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Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2018: The Year in Review

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

This report treats developments in the violent extremist and terrorist online scene(s) in the 12-month period from 1 December 2017 to 30 November 2018.[1] It is divided into three parts: Part I focuses on the online activities of violent jihadis, particularly the so-called 'Islamic State' (hereafter IS); Part II supplies information on contemporary extreme right online activity; and Part III identifies issues in the violent extremism and terrorism online realm that bear watching in 2019.

In terms of overarching trends, the focus of policymakers, internet companies, media, and thus also publics has, since 2014, been almost exclusively on IS's online activity. A growing concern with extreme right activity, both its online and offline variants, began to be apparent in 2017 however, especially in the wake of events in Charlottesville. This solidified in 2018 due to a number of factors, including a decrease in IS terrorist attacks in the West and an uptick in extreme right and hate attacks and terrorist events, a number of the latter of which appeared to have significant online components. Having said this, IS is still active on the ground in numerous locales globally and continues to produce and widely disseminate online content, as do a large number of other groups that share core tenets of its ideology. IS may be down therefore, but it is certainly not out.

[1] VOX-Pol's *Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2017: The Year in Review* addressed developments in violent extremism and terrorism online from 1 December 2016 to 30 November 2017. It is free-to-access online at https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/YiR-2017_Web-Version.pdf. VOX-Pol's *Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2016: The Year in Review* addressed developments in violent extremism and terrorism online from 1 January 2016 to 31 November 2016. It is free-to-access online at http://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/Year-In-Review-WEB.pdf.

PART I. VIOLENT ONLINE JIHADISM IN 2018

IS: DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

Despite significant territorial losses, a downturn in terrorist attacks in the West, and dropped media output, IS is still active globally in both 'real world' and online settings. It claimed, for example, to have carried out 467 attacks worldwide in September 2018, 228 of these in Iraq and 172 in Syria, based on its own count. Its most deadly 2018 attacks were carried out by its 'Khorasan Province' in Afghanistan rather than in previously core territories however.[2] Somalia and the Philippines—both of which were awarded the status of *wilayah* or 'province,' so basically designated official branches, in July 2018[3]—were two other countries that witnessed an increase in IS activity during the year.

Official IS media outlets continued to circulate press releases/official claims of responsibility, photo montages, audio, videos, and infographics online throughout 2018. These were most easily accessible via the messaging application Telegram. Almost 700 items of official IS propaganda were produced in January 2018, a distinct uptick from the 345 in October 2017, 307 in November 2017, and 326 in December 2017 respectively.[4] By September 2018 this had risen further, to a total of 894 media items, compared to 774 in September 2017, the month before IS lost its Iraqi 'capital' of Raqqa. Overall, IS issued an average of 616 media items per month between January and September 2018, compared to 947 for the same period in 2017.[5] This means it was operating at about half its monthly output capacity in, say, 2015.

Regarding the nature of the content being circulated, in the period under review, IS's *Amaq 'News Agency'* released claims of responsibility online for attacks in Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Cameroon,

[2] BBC Monitoring. 'Analysis: Islamic State—One Year on Since Loss of Raqqa.' *BBC Monitoring*, 17 October: https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200bddq.
[3] For more, see BBC Monitoring. 'Analysis: Islamic State Restructures its 'Provinces' a Year on From 2017 Defeats.' *BBC Monitoring*, 17 October: https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200bdcn.
[4] BBC Monitoring. 'IS Media Show Signs of Recovery After Sharp Decline.' *BBC Monitoring*, 23 February 2018: https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1dov471. For a description of BBC Monitoring's methodology (i.e. how and what they count), see BBC Monitoring. 'Analysis: Islamic State Media Output Goes Into Sharp Decline.' *BBC Monitoring*, 23 November 2017: https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1dnnj2k.
[5] BBC Monitoring. 'Analysis: Islamic State - one year on since loss of Raqqa,' 17 October.

Canada, Chechnya, Egypt, France, Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Somalia, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Yemen, and elsewhere.[6]

Similar to 2017, images, including individual still images and multiple photos combined into 'albums' or 'photo montages,' infographics, posters, and claims regarding operations, remained the most prevalent type of official online content produced by IS in 2018. In 2015 the dominant themes within photo montages were identified as mercy, belonging, brutality, victimhood, war, and utopia.[7] Again similar to 2017, in 2018 a significant decline in previously prominent themes, such as the victimhood and 'caliphate' as utopia narratives, and a substantial uptick in the war theme was observable.

A previously key feature of IS's online media strategy was its magazines. It has failed to publish a non-Arabic language magazine since its loss of Raqqa however. The most recent issue of IS's *Rumiyah* monthly magazine, which was available in English and 10 other languages, including French and German, appeared in September 2017.[8] IS's dedicated French-language magazine *Dar al-Islam* also appears to have been discontinued, with no new issues appearing in 2017 or 2018.[9] This means IS "currently has no publication for non-Arabic speakers, which is a big deal for a group that seeks to reach a global audience."[10] IS's weekly Arabic-language newspaper *al-Naba'* has continued to appear however.

Like for other official IS content, numbers of videos dipped precipitously at the end of 2017, with 11 *Amaq* media clips appearing in October 2017, 10 in November 2017, and 7 in December 2017. Again like for other content however, the number of *Amaq* videos rose steeply in January 2018 to 43. Over the course of 2018, video products were overwhelmingly short clips containing raw footage released by *Amaq* rather than lengthier 'cinema style' productions. Having said this, in August 2018 IS's al-Hayat Media Centre introduced a new video product: a weekly data journalism-type video series entitled 'Harvest of the Soldiers.' The new series, 18 of which had been produced by the end of November 2018, uses animated

[6] These claims, often made available in multiple languages, are not included in the above counts.
[7] Charlie Winter. 2015. *Documenting the Virtual Caliphate* (London: Quilliam), pp.'s 17-37: http://www.quilliaminternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf.
[8] *Rumiyah* replaced IS's previous flagship English-language magazine *Dabiq* in September 2016.
[9] For more on *Dar al-Islam* magazine, see Myriam Benraad. 2017. *L'État Islamique Pris Aux Mots* (Paris: Armand Colin); Olivier Roy. 2017. *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (London: Hurst).
[10] BBC Monitoring. 'Analysis: Islamic State—One Year on Since Loss of Raqqa,' 17 October. A similar point is made in Europol. 2018. *Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018 (TESAT 2018)* (The Hague: Europol), p.30: https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2018-tesat-2018.

infographics to supply statistics on IS attacks, broken down by date, location, type of attack, and targets. The videos, in English and Arabic, averaged three to four minutes in length.

Also worth mentioning is that three new videos in the 'Inside the Caliphate' series were distributed in the period under review. Number six in the series, subtitled 'Rise O Sons of Islam: Answer the Call,' appeared in December 2017 and featured an amputee fighter with an American accent speaking to camera in English and encouraging "brothers" in the US and elsewhere to "rise and strike the *kuffar*" (i.e. infidels). Just over four minutes in length, the video features footage from the 2016 Nice and 2017 Las Vegas attacks.[11] The seventh video in the series, which is just over 20 minutes in duration, appeared in February 2018, has an English-language voice over, and shows largely battlefield and attack footage. It is however the eighth video in the series that rates further comment.

'Inside the Caliphate #8' was circulated at the end of October 2018 and is, again, just over 20 minutes in duration. The Arabic language video has very high production values and is largely concerned with dos and don'ts for IS's active online *munasirun* or 'supporters.' About five minutes in, for example, the voiceover says that even one supporter is capable of sending IS's message to millions of users online; the accompanying visual is of a SVBIED blowing up. This is followed by an explicit request for supporters to carry out attacks in "enemy" cities, which is inter-spliced with images of the 2016 Orlando attacker Omar Mateen and audio of his 911 emergency call, in which he pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. In addition to the Orlando attack-related audio and media footage, the video includes mass media and other footage related to the 2015 Paris, 2016 Brussels, 2016 Nice, and 2017 London attacks, amongst others. This is followed, in turn, by commentary on the "enemies'" powerful media apparatus which, the voiceover intones, is exploited for psy-ops purposes, alongside similar campaigns conducted by the NSA, CIA, LulzSec, and GCHQ. This portion of the video is accompanied by a show reel of the names of largely Western media outlets, film studios—including Disney, Miramax, and Pixar—and images of commentators and others, including—somewhat bizarrely—Gerard Butler's character from the film *300*.

The message from about 11 minutes into the video onwards is that online supporters must amplify only the official propaganda of 'the Caliphate.' It warns against publishing conflicting messages, leaking

[11] IS continues to claim the Las Vegas shooting, but without any supporting evidence, including in other videos (e.g. September 2017's *Flames of War II*).

information, or spreading material that contradicts official IS beliefs and requests online IS activists to guard the secrets of IS and its institutions and not to reveal the plans or identities of its fighters, officials, or commanders. It goes on to ask "the lions of the media" to wage a battle against the opponents and *kuffar* and incite the believers to victories. It further states that those fighting on the electronic frontier give the *kuffar* restless days and sleepless nights. At 13 minutes 55 seconds, the voiceover intones: "If they close one account, open three, and if they close three then open up 30." It then says that IS's enemies can be overcome by honest and sincere effort and by filling their hearts with fear while showing onscreen messages allegedly coming from IS fighters engaged against the Kurdish YPG and news of attacks from other locations.

'Inside the Caliphate #8' draws to a close with the exhortation that in terms of their frustrating the enemies of IS, online supporters' efforts are as valuable as those of fighters on the physical frontlines and "by God's grace" will be rewarded. A negligible amount of the video—besides the audio of Mateen's 911 call—is in English, but a number of items of English text are misspelled, which may indicate that the video's producer(s) is not a native speaker. Such "editorial difficulties" have also been remarked upon in regard to IS's official claims; previously rare, since December 2017 "corrections" and "modifications" have become a regular feature of IS media.[12]

'Inside the Caliphate #8' is a clear acknowledgement of the increased amounts of user-generated content (UGC)—as distinct from official IS content—produced by IS 'fanboys' and apparent in online settings in 2018.[13] It thus had the function of both crediting *munasirun* activity while, at the same time, seeking to rein it in somewhat. Europol had this to say about such activity in its *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018*:

> The decrease in official IS propaganda in the last quarter of 2017 spurred IS supporters into producing more user generated—and translating older—content (UGC), thereby blurring the distinction between official and unofficial activism. Indeed, despite retaining a close group of core sympathisers for reasons of authentication, IS has gone to great lengths to glorify information warfare and repeatedly encourages sympathisers to become more active online. The IS's supple definition of media operatives—which encompasses the organisation's "war correspondents" as much as online propagandists—and the possibility of taking part in

[12] BBC Monitoring. 'IS Media Show Signs of Recovery After Sharp Decline,' 23 February 2018.
[13] Charlie Winter and Jade Parker. 2018. 'Virtual Caliphate Rebooted: The Islamic State's Evolving Online Strategy.' *Lawfare*, 7 January: https://www.lawfareblog.com/virtual-caliphate-rebooted-islamic-states-evolving-online-strategy.

active, yet lower-risk, activism has encouraged many to join the circle of these "martyrdom-seekers without a belt". This strategy seems to have been designed to bolster the resilience of IS's online media model. Most of this UGC focuses on praising the attacks perpetrated by IS affiliates, or on inciting Muslims in Western countries to take part in the struggle.[14]

In April and May 2018, for example, numerous 'posters' threatening the World Cup, which took place in Russia from mid-June to mid-July, were circulated. Produced largely in Russian and English, and attracting considerable press coverage, the images included instructions for specific types of attacks and made direct threats against prominent players, including FC Barcelona and Argentina's Lionel Messi. A four-minute video threatening the Sochi World Cup village with drone attacks was also released by a pro-IS media outlet on 13 June 2018, the day before the opening game of the tournament. In mid-October 2018 another pro-IS outlet released a poster depicting the Eifel Tower overlaid with crosshairs, to the left of which appeared an explosives-laden drone and the text "Await for our surprises."[15] This type of UGC appeared largely the brainchild of its creators rather than being part of any larger strategy albeit there are some indications that this content is "monitored and regulated" by IS media officials.[16]

OTHER JIHADIS

Figures for the volume of online content produced by non-IS jihadis including, for example, al-Qaeda, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), al-Shabab, Boko Haram, and others, in 2018 were not available, due largely to the heightened threat felt to be posed by IS in a Western context and the resultant narrowed law enforcement, policy, researcher, and media focus on that group to the exclusion of others. This almost certainly needs to change, especially in the context of the opening-up of some online spaces to other jihadis due to the large scale disruption of IS, especially by major social media platforms.[17]

Some trends as regards these other violent jihadis' online activity were discernible however. For example, other jihadi groups produced and circulated largely the same types of online content as IS in the period, including press releases/official claims of responsibility, photo montages, videos, audio, magazines,

[14] Europol. 2018. *TESAT 2018*, p.31.
[15] For more on IS's use of drones for both attack and propaganda purposes, see Don Rassler. 2018. *The Islamic State and Drones: Supply, Scale, and Future Threats* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center): https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/07/Islamic-State-and-Drones-Release-Version.pdf.
[16] Winter and Parker. 2018. 'Virtual Caliphate Rebooted.'
[17] Maura Conway, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson and David Weir. 2018. 'Disrupting Daesh: Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and Its Impacts.' *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* [Online First].

and infographics. This is unsurprising as these are learning organisations that have clearly taken a leaf from IS's playbook. Again similar to IS, this content was made available not just in local languages, but in a variety of other languages depending on the nature of the content. On the 2018 anniversary of 9/11, for example, al-Qaeda released audio of a speech by its leader Ayman al-Zawahiri entitled 'How to Confront America' identifying the United States as "the number one enemy of Muslims." An al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)-affiliated group subsequently repackaged the speech and made it available in English, French, German, and Spanish.

Probably the most well-known non-IS jihadi online product was al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) *Inspire* magazine, which infamously included the article 'How to Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom,' received very wide media coverage, and was implicated in a number of attacks.[18] No new issue of the latter has appeared since number 16 in November 2016. Less well-known, but also having multiple issues in Swahili and English was al-Shabaab's *Gaidi Matani* (i.e. *Terrorist on the Street*); no new issue of this magazine has appeared since number 9 in 2017. A whole host of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, including HTS, AQAP, and al-Shabab, continued to produce and circulate other online content in the period under review however.

Boko Haram is also an interesting case. It has found it difficult to maintain a persistent online presence. In mid-November 2018, however, Boko Haram established a new Telegram channel that although repeatedly suspended continued to return, and which over 8 and 9 November released three videos. The most consequential of these was the just under eight-minute video titled 'A New Message,' in which the group's leader, Abubakar Shekau, spoke directly to camera in Hausa with the purpose of dispelling "rumours that I am dead." He had last appeared in a video in July in which he also underlined that he was alive and well. In contrast to previous Boko Haram videos, which were of uniformly low quality, the November 2018 releases were much more professional in style and feel. Also, while a 2016 schism means that Boko Haram is no longer IS-affiliated, this did not stop them using branding and templates almost

[18] Maura Conway, Jade Parker, and Sean Looney. 2017. 'Online Jihadi Instructional Content: The Role of Magazines.' In Lee Jarvis, Orla Lehane, Stuart Macdonald, and Lella Nouri (Ed.s), *Terrorists' Use of the Internet: Assessment and Response* (NATO Science for Peace & Security Series – Vol. 136) (Amsterdam: IOS Press): https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/Conway-Parker-and-Looney_FINAL.pdf.

identical to IS's for a spate of online claims made towards the end of 2018. Their Telegram channel's logo was also remarkably similar to al-Hayat's.[19]

In summary, while there has been a decrease in IS content production and circulation, there are still large amounts of jihadi content available online, including a massive archive of IS content. Also, there is no certainty that IS's levels of online media production cannot rebound in the short, medium, or long term.

PART II. THE ONLINE EXTREME RIGHT: UNDER PRESSURE, BUT REMAINING AND EXPANDING

2015 and 2016 witnessed an eruption of hateful online content due at least in part to the US presidential campaign, the Brexit referendum, the election of US President Trump, a spate of IS-inspired or directed terrorist attacks, and the arrival of large numbers of refugees to Europe from war torn Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The extreme right sought to capitalise on the fear and anger generated by the terrorist attacks and the refugee crisis and the elation generated by the other events to increase its political power and recruit new followers. In 2017, attention was drawn to the role of the Internet in extreme right activity in the wake of the mid-August 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, particularly the decision by Cloudflare to deny *The Daily Stormer* security protections.[20] In 2018, concerns about the political fallout of online extreme right activity, including disinformation and radicalisation, became mainstream, at least partially due to a series of attacks in the United States that appeared to have significant online components.

In this report, the terminology 'hateful content' is used in order to avoid falling into complex discussions around the definition of 'hate,' with the term 'content' rather than 'speech' used in order to draw attention to the online aspects of the phenomenon focused upon herein.

The volume and frequency of production of extreme right online content cannot be measured in the same way as that of IS as the extreme right scene is not dominated by a single group or a discernible number of franchises or groups as

[19] Mina al-Lami. 'Analysis: How Boko Haram is Ripping Off Islamic State Branding.' *BBC Monitoring*, 14 November 2018: https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200exu9.

[20] For more on this, see Maura Conway (and Michael Courtney). 2018. *Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2017: The Year in Review* (Dublin: VOX-Pol), p.17: https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/YiR-2017_Web-Version.pdf.

is the case with violent jihadism. Instead, the extreme right is composed of a shifting and complex overlapping of individuals, groups, movements, political parties, and media organs—both online and traditional—espousing extreme nationalist, National Socialist/Nazi, fascist, white supremacist, and/or so-called 'alt-right' ideology. Important to acknowledge too is the difficulty of differentiating users, social media accounts, websites, etc., espousing more traditionally violent extremist views (e.g. Nazi or neo-Nazi) from users who hold more radical populist views around, particularly, anti-immigration and Islam. Having said this, much of the online content produced and disseminated by extreme right Internet users shares certain core values and commitments that can be described as 'hateful'.

In their work on online hate speech, Gagliardone *et al*. define it as "expressions that advocate incitement to harm (particularly, discrimination, hostility and violence) based upon the target's being identified with a certain social or demographic group."[21] This definition is often expanded to include content that "foster[s] a climate of prejudice and intolerance on the assumption that this may fuel targeted discrimination, hostility and violent attacks."[22] This approach matches well with the large literature on hate speech, in which there is broad agreement that it dehumanises its victims according to their group identity. It is nonetheless important to point out that hate speech generally also amplifies the group identity of its perpetrators by constructing an 'us' and 'them' frame of understanding.[23] In extreme right online spaces, this 'us' is generally, though not exclusively, white, Christian, heterosexual and, oftentimes, male.

Hateful content was pervasive online in 2018, but is not all the same. Siapera *et al*. suggest thinking about this type of content in terms of a continuum, with extreme and overtly hateful content occupying one end and subtler, more 'under the radar' types of hateful content occupying the other.[24] Instances of the former are easy to identify, instances of the latter can be much more difficult. Per Pohjonen, "[n]ot all hateful speech contains easily identifiable linguistic markers or features that could help to identify it. Instead, the everyday use of language continually changes and is made up of nuanced linguistic forms such as

[21] Iginio Gagliardone, Danit Gal, Thiago Alves, and Gabriela Martinez. 2015. *Countering Online Hate Speech* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing), p.10: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002332/233231e.pdf.
[22] *Ibid*.
[23] Matti Pohjonen. 2018. *Horizons of Hate: A Comparative Approach to Social Media Hate Speech* (Dublin: VOX-Pol), pp.'s 5-6: https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/Horizons-of-Hate.pdf.
[24] Eugenia Siapera, Elena Moreo, and Jiang Zhou. 2018. *Hate Track: Tracking And Monitoring Racist Speech Online* (Dublin City University: School of Communications and FuJo), p.3: https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2018/11/HateTrack-Tracking-and-Monitoring-Racist-Hate-Speech-Online.pdf.

jokes, innuendo, irony, metaphors, and double meanings…"[25] Online content that employs hateful codes is at least equally, but may be even more, problematic than the more explicit sort as it doesn't just seek to suppress its targets, but also creates a sense of community amongst those in a position to decode it.

Hateful online content has a great many targets, chief amongst them are people of colour, Jews, Muslims, immigrants and refugees, the LGBTQI[26] community, and women. Table 1 lists some of the common characteristics associated with each of these groups by extreme right posters in online settings. This hateful content is circulated by ordinary extreme right users, high profile extreme right individuals (e.g. Renaud Camus, Roberto Fiore, Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders), media outlets (e.g. *Breitbart*, *InfoWars*, *MV-lehti*), groups (e.g. Identity Evropa, National Action), movements (e.g. Pegida), and political parties (e.g. *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), British National Party (BNP), *Fratelli d'Italia*). In 2018, it largely took the form of text and still images, including social media posts, forum posts, posts in 'Comments' sections of news websites, and website content. Hateful videos were also produced and circulated.

Websites are still an integral part of the extreme right online ecosystem. *The Daily Stormer* site and its founder Andrew Anglin gained widespread notoriety in the wake of the Charlottesville rally, when he wrote and published an article on his site mocking and abusing Heather Heyer, who died when a car was driven into a crowd of counter-protesters at the rally. This was compounded by a series of follow-up articles penned by Anglin, including one calling for harassment of mourners at Heyer's funeral. When major web-hosting companies began refusing to host the site, and Cloudflare refusing security services, it could not remain on the open Internet and retreated for some time to the Dark Web. Anglin's site returned to the surface web in 2018 however—with the new tagline 'The Most Censored Publication in History'—hosted by the giant US Internet company Verisign using the '.name' top-level domain. The site continued to advocate against people of colour, Muslims, Jews, immigrants, refugees, and women. Its content continued to be virulently anti-Semitic and racist, with prominent sections on the 'Jewish Problem' and 'Race War.' Very high levels of misogyny were also displayed, with a 2018 episode of its *Radio Stormer* entitled 'Women Are Worse Than Satan.'

[25] Pohjonen. 2018. *Horizons of Hate*, pp.'s 16-17.

[26] 'LGBTQI' is the shorthand used to describe the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transsexual, queer, and inter-sex community/communities.

Table 1. Group Identities, Types of Hateful Discourses, and Their Characteristics		
Group Identity	**Hateful Discourse**	**Characteristics of Discourse***
Black people	Racism	Trope of criminality; trope of being 'uncivilised', lazy, 'parasites'; the dehumanising trope of African men as animals [*Also targeted in the anti- immigrant/refugee and Islamophobic discourses]*
Jews	Anti-Semitism	Targeted as hidden figures, 'globalists' scheming behind the scenes; as Shylocks (i.e. devious merchants and usurers); Holocaust denial
Muslims	Islamophobia	Targeted as terrorists; clash of civilisations; Muslim men as misogynist and sexually deviant; a general and unspecified antipathy *[Also targeted in racist and anti-immigrant/refugee discourses]*
Immigrants/ Refugees	Anti-immigrant /refugee	Targeted on basis of moral (un-)deservedness, esp. access to welfare and housing; good versus bad immigrant trope; language of 'rapefugees' *[Also targeted in racist and Islamophobic discourses]*
LGBTQI	Homophobia/Transphobia	Targeted as sick, sinners, sexual deviants, degenerate *[Can also be targeted in all other discourses depending on other identities held]*
Women	Misogyny	Targeted both as whores and unwilling to 'put out;' as grasping, two-faced, untrustworthy; only interested in money and status; a general and unspecified antipathy *[Can also be targeted in all other discourses depending on other identities held]*
** Based on primary research, plus findings reported in Pohjonen. 2018.* Horizons of Hate *and Siapera et al. 2018.* Hate Track.		

A number of additions to *The Daily Stormer* site were apparent to returning visitors to the site in 2018 versus 2017. First, the site made content available not just in English, but also in Greek, Italian, and Spanish. The Greek and Italian sections of the site contained content focused on Italy and Greece respectively, but also Europe more widely. Second, the top page included a disclaimer reading:

> We here at the Daily Stormer are opposed to violence. We seek revolution through the education of the masses. When the information is available to the people, systemic change will be inevitable and unavoidable. Anyone suggesting or promoting violence in the comments section will be immediately banned, permanently.

The above was probably added for at least two reasons. First, it may have been necessary in order to source a hosting company and, second, Andrew Anglin is embroiled in a court case that may well hinge on various calls to action he made on the site in 2016. A 16 December 2016, post on The Daily Stormer entitled "Jews

Targeting Richard Spencer's Mother for Harassment and Extortion — TAKE ACTION!," was the first of 30 about the plaintiff, Tanya Gersh on the site. In order to further his malicious intent, Anglin doxed Gersh, her family, and friends.[27] Gersh was thereafter in receipt of upwards of 700 violence and hate-filled phone calls, emails, voice mails, texts, and social media posts, including death threats, for which she is suing Anglin. On 14 November 2018, a Montana judge refused Anglin's motion to dismiss the case on First Amendment grounds. In his written opinion, the judge said Anglin drew on "his readers' hatred and fear of Jews, rousing their political sympathies," "exploited the prejudices widely held among his readers to specifically target one individual," and called for "confrontation" and "action" which, the judge said, was not constitutionally protected speech.[28] This case is therefore definitely one to watch.

In addition to websites, the extreme right is still committed to the use of both general and dedicated online forums. A diversity of more general online forums or forum-like online spaces host increasing amounts of extreme right content. These include the popular social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion sites Reddit and image-based bulletin board and comment sites 4Chan and 8Chan. The latter image-based sites were the source of many hateful memes in the period under review. Memes are pieces of text, images, videos, or some combination of these, oftentimes humorous, which are copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations, the most successful of which enter into popular cultural consciousness. Image macros, still images upon which a caption has been digitally superimposed, are the most common form of meme and are widely circulated across social media platforms.

Hateful memes often feature distorted or unflattering images of people of colour, Jewish people, and others overlaid with 'humorous' text. As Siapera *et al*. point out:

> In general, visual elements tend to be recalled faster than audio or text and retention for images is better and more accurate compared to verbal and textual information. This is important to note here because it implies that images of hate may be more pernicious than words alone.[29]

[27] 'Doxing' is the term used to describe publication of individuals' personal contact details online, oftentimes including phone numbers, email addresses, home and work addresses, for negative purposes.
[28] Deanna Paul. 'You Should Have Died in the Holocaust': Neo-Nazi Harassment is Not Free Speech, Judge Rules.' *The Washington Post*, 17 November 2018.
[29] Siapera *et al*. 2018. *Hate Track*, p.34.

James Alex Fields Jr. will be sentenced in March for killing Heather Heyer and injuring a number of others by driving his car into a crowd of counter protesters in Charlottesville. Court documents show that he shared two images on Instagram that showed a car hitting protesters months prior to the events in Charlottesville. Both memes, one of which he shared publicly and one in a private chat, show a car driving through a crowd of people described as protesters. The public post carried the caption, "You have the right to protest, but I'm late for work."[30]

A prominent dedicated 'white nationalist' online forum is the Florida-based Stormfront, which has been in operation since 1995, recording over 400,000 new posts in the period 30 November 2017 to 30 November 2018, and a total of over 13 million posts to-date. The forum, to which Norwegian extreme right terrorist Anders Breivik was a contributor, came under pressure, like *The Daily Stormer*, post-Charlottesville, but was back on the surface web, using its standard '.org' URL by early October 2017. According to Stormfront's own stats, the new high for most users ever on its platform at one time were 24,066 on 16 January, 2018.[31] Other dedicated extreme right sites and forums didn't fare as well post-Charlottesville. For example, Cody Wilson's crowdfunding site Hatreon, which he described as "My love letter to the failure of the European Union," is now inactive, with a message reading "[t]his site's services were suspended by VISA in November of 2017. You may request to be notified via email should we become active again." This contrasts with Gab and Voat, two other relatively new dedicated extreme right forums/platforms that withstood the pressures that caused other ventures to close. Gab came to public attention this year when it emerged that Robert Bowers was an active member.

Gab (estbd. 2016) currently has roughly 450,000 users that have posted circa 30 million comments on the platform to-date.[32] It has been described as "a hybrid of Twitter and Reddit—posts are capped at 300 characters, and the crowd votes to boost or demote posts in the feed." Robert Bowers, the man who killed 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue in October 2018, joined Gab in January 2018. His profile picture

[30] In the Circuit Court for the City of Charlottesville, Commonwealth of Virginia Vs. James Alex Fields, Jr., Defendant. 'Commonwealth's Motion *in limine* to Admit Two Instagram Posts,' 29 November 2018: http://www.charlottesville.org/home/showdocument?id=63713

[31] Stormfront hosts a number of European country-specific sub-forums. These include active sub-forums, in order of their popularity measured by number of posts on 30 November 2018, 'Stormfront Britain' (1,057, 183), '*Stormfront Italia*' (270,938), '*Stormfront en Español y Portugués*' (240, 692), Stormfront Europe ("Discussion of nationalism in all European nations") 179,024, '*Stormfront en Français*' (133,073).

[32] Matthew Phillips, Arunkumar Bagavathi, Shannon E. Reid, Matthew Valasik, Siddharth Krishnan. 'The Daily Use of Gab is Climbing. Which Talker Might Become as Violent as the Pittsburgh Synagogue Gunman?' *The Washington Post*, 29 November 2018.

featured the neo-Nazi code '1488,' in which the 14 refers to the white supremacist David Lane's "14 Words" slogan and the 88 stands for 'Heil Hitler' as 'H' is the eighth letter of the alphabet. Bowers made 998 posts and replies on the site prior to carrying out his attack. His final post appeared just minutes before his shooting spree commenced and read "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in." An analysis of all of his Gab posts by US researchers showed that they were overwhelmingly anti-Semitic, with his most used words "kike" and "jew" [*sic*], often in association with terms like "vile" and "degenerate." Like some other forums, Gab has groups in which users with similar interests can interact. Many of Bowers' posts were in groups such as "Guns of Gab," "Supremacy," "Immigration," and "Anti-white." According to researchers:

> Bowers boasted about 600 friends and followers on Gab but was far less active than many in his network. Judging by the number of messages sent among members, Bowers was tightly connected with a select few members of this network and loosely connected with many.[33]

Gab was unavailable for a number of days after the shooting, but came back online thereafter.

In terms of general Gab users, the aforementioned researchers' analysis of all c.30 million posts on the site identified hashtags such as #maga, #trump, #altright, and #fakenews as the most popular. Gab is also rife with conspiracy theory-related discussion, with hashtags such as #qanon and #pizzagate prominent. Also pervasive on the platform is anti-Islam and anti-immigrant sentiment, represented by the prominence of hashtags such as #islam, #banislam, #buildthewall, and #bansharia.[34] These findings fit very well with those of JM Berger in his *The Alt-Right Twitter Census*. In his analysis of a network of 27,895 self-described alt-right Twitter users on which he collected data from June to April 2018, Berger identified four dominant overlapping themes: "support for US President Donald Trump, support for white nationalism, opposition to immigration (often framed in anti-Muslim terms), and accounts primarily devoted to transgressive trolling and harassment."[35] Berger went on to state:

[33] *Ibid*.
[34] *Ibid*.
[35] J.M. Berger. 2018. *The Alt-right Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Audience for Alt-right Content on Twitter* (Dublin: VOX-Pol), p.6: https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/AltRightTwitterCensus.pdf.

Support for Trump outstripped all other themes by a wide margin, including references to his name and various campaign slogans in hashtags and user self-descriptions. The most common word in user profiles was 'MAGA' (short for Make America Great Again, Trump's 2016 campaign slogan), and the most common word pair in user profiles was 'Trump supporter'.

In addition to prominent Trump supporters, many of the most influential accounts in the network promoted conspiracy theories. For the most part, conspiracy content was marbled into the network, serving to support one of the themes identified above, rather than existing as an independent theme.

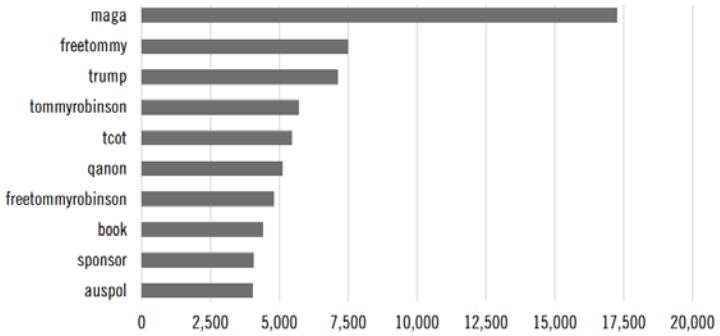
Many overt white nationalists were extremely influential within the alt-right network, and white nationalist hashtags and websites were widely shared…[36]

The second most common word in user profiles was 'anti,' which was used in many of the top-ranked word pairs, including 'anti-EU'—the second most common word-pair in bios after 'Trump Supporter'—'anti-Islam,' 'anti-globalist,' and 'anti-feminist.'[37]

Extreme right online discussions are extremely responsive to, often 'real world,' trigger events. Two examples can suffice to illustrate this. Figure 1 shows the top hashtags used in Berger's alt-right Twitter network. The hashtags #freetommy (no. 2), #tommyrobinson (no. 4), and #freetommyrobinson (no. 7) all relate to Tommy Robinson, the founder of the right-wing, anti-immigrant, English Defence League. Their prominence is due to UK authorities arresting and jailing Robinson for illegally filming at the scene of court proceedings during the data collection period. The second example relates to the aftermaths of the US mail bomb scare, the shooting dead of two African-Americans in a Kentucky supermarket, and the Pittsburgh synagogue attack, all of which took place within days of each other in October 2018, and all of which were applauded by extreme right users across social media platforms, online forums, and other online spaces. On Gab, for example, one user initiated a poll using the #treeoflifeshooting hashtag and asking, "What should the future of Jewish people in the West be?" Thirty five percent of respondents voted for "genocide," with another 47% voting for repatriation. The same poster also posted a poll asking "Do you support the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter, Robert Bowers?" Almost 25% of respondents said they did, with

[36] Berger. 2018. *The Alt-right Twitter Census*, p.7.
[37] Berger. 2018. *The Alt-right Twitter Census*, pp.'s 24-26.

Figure 1. Top 10 Hashtags in J.M. Berger's *The Alt-right Twitter Census* (2018)



one stating "Robert Bowers literally did nothing wrong."[38] Memes venerating Bowers and his actions were also widely circulated on the site post-attack.

While the alt-right—which originated online—is United States-centric, it reaches internationally, including connections with right-wing movements in the UK, the Netherlands, and Germany. Having said this, multiple authors have found that language raises a barrier to robust transnational extreme right online networks.[39] This is exacerbated by the extreme right's core ideological commitment to nativism (i.e. protection of the interests of native-born inhabitants of a country against those of immigrants), which means that local, regional, and national issues often dominate. In a preliminary analysis of over 200,000 tweets by European extreme right Twitter users in October and November 2018, for example, the top trending hashtags were not just highly responsive to 'real world' trigger events, as already alluded to, but to country-specific events and issues, such as domination of the French network by hashtags such as #Macron and #*GiletsJaunes* and the Polish network by #*MarszNiepodległości* (i.e. the annual nationalist march through Warsaw). Evident too was the strong role of extreme right political parties and figures in the European extreme right online scene, with hashtags such as #*CasaPound*, #Salvini, and #Orban also prominent.[40]

[38] Rita Katz. 'Inside the Online Cesspool of Anti-Semitism That Housed Robert Bowers.' *Politico Magazine*, 29 October 2018: https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/10/29/inside-the-online-cesspool-of-anti-semitism-that-housed-robert-bowers-221949.

[39] J.M. Berger. 'The Alt-right in Europe.' *VOX-Pol Blog*, 7 November 2018: https://www.voxpol.eu/the-alt-right-in-europe/; Caterina Froio and Bharath Ganesh. 2018. 'The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter: Issues and Actors that Cross Borders in Western European Democracies.' *European Societies*, 20 July.

[40] Maura Conway and Matti Pohjonen. Forthcoming 2019. *Title TBC* (Dublin: VOX-Pol).

In summary, the European extreme right online scene is diverse and fast changing, but was very much strong and growing in 2018. It also has strong ties with, in particular, the US extreme right online scene, which was also extremely buoyant in the period under review.

PART III. POTENTIAL FUTURE TRENDS

In addition to continued attention to the online activity of the threat actors already described, some other actors and issues to watch in 2019 are raised in this section.

INCEL TERRORISM

On 31 October 2018, in the same week as Caesar Sayoc's mail bombs and Robert Bowers' synagogue attack, Scott Beierle walked into a Florida yoga studio and opened fire, killing two women and wounding five others, and then killing himself. Beierle was the most recent of several men to have been involved with 'incel'—shorthand for 'involuntary celibate'—communities online prior to carrying out murderous attacks. He had a lengthy online history of hatred for women. In the months before the attack, he recorded and uploaded songs to Soundcloud in which he talked about ripping off a woman's head and chaining-up a woman in his basement in order to rape her. He had previously posted videos to YouTube in which he called women "sluts" and "whores" and at least one in which he mentioned Elliot Rodger, who killed six people and injured 14 in Isla Vista California in May 2014. Rodger is a hero in the incel community; he too left behind a YouTube video in which he said women would be punished for not being sexually attracted to him. Earlier in 2018, on 23 April, Alek Minassian killed 10 people by intentionally driving a van at speed down a crowded Toronto street. Minassian identified himself on Facebook as part of the "Incel Rebellion," where he also praised Rodger, terming him a "Supreme Gentleman," the moniker Rodger used to describe himself.[41]

Two things should be underlined about these attacks. First, they are rarely viewed as acts of terrorism, even though they are agreed my most scholars to fit easily into common definitions of terrorism. This means that they are not treated by terrorism researchers or discussed in the terrorism literature,

[41] Anna North. 'How Mass Shooters Practice Their Hate Online.' *Vox*, 3 November 2018: https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/10/31/18039294/scott-beierle-tallahassee-shooting-pittsburgh-gab.

including the literature on online radicalisation. This is despite, second, the incel community having its genesis online and, in fact, being a foundational component of the alt-right. The overlap between violent misogyny and alt-right culture was immediately apparent in Scott Beierle's online posts that, in addition to displaying a loathing for women, also contained racist and anti-Muslim sentiments. The increasingly wide normalisation of violently anti-women views in online settings means that attacks such as the above-described are only likely to increase and warrant more sustained attention from researchers, social media companies, policymakers, and publics alike.

DARK WEB

The vast majority of all contemporary extremist and terrorist activity takes place on the surface web (i.e. the portion of the WWW that is searchable using standard search engines). A heavier reliance by extremists and terrorists and their supporters on the Darkweb has nonetheless been foreseen for some time.[42] The 'Darkweb'—sometimes also known as the 'Darknet'—refers to encrypted online content that is not indexed by conventional search engines, but requires specialised free software such as TOR to access it.

With its disadvantages from an outreach perspective acknowledged, what the Darkweb has proved useful for is the mirroring of some extremist and terrorist websites and forums. For example, in a sidebar on the site titled 'Censorship,' *The Daily Stormer* now states "You can also visit us at any time…using the Tor browser. Here you can not [*sic*] censor us." More recently too, the Darkweb has been used for the establishment of archives of IS's online content and advertisement of propaganda hosted on social media platforms. This segues with Europol's observation in its *TESAT 2018* that:

> IS sympathisers continued to invest resources into promoting open source tools which ensure anonymisation of communication (e.g. TOR Browser, TAILS OS) on specific IS propaganda sites and some Darknet sites in order to safeguard the interests of their sympathisers when accessing online terrorist propaganda.[43]

[42] Gabriel Weimann. 2016. 'Terrorist Migration to the Dark Web.' *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10(3), pp.'s 40 – 44.
[43] Europol. 2018. *TESAT 2018*, p.31; see also Europol. 2018. *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2018 (IOCTA 2018)* (The Hague: Europol), p.13: https://www.europol.europa.eu/iocta/2018.

Illicit Darkweb markets have also been used by terrorists for the purchase of firearms and other material, including allegedly some of the guns used in the Paris attacks, though it is not yet relied on to the extent originally envisaged. This having been said:

> The availability of firearms and explosives on Darknet markets remains a key concern for law enforcement. While it typically is one of the least common commodities found on Darknet markets, it is the one which represents the greatest potential danger to public safety. Buyer motivation ranges from feelings of insecurity to curiosity, a collecting passion, and preparation for private disputes, to possible planned criminal or terrorist offences.[44]

The acquisition of knowledge regarding homemade explosives (HMEs) and purchase of their precursors are interesting cases in this respect. According to Europol, information on bomb making is generally sourced by terrorists via messaging applications or social media platforms. Venues specifically mentioned are Telegram, WhatsApp, and Facebook. It is further acknowledged that, "[e]ven though content such as bomb-making instructions is continually removed from the internet, various sites persist where such information can be retrieved." So the Darkweb does not play a significant role in HME knowledge acquisition, but what about access to bomb components? The Darkweb is not widely used for that purpose either says Europol:

> The internet is also increasingly used for online procurement of explosives precursors through web shops located in various EU Member States. The procurement of explosives precursors from outside the EU is also facilitated by legal companies apparently conducting legitimate business…In addition to legal pyrotechnics shops and illegal street markets, online shops and vendors on various *social networks* have become the main sources of illegal pyrotechnic articles. [*italics mine*][45]

Their characteristics and easy availability make fireworks and gas cylinders a viable alternative to TATP[46] and their use in improvised explosive devices (IEDs), essentially homemade bombs, has been heavily promoted by jihadis online.

[44] Europol. 2018. *IOCTA 2018*, p.50.
[45] Europol. 2018. *TESAT 2018*, p.13.
[46] 'TATP' is shorthand for triacetone triperoxide, which is an explosive material.

CRYPTO CURRENCY

The extreme right widely solicits funding via cryptocurrencies. Infamous neo-Nazi troll Andrew Auernheimer, a.k.a. Weev, wrote in 2014 "I heartily encourage you to consider cryptocurrency, including bitcoin."[47] The alt-right's 'founder' Richard Spencer followed-up with a March 2017 tweet stating "Bitcoin is the currency of the alt right."[48] In 2018, the top item on the sidebar of *The Daily Stormer* website read "shekels plz goyim. This is a reader funded site. It is the most censored publication in history. Send BTC or XMR." 'BTC' refers to Bitcoin and 'XMR' to Monero, the latter of which Auernheimer has stated was preferred by him because it "best maintains our privacy."[49] On 30 November 2018, Auernheimer's Bitcoin wallet was showing a lifetime total received of US$785,271.37, *The Daily Stormer's Anglin's* wallet was showing a total received of US$260,821.51, Stormfront's Don Black's wallet a total received of US$22,703.94, but RedIce.tv's Henrik Palmgren only US$707.63 received in total.[50]

IS and their supporters also raised the potential benefits of cryptocurrencies as early as 2014 and they have been sourced and utilised by IS adherents and supporters in a number of instances since.[51] Cryptocurrencies' benefits include the ability to transfer funds transnationally with relative anonymity, which is no longer wholly feasible using the regular banking system. It was not until late 2017 however that IS sympathisers initiated cryptocurrency—specifically Bitcoin and the more anonymous Zcash—donation campaigns on IS-affiliated websites and Telegram groups.[52]

The pro-IS website Akhbar al-Muslimin began asking for Bitcoin donations in November 2017. According to Europol's *Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2018*:

[47] Julia Ebner. 'The Currency of the Far-right: Why Neo-Nazis Love Bitcoin.' *The Guardian*, 24 January 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/24/bitcoin-currency-far-right-neo-nazis-cryptocurrencies.
[48] Richard Spencer (@RichardBSpencer). 18 March 2017, 9.04pm. *Tweet* (thread): https://twitter.com/richardbspencer/status/843206485794471937?lang=en.
[49] Ebner. 'The Currency of the Far-right,' *The Guardian*, 24 January 2018.
[50] Neonazi BTC Tracker (@NeonaziWallets). 'An automated feed of bitcoin transactions involving suspected neonazi [*sic*] or altright [*sic*] extremist wallets.' *Twitter*: https://twitter.com/neonaziwallets?lang=en.
[51] See, for example, US Department of Justice. 'New York Woman Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to ISIS.' *Press Release*, 26 November 2018: https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/new-york-woman-pleads-guilty-providing-material-support-isis; Resty Woro Yuniar. 'Bitcoin, PayPal Used to Finance Terrorism, Indonesian Agency Says.' *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 January 2017.
[52] Europol. 2018. *IOCTA 2018*, p.53; see also, Europol. 2018. *TESAT 2018*, p.31.

Initially, the link pointed to an external Bitcoin payment site; this then changed to a page within the website that generated Bitcoin addresses—thereby allowing sympathisers to copy the URLs and donate away from the page. This—alongside embedding malware within the website to mine for cryptocurrencies—shows a certain technical sophistication on the part of the administrators. Furthermore, the system allowed donors to use prepaid credit cards issued by "btc to plastic" service providers instead of their Bitcoin address.[53]

Other IS-affiliated websites, including *Dawaalhaq Islamic News Agency* and *Isdarat*, also solicited cryptocurrency donations in late 2017 to finance their online infrastructures, including the purchase of hosting servers. Launched in November 2017 too was an English-language social media campaign dubbed 'Sadaqah,' which targeted supporters in the West. This cryptocurrency fundraising drive's purpose was to supply fighters in Syria with weapons and other materiel.[54] Pointed out by Europol however is that none of IS's Europe-based attacks appear to have been funded via cryptocurrencies: "The use of cryptocurrencies by terrorist groups has only involved low-level transactions—their main funding still stems from conventional banking and money remittance services."[55] This could change quickly however if Telegram's proposed Gram cryptocurrency gets off the ground in 2019.

CONCLUSION

In a November 2018 editorial entitled 'The New Radicalization of the Internet,' *The New York Times'* Editorial Board raised concerns that "Jihadists and right-wing extremists use remarkably similar social media strategies."[56] There is, of course, nothing new about this observation, particularly from a scholarly perspective. What is new however is the entry of these concerns about the extreme right's online activity and its potential impacts into wider public consciousness. Recognition that the extreme right has a significant and probably growing online presence should not, on the other hand, cause us to wholly shift the spotlight from IS and other violent jihadis and their continually adapting online strategies. "In many ways, military defeat has made the internet even more important for the IS; the difference being that it has since shifted from using it to support its state-building ambitions toward inspiring and attempting to direct

[53] Europol. 2018. *IOCTA 2018*, p.53.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] The Editorial Board. 'The New Radicalization of the Internet.' *The New York Times*, 24 November 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/24/opinion/sunday/facebook-twitter-terrorism-extremism.html.

terrorist attacks in the West," Europol said in 2018.[57] In 2019 therefore, our focus should be on both extreme right and violent jihadi online activity, whilst also scanning for other online threat actors and seeking to identify what online spaces and functionalities may prove attractive to extremists and terrorists going forward.

[57] Europol. 2018. *IOCTA 2018*, p.51.