



Analysis #10

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Australia's Right-Wing Landscape: Local Threats in Transnational Context

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This brief will look at the evolution and diversification of the Australian extreme right, including successful and ongoing prosecutions, proscriptions of organisations, and the broader political and operational landscape. In doing so, this brief will focus on the increasingly transnational character of the threat, and the increased body of counter terrorism activity by Australia's allies and partners in response to this specific threat manifestation.

The extreme right-wing (XRW) landscape in Australia has evolved from the XRW ideological frameworks associated with its US and European 20th century origins and has become more entrenched in the diverse ideological spectrums associated with the increasingly transnational XRW movement. Expanded ethno-nationalist themes combined with white supremacist, misogynistic, conspiracy-based, and anti-government beliefs demonstrate the increasingly diverse, and disparate array of ideologies and micro-ideologies that contribute to contemporary XRW ideologies. The manifestation of these extremist ideologies and idiosyncratic actors within the Australian community and within online transnational networks has altered a national security threat environment previously dominated by Salafi Jihadi terrorism. Despite international XRW organisations demonstrating a significant increase in violent activities from 2014, national security agencies and policy makers failed to appreciate the momentum and significance of the threat to the Australian community. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, exacerbated by broader societal fears as a result of the 9/11 attacks, and nearly two decades of global Jihadi terrorism were predominantly responded to through a lens of 'hate crime,' 'hate speech,' and 'racist rhetoric,' as opposed to recognising it as the re-emergence of neo-Nazi and white supremacist attitudes and action.

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The plethora of anti-terrorism legislation and policies enacted in Australia in response to the 9/11 terror attacks were ill suited to combat the rise of XRW activism and rhetoric, both social, politically, and operationally. For example, counter measures imposed to prevent Australian citizens travelling overseas to join militant Jihadist groups such as the “Islamic State” were not applied equally to the 5 Australians identified as travelling to fight with the Ukrainian XRW paramilitary Azov Battalion.¹ The Azov Battalion originated as a volunteer unit formed to bolster the Ukrainian army against Russian aggression, and was comprised of neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Azov Battalion’s attachment to the Ukrainian National Guard afforded the unit some legitimacy and prevented attempts by nations to proscribe the militia unit as a terrorist organisation. The Azov Battalion conceded that some members subscribed to XRW ideology, however, suggested only 10-20% of its members were neo-Nazis.² Azov uniforms adorned with Nazi symbols supported assessments of the militants being considered “an ultra-right-wing global terrorist network” and “a rallying point for the neo-Nazi international community”,³ and as a result, multiple countries, including the United States, withdrew their support to the Ukrainian forces.

Unlike measures imposed to prevent Australians travelling to Syria and the surrounding conflict zones involving Jihadist violence, none exist with respect to citizens exiting or re-entering Australia after training or fighting with units such as the Azov Battalion.⁴ Until January 2020, Australia refrained from placing constraints on individuals either travelling or returning from Ukraine. This changed when an Australian that had connections to domestic and transnational white supremacist networks had his passport cancelled to prevent his travel to fight with the Azov Battalion.⁵ The links between XRW actors and the Azov Battalion can be demonstrated by white supremacists that trained in Ukraine, prior to their return to the USA where they were indicted for their participation in the violence against counter protestors during the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville in 2017.⁶ A report from the Soufan Center in 2019 likened the transnational white supremacist extremist networks to those formed by Jihadists prior to 9/11.⁷

The interconnectivity of these transnational networks and the manifestations of these extremist ideologies in Australia could be seen in 2019, when an Australian citizen committed an act of extreme right-wing terrorism, killing 51 people in Christchurch, New Zealand. The attack against members of the New Zealand Muslim community at the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre was live-streamed on Facebook, with the footage being viewed around 4000 times prior to being removed from the platform.⁸ A copy of the footage was uploaded to 8Chan, an online platform known for housing XRW communities.

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- 1 Bucci, N. 23rd April, 2019. “Five Australians free to return after fighting in Ukraine far-right ‘finishing school’ alongside Russian nationalist militia”. ABC News Australia. <https://abc.net.au/news/2019-04-23/five-australians-free-to-return-after-ukraine-conflict/11004438>
 - 2 Pugliese, D. 20th June, 2020. “Ukrainian unit accused of neo-Nazi links wants Canada’s help”. Ottawa Citizen. <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/ukrainian-unit-accused-of-neo-nazi-links-wants-canadas-help>
 - 3 Nemtsova, A & Dickey, C. 15th November 2019. Ukraine’s Anti-Russia Azov Battalion: ‘Minutemen’ or neo-Nazi Terrorists?” Daily Beast <https://thedailybeast.com/ukraines-anti-russia-azov-battalion-minutemen-or-neo-nazi-terrorists>
 - 4 Rubinsztein-Dunlop, S. Dredge, S and Workman, M. 7th May, 2018. “From Neo-Nazi to militant: The Foreign fighters in Ukraine who Australia’s laws won’t stop”. ABC News Australia. <https://abc.net.au/news/2018-05-01/foreign-fighters-return-to-australia-with-military-training/9696784>
 - 5 McKenzie, N & Tozer, J. 22nd August, 2021. “Fears of Neo-Nazis in military ranks after ex-soldier’s passport cancelled”. The Age. <https://theage.com.au/national/fears-of-neo-nazis-in-military-ranks-after-ex-soldier-s-passport-cancelled-20210820-p58kxk.html>
 - 6 The Soufan Centre. 2nd March 2019. “Intel Brief: The Transnational Network That Nobody is Talking About” The Soufan Centre. <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-the-transnational-network-that-nobody-is-talking-about/>
 - 7 Seldin, J. 30th September 2019. White Supremacists Lead new wave of foreign fighters. VOA News <https://voanews.com/usa/white-supremacists-lead-new-wave-foreign-fighters>
 - 8 Schwartz, M. 19th March, 2019. “Facebook Admits Mosque Shooting Video was viewed at least 4000 times”. NPR. <https://npr.org/2019/03/19/704690054/facebook-admits-mosque-shooting-video-was-viewed-at-least-4-000-times>

The content was designed to radicalise, recruit and incite violence amongst those who see themselves as part of the same so-called European heritage that the shooter claimed to be defending.⁹

The weapons and tactical gear worn by the shooter were adorned with references to his white supremacist and anti-Islamic beliefs, while his manifesto, 'The Great Replacement,' made repeated references to 'birth rates' and the need to maintain the purity of the so-called European identity. The shooter's manifesto clearly seeks to identify himself as acting in defence of a 'European identity,' and uses both overt communication, such as explicitly articulating this identity through the manifesto, and reference to obscure music such as 'Karadžić, Lead Your Serbs,' which praises the convicted war criminal and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić. This European identity provided a transnational rather than nationalist identity for the numerous extremists who venerated the Christchurch shooter and were inspired by him to commit violence.

The actions of the Christchurch massacre strongly reflected those of the terrorist attack that killed 77 people in Norway in 2011. Both attacks were intricately planned to maximise lethality and were flanked by manifestos claiming their transnational ideological justification, highlighting multiculturalism as a threat to a perceived white European identity. The evolution from the 2011 attack to the 2019 live-streamed massacre exemplified the increased threat posed by XRW terrorists and the increased role the online environment has played in inspiring terrorist violence. The transnationality of the XRW ideology of these communities has expanded the opportunities for individuals to embrace wider perceived grievances demonstrated by other XRW actors to justify violence.

The actions and associations of the Christchurch shooter demonstrated that the threat posed by XRW ideology and violence in the Australian landscape was no longer limited to racist and hateful rhetoric but constituted an actual threat which Australian legislation and policies were ill-equipped to combat. The 2021 Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (CRIS) report to the Parliamentary inquiry into Australian extremism cited that the 320%¹⁰ increase in global far-right attacks between 2014-2019 has continued in its upward trend, particularly in Europe.¹¹ This report highlighted significant differences between the Australian XRW landscape compared to North America and Europe that are home to a large number of established XRW organisations actively involved in committing acts of violence.¹² The Australian XRW milieu's activity is predominantly conducted within small cells and online communities in line with Louis Beam's Leaderless Resistance model. International platforms that promote neo-Nazi, fascist and white supremacist ideology such as the now defunct "Iron March", enable easy connections that otherwise would be hard to uphold.¹³

The Australian XRW milieu's online interaction has shown greater interconnectivity with a more diverse array of idiosyncratic actors within the far-right community.¹⁴ "Generation Identity" is one of many groups to have emerged in the previous decade, originating in France and expanding rapidly through Europe with branches in Italy, Austria, Germany and the UK.¹⁵

9 Ibid

10 Global Terrorism Index 2019 Briefing. "Measuring the Impact of Terrorism". Institute for Economics and Peace. <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/GTI-2019-briefingweb.pdf>

11 Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies Submission to PJCIS February 2021, Inquiry into extremist movements and radicalism in Australia. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d48cb4d61091100011eded9/t/60a30784d4e6c9327719d7ee/1621297030571/Sub+11+-+Centre+for+Resilient+and+Inclusive+Societies+%281%29.pdf>

12 Ibid

13 Ibid

14 Ibid

15 Al Jazeera. 10th December, 2018. "What is Generation Identity?" Al Jazeera <https://aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/10/what-is-generation-identity>

The identitarian movement opposes globalism and multiculturalism, subscribing to the Great Replacement Theory and advocating so-called ethnopluralism or remigration¹⁶. The concept of remigration is the removal of immigrants of non-European heritage to their country of origin, ensuring the purity of the 'white' European identity.¹⁷ Connections between Australia and the transnational XRW community were identified when it was revealed that the Christchurch shooter had been in communication with Austrian neo-Nazi turned Identitarian, Martin Selner, and had donated \$2,300 AUD in funds to his organisation, while also donating to the French Identitarian organisation.¹⁸ Donations to other right wing organisations included a White Supremacist think tank in the USA, and to Freedom Radio, a podcast and YouTube channel run by prominent, far-right personality Stefan Molyneux.¹⁹

The Christchurch shooter's manifesto outlined his travel to Ukraine, the home of the Azov Battalion. The Azov Battalion was estimated to have recruited over 17,000 foreign fighters from 50 countries between 2015 – 2021, indicating Facebook and other social media to be a primary element of their recruitment campaign.²⁰ The Royal Commission Inquiry report confirmed the Australian's extensive travel included a period of approximately 3 weeks in Ukraine.²¹ There is no evidence he participated in any training with the Azov Battalion, however, the "Sonnenrad" which forms part of Azov Battalion's logo was featured on his manifesto and his tactical gear. A raid conducted in June 2020 by the Ukrainian Secret Service identified a network of neo-Nazi's that were not only stockpiling weapons and Nazi paraphernalia, but were also printing and distributing translated copies of the Australian's manifesto²². The translation of the manifesto was not limited to the Ukrainian network, with 15 translations found online including French, German and Russian.²³ Russian translations of the manifesto appeared on the neo-Nazi website "Wotanjugend" within 5 days of the Christchurch massacre, with 26,000 page views and 8600 views on their Telegram channel promoting the manifesto.²⁴ Similarly, the Christchurch shooter's manifesto expressed his admiration for other 'partisans' that had committed XRW attacks, specifically the influence of the manifesto '2083 – A Declaration of Independence', written by the perpetrator of the 2011 Norway terror attacks. The impact the online environment had in connecting the XRW community showed a 600% increase in activity between 2012 and 2016, and 80% of the XRW channels identified on Telegram were created in the 7-month period following the Christchurch massacre.²⁵

The rise in XRW activity in Australia was flagged by the NSW Police as early as 2015,²⁶ and had been noted by ASIO over multiple years²⁷, however, the extent of the transnational influences and the threats these posed to Australia failed to garner the same level of attention given to Jihadi terrorism.

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16 Ibid

17 Ibid

18 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019. <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/firearms-licensing/general-life-in-new-zealand/>

19 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019. <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/firearms-licensing/the-regulation-of-semi-automatic-firearms/>

20 Shuster, S & Perrigo, B. &th January 2021. "Like, Share, Recruit: How a White Supremacist Militia Uses Facebook to Radicalise and Train New Members". Time. <https://time.com/5926750/azov-far-right-movement-facebook/>

21 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019. <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/firearms-licensing/the-regulation-of-semi-automatic-firearms/>

22 Hume, T. 19th June 2020, "Ukraine's Secret Service Busts Neo-Nazi Cell Inspired by Christchurch Shooter". Vice World News. <https://vice.com/en/article/pkyap8/ukraines-secret-service-busts-neo-nazi-cell-inspired-by-christchurch-shooter>

23 Bellingcat. 14th August, 2019. "The Russians and Ukrainians Translating the Christchurch Shooter's Manifesto". <https://bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/08/14/the-russians-and-ukrainians-translating-the-christchurch-shooters-manifesto/>

24 Ibid

25 Lister, T. 2020. "The Nexus Between Far-Right Extremists in the United States and Ukraine". CTC Sentinel. April 2020 Volume 13, Issue 4. <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-nexus-between-far-right-extremists-in-the-united-states-and-ukraine/>

26 Baldin, D. & Lucas, K. 2019. Anti-government rage: understanding, identifying and responding to the sovereign citizen movement in Australia. Journal of policing, intelligence and counter terrorism, 14, 245-261.

27 ASIO annual Report 2019-20. Australian Government, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation <https://asio.gov.au/asio-report-parliament.html>

The actions of Australian white supremacist, neo-Nazi groups such as the 'National Socialist Network' (NSN) in 2020 received significant community, media and national security attention as a result of the overt use of Nazi symbols and gestures in the Victorian Grampians National Park.²⁸ Despite the provocative actions of the NSN chanting "Heil Hitler" and performing Nazi salutes, their actions were not illegal under Australian law, although various members of these groups are currently incarcerated on non-terrorism related offences.

The NSN's social media post on October 1, 2020 displayed balaclava clad figures performing Nazi salutes, with similarly attired members holding the NSN converging arrows flag with the comment "National Socialists in Adelaide standing back and standing by". Despite the overt and offensive nature of the NSN's activities, the lack of legislative measures available to law enforcement highlights the need to examine international measures that have proven successful. German law classifies Nazi symbols including the swastika and the SS sig runes as "symbols of anti-constitutional organisations", and has banned the use of Nazi gestures including the Nazi salute and the 'Heil Hitler' chant in public places.²⁹ The public denial of the "Holocaust" is also penalised by German Criminal Law. The implementation of such measures would empower police agencies to enforce laws relating to public and online XRW activities, as well as constitute a public condemnation of the ideologies associated with the symbols. The increasing threat of XRW actors and organisations and the online radicalisation of young Australians by XRW content was highlighted by Australian Federal Police (AFP) Deputy Commissioner Ian McCartney in a report given to the 2020 Senate estimates committee³⁰.

The XRW presence in Australia became more evident across 2020 and 2021 with the increase in civil protests resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic. The convergence of idiosyncratic right-wing actors, including anti-authoritarian, anti-lockdown, anti-vaccination, Q-Anon conspiracists and sovereign citizen groups, resulted in increased civil protests and demonstrated an increased presence online. The increased presence of these actors in online communities raises the risk of radicalisation or exposure to more extreme XRW content. The threat posed by online exposure to transnational XRW content led to the Australian government proscribing the UK based neo-Nazi "Sonnenkrieg Division" (SKD) as a terrorist organisation.³¹ The Australian Labor party has previously called for the US based "Proud Boys" to be proscribed as a terrorist organisation, however, at the current time, SKD remains the only XRW organisation to be listed amongst the 27 terror groups proscribed by Australia.³²

A raid conducted in September 2021 by the Joint Counter Terrorism Team led to the arrest of a male for importing illegal firearm components. Photos from the operation showed a swastika flag hung in a bedroom of the property. The increased instances of racial and cultural vilification by XRW proponents has led the Victorian state government to propose legislation to ban the use of Nazi symbols such as the swastika.³³

28 McKenzie, N & Tozer, J. 16th August 2021. "Inside Racism HQ: How home-grown neo-Nazi's are plotting a white revolution". The Age <https://theage.com.au/national/inside-racism-hq-how-home-grown-neo-nazis-are-plotting-a-white-revolution-20210812-p58i3x.html>

29 Bierbach, M & Kaminski, K. 14th August, 2018. "Germany's confusing rules on swastikas and Nazi symbols". DW. <https://dw.com/en/germanys-confusing-rules-on-swastikas-and-nazi-symbols/a-45063547>

30 Staynert, T. 20th October, 2020. "Young Australians are being 'aggressively radicalised' through right-wing extremism, federal police warn". SBS News. <https://sbs.com.au/news/young-australians-are-being-aggressively-radicalised-through-right-wing-extremism-federal-police-warn/b86d16f3-541e-400f-9ae1-5d29e7339c98>

31 Lowrey, T & Lipson, D. 2nd March, 2021. "Neo-Nazi Sonnenkrieg Division to become first right-wing terrorist organisation listed in Australia. ABC News Australia. <https://abc.net.au/news/2021-03-02/sonnenkrieg-division-first-right-wing-terror-group-listed/13206756>

32 Ibid

33 Pearson, E. 2nd September, 2021. "State to ban swastika as part of anti-vilification reform". The Age. <https://theage.com.au/national/victoria/state-to-ban-swastika-as-part-of-anti-vilification-reform-20210902-p58o59.html>

Legislative measures such as this are critical to the political and operational landscape to not only enable the prosecution of offenders, but also to act as a deterrent, and to demonstrate that the community finds the ideology unacceptable. Increasing accountability for online platforms such as Facebook to restrict and remove extremist content is as necessary as identifying and de-platforming sites that encourage and incite XRW ideologies and glorify and attempt to emulate the acts of violent extremists.

The increased prevalence and diversity of XRW ideology as well as the spreading transnationalisation of white supremacy specifically continues. This growing and more diverse array of idiosyncratic actors are inspired to commit violence inspired by other successful XRW extremist attacks, or are framing their justification of violence using a combination of these ideologies. Former FBI Special Agent and terrorism expert Ali Soufan highlighted the lack of legal tools available to counter the threat of domestic XRW in the same manner that Jihadi terrorism has been investigated and prosecuted.³⁴ His assessment, provided to the hearing before the Senate Committee for Homeland Security and Government Affairs, identified that the XRW groups are evolving in the same manner that the jihadists were in the 1980's and 1990's.³⁵

It is important that governments remain focused on the XRW threat, both domestically and also from a transnational perspective. Jurisdictions such as Australia must work closely with their friends and allies to be capable of addressing the increased threat from XRW ideology and terrorism. The lessons from the pre-9/11 period must be learnt and implemented. Soufan's assessment of requiring the appropriate tools to counter the threat applies equally to the Australian context. The use of proscription and pre-emptive measures that identify XRW actors will not only increase the chances of preventing violent activity, but should aim to prevent the narrative of hate and bias becoming normalised.

³⁴ Countering Domestic Terrorism: Examining the Evolving Threat, Hearing Before the Committee in Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Unites States Senate, One Hudred Sixteenth Congress, First Session, September 25, 2019.
<https://hsdl.org/?abstract&did=835354>

³⁵ Ibid

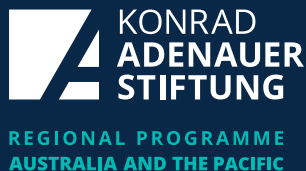
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Kristy Milligan VA was a member of the New South Wales Police Force for 16 years until 2021. Kristy completed her Masters of Terrorism and Security Studies with Distinction through the Australian Graduate School of Policing, Charles Sturt University and will begin her PhD in 2022. Her current research is centralised around right-wing extremist idiosyncratic actors, including the Sovereign Citizen Movement, and symbolism in terrorist propaganda. Kristy has contributed to research on the exploitation of extremism during the Covid pandemic, and is a presenter on CSU's 2021 Threat Briefing series, where she will speak on the role of symbolism in terrorism and extremism. Kristy is currently involved in the development of technology designed to aide law enforcement and government agencies in combating terrorism and extremism.

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