According to the U.S. Intelligence Community, racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists are among the most lethal domestic violent extremists and the “most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians.”

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**Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism: The Basics**

Racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) refers to a loosely organized movement of individuals and groups that espouse some combination of racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, misogynistic, and homophobic ideology. REMVE actors see their race or ethnicity under threat and promote the use of or engage in violence against a given population group. The majority of REMVE actors are motivated by cultural nationalism or White supremacy—beliefs that Caucasian or “Aryan” peoples represent superior races, and that “White culture” is superior to other cultures. Many REMVE actors also are motivated by White nationalism, which overlaps with White supremacy: Adherents espouse the belief that the White race is superior to others, and White nationalism emphasizes defining a country or region by White racial identity and promoting the interests of White people exclusively and at the expense of non-White populations.

**Key Takeaways**

- The United States is overwhelmingly responsible for REMVE discourse online.
- Although global coordination is important and there are lessons to be learned from international partners, the primary need is for robust national strategies to counter REMVE, foremost inside the United States.
- Unlike U.S. counter-jihadist strategies, a counter-REMVE strategy that focuses on organizations or individuals likely will not work because the REMVE movement is diffuse and leaderless.
- Security mechanisms—namely law enforcement and intelligence tools—will not be sufficient to deal with the REMVE movement in the United States. Intervention strategies will need to be multifaceted because of the scale and complex nature of far-right extremism and its intersections with protected civil rights.
- Compared with the broad deplatforming approaches used to counter jihadist activity online, a more-targeted approach to deplatforming, potentially combined with counter-REMVE messaging interventions, might be viable and at least partially effective in preventing radicalization and violence.
More-common terms related to REMVE include far-right extremism, right-wing terrorism, radical right, or extreme right, which are used more frequently in literature and by other countries. Although these terms are not synonymous, they are used somewhat interchangeably and often without precise definitions. These terms also can be applied to political parties and movements that participate in political systems and do not engage in violence directly, particularly in Europe, where many parliamentary systems have formal far-right parties that participate in elections.

The U.S. State Department commissioned the RAND Corporation to produce a comprehensive network analysis of the White Identity Terrorist Movement (WITM) and REMVE in response to a congressional requirement from the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act. The analysis—which sought to identify key actors, organizations, and supporting infrastructure and the relationships and interactions between them—is intended to inform a U.S. government strategy to counter REMVE.

### REMVE Characteristics

| Focused on violence by non-state actors | Often xenophobic, anti-Semitic, racist, misogynistic, and homophobic | Often motivated by White supremacy |

### Study Methods

The analytic approach centered on two key activities:

- A review of the existing literature on REMVE: specifically, material related to European countries, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. Sources had to be published between 2016 and 2021 and address contemporary trends, which the authors defined as occurring in the past ten years.

- A new analysis of REMVE social connections and discourse on six social media platforms: Reddit, Twitter, Gab, Ruqqus, Telegram, and Stormfront.

The research team drew on material from both the literature review and the network analysis to develop ten country-specific case studies, which could offer lessons for U.S. policymakers.
About Unifying Factors

- Although race or identity can be unifying concepts, REMVE actors typically are far from homogenous—they have disparate networks, political parties, and groups that are active within national borders.
- *Accelerationism*—a concept supporting the total collapse of the current system as a necessary precursor to a new extreme-right sociopolitical reality—has fostered an operational alliance among otherwise ideologically diverse far-right adherents.
  
  - Most of the accelerationist chatter that appears on such platforms as Telegram is inspirational in nature rather than organized; this chatter is meant to encourage lone actors to take whatever actions are necessary to hasten violence and the collapse of the status quo.

About Trends

- Although right-wing extremism has been increasing both online and offline, the movement is largely online. There are more-limited instances of offline activity and violence.
- There has been a shift toward a post-organizational landscape that is made up of decentralized networks of small cells and lone actors.

About Transnational Dynamics

- Internationalization of the REMVE movement has accelerated across the West in recent years; online messaging and social media platforms contribute to the spread of far-right extremist ideologies. However, much of the far-right discourse in online conversations stays within national boundaries.
- REMVE concerns are generally local and domestically focused, although online REMVE actors in different countries share many of the same sentiments, especially about anti-immigration tropes.

About Recruitment

- *Mainstreaming*—for example, sharing messages on Twitter that mingle extremist views with mainstream messages (e.g., using hashtags) or that normalize extremist perspectives using humor or satire—is the most common recruitment tactic.
- In-person recruitment activities often are centered around festivals, concerts, and other events, such as those related to the mixed martial arts scene.

About Training

- In the United States, REMVE groups conduct both field-based paramilitary training and online security training. Some groups encourage their members to seek organized, professional training; this includes urging group members to join the U.S. military.
- Both Russia and Ukraine have attracted extremists interested in training. Neo-Nazis (who are mostly Russian, but some are American) have trained and fought with militias, such as the Azov Battalion, in Ukraine. The Russian Imperial Movement organizes training through its armed wing, the Imperial Legion.

About Fundraising

- Most funding is obtained through legal, public means. Major funding sources (both in dollar amount and number of organizations and transactions) include crowdfunding, private donations, and commercial activities. How much revenue groups are raising and what portion of those revenues—and from what sources—go toward violent activities remain poorly researched.
- Little evidence exists of extensive funding of REMVE causes through trafficking or criminal activity. The groups themselves are not sanctioned or labeled as terrorist organizations and thus are not inherently illegal.
RAND researchers analyzed over 27 million sampled messages across six social media platforms and from over 2 million users around the world, and they developed a network map with groups of relatively well-connected individuals (i.e., network communities). They assessed the size of these network communities, the interconnections among them both within and across platforms, the content of their discussions (including potentially violent sentiment and mentions of White supremacist organizations), and the locations of users.

Networks Are Dominated by Users in the United States

Across the six social media platforms that RAND researchers examined, Twitter REMVE communities are the largest. Twitter also provides direct information about user-supplied locations, and most Twitter REMVE network communities appear to be dominated by users in the United States. Furthermore, most geolocated network connections on Twitter are within single countries and have little observed transnational network connectivity. The authors considered whether this was true for networks generally by looking at social network comparators of general religious discourse or specifically Christian discourse on Twitter and found that these trends—dominated by users in the United States and within-country focused—were particularly true for REMVE networks.

The authors sampled messages using key terms connected to White supremacy and xenophobia. They translated the keyword “white genocide” into 20 languages common in Europe.

Fringe and Niche Platform Content Is More Indicative of Violence

The authors used a published technique that determines dark triad psychometric scores using social media word-use patterns. The dark triad is a set of personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) that has been shown through survey research to correlate with violent behaviors. The researchers found that user groups on platforms that are considered more fringe and niche generally exhibited higher dark triad scores than did user groups on more-mainstream platforms, such as Twitter. Twitter, on average, has less severe dark triad language, but it still has an incredibly high number of users. Twitter’s highest-scoring dark triad community has more than 300,000 individual users; this is a larger number of users than all the users of REMVE-heavy fringe platforms combined (i.e., Gab, Stormfront, Telegram).

Some Communities Are Likely Shifting Platforms

The authors analyzed lexical similarities among platforms to identify when communities might shift to or interact with platforms with more-permissive content rules. This helped them understand how communities might (1) reconstitute themselves if deplatformed by mainstream social media platforms or (2) push newcomers to more-extreme and explicit centers of discourse.

German-Language Content on Telegram

Language usage allows for inferences even when direct location data is unavailable. The authors found nearly all the content on each platform was in English, except for on Telegram, where content was mostly in English but approximately 29 percent was in German. This is highly suggestive of a strong German national presence on that particular platform, which could be related to Telegram’s general popularity in Germany and the appeal of a platform that more effectively conceals locations, given Germany’s strict hate-speech laws.
Lexical similarities of a community on Gab suggest that it overlapped with the approximately 300,000-member Twitter community with the highest dark triad scores. On Gab, more-hardcore REMVE discourse is readily observable because Gab does not engage in any content moderation. The authors found that Reddit communities also exhibited high levels of dark triad scores, and subreddits (conversation threads) that made more mention of dedicated White supremacy organizations tended to have more network connections than those without such mentions. Thus, despite content moderation efforts on mainstream platforms, such as Twitter and Reddit, REMVE communities appear to be sustained by and even interacting with communities on more-fringe platforms that have more-extreme content.

Country-Specific Analyses

In consultation with the State Department, researchers identified ten countries that they assessed on REMVE trends: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. Canada and the United Kingdom were selected because these countries featured prominently in the network analysis—after the United States, they had the highest number of geolocated REMVE users among the countries examined in the study. Germany and the Nordic states of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were chosen because they are European countries where REMVE is known to be of concern and interest. Australia and New Zealand are countries where REMVE historically has not been an issue of major concern despite White nationalist sentiment in both countries; however, these threats are seen as growing in these countries. Russia was selected because of its role in producing and proliferating REMVE material and providing haven to REMVE groups, and Ukraine was selected because of the country’s potential to attract REMVE-oriented foreign fighters. Overarching lessons from these case studies are presented in the following sections.

The REMVE Threat

Nationalist, White supremacist, anti-Semitism, xenophobic, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant sentiment are all motivating factors for far-right extremism in the studied countries. In many of these countries, there are formalized far-right parties to which proponents of these sentiments might gravitate. These parties operate on the margin, which keeps them out of the political and sociocultural mainstream. But their presence as acknowledged political parties also works to keep them nonviolent.

Major Attacks

Across the studied countries, there have been few lethal attacks, and those that have occurred mostly have been perpetrated by lone actors. The authors did note that reliable data on attacks were not available for all countries.

National Efforts

Except in Russia, the studied countries have broadly scoped counter-extremism efforts in place. In addition to more-punitive measures, such as hate speech laws and bans on REMVE groups, many countries are using more–socially based prevention strategies, such as immigrant integration programs and community engagement initiatives that are aimed at preventing radicalization.

Notes

2 Public Law 116-283, William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, January 1, 2021. Although the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act refers to both WITM and REMVE, this brief uses the latter term because the use of WITM is relatively uncommon and it is no longer used in government.