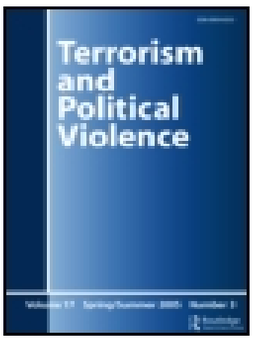

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The Role of the Internet in Facilitating Violent Extremism: Insights from Former Right-Wing Extremists

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ABSTRACT

While a growing body of evidence suggests that the Internet is a key facilitator of violent extremism, research in this area has rarely incorporated former extremists' experiences with the Internet when they were involved in violent extremism. To address this gap, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten Canadian former right-wing extremists who were involved in violent racist skinhead groups, with interview questions provided by thirty Canadian law enforcement officials and ten community activists. Participants were asked about their use of the Internet and the connection between their on- and offline worlds during their involvement in the violent right-wing extremist movement. Overall, our study findings highlight the interplay between the Internet and violent extremism as well as the interactions between the on- and offline worlds of violent extremists. We conclude with a discussion of study limitations and avenues for future research.

KEYWORDS

Violent extremism; radicalization; internet; former extremists; qualitative research

Purpose

In the past five years, it has become increasingly common for practitioners and policymakers in the Western world to draw from the insights of former extremists to generate knowledge on—and respond to—the prevalence and contours of extremism and terrorism.[1] While some researchers and practitioners have raised concerns about including formers in this space, ranging from discussions about their reliability and credibility to questions about whether their inclusion could raise concerns in the public sphere,[2] others have argued that formers can provide valuable insight into issues that terrorism scholars, among many others, are concerned with.[3] To illustrate, researchers have shown a growing interest in drawing from the voices of former extremists to address key questions in terrorism and extremism studies, including empirical studies focusing on processes of radicalization to extremism,[4] processes of deradicalization and disengagement from extremism,[5] or both pathways in and out of extremism.[6] Researchers have also explored various aspects of the above-mentioned processes via the insights of formers, including the parental influences on radicalization and deradicalization,[7] the impact of extremist online content and violent radicalization,[8] factors that minimize radicalization to mass-casualty violence,[9] the role of formers in preventing terrorism and political violence in post-conflict communities,[10] the impact of using formers in schools to combat violent extremism,[11] and an assessment of how former extremists think that extremism should be prevented and countered.[12] Some research is also beginning to emerge that draws from the insights of formers to examine the experiences of women in groups that advocate racial and political violence.[13] Indeed, formers have played an increasingly important role in informing empirical research on terrorism and extremism-related issues.[14]

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Regardless of the above-mentioned developments, scholars who are working in the field of violent online political extremism have been much slower to bring formers to the table.[15] This is in light of the fact that many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers continue to raise questions about the role of the Internet in facilitating violent extremism.[16] An exhaustive search using dedicated academic research databases produced only two studies that interviewed former extremists about their Internet usage when they were involved in extremism. Koehler,[17] for example, conducted in-depth interviews with German former right-wing extremists, with the focus of the study on the role of the Internet in individual radicalization processes. The author found that the Internet was the most important driving factors in participants' individual radicalization processes, as it provided members with a space in which they could learn skills that were necessary to access online extremist groups. Koehler[18] also found that the Internet was a central hub for extreme right-wing groups, recruiters, and strategies to influence the radical views and subsequent behavior of others online. Sieckelinck and colleagues,[19] during their interviews with thirty-four former extremists (extreme right and jihadist) in Denmark and the Netherlands on their life courses into and out of extremism, also highlighted the key catalytic role of exposure to propaganda online. Following the 9/11 attacks, an individual in their study decided to search online for information about the war in Afghanistan. Viewing this content, the participant claimed, was a key push factor within their radicalization process.

Also worth mentioning here are a small number of studies that interviewed current extremists on their media consumption and radicalization process. Ilardi,[20] for example, conducted interviews with seven Canadian jihadists and found that, in combination with close personal relationships with other extremists, the exposure to extremist literature and media was "decisive in instilling in interviewees the type of beliefs that would lead them to identify with the world of radical Islam." Wojcieszak[21] conducted a triangulated study which included content analyses of white supremacist forums as well as surveys with 182 of these forum users. Analyses suggested that traces of extremist utterances increased with increased online participation as a result of both informational and normative influences operating within the sample of online users. Deliberative and biased processing models predicted that like-minded and dissimilar social ties both exacerbate extremism. Özeren and colleagues,[22] in their examination of the recruitment strategies of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) via face-to-face interviews with forty-two members, depicted the organizations' various media outlets, including websites, online radio and television, as key to the organization's recruitment strategy. Lastly, Bazex and Mensat[23] conducted in-depth interviews with twelve young French jihadists who fought in Syria and were, at the time of the study, in custody for terrorist related offenses. The authors, who also had access to investigation files, noted several individual risk factors including delinquent behaviors, setbacks in personal loving relationships, school failure, variability in religious beliefs, and a lack of protective factors. The study also demonstrated that consumption of radical material on the Internet played a fundamental role in the young jihadists' decisions to go to Syria.

While these studies provided valuable insight—both from current or former extremists—into the Internet's role in facilitating violent extremism, this area of research remains in its infancy.[24] In furthering our understanding of the interplay between the Internet and violent extremism, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews with former right-wing extremists who were involved in violent racist skinhead groups on their use of the Internet and the connection between their on- and offline worlds during their involvement in violent extremism.

Current study

This study represents an original contribution to the academic literature on violent online political extremism on four fronts. First, the study addresses an important missing data issue that limits many studies relying on official and open source data to generate knowledge on (1) the link between the Internet and violent extremism, and (2) the interactions between on- and offline worlds of violent extremists. Drawing from the voices of individuals formerly involved in violent extremist groups or

movements who have experience with—and insight into—the online dynamics of violent extremist movements offers a first-hand account of the impact of the consumption of, and networking around, violent extremist online content in their uptake of extremist ideology and/or their decision to engage in violent extremism. This is a critical area of research that many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers continue to be concerned with.[25] Second, although there has been a surge of research on the intersections of violent extremism and the Internet, relatively few empirically grounded analyses are yet available. In other words, little is empirically known about the Internet's role in the facilitation of violent extremism,[26] and even less is known about the link between the on- and offline worlds of violent extremists.[27] Third, a growing body of literature—particularly in the Western world—has sprung up around the project of drawing from the insights of former extremists in general and former right-wing extremists and Islamists in particular to generate knowledge on the prevalence and contours of violent extremism.[28] Scholars in this space, however, have been much slower to ask formers questions about their Internet usage and activity during their involvement in violent extremism. Fourth, to date and within a Western context, little research in terrorism and extremism studies has conducted a needs analysis with law enforcement officials and community activists in preparation to interview former extremists.[29] Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to provide an in-depth, descriptive account of former extremists' use of the Internet and the connection between their on- and offline worlds during their involvement in violent extremism, which was based on a series of interview questions provided by law enforcement officials and community activists. This study, however, does not systematically examine how participants' use of the Internet and various online platforms developed or evolved over the course of time that they were involved in violent extremism.

Methods

Data collection and interview guide

This study is part of a broader project that draws from the perspectives of former extremists to develop empirically informed strategies to combat violent extremism.[30] Data collection efforts for the project consisted of two central components.

First, prior to conducting the interviews with formers, we consulted with key stakeholders, namely Canadian law enforcement officials and community activists, and they developed a list of interview questions that they would ask formers and those questions were incorporated into the interview guide. The purpose of this approach was simple: rather than developing an interview guide that was derived from an academic perspective only, we included interview questions from key stakeholders for the purposes of developing a multidimensional, multi-perspective interview guide.

A convenience sample of thirty law enforcement officials and ten community activists were solicited through e-mail communications with a letter of invitation and "word of mouth" tactics.[31] Approximately 550 questions were collected from these stakeholders which ranged from questions about the identities, roles, goals and activities of former extremists—both before, during, and after their time in violent extremism—to questions about formers' experiences with leaving extremism, to questions about their perceptions of law enforcement and anti-extremists, their use of the Internet, and how they think stakeholders can combat violent extremism. Given the sheer volume of interview questions that were accumulated during this process, questions were categorized and duplicate questions were removed.[32] Here the interview guide consisted of a combination of 275 open-ended structured and semi-structured questions.[33] Interview questions, however, did not focus specifically on violent right-wing extremism in Canada in an effort to have maximum impact within a Western context.[34]

Second, once the interview guide was finalized, the next step was to recruit former extremists to participate in the study. Initially, we relied on our contacts from our research on right-wing extremism in Canada[35] to gain access to a few formers. We developed a level of trust with these formers over a period of time and through several discussions, and they eventually connected us with other

Canadian former extremists who they believed would participate in the study. While we acknowledge the facilitation of snowball sampling to reach a wider group of former extremists, we understand the risk of selection bias which limits the extent to which we observe diverse points of view.

A total of ten former right-wing extremists participated in the current study and were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Interviews were conducted voluntarily in person or via telephone or Skype between the months of March and September of 2018. Interviews ranged from approximately 1.5 hours to seven hours in length with an average of approximately four hours. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and all names were de-identified for the purpose of ensuring participant confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of individuals and the violent extremist groups they were associated with. But transcriptions were verbatim, all in an effort to stay true to the voices of each respondent. Edits were minimal and did not affect participants' vernacular, use of profanity, or slang.

Sample characteristics

Included in the current study were eight males and two females, ranging from twenty-seven to forty-four years old with an average age of thirty-eight. Each of these participants identified themselves as a "former extremist," meaning that they were individuals who, at one time in their lives, subscribed to and/or perpetuated violence in the name of a particular extremist ideology and violent extremist group or movement. To illustrate, all ten study participants were actively involved in violent racist skinhead groups in Canada. Study participants are best described by Simi and Futrell's[36] conception of racist skinheads, which they defined as:

> . . . the youngest branch of the white power movement. They derive from a distinct youth subculture, and since the late 1980s racist skinheads have synthesized neo-Nazi ideals and symbolism. Racist skinheads persist in loosely organized gangs and activist networks that congregate in skinhead crash pads and white power music gatherings. The largest organized groups, such as the Hammerskin Nation, produce white power concerts and festivals and have active cells around the world and an extensive Internet presence.

Furthermore, our sample reflects Perliger's[37] understanding of racist skinheads, in that the former racist skinheads in our study tended to be incredibly violent and were among the most violent factions of the Canadian right-wing extremist movement. Seven participants, for example, discussed a number of instances in which they used violence or the threat of violence in support of the racist skinhead group's mission, which ranged from vandalizing mosques to violent attacks against minority groups to bombmaking efforts targeting government officials. Additionally, all study participants described several instances in which spontaneous violence was part of the daily routine of the group to which they belonged, which ranged from armed robberies against rival groups to acts of violence against specific minority groups. Together, these instances of violence align with Bjørgo and Ravndal's understanding of extreme-right violence, which they describe as "violent attacks whose target selection is based on extreme-right beliefs and corresponding enemy categories—immigrants, minorities, political opponents, or governments [. . .] [or] vandalism and spontaneous violence."[38]

Participants' roles in the violent groups ranged from presidents and sergeants, to enforcers, musicians, and spokespersons. The majority of the study participants described themselves as the "upper echelon" of Canada's racist skinhead movement and approximately half noted that they were group leaders. Most of the study participants were born in urban or suburban parts of Canada, but all were involved in group activity in major Canadian urban centers. While some participants were members of several racist skinhead groups throughout their involvement in the violent right-wing extremist movement, five of the study participants were mostly part of one particular group, which was arguably the most conspicuous racist skinhead group in Canada. Three participants were part of another racist skinhead group and two participants were involved with another group, both of which were among the most violent right-wing extremist groups in Canada.[39]

The amount of time that each interviewee was involved in the violent right-wing extremist movement ranged from approximately four years to twenty-two years with an average of thirteen years in length. On

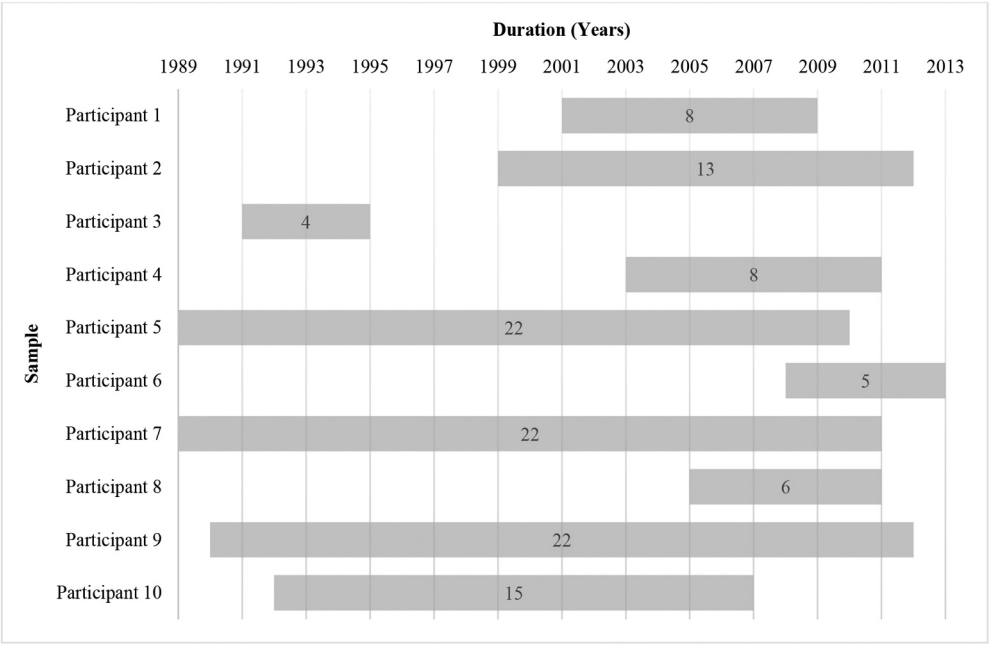

Figure 1. Time period that study participants were involved in the violent right-wing extremist movement.

average, their involvement began in 1997 and they disengaged from the movement in 2009. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the time frame that participants were involved in the violent right-wing extremist movement.

As "former extremists," the participants have since publicly and/or privately denounced violence in the name of a particular extremist ideology. In short, they no longer identify themselves as adherents of a particular violent extremist ideology or are affiliated with an extremist group or movement. The majority of the interviewees also identified themselves as "off the grid," meaning that up until the point that they were being interviewed for the current study, never did they make it publicly known—either through media or public events—that they, at one point in their lives, were part of a violent extremist group or movement. Similarly, the majority of interviewees noted that they had never participated in a research study.

Analysis and coding procedure

The results were analyzed via thematic coding, initially utilizing a constructivist grounded theory approach, which allowed us to draw from existing literature to validate codes.[40] As codes were later grouped into themes, we specifically focused on perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of study participants' use of the Internet during their involvement in violent extremism. Central emergent themes which composed of respondents describing similar experiences or views were identified, and less relevant data were omitted (i.e., selective coding). Here we coded and analyzed the data independently of one another, identifying the themes and patterns with collaborative agreement, all of which reinforced each emergent theme. The use of multiple perspectives enhanced the reliability of our observations and our subsequent understanding of how the Internet was used by former extremists in our sample during their involvement in violent extremism. The purpose of this strategy was to authenticate our coding and to maximize the robustness of the results.[41]

The role of the internet in facilitating violent radicalization

Study participants overwhelmingly suggested that the Internet played an important role in facilitating their process of radicalization to violence, largely because it provided them with unfettered access to extreme right-wing content and a network of like-minded individuals, which in turn increased their exposure to violent extremist ideologies and violent extremist groups. This, however, was not the case for all participants—two former extremists in the current study indicated that their use of the Internet during their process of violent radicalization was minimal. The reasons for this varied between each participant. In one case, the racist skinhead group that the participant associated with rarely used the Internet during their time in the movement, so the interviewee's usage was also minimal. But it is worth noting here that this study participant was active in the movement during a time when the Internet was not as widely used as it was during the time that most study participants were involved in violent extremism. This most likely explains why the Internet was not a key factor in facilitating the one participant's process of violent radicalization. On the other hand, one participant, although they admitted to browsing violent extremist forums on occasion or making plans via e-mail with other extreme right adherents, indicated their use of the Internet was minimal and believed that the Internet did not play a role in their violent radicalization. This participant further noted that communicating with other extremists online was "a waste of time" because most digital spaces of the extreme right were "swarming" with members who lacked commitment to the cause. As this interviewee added: "I was on Stormfront [a right-wing extremist discussion forum] for a bit, but nah … it was almost minimal because it's mostly just keyboard commandos and people that don't show up for events and just like to talk a big talk and not actually follow through" (Participant 5). Yet these two participants' experiences with the Internet during their processes of violent radicalization do not represent the experiences of the majority of those who participated in the current study.

Exposure

Three of the participants were first exposed to violent extremist ideologies as a result of accessing radical right-wing content online. One participant, for example, was an avid heavy metal fan who frequented music discussion forums, and it was here that she first met a member of a violent extremist group who began to share white power music with her. They eventually built a friendship online, oftentimes discussing different genres of music, and here she shared with him that she played the bass guitar. In an effort to increase her interest in white power music and the violent extremist movement in general, he continuously shared white power music with her that featured a prominent bass line. As this participant further added:

> So, this guy messages me one day. I grew up listening to metal. And yeah, he was in a [violent extremist] group so … we started chatting, and he sent me all these NSBM songs. Nationalist Socialist Black Metal. As soon as he figured out I played bass, he'd send me songs with really good basslines in them. Yeah and of course, you know, I was fascinated. And I got to admit, a lot of them are actually very musically talented. I can pick those things out being a bass player. (Participant 6)

Worth highlighting is that, unlike the above experiences that were shared by this participant, most of the study participants who were first exposed to violent extremist ideologies online did not "just stumble across the material," as one interviewee put it. And how they were first exposed to extremist content online varied by participant. For instance, one former extremist in the current study who later led one of Canada's most violent racist skinhead groups noted that he was first exposed to violent extremist ideologies when an individual who he knew and trusted in the offline world shared digital materials with him during an online conversation. Another participant who later became an enforcer in a racist skinhead group explained that, as he was getting to know a member of a violent extremist group during an offline interaction, he was later encouraged by that adherent to visit the group's websites to "get up to speed" on the goals of the group. One participant who became a guitar player in a white power band that promoted violence against immigrants also noted that, when he went to his

first white power concert, it was here that other concert goers suggested that he visit specific websites that sold hate music. But regardless of how they were first exposed to the violent extremist content online, these participants oftentimes described this exposure as a critical point that sparked their initial interest in violent extremist ideologies. To illustrate, one interviewee, for example, recalled that accessing extreme right-wing content online in the form of white power music videos exposed them to violent extremist ideologies and, as a result, their curiosity in violent extremist ideologies and the broader right-wing extremist movement was piqued. As this participant put it: "I saw a few [white power music] video clips. I remember looking at what they called at the time … was called Aryan Fest back then. So, I'd watch … you know, a few video clips of bands playing live. That was pretty neat I first thought" (Participant 4).

In addition, four of the interviewees were first exposed to violent extremist groups on the Internet —most often through extreme right-wing discussion forums. In some instances, this exposure was a result of participants being directed by a group member – who they were communicating with online —to their group discussion forums. In other instances, participants were exposed to group content while browsing through collective extremist forums for a general extreme right-wing audience. One participant similarly recalls being exposed to a violent extremist group for the first time online by visiting a group-based discussion forum and reaching out to group members there. Another participant also described how a friend in the offline world first exposed him to a violent extremist group by connecting him with the group through a collective extremist forum.

Among the most common forms of violent extremist content that participants were exposed to online during their initial process of violent radicalization was extreme right-wing literature and music. To illustrate, one former who was active in violent racist skinhead groups for approximately fifteen years discussed the various extremist materials that they engaged with online and claimed that they accessed violent extremist literature, from books to other short readings, for the purposes of "research" and "nothing more, nothing less" (Participant 10). White power music, however, was the most popular form of extremist content that the interviewees accessed online in their early stages of violent radicalization. Here they oftentimes discussed how the music lyrics were particularly effective in conveying violent extremist ideologies, all which tended to promote the use of violence in the name of the cause and to maintain a "brotherhood" between movement adherents. As one participant who was involved in the violent right-wing extremist movement for over ten years explained it:

> The messaging in the music was so important, right? You could learn more about ideology from the music. Like you'd listen to one band that might be hate core, which is one genre in the [white power] music where they'd talk about like … extreme shit like just … you know, beating up immigrants on site, or even single-issue stuff. They would talk about burning down native reservations or just really extreme stuff. And you could listen to that if you were in a real pissed off mood. Or if you were in a party mood, you could listen to another group that's talking about brotherhood and … you know, everyone getting together and … you know, that kind of thing. So, there was something for every mood you were in I found. (Participant 2)

Three participants also noted that this white power music was rooted in upbeat, catchy rhythms, which were particularly effective in capturing their initial interest in violent extremist ideologies. It was the powerful and stimulating sound of the music that participants used to "absorb" the "dark, frankly very inappropriate undertone of the lyrics," as Participant 6 put it—and much more effectively than violent extremist literature or lectures. As one interviewee best summarized this sentiment:

> Music's a way to get your message across. Because a lot of people, especially young people, don't wanna listen to long ass speeches. I did because that's … you know, that was just something that I enjoyed. But for a lot of people, they just want to listen to loud music. They wanna hear … you know, loud guitars and punk or metal or music they can mosh to and be angry to, and then hear messages that will align with their ideas. Music is a way to rally people together. […] Music was kind of like a … it was just … it was a major recruiting tool. (Participant 1)

During the discussions about exposure to violent extremist ideologies, the majority of the participants noted that, whether this exposure happened online or offline, their initial interest in the violent extremist ideologies stemmed from "wanting to be part of something," as one participant put it, or

as another participant explained: "I definitely think it was the sense of belonging I was first looking for" (Participant 6). Worth highlighting is that approximately three-quarters of the study participants described feeling isolated and disconnected from their family and friends, which they described as making them feel vulnerable and susceptible to being recruited into violent extremist groups. As one participant explained it: "I was a vulnerable kid, right? I was looking for belonging, right? You could see the vulnerabilities. You could see a person that was looking for direction" (Participant 2). Five study participants also added that recruiters would oftentimes seek out these vulnerable individuals, both on- and offline, and attempt to introduce them to violent extremist ideologies. Participant 6, for example, explained that: "As far the recruiters themselves, [. . .] a lot of the time they will go after that kid who is isolating, feels alone and . . . like, they want someone who's isolated and who will trust them immediately." Similarly, one former extremist in the current study described his interactions with an individual who eventually recruited him into a violent extremist group:

> The main thing he did was give me belonging and he promised me that, "hey, if you come and hang out and I'll introduce you to more of these guys." And I always wanted to belong to something because I had failed at sports, I had failed at joining gangs, I had failed at . . . you know, many different groups of friends too. He just had . . . he offered that . . . he offered that availably and said "hey, look at this group. All you need to do is be white." You know? And . . . you know, at first it was hard to accept . . . you know, some of the stuff they were staying . . . like all the racial stuff [. . .] I just wanted to get to the concert, or the meeting, or whatever to hang out with all the guys. But of course, it was a necessary point for the far-right, so I went with it. (Participant 2)

Immersion

Following their initial exposure to violent extremist content online, study participants commonly reported that, because they wanted to feel like part of a group, they continued to use the Internet to access a variety of forms of extreme right-wing content to indulge their "newfound curiosity" in violent extremist ideologies. In fact, half of the study participants spent a significant amount of time online every day accessing extremist content and immersing themselves in violent extremist ideologies during their process of violent radicalization. As one participant who was a member of one of the most violent racist skinhead groups in Canada put it:

> . . . most of the time, I'm on my own. And between school stuff I would be reading this [extreme right-wing] stuff constantly. So yeah, I'm on here [the Internet] and I'm on these [extreme right] forums, you know? Even if I'm not posting directly, I'm reading . . . I'm reading what other people are saying. [. . .] I'm sitting there reading, like, "you're right, you're right." And then they would say, "well, you should read this article" and then it's just like boom—all of a sudden, by the end you'd be reading a hundred different articles about this stuff. And then it's like, oh my god . . . it's like three in the morning, you know? And that was like all the time. (Participant 1)

The majority of the study participants further added that, during their process of radicalization to violence, they increasingly immersed themselves in violent extremist content as well as right-wing extremist networks via online discussion forums, chatrooms and social media platforms. That is, eight of the study participants frequented extreme right-wing discussion forums—which included collective extremist forums for a general audience (e.g., Stormfront) and forums dedicated to violent extremist groups—and three of them used social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Three study participants also mentioned that online chatrooms, such as MSN and Yahoo messenger, were commonly used by violent extremist groups that they were becoming involved with to facilitate group meetings. Participants oftentimes noted that these digital spaces allowed them to connect and communicate with supportive, like-minded peers about their grievances and perceived injustices, among other things, which made them feel connected to a larger "community." Participant 6, for example, described these online spaces as "empowering" during her process of violent radicalization, noting that: "looking back on it, we enabled each other quite a bit online. Like . . . whenever we would ever see a problem, another friend of ours would tell us, 'okay, well it's these peoples' fault!' Like . . . they'd always find a way to twist it around and blame somebody else." Engaging in these virtual communities, according to eight interviewees, reaffirmed their radical views and, by extension,

facilitated their process of violent radicalization. In particular, formers in the current study oftentimes discussed how chatrooms (e.g., MSN and Yahoo messenger) and extreme right-wing discussion forums provided them with an important space to engage with their like-minded and oftentimes violent peers, largely because, during their process of violent radicalization, a peer network of like-minded individuals in the offline world was missing. As one participant explained it: "As I got more into white power, I became more anti-social. I started to participate less and less in like … sports and going out. I went to chatrooms and forums because it's where you can connect with other people who have the same views as you. That's how it started" (Participant 1). Oftentimes discussed within this context was how, when study participants were able to engage in an online network of like-minded others, it facilitated their process of violent radicalization because they could communicate directly with "seasoned members" of the violent movement. This, according to seven participants, was a key element that facilitated their involvement in violent extremist groups because these adherents provided them with a significant amount of knowledge about the right-wing extremist movement. Within this context, one study participant, for example, noted that:

> I would learn as much as I could from people [in the violent extremist movement], especially those who had been involved for longer. Because when I started [to get involved in violent extremism] from the beginning, I didn't know anything, you know? At the beginning, you start learning, you start learning all this [extreme right] lingo. You're like, "what's fourteen words? Oh right! Well who is that guy in the movement?" He goes, "well, he started this group called The Order." And you go, "well, what's The Order?" He goes, "well, they're a group who robbed banks and they were like white revolutionaries!" and I'm like, "well, that's so cool!" I'm like, "where can I learn more about that?" He's like, "well, read this book. And then there's a movie, and then you can learn about it and this other [extreme right] guy too." And then I find out that the guy from The Order is in jail and I can reach him and I can write to them! (Participant 1)

Also discussed in this regard was how, in the online world, seasoned members were very generous with their time and dedication to mentoring younger recruits. These established members offered the newer recruits detailed, intimate and personal insights into the beliefs, norms, and values of the violent right-wing extremist movement as well as provided guidance and support about life-matters in general and matters relating to right-wing extremism in particular. It was this kind of support that interviewees were oftentimes looking for in the offline world, largely because they felt alone in their extreme beliefs as most friends and family members did not share similar views, nor did they support the use of violence in the name of a particular extremist ideology or group. Again, the majority of the study participants oftentimes discussed feeling like an "outsider" prior to their process of violent radicalization, noting for example that they felt disconnected from people, or as one participant explained: "I could be in a crowd of like … forty or fifty, and I … I would feel like I didn't belong" (Participant 8). When these seasoned members gave them attention and made them feel like part of a group, it was here that they began to immerse themselves with violent extremist content online.

The role of the internet in connecting the on- and offline worlds of violent extremists

When study participants were asked about the ways that the Internet connected their on- and offline worlds during their involvement in violent extremist groups, participants initially explained how their on- and offline worlds did not operate independently from one another. Rather, their on- and offline worlds tended to interact with regard to their activities, identities, and security and surveillance.

Activities

Eight of the study participants explained how discussion forums, chatrooms, and social media sites were ideal spaces to advertise events being held by violent extremist groups in the offline world. For example, four participants described how designated extremist forums for groups who were known to engage in violence offline advertised group-specific events (e.g., concerts, gatherings) on their platforms. Similarly, collective extremist forums for a general audience, such as Stormfront, were

described by six interviewees as ideal platforms for adherents to advertise offline events that oftentimes involved violence (e.g., rallies, protests) because it was the largest and most active online hate site. As Participant 2 further added, Stormfront was "*the* communication forum for all the organized hate groups." Having said that, these study participants noted that, for those who advertised offline events on popular platforms such as Stormfront, they were generally successful in attracting adherents to the events. As one participant who was an event promoter during his eight years in a violent racist skinhead group explained it: "I'd actually go on there [Stormfront] when I wanted to post something. I'd create a flyer through Photoshop or whatever and then post it on to Stormfront. And that was that —lots of people would show up" (Participant 4). Worth noting here is that the purpose of advertising these offline events in online spaces, according to five interviewees, was not only to encourage adherents to connect with others in the offline world, but to encourage others to engage in movement-related activities and, in many cases the use of violence, beyond the digital world. Seven participants also explained that such online platforms were exploited by the recruiters of violent extremist groups to attract new members. Stormfront, for example, was a popular space for such activity because recruiters could identify and connect with local adherents who were interested in joining a group. As an example, one former extremist in the current study who was also a recruiter during their involvement in a violent extremist group described their use of Stormfront for recruitment purposes:

> Early on, recruitment was . . . usually happening face-to-face before the Internet. But then when the Internet came along, we would use the Internet as that tool [to recruit], right? So, we would post, "hey we're having a meeting on August 2nd. Any interested people come on out". [. . .] And then we'd . . . you know, if we found a couple of guys that were more interested, you'd give them your email or you'd give them your MSN [messenger] name or whatever. And then you'd have a chat and then maybe meet up again when it's not prearranged . . . like that publicly like on Stormfront. (Participant 2)

Approximately one-third of the study participants also reported that, during their involvement in violent racist skinhead groups, they themselves used the Internet to organize and facilitate their activities with other violent individuals and groups in the offline world. Participants also noted that they used online platforms to meet their first offline violent extremist peers and groups, including to attend their first violent extremist events such as white power music concerts and music festivals that promoted the genocide of Jews. Interestingly, a key feature of online platforms that facilitated the connection with the offline world, according to interviewees, was the interactive and localized nature of these spaces; the like-minded could seek out, connect and interact with local adherents online who shared their views and who they could then meet in offline, in-person settings. One participant, for example, explained that online discussion forums were instrumental in helping them make some of their first connections with local members of a violent extremist group, which eventually led to them becoming an active violent adherent in the offline world. As this interviewee and another explained:

> Both the group I eventually became part of and other [extreme right] groups had a website. And from there, I remember they had a web board. And that's where I first connected with people who were local. And, yeah, so I used that board to meet people online and connect offline. (Participant 1)

> Each group has its own site, right? Groups had publicly available websites that are about their group, right? Then you can join the forums, hear about what they're doing, and then get involved and all that kind of shit offline. (Participant 2)

In addition, over one-third of the study participants discussed how they, themselves, used online platforms to engage in various online activities in the name of the cause, which they oftentimes described as "spilling over into the offline world." Such activities included flyering campaigns that promoted violence against the LGBTQ community, with propaganda flyers first being publicized to adherents within extreme right-wing discussion forums for the purpose of encouraging others to print and disseminate the flyers within their local communicates. Similar strategies were used to advertise white power music events that promoted violent right-wing extremist beliefs, including concerts and festivals. Study participants also described how they used music sharing websites specifically for the extreme right (e.g., Tightrope Records and Resistance Records) as well as popular online music

services (e.g., Napster and Limewire) and online shopping sites (e.g., Ebay) to share and exchange violent white power music with others at a local, national, and international level. Oftentimes discussed within this context was how they could distribute the hateful music, both on- and offline, as a result of the laissez-faire content policies that were maintained by the websites. Three participants also noted that they sold music online in the form of compact discs (CDs) to offline buyers and made a substantial profit as a result of the high volume of sales. One participant, for example, described how they used the popular online platform eBay to disseminate white power music that promoted violence against Jews: "Back then eBay wasn't cracking down as hard on it [white power music]. So, I used to sell the shit outta white power music on eBay! I used to … I used to make like three or four thousand dollars a month selling white power music on eBay." (Participant 8)

Identities

Study participants oftentimes discussed how their on-and offline identities were interconnected during their involvement in a violent extremist group, with over half of the interviewees reporting no substantial differences between their on- and offline identities. For three of these participants, they discussed how they maintained the same identity both on- and offline in an effort to represent an authentic version of themselves and their beliefs, as well as for the purpose of creating authentic connections with other violent adherents. In this regard, one participant explained that "for me, it was just about … just being involved with other people who felt the same. That was the whole thing [about how I represented myself online and offline]" (Participant 1). Similarly, three study participants reported that they maintained the same on- and offline identities because they associated their identity with their role in the violent extremist group. To illustrate, one participant explained that their on- and offline identities were the same because they considered the online world to be "just another space" to engage in similar movement-related activities, comparable to how they would engage in offline. As this study participant further noted:

> For me, I think I was the same person [online and offline]. Like, on the … on the websites, I was always … a recruiter. On the outside, I was a recruiter. […] I never tried to create a false persona online to make me seem better or worse than I was in person. […] It was very evident who I was … in … offline too, right? I was proud of it! (Participant 2)

Although most interviewees maintained that they had the same identity in both offline and online settings, four of the study participants were convinced that there were discrepancies between the on- and offline identities of some of the "violent right-wing extremists" they encountered online. These four participants noted that these so-called violent extremists may have felt emboldened by the anonymous nature of the Internet, as they could present themselves as violent and committed to the cause in online settings. One participant further added that: "I just pictured them as back-talking keyboard cowboys. I've seen these guys online and they're talking tough. You want to be a tough guy? We're gonna be face-to-face! I'm not going to be the guy hammering out all of your threats on a keyboard" (Participant 7). Such an online identity was largely regarded by the study participants as inauthentic. That is, despite their willingness to present themselves as violent extreme right-wing adherents, these "Net Nazis" would not meet other adherents in-person and, as a consequence, their violent and extreme identity could not be verified. This was frustrating for four study participants, as they oftentimes connected digital spaces of the extreme right with those that were crowded with "Internet warriors" who would engage in violent conversations online, but in reality were, as one participant explained it, just "sitting there with a Big Gulp in their mom's basement and is fifty years old." (Participant 2)

Security and surveillance

What emerged during the interviews with the former extremists was an interaction between their online activities and concerns about offline security. In particular, approximately three-quarters of the study participants noted that, during their involvement in a violent extremist group, they were oftentimes concerned that law enforcement officials and anti-racist groups were actively monitoring

their online activities and trying to "bait" them into providing personal information to infiltrate their group. As one participant put it: "Whenever I was online, I treated every single minute of every single day like everything I was saying was going right to a fucking cop" (Participant 10). Another interviewee who was an active recruiter added that:

> I tried to meet up with people that I first met online, but I ended up meeting up with cops lots of times. Or informants. Or anti-racists. I mean . . . there's one instance where for sure we meet up with an anti-racist guy who was pretending to be a white supremacist online, right? So, I mean . . . you can't discount that these types of groups like anti-racists and cops aren't going to try everything to infiltrate the groups, right? (Participant 2)

Three study participants even feared that this "surveillance" spanned across platforms to all of their online activities. As a result, interviewees were concerned with and cautious about their online activities and were suspicious about online users who they interacted with—particularly when communicating in extremist spaces online. For those who they initially connected with there, study participants explained how they had to exercise caution during their attempts to meet with them in-person. Interviewees, for example, described their efforts to scrutinize the online activities of those who they were interested in meeting in person, looking for indicators to suggest that online users were not, in fact, violent right-wing extremists but instead were uncover police officers or anti-racists. As one interviewee explained: "If some guy's sending you a message and it's all questions, you start to wonder, 'is this an anti-racist or is this a cop?' Or if they're asking, 'what's your name?' or 'what city are you in?' that's frickin' cop behavior, right? That's what would come to mind right away" (Participant 2). Another study participant added that these indicators included online behaviors that were "over the top extreme," all in an effort gather information on an adherent or their associated violent extremist group: "If you're talking to somebody about meeting up, you may meet if they didn't hit the big warning signals . . . like, the big red flags . . . like, if they weren't talking out of their ass or talking like they were trying to overthrow the fucking government or any of that stupid shit that you expect from somebody who's trying to research the movement properly" (Participant 10).

As a result of the above-mentioned security and surveillance concerns, four of the study participants noted that they took measures to conceal their group-related activities online to avoid detection from law enforcement or anti-racist groups. One measure, for example, related to the computers they used to access extremist content and networks online. To illustrate, when study participants were asked whether they were security-conscious about their online activities while involved with a violent extremist group, two interviewees noted that they avoided using their personal computers to access extremist content or interact with other adherents online. Participant 10, for example, noted that: "I didn't send emails. I didn't join web-forums or message boards from my computer, at all." Instead, this participant ventured outside the home, to libraries or Internet cafés, to use the Internet because they believed their Internet history could not be traced back to them—or not easily at least. Similarly, another interviewee took measures to conceal their affiliation with the violent group on their personal social media profile by modifying their security settings: "I set all my security settings to private. So, you had to be on my contacts list to see what I was posting" (Participant 6). One study participant—who, at one time, was the president of one of the most violent racist skinhead groups in Canada—also indicated that, to avoid detection from law enforcement, he avoided posting messages on the more popular extreme right-wing platforms and instead had others post on behalf of his group: "I let other guys deal with that stuff. It's like . . . yeah, go ahead post this, go ahead post that" (Participant 7).

Discussion

Researchers and practitioners have shown a growing interest in drawing from the insights of former extremists to address key research questions in terrorism and extremism studies,[42] including studies focusing on processes of radicalization to violent extremism[43] and processes of deradicalization and disengagement from violent extremism,[44] for example. But within this emerging area of work, relatively few empirically grounded studies have interviewed former extremists about their Internet

usage and activity when they were involved in violent extremist groups or movements.[45] This is in light of the fact that many researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers continue to raise questions about the role of the Internet in facilitating violent extremism.[46] The purpose of this study, then, was to address this area of inquiry by drawing from the insights of former right-wing extremists who were involved in violent racist skinhead groups, asking them questions about their online activities during their involvement in violent extremism and with a particular focus on their processes of violent radicalization and the connections between their on- and offline worlds. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study.

First, with regard to how formers in the current study were first exposed to violent right-wing extremist ideologies and groups, the results are mixed: approximately one-third of the study participants were first exposed online while the remainder were exposed via offline interactions. This finding aligns with empirical work that highlights the complex and multi-dimensional nature of initial exposure to violent extremism, particularly of violent right-wing extremist content[47] and jihadi content.[48] For our study participants, however, exposure most commonly occurred after a "friend" in the offline world who they knew and trusted directed them to violent extremist materials online—a finding that is supported by empirical research on the importance of trust in attracting individuals to violent right-wing extremist movements.[49] Such a finding also mirrors empirical work which found that the Internet played a secondary role in radicalizing U.S. extremists (Islamist, far-left, far-right, and single-issue) to violence, wherein the Internet was used to "reaffirm or advance pre-existing extremist beliefs that were first acquired through face-to-face relationships."[50] Regardless, it is worth adding that exposure to extremist content online played a critical role in sparking participants' interest in violent extremist ideologies, which aligns with previous empirical work highlighting the importance of exposure to extremist content in instilling violent extremist ideologies, whether it is from the extreme right[51] or other types of violent extremist movements.[52] But what is apparent in our study is that it is those who are susceptible to being recruited into violent extremist groups and have a desire to "belong to something," as one participant put it, that sparks initial interest in the violent extremist ideologies. This need to be part of the collective is key factor discussed in a number of empirical studies on violent radicalization and right-wing extremist movements.[53]

Second, our study findings reveal that, regardless of how individuals are first exposed to violent extremist ideologies and groups, it is the Internet that eventually facilitates processes of violent radicalization by enabling them to immerse themselves in extremist content and networks—a finding supported by empirical research on the role of the Internet in facilitating an array of violent extremist movements (e.g., the extreme right, jihadi, single issue)[54] and the extreme right-wing movement in particular.[55] And similar to previous research which observed that online spaces of the extreme right—from discussion forums to social media and fringe platforms—serve as important virtual communities for adherents to support one another, among other things,[56] interviewees in our study oftentimes reported that seasoned or veteran extreme-right wing adherents "took them under their wing" in online settings, providing them with information and offering them a sense of belonging that participants were seeking. Within this context, former extremists in the current study also highlight the importance of exposure to white power music online in facilitating their process of violent radicalization. Indeed, the power of white power and national socialist black metal music as a recruitment tool for violent extremists has been underscored in a number of empirical studies[57] and has been found to be a key pillar of racist skinhead subculture generally.[58]

Third and finally, our study findings highlight an important interaction between the on- and offline worlds of violent right-wing extremists which are intertwined with extremist activities, identities, and a need for security. To illustrate, former extremists in the current study believe that the Internet can serve as a gateway for individuals to engage in violent extremist activities offline, connecting adherents in the online world to the offline world, oftentimes through the online promotion of offline events (e.g., concerts, rallies, protests, and gatherings)—a set of findings that aligns with empirical work emphasizing an important relationship between online interactions with offline extremist events underpinning various right-wing extremist movements.[59] Worth adding here is that most of our study participants were concerned about their on- and offline security during their involvement in violent extremist groups, noting that they modified their on- and offline behaviors to avoid detection

and infiltration from law enforcement and anti-fascist groups. Similar tactics have been adopted by a newer generation of right-wing extremists who in recent years have exploited various encrypted online platforms and messaging apps to avoid being tracked and detected.[60] Interestingly, though, is that, despite our study participants' security concerns, most participants in our study—unlike the newer generation of violent right-wing extremists who are active and communicate anonymously in various encrypted online spaces[61]—maintained the same identities in both their on- and offline worlds and displayed their roles in the movement (e.g., as recruiters or promoters) similarly in both worlds. Discussed within this context was how the Internet was flooded with "Net Nazis" or "Internet Warriors" (i.e., adherents who were very active online but would not meet others offline), which reflects what some in terrorism and extremism studies have described as activity involving individuals who behave more violently online when there is a perception of increased anonymity and privacy there.[62]

Limitations and future research

While this study offers a first-hand account of the interplay between the Internet and violent extremism by drawing from the insights of former right-wing extremists, this study is not without its limitations.

First, the retrospective nature of the in-depth interviews with former extremists raises questions about the reliability of some of their accounts of past events, especially those described as significant in retrospect, due to memory erosion, distortion, and selective recall.[63] Having said that, future studies may consider verifying the authenticity of formers' accounts by triangulating interview data with interviews with family members or peers as well as analyses of open source intelligence (e.g., court records, media scans, website analysis, etc.).

Second, our study included a relatively small sample size and was focused on a specific type of violent extremist in one geographical context. The study sample also consisted of a group of formers who were deeply entrenched in violent racist skinhead groups for an extensive period of time and who may also be deemed the "older guard" of the violence right-wing extremist movement. Although the purpose of this exploratory study was not to be representative or provide generalizations, future research should include larger sample sizes in an effort to better inform practitioners and policymakers on the role of the Internet in facilitating violent extremism. Future studies should also incorporate different types of comparison groups, perhaps using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA)[64] used by researchers in terrorism and extremism studies,[65] to assess whether the study findings are unique to the ten former extremists who we interviewed. Future research could compare former extremists' Internet usage and how their on- and offline worlds interacted when they were involved in violent extremism across movements (i.e., former Islamist extremists versus right-wing extremists versus left-wing extremists), across nations (e.g., the United States versus the United Kingdom versus Europe versus Australia), and across time frames in which they were active in a particular violent extremist movement (e.g., 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, and now).[66] Comparison groups may also include nonviolent extremists,[67] or a younger generation of those who are currently active in extremism, as their experiences with the Internet during their involvement in extremism will most likely differ from those who participated in the current study. Together, all of these comparisons would provide a more nuanced account of the complex link between the Internet and violent extremism as well as the evolving connection between the on- and offline worlds of violent extremists.

Lastly, while the current study shed some light on the impact of the consumption of and networking around violent extremist content and users online, our understanding of the extent to which their uptake of extremist ideology and decision to engage in violent extremism as a result of such exposure is limited. Having said this, the key now is to build upon this exploratory study to give us a sense of not just whether exposure to ideological content in the online environment causes violent extremism, but also how, in what contexts and for whom? Is "exposure" sufficient whether it is in the virtual or physical world? Does it work differently for different people in different contexts? To unpick the specificity of the "online" environment,

exposure to other materials offline have to be incorporated into research designs. The only study of its type is Turpin-Petrosino[68] who conducted 567 surveys with secondary school and university-level students. The surveys centered around exposure to hate group propaganda and individual attitudes toward these groups. Of the six exposure types (i.e., print material contact, word-of-mouth contact, U.S. mail contact, local cable television contact, Internet contact, and phone contact), the Internet was the third most prolific source in changing people's attitudes—behind word-of mouth contact and phone contact. Given the large innovations in the immersiveness of the online space since this study was conducted, further empirical undertakings are necessary. Furthermore, recent research on exposure to violent extremist content in online environments—and via new social media platforms—have demonstrated that when social climates of fear, uncertainty and polarization are more prevalent, there are increased chances of individuals encountering rhetoric that support hateful content and violent extremist ideologies and thus serve as platforms for recruitment into violent extremism.[69] Future empirical studies that include the experiences of former and/or current extremists in this regard should examine in more detail how combined exposure to and consumption of violent extremist rhetoric in divisive socio-cultural and political climates might have contributed to their violent radicalization. This could be done by incorporating various grading scales that have been used in terrorism and extremism studies to categorize and assess levels of violent extremism found in the content consumed by users,[70] especially as exposure and consumption develop and evolve over time.

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29. A notable exception includes Scrivens et al., "Combating Violent Extremism."
30. See *Ibid*.
31. Law enforcement officials who participated in the study were working in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta and New Brunswick and were stationed in various law enforcement divisions, including research and innovation; crime prevention; major crimes; behavior analysis; federal policing; state protection and intelligence; hate crimes, and; the extremist threat division. Community activists who participated in the study were situated in Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta, and were active members of various anti—hate initiatives across Canada.
32. Interview questions were organized into the following categories:
    Personal experiences in violent extremism: (i) before the radicalization process; (ii) radicalization process; (iii) experiences in the violent extremist movement; (iv) leaving violent extremism; and, (v) reflections after leaving violent extremism.
    Responding to violent extremism: (i) disengagement from violent extremism; (ii) deradicalization from violent extremism; and, (ii) Preventing and countering violent extremism.
33. While certain terms, such as "radicalization" and "de-radicalization," were included in the initial interview guide, we were concerned that some of the study participants may be put off by these terms. Other participants may have been involved in violent extremism prior to such terms being used in the mainstream. As a result, our interview guide, while systematic, was also flexible and dynamic. As but one way to account for the above concerns, within our interview guide we included a side list of alternative terms and ways of framing the questions. For terms associated with "radicalization," as an example, alternative terms included "indoctrination" or alternative wording such as "adhering to radical views" or "thinking differently than other people." For terms associated with "de-radicalization," alternative wording included "being open-minded" or "thinking differently."
34. It is important to highlight that, while the interview guide consisted of a set of questions that corresponded specifically with the interview guide categories noted above (such as "how old were you when you were first introduced to radical beliefs?"), the guide also consisted of a similar and rigorous set of questions within and across categories. For example, the guide included a systematic series of questions about friendship networks, belief systems, use of the Internet, and interactions with law enforcement (among many other topics of discussion) both before, during, and after being involved in violent extremism.
35. See Perry and Scrivens, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2019).
36. Pete Simi and Robert Futrell, *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement's Hidden Spaces of Hate*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 17.
37. Arie Perliger, *Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America's Far Right* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012).
38. Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses* (The Hague: International Center for Counter-Terrorism, 2019), 5.
39. The name of this racist skinhead group or other groups that study participants were involved in are not disclosed because doing so could reveal their identities.
40. See Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London, UK: Sage, 2006).

41. Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act in Sociology* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1970).
42. See Scrivens et al., "Former Extremists in Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization Research."
43. Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization Processes"; Simi et al., "Narratives of Childhood Adversity."
44. Barrelle, "Pro-Integration"; Horgan et al., "Walking Away."
45. Notable exceptions include Koehler, "The Radical Online" and Sieckelinck et al., "Transitional Journeys Into and Out of Extremism."
46. Scrivens et al., "The Role of the Internet in Facilitating Violent Extremism and Terrorism."
47. Sieckelinck et al., "Transitional Journeys Into and Out of Extremism"; Pete Simi and Robert Futrell, "Cyberculture and the Endurance of White Power Activism," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 34, no. 1 (2006): 115–42.
48. Drevon, "Embracing Salafi Jihadism in Egypt."
49. Tore Bjørgo, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators, and Responses* (Oslo, Norway: Tano-Aschehoug, 1997); Kathleen M. Blee, *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada*; Simi and Futrell, *American Swastika*.
50. Michael Jensen, and Patrick James, Gary LaFree, Aaron Safer-Lichtenstein, and Elizabeth Yates, *The Use of Social Media by United States Extremists* (College Park, MD: START, 2018), 2.
51. Wojcieszak, "'Don't Talk to Me'."
52. Bazex and Mensat, "Who are the French Jihadists?"; Ilardi, "Interviews with Canadian Radicals."
53. Perry and Scrivens, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada*; Sieckelinck et al., "Transitional Journeys Into and Out of Extremism"; Simi and Futrell, *American Swastika*.
54. Gill et al., "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers"; Paul Gill and Emily Corner, "Lone-Actor Terrorist Use of the Internet and Behavioural Correlates," in *Terrorism Online: Politics, Law, Technology and Unconventional Violence*, edited by Lee Jarvis, Stuart. Macdonald, and Thomas M. Chen (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), 35–53; von Behr et al., *Radicalization in the Digital Era*.
55. Jensen et al., *The Use of Social Media by United States Extremists*; Koehler, "The Radical Online."
56. Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, *"The Great Replacement:" The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism* (London, UK: Institute for Strategic Dialogue); Maura Conway, Ryan Scrivens and Logan Macnair, *Right-Wing Extremists' Persistent Online Presence: History and Contemporary Trends* (The Hague, Netherlands: International Center for Counter-Terrorism, 2019).
57. Robert Futrell, Pete Simi, and Simon Gottschalk, "Understanding Music in Movements: The White Power Music Scene," *The Sociological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2006): 275–304; Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada*; Simi and Futrell, *American Swastika*; Vivek Venkatesh, Jeffrey S. Podoshen, Kathryn Urbaniak, and Jason J. Wallin, "Eschewing Community: Black Metal," *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 25, no. 1 (2015): 66–81.
58. Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada*; Simi and Futrell, *American Swastika.*
59. Koehler, "The Radical Online"; Simi and Futrell, *American Swastika*.
60. See Conway et al., *Right-Wing Extremists' Persistent Online Presence*.
61. See *Ibid*.
62. Koehler, "The Radical Online."
63. See Alan David Baddeley, "Working Memory and Reading," *Processing of Visible Language* 1 (1979): 355–70.
64. Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).
65. Jensen et al., "Contextualizing Disengagement."
66. Simi et al., "Addicted to Hate"; Simi et al., "Narratives of Childhood Adversity."
67. Simi et al., "Narratives of Childhood Adversity"; Pete Simi and Steven Windisch, "Why Radicalization Fails."
68. Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino, "Hateful Sirens … Who Hears Their Song? An Examination of Student Attitudes Toward Hate Groups and Affiliation Potential," *Journal of Social Issues* 58, no. 2 (2002): 281–301.
69. Markus Kaakinen, Atte Oksanen, and Pekka Räsänen, "Did the Risk of Exposure to Online Hate Increase After the November 2015 Paris Attacks? A Group Relations Approach," *Computers in Human Behavior* 78 (2018): 90–97; Nele Schils and Lieven J. R. Pauwels, "Political Violence and the Mediating Role of Violent Extremist Propensities," *Journal of Strategic Security* 9, no. 2 (2016): 70–91.
70. See Donald Holbrook, "The Terrorism Information Environment: Analysing Terrorists' Selection of Ideological and Facilitative Media," *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Ahead of Print; Donald Holbrook, Gilbert Ramsay, and Max Taylor, "'Terroristic Content': Toward a Grading Scale," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25, no. 2 (2013): 202–23.

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