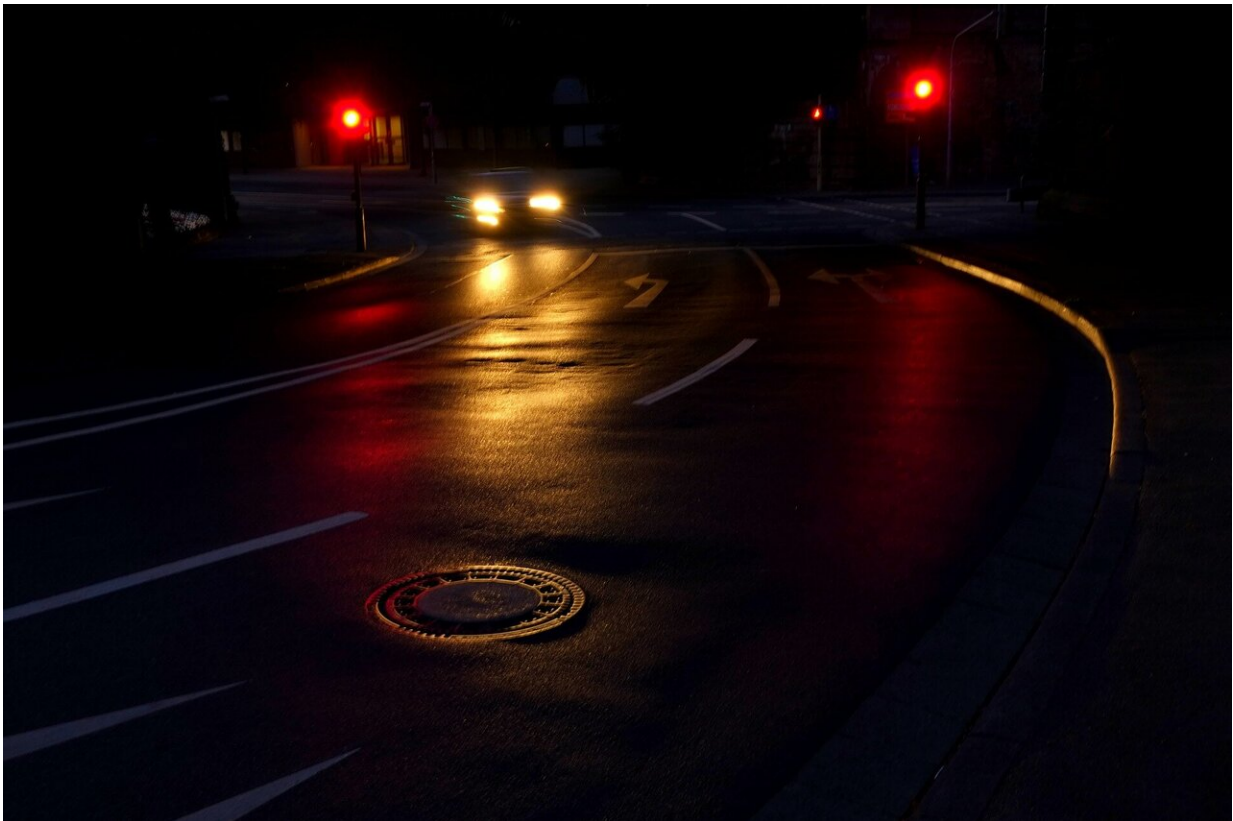


Research shows the need to address the root cause of far-right extremism

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A new report from Swinburne researchers helps to explain why far-right extremism is on the rise and what we can do to stop it. It says that if we want to tackle right-wing extremism, we should start at the root:

misogyny.

With attacks like the Christchurch mosque murder perpetrated by an Australian man and the presence of the all-male, white nationalist Proud Boys group in Victoria, we're seeing more cases of far-right [extremism](#) locally and around the globe. A team led by Swinburne's Associate Professor Christine Agius and Professor Kay Cook outline how the normalization of anti-female sentiment is a gateway to this type of extremism in a new report, "[Mapping Right-wing Extremism in Victoria](#)."

The link between misogyny and far-right extremism

Hate for women is a stepping-stone to right-wing extremist violence. Dr. Agius and Professor Kay's research tracked how these steps are laid out on social media, particularly YouTube.

"Reading the comments in the online spaces we investigated was akin to entering a bizarre world where logic became twisted and aggrieved entitlement took over," says Associate Professor Agius.

The sentiment in these online spaces is often around how 'the system' works against men, according to the researchers. Those making these claims seem to harbor a sense of aggrieved entitlement and believe themselves to be deprived, while minorities and women benefit at their expense. They call for a 'return to traditional social and political relations.' They call women 'hypocrites' and 'feminazis.'

"Words have meaning and carry weight—these are not harmless posts but, at times, instigations to 'take action' or enact violence. Words have power and many of these posts articulated ideas that were anti-democratic, misogynistic and violent," Professor Cook says.

Extremist views escalate and become normalized because they are preached to the converted. By that time, it is difficult to reprogram people who hold these views—made more difficult by the lack of understanding of how anti-feminism plays a role.

What we need from policymakers

Policy responses and prevention measures rarely address far-right extremism, the researchers say. Australia only listed its first right-wing extremist group as a terrorist organization under the criminal code in March 2021.

When policies mention women, the study found that they explore how women can aid deradicalisation in their communities, are victims of terrorism or can contribute to the recruitment of others to violent extremist causes. They don't, for example, look at how perpetrators of domestic violence may go onto commit extremist violence. Nor do they address how online communities breed anti-woman sentiment that is a gateway into right-wing extremist ideologies.

"Stronger measures to recognize and address far-right extremist violence are needed, but these debates often fall into 'culture wars,'" says Associate Professor Agius.

"We want policymakers to develop a greater awareness of how anti-feminist or anti-gender ideas can be extremist and serve as a gateway to other forms of violent extremism."

Dr. Christine Agius and Professor Kay Cook have submitted their research to the [federal government](#) as part of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security inquiry into extremist movements and radicalisation in Australia. They hope it will inform better ways to respond to extremism by understanding its links to

misogyny.

More information: Mapping right-wing extremism in Victoria:
apo.org.au/node/307612

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