative to conduct new research that assesses the role of conspiracy myths in fueling terrorism and devises strategies to avert further radicalization.

Français

Ces dernières années, on a constaté une montée notable du succès électoral des mouvements populistes d'extrême droite dans divers pays occidentaux,

coïncidant avec une augmentation alarmante des attaques terroristes d'extrême droite. Alors que les populistes d'extrême droite cherchent à accéder au pouvoir par des moyens démocratiques, leur rhétorique a involontairement favorisé un environnement propice à la croissance des idéologies extrémistes. Cet article se penche sur les manifestes publiés par des extrémistes d'extrême droite aux États-Unis, en Allemagne, en Norvège et en Australie, mettant en lumière comment ces manifestes reflètent et amplifient les récits véhiculés par les populistes d'extrême droite. Au-delà de partager des mythes conspirationnistes communs, ces terroristes font souvent référence les uns aux autres et aux politiciens populistes dans leurs manifestes, montrant ainsi davantage l'entrelacement entre le populisme d'extrême droite et l'extrémisme. Cet article entreprend une analyse du discours de ces manifestes terroristes, examinant comment les extrémistes de droite exploitent les mythes conspirationnistes promus par la droite populiste. Alors que le terrorisme d'extrême droite menace de plus en plus la coexistence pacifique, il devient impératif de mener de nouvelles recherches qui évaluent le rôle des mythes conspirationnistes dans l'alimentation du terrorisme et élaborent des stratégies pour éviter une radicalisation supplémentaire.

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AUTEUR

Armin Langer
University of Florida, Center for European Studiesalanger@ufl.edu
IDREF : https://www.idref.fr/278338313