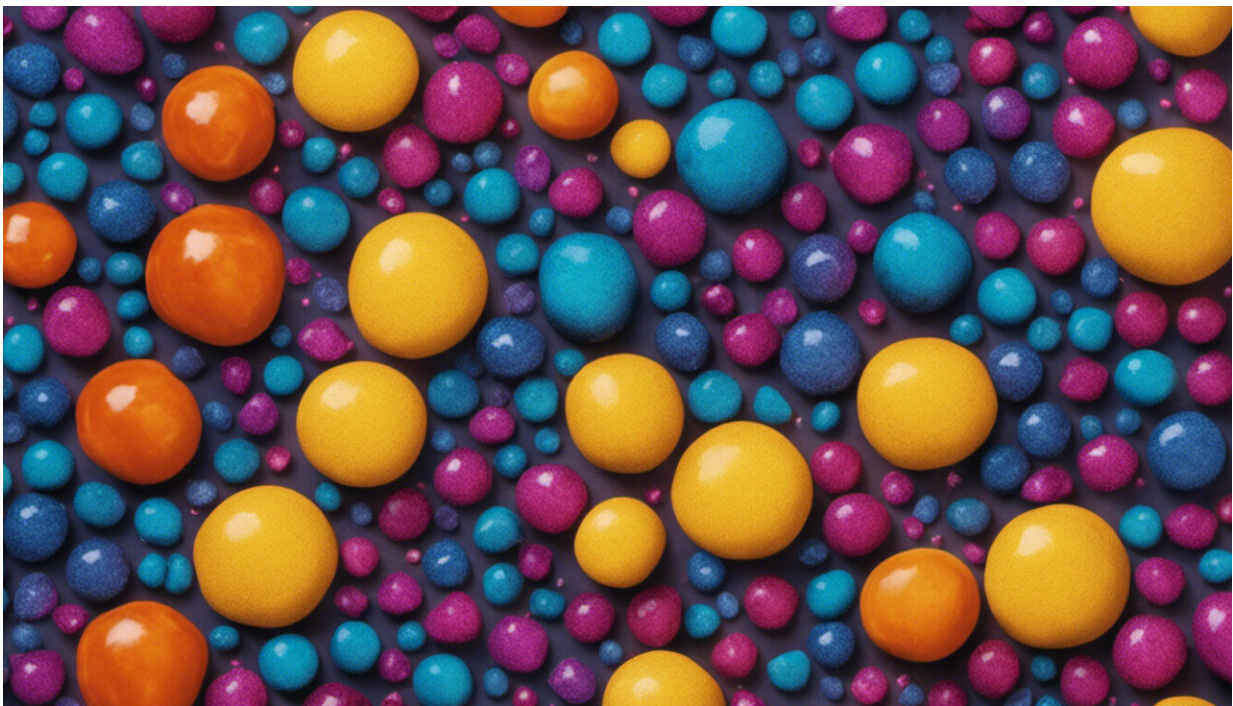# Extreme far right: 'pick'n'mix' ideologies and direct messaging online make for deadly new combination

March 19 2019, by Chris Allen

Credit: AI-generated image (disclaimer)

While it is difficult to look beyond the atrocities committed in New Zealand, that they were perpetrated by someone inspired by the extreme right reminds us of the very real threat such ideologies and those committed to them pose to our ongoing safety and security. Described

by the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, [as an](#) "extremist, right-wing, violent terrorist", the Australian national arrested after the two attacks on Christchurch mosques that killed at least 50 people confirmed much the same in [a manifesto](#) uploaded to the internet shortly before the shooting spree.

While much has been made of [the Islamophobic nature of the attacks](#), a deeper look at the suspect and his manifesto afford an insight into how the extreme right wing is not only increasingly dependent upon [social media](#) but would also seem to be moving away from rather more fixed and traditional ideologies.

Social media as a message generator

The attacks on the two Christchurch mosques are sadly, of their time. This is readily apparent from the [sharing of photos of weapons](#) by the suspected attacker via Twitter days before the attacks and the livestreaming of the attacks as they happened. Neither were by chance. In today's social [media](#) age, the attacker knew that doing so would ensure his actions had the greatest possible impact. By bypassing traditional media outlets – which would report the story albeit after everything had gone viral – social media enabled the opportunity to ensure a pure and unadulterated message reached as large an audience as possible. And it was initially shared, copied and reposted far quicker than governments, security services and social media providers themselves could remove it.

All acts of terrorism function as "[message generators](#)" but in our social media age, messages can be generated more immediately and directly than would have been possible even a decade ago.

While the use of social media to speak directly to others who share the same beliefs is a more recent phenomenon, the outline of the suspected attacker's motivation, inspiration and justification in a manifesto –

unequivocally motivated by Islamophobia, racism, xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiment – are recurrent themes found in traditional far-right nationalism and the established ideologies of the extreme right wing. Citing mass migration, high birth rates and the "replacement" of "European people—those he refers to as ethnically and culturally white—the Christchurch attacker claimed his actions were ultimately necessary to stop, what he referred to as "white genocide". Anders Behring Breivik who did something similar shortly before detonating a bomb in Oslo killing eight and then shooting 69 on the island of Utøya back in 2011.

The manifesto also clearly speaks to another group of like-minded people: those that frequent the darker realms of the internet. Referred to as "shiposting" – described by journalist Robert Evans as the posting of ironic content online with the purpose of provoking an emotional reaction among the "less internet savvy" – the manifesto contains a lot of "in-jokes" designed to send up or create the moral outrages that have blamed child killing on "video nasties" or high school shootings on the music of Marilyn Manson.

Examples of this include the claim that the video game Spyro the Dragon 3 taught the attacker all he needed to know about ethno-nationalism while Fortnite taught him how to kill. Another good, but less obvious, example of this is the claim that Candace Owens – an American conservative activist – was the person whose position had radicalised the attacker the most, with the aim of sparking others, especially those within the mainstream media, to point an accusatory finger at Owens and blame her for the attacks. This is exactly what happened. In a tweet, Owens said "it should go without saying but neither myself … or Spyro the Dragon had anything to do with the tragedy in New Zealand".
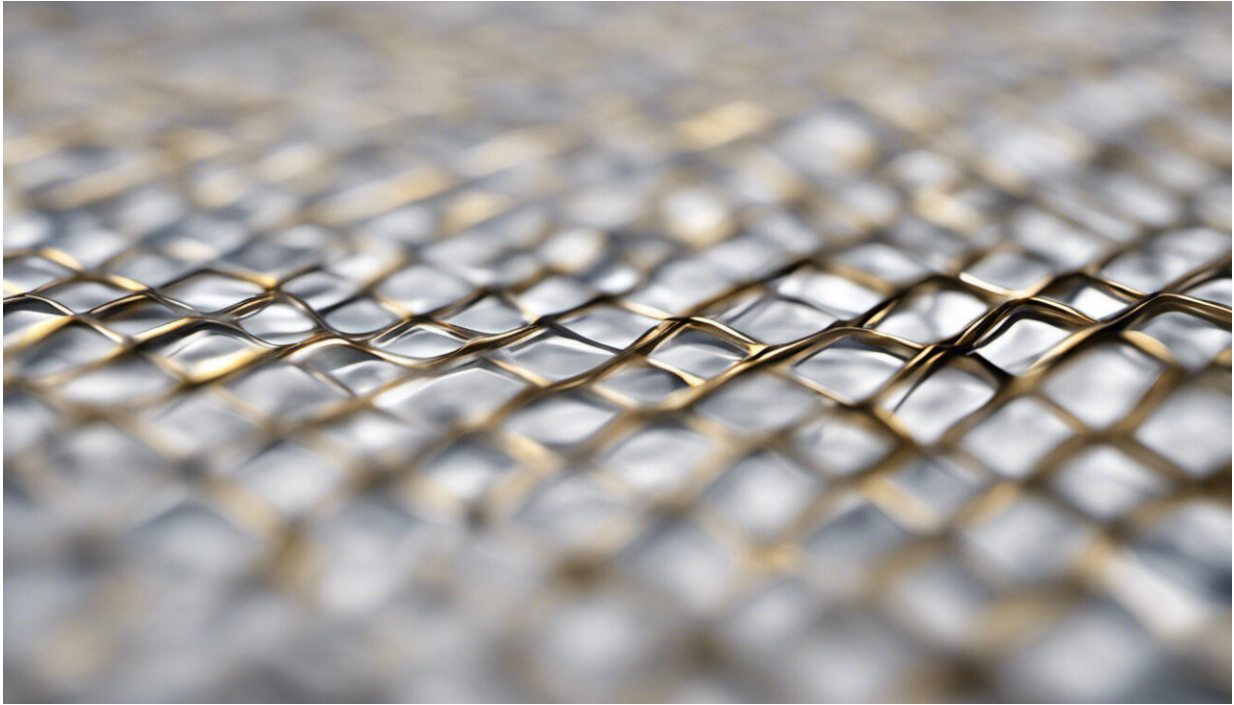
Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

How the extreme right has changed

What is clear about the extreme right wing today is that it is far removed from the stereotypical "football hooligan", and "feet on the street" image of the far right in the 1970s and 1980s. While [street protests by groups such as Britain First](#) continue to reinforce this image, the reality of the extreme right wing is that it thrives online.

The right is creating and constructing content-specific platforms from which their chosen ideologies can be shared. Take for instance Rebel Media, a Canadian-based website that has been accused of having become a global platform for those [espousing Islamophobic and right-wing ideologies](#). While no one on the platform espouses content justifying the Christchurch massacre, much of what is said has some

resonance with parts of the content contained in the manifesto released before the attack.

Individuals on the right are also increasingly functioning akin to social media influencers. Instead of promoting brands or products to large numbers of followers (consumers) across the world, charismatic figures such as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) are promoting ideas and ideologies to transnational, right-wing consumers. The similarities are real.

And of course, one cannot overlook the role and function of 4chan, 8chan and others and the outer recesses of the web — and the dark web – where the most extreme and vile forms of extreme right-wing ideologies and thinking not only find form but also find affirmation. It is maybe a little premature to cast the removal of Generation Identity from Facebook as a major win despite the racist group sharing aspects of an "identitarian" ideology with the attacker, one that includes the need to defend Europe and its culture in the face of mass migration.

Traditional ideologies are increasingly informed and shaped by a much wider range of sources that cut and paste large tracts from traditional nationalist and right-wing sources. Breivik's manifesto, for example, was supplemented with references to America's Unabomber, as well as the British journalist Melanie Phillips, Dutch politician Geert Wilders, Top Gear presenter Jeremy Clarkson and the Belgian orientalist Koenraad Elst, among others.

The Christchurch attacker did similar, citing Brexit, British fascist Oswald Mosley, Donald Trump, American white supremacist Dylann Roof, and the perpetrator of the terror attack on London's Finsbury Park Mosque, Darren Osborne. Today, an outspoken television presenter can clearly be as influential to those on the extreme right wing as historical figures such as Adolf Hitler.

Today's extreme right wing is therefore rather more "pick'n'mix" than traditionally loyal. Akin to how sociologist Grace Davie used the phrase to describe how people were increasingly "consuming" religion as they were other "markets" – pulling together different things from different religious traditions to explain their own beliefs – so the same would appear to be true of the extreme right wing in regards to understanding, informing and justifying their own personal ideologies.

Combine this with the ever-changing landscape of the internet and social media and the likelihood is that extreme right-wing ideologies will not only become ever more diversified and difficult to understand but will so too find an increasingly diversified and complex way through which they are shared, engaged and worryingly, enacted on also.

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