3-9-2022

**Fighting the Hydra: Combatting Vulnerabilities in Online Leaderless Resistance Networks**

Iris Malone  
*George Washington University*

Lauren Blasco  
*George Washington University*

Kaitlyn Robinson  
*Stanford University*

National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ncitereportsresearch](https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ncitereportsresearch)  
Please take our feedback survey at: [https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE](https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE)

**Recommended Citation**  
[https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ncitereportsresearch/24](https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ncitereportsresearch/24)

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education (NCITE) at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reports, Projects, and Research by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.
Fighting the Hydra
Combatting Vulnerabilities in Online Leaderless Resistance Networks

Iris Malone, Lauren Blasco, and Kaitlyn Robinson
# Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................... 3  
1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................... 4  
2 WHAT IS LEADERLESS RESISTANCE? ............................................................................................ 4  
3 STRATEGIC GOALS OF RACIALLY-MOTIVATED VIOLENT EXTREMISTS (RMVE) ................... 5  
4 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERLESS RESISTANCE STRUCTURES .......................... 8  
   EARLY NOTIONS OF LEADERLESS RESISTANCE: FROM THE FAR-LEFT TO THE FAR-RIGHT ........... 8  
   LOUIS BEAM AND THE INTERNET ............................................................................................... 9  
   THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: INSPIRING LEADERLESS FOLLOWERS ONLINE ................... 10  
5 CRITICAL REQUIREMENTS AND CAPABILITIES ..................................................................... 14  
   DOCTRINE .................................................................................................................................. 16  
   NARRATIVE ............................................................................................................................... 18  
   DENSE COMMUNICATION NETWORKS ....................................................................................... 22  
6 STRENGTHS AND VULNERABILITIES IN ONLINE LEADERLESS RESISTANCE .................... 26  
   ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES ............................................................................................ 26  
   IDEOLOGICAL AND COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES ............................................................. 27  
7 POLICY CONSIDERATIONS TO COMBAT VULNERABILITIES ............................................... 28  
   VULNERABILITY 1: ORGANIZATIONAL COHESION AND CONTROL ....................................... 29  
   VULNERABILITY 2: IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVE AND INFLUENCERS ....................................... 32  
   VULNERABILITY 3: DENSE COMMUNICATION NETWORKS ...................................................... 38  
8 CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................................. 40
Suggested Citation: Malone, Iris, Lauren Blasco, and Kaitlyn Robinson. “Fighting the Hydra: Combatting Vulnerabilities in Leaderless Resistance Networks.” 2022. NCITE: Omaha, NE (March).

About the authors: Iris Malone is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University (irismalone@gwu.edu). Lauren Blasco is a MA Candidate at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University (lwblasco@gwmail.gwu.edu). Kaitlyn Robinson is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at Stanford University (knrob@stanford.edu).

Corresponding author: Iris Malone (irismalone@gwu.edu)

About NCITE: The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education (NCITE) Center was established in 2020 as the Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence for counterterrorism and terrorism prevention research. Sponsored by the DHS Science and Technology Office of University Programs, NCITE is the trusted DHS academic consortium of over 60 researchers across 18 universities and non-government organizations. Headquartered at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, NCITE seeks to be the leading U.S. academic partner for counterterrorism research, technology, and workforce development.

Acknowledgement: This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under Grant Award Number 20STTPC00001-02. Iris Malone, Principal Investigator, was the primary author of this analysis. Significant contributions from NCITE Ph.D. Candidate Kaitlyn Robinson and M.A. Candidate Lauren Blasco contributed to this report’s production. All errors in reporting are those of the authors.

Disclaimer: The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
Executive Summary

Why do contemporary Racially-Motivated Violent Extremist (RMVE) movements champion “leaderless resistance,” and how can practitioners combat this organizational strategy? To answer this question, we draw on insights from military planning to identify why this online network structure provides the RMVE community its primary source of power, or “center of gravity.” We then use this information to deconstruct the movement’s operational activities including its critical capabilities and critical requirements to perpetrate these actions. Based on these requirements, we identify key vulnerabilities to undercut the movement’s resilience and growth.

Leaderless resistance is an organizational strategy “that allows for and encourages individuals or small cells to engage in acts of political violence entirely independent of any hierarchy of leadership or network of support.” Fueled by a growing virtual reach, leaderless movements and groups based in the United States have flourished in the last decade. These entities can largely be divided into two categories: those that deliberately adopted a leaderless structure for its strategic benefits (e.g., Atomwaffen, the Base), and those that are organically leaderless due to the highly fluid nature of their network of followers (e.g., Boogaloo Bois, Groypers).

The online RMVE leaderless resistance network relies on three critical requirements to achieve their desired end goals: (1) common doctrine, (2) shared narrative, and (3) dense communication networks. Online communication networks, in particular, are critical to spread information, share key doctrinal concepts through common texts, mobilize followers, and radicalize individuals to take actions.

Given these requirements, we identify at least three vulnerabilities in these network structures:
1. Poor organizational cohesion and control,
2. Limited visibility of ideological narratives/influencers, and
3. Barriers to communication and coordination.

These challenges can undercut the perceived legitimacy, momentum, and growth of the movement. To exploit these vulnerabilities, we assess the effectiveness of several previously tested policy interventions including:

- **Law Enforcement-Based Interventions**: Proscription, Arrests, and Litigation
- **Community-Based Interventions**: Inoculation Theory, Counter-Messaging, Disengagement, De-Radicalization
- **Industry-Based Interventions**: De-platforming, Content Moderation, Redirect, and Hash-Sharing Directories

We assess that community-based and industry-based interventions are more likely to succeed than law enforcement-based interventions because the profound distrust of government in these communities limits the potential effectiveness of government-backed interventions and also creates a high potential for unanticipated, counterproductive effects.
1 Introduction

A defining feature of contemporary Racially-Motivated Violent Extremist (RMVE) movements inside the United States is the promotion of “leaderless resistance.” This strategy encourages individuals or local cells to carry out independent acts of violence without direct orders from a leader. Leaderless violence can be highly unpredictable, creating a significant challenge for law enforcement. RMVE rhetoric can incite violence with relatively little warning, and indirect and loose connections between members can make it hard to identify broader conspiracies or foil plots before they happen. Decentralized networks allow for high levels of plausible deniability, stealth, and secrecy. The end result is an “intelligence nightmare” that imbues these network structures with high resilience to state action.\(^1\)

Given these problems, how can practitioners effectively combat leaderless resistance networks?\(^2\)

This report outlines a multi-layered systems approach to combating the threat of leaderless resistance within online racially-motivated leaderless resistance structures. This involves exploring the role of contemporary leaderless resistance movements inside the United States and identifying the critical requirements, strengths, and vulnerabilities these movements depend on to function. We then propose how to exploit these vulnerabilities by drawing lessons from different community, industry, and government experiences (e.g., historical FBI actions, Moonshot, Jigsaw, and EXIT-USA) that can be applied to leaderless resistance structures.

As a scope condition, this report principally focuses on how far-right RMVE movements inside the United States use “leaderless resistance” structures to achieve their political ends. We focus on far-right RMVEs given their recognized threat to U.S. national security, although far-left or nonviolent political organizations also frequently adopt leaderless resistance struggles (e.g. Occupy Wall Street, Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement).\(^3\)

Racially-motivated militants principally include white nationalists (e.g., Atomwaffen Division, Patriot Front) who fight for a wide-ranging set of racially-motivated ends instead of anti-government extremists (e.g. Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, Patriot Militia Movement).\(^4\)

2 What is Leaderless Resistance?

Leaderless resistance is an organizational strategy “that allows for and encourages individuals or small cells to engage in acts of political violence entirely independent of any hierarchy of leadership or network of support.”\(^5\)

Groups or movements practicing leaderless resistance eschew vertical command structures and instead adopt loose, horizontal relations. Local cells and individual members act independently without direct instruction or coordination from a central authority.

---


\(^4\) We focus on RMVEs rather than anti-government extremists since the latter conforms to more standard hierarchical organizational structures.

The term leaderless resistance goes by several other names. Insurgency scholars describe this decentralized structure as “netwar” or “networked insurgency.” Terrorism scholars sometimes describe the individual perpetrators behind violence as “lone wolves” or “stochastic terrorists.” Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram call these resistance structures “militarized social movements.”

A defining characteristic in a leaderless resistance network is the presence of a centralized doctrine but decentralized set of conduct. Followers adhere to a common set of ideological principles, which motivate their struggle and can legitimize the use of violent tactics to achieve these goals. Followers may carry out attacks using similar tactics (e.g., mass shootings) or cite similar grievances to motivate this violence (e.g., white genocide theory). They may communicate or coordinate with other cells through a web of dispersed and interconnected nodes, though they operate autonomously without central direction. This is distinct from a “hub and spoke” organizational structure where a central “hub” provides instruction and facilitates communication between independent cells.

Leaders can still be important actors in groups or movements with leaderless structures, providing generalized inspiration and ideological guidance. However, these leaders do not directly oversee the operations of cells or individual members.

Groups and movements may adopt a leaderless structure for its tactical and strategic benefits. Leaderless resistance purposely dismantles traditional organizational structures to improve the movement’s odds of survival. The absence of traditional hierarchical command and control structures renders it more difficult for authorities to detect, infiltrate, and dismantle a movement. Since autonomous members do not depend on a central figure to function, the arrest of a major leader does not hamper an individual member’s ability to carry out attacks. Members choose their own targets and tactics and do not need a defined piece of territory to stage attacks.

3 Strategic Goals of Racially-Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVE)

What do RMVE movements want? Although RMVEs inside the United States broadly aim to promote white power, there is significant disagreement among extremists about what exactly that entails. Recognizing RMVE objectives is critical to understanding extremists’ strategic orientation and why they rely on leaderless resistance structures to achieve it. This section outlines three different strategic goals of
the RMVE movement centered around (1) accelerationism, (2) nativism and identitarianism, and (3) neo-redemptionism. Section 4 follows with a discussion about how RMVE followers have adopted and refined a strategy of leaderless resistance to achieve these goals.

Accelerationism

At the most extreme are an increasingly growing number of “accelerationist” RMVEs who aim to establish a white ethno-state through an impending race war. The website Iron March initially facilitated the spread of “accelerationism,” a philosophy inspired by the ideas of U.S. neo-Nazi James Mason that seeks to violently overthrow the liberal democracy. These followers espouse an eschatological belief that a large-scale apocalyptic race war is imminent and that it is imperative to take action now to prepare for this battle. Members take inspiration from the novel The Turner Diaries in which a white supremacist revolution starts with a “Day of the Rope,” or large-scale number of mass lynchings carried out by right wing death squads. Examples of prominent accelerationists in the United States include the Atomwaffen Division and the Base, both of which were designated terrorist organizations by the Government of Canada in February 2021.

Nativism and Identitarianism

Another subset of RMVEs champion anti-immigration and nativist policies. These individuals stem from the “paleoconservatism” movement, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a backlash to liberal idealism. It rejected socio-economic welfare policies and promoted traditional values. In the 1990s, Peter Brimelow expanded on these ideas in his book Alien Nation, which argued America was – and should remain – a principally white nation. Brimelow later went on to found one of the earliest far-right websites known as VDARE in reference to Virginia Dare, the first white colonist born in America. In 2009, Richard Spencer created National Policy Institute, a far-right think tank, and launched a blog that would solidify key tenets of nativist ideology.

Spencer would go on to popularize the term “alt-right” to describe a set of white nationalist beliefs that centered on the preservation of “Western Civilization.” Broadly, the alt-right believes that “white identity’ is under attack by multicultural forces using ‘political correctness’ and ‘social justice’ to...
undermine white people and ‘their’ civilization.” Alt-right followers separate themselves from mainstream conservatives, whom they see as too moderate and unwilling to protect the interests of white people. A less extreme version of the alt-right, often termed “alt-lite,” rejects the overt white supremacy and racism of the alt-right but embraces its misogyny and xenophobia.

In Europe, the “Identitarian” movement makes similar nativist calls to ban immigration and use force, if necessary, to protect white populations. This movement takes its inspiration from Renaud Camus’ 2012 conspiratorial “Great Replacement Theory,” which suggested immigrants from North Africa would slowly replace the Caucasian population. Brendon Tarrant’s 2019 attack against a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand referenced the “Great Replacement” theory as justification for his attack.

Neo-Redemptionism

A third segment of RMVEs can be classified as neo-redemptionist, meaning they aim to reassert white control over politics. In practice, it entails the dismantling of existing civil rights protections and reversal of other policies to restore white dominance in politics. During the Reconstruction Era after the American Civil War, “Redeemers” counter-mobilized against Radical Republicans to push for a policy of “redemption” and the return of white supremacist policies. Today, neo-redemptionists lobby for reversing affirmative action policies, voting protections, the teaching of “critical race theory” and other racially-charged positions. Anders Breivik’s manifesto justified his 2011 attack in Norway, which killed 77 people, through appeal to this grievance. He decried a political environment full of “anti-racist witch hunts” and the “ridiculous pursuit of equality” in legitimating his use of violence.

Together, accelerationism, nativism, and neo-redemptionism form a triumvirate of different strategic goals for the RMVE movement. Collectively, these desired end states coalesce into a broad effort to champion policies, politics, and politicians that support their ambitious desires to create a white ethno-state.

---

4 Historical Development of Leaderless Resistance Structures

While the term “leaderless resistance” is traditionally attributed to a 1992 pamphlet by white supremacist Louis Beam, it is, in fact, a much older phenomenon. This section describes how the leaderless strategy employed by RMVEs in the United States emerged and developed into the online threat it poses today.

To preview, the growth of online leaderless resistance networks stem from the RMVE’s early adoption in the 1980s and 1990s of personal computers and the Internet to spread white supremacist ideas and literature. In the 2000s and 2010s, RMVEs employed new forms of social media – both mainstream social media and websites created specifically for white supremacists – to attract new followers and develop common ideologies and goals through virtual interactions (e.g., the sharing of memes). This new online environment facilitated the formation of far-right RMVE movements with decentralized organizational structures and fluid memberships. In this digital age, two primary forms of leaderless RMVEs emerged, differentiated by either their deliberate or organic adoption of the network structure.

Early Notions of Leaderless Resistance: From the Far-Left to the Far-Right

The Organization of Insurrectionary Anarchism

Decentralized resistance networks date back to at least 1879 with the formation of Narodnaya Volya (NV) in Russia. This early far-left movement aimed to overthrow the tsarist regime in Russia through the systematic assassination of top political officials. To evade detection and destruction, Narodnaya Volya organized itself in a series of local semi-independent cells across the country. The cells looked for direction from a secretive top Executive Committee, but otherwise did not interact with each other and tried to conceal their activities as much as possible. NV’s operational success culminated with the assassination of Tsar Nicholas II in 1881. Its activities inspired a wave of what Alfredo Bonnano termed “insurrectionary anarchism,” or loosely-coordinated attacks by decentralized cells and individuals against common political targets.

Inside the United States, decentralized militant movements emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. In perhaps one of the earliest acts of “stochastic terror,” Leon Czogolsz assassinated William McKinley in 1901. Upon his arrest, he attributed his actions as taking inspiration from an Emma Goldman speech to use violent force, if necessary, to achieve real reform inside the United States.

A decade later, an Italian-American anarchist movement known as the Galleanists conducted several prominent bombing campaigns between 1914-1919 in New York, culminating with 30 nationwide mail bomb packages in 1919 and the 1920 Wall Street Bombing, which killed 40. To conduct these attacks, the Galleanists operated in a series of dispersed interconnected cells throughout the country. Few interacted directly with founder Luigi Galleani. Rather, they took inspiration and direction from a manual Galleani published in 1905, which justified the need for violence and provided instructions on how to create small

---

explosives. By 1920, police had managed to arrest many members and disrupt different cells across the country, undermining the group’s operational capacity. However, its decentralized organizational structure illustrated the viability of these resistance structures in U.S. extremism.

*Ulius Amos, Anti-Communism, and the Minutemen*

Leaderless resistance in far-right circles began to materialize in the late 1950s as part of a burgeoning new far-right consciousness. Military officer Ulius Louis Amoss published an essay outlining the tenets of leaderless resistance in 1953 as part of his plan to combat the Soviet threat. He emphasized that the U.S. needed to focus on subverting communism through small, decentralized cells in Europe rather than through traditional hierarchical structures, which could attract attention.

In 1960, Robert DePugh took these ideas to form an early far-right organization in Missouri known as the “Minutemen.” DePugh was originally a member of the John Birch Society, a conspiratorial group that promoted the myth that the U.S. Federal Government was part of a communist conspiracy to overtake America. DePugh left the Birch society to take — as he believed — Bircher’s ideas to their logical conclusion and prepare to fight off communists within the United States. To this end, DePugh recruited far-right followers whom he would train in guerrilla warfare to fend off against external Communist invasion.

To avoid detection, the Minutemen adopted an early form of “leaderless resistance” across the Midwest. Participants did not know anyone outside their local cell, used pseudonyms to conceal their real identities, and held secret meetings to avoid infiltration. Although the group never conducted violent attacks, the Minutemen’s organizational strategy reflected one of the first instances in which the domestic far-right extremists adopted a decentralized organizational approach.

*Louis Beam and the Internet*

Louis Beam, a former leader of the Texas chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, is often credited with the popularization of the concept of leaderless resistance. In the early 1980s, Beam pioneered the use of personal computers to spread white supremacist ideas online. In 1984, Beam helped to create an online bulletin board, known as the Aryan Nations Liberty Net, where users could post and read white supremacist literature that was otherwise banned or difficult to access. Beam’s use of computers to spread ideas, inspire action, and facilitate communication was revolutionary. As one scholar writes, “information and literature that was once difficult to obtain [had] been made readily available over the Internet to millions.”

Other white supremacists adopted similar tactics. In late 1984 or early 1985, Tom Metzger founded the White Aryan Resistance online bulletin board to promulgate white supremacist ideas. In addition to his

---

online presence, Metzger hosted a television show on local cable, known as “Race and Reason,” that, at
its height, reached viewers in 21 different states. Metzger’s White Aryan Resistance group also published
a monthly newspaper and managed a telephone hotline, both of which distributed information and
literature to white supremacist followers and skinheads.35

By the early 1990s, several white supremacist online bulletin boards existed based in cities across the
United States. These bulletin boards adapted to advances in technology, and webpages with racist and
antisemitic information began to materialize.36 In 1992, Beam published his famous essay on leaderless
resistance. 37 In it, Beam emphasized the role that “newspapers, leaflets, computers, etc.” could play in
coordinating the ideas and activities of otherwise independent “phantom cells.” He argued that, by
adopting a leaderless structure, the white supremacist movement in the United States could withstand
government efforts to undermine it. A “pyramid style” organization with a clear, hierarchical chain-of-
command was vulnerable to detection, infiltration, and dismantlement. Beam writes that “A single
penetration of a pyramid type of organization can lead to the destruction of the whole.” In contrast, a
leaderless movement “presents no single opportunity for the Federals to destroy a significant portion of
the Resistance.”38

Though the notion of leaderless resistance had been circulating seriously among white supremacists since
at least the 1970s,39 Beam’s clear articulation of the idea and its publication online helped to inspire
individuals to carry out independent acts of violence.40 The essay was read by RMVE leaders and re-
published, invigorating the concept of leaderless resistance with “newfound credibility” and ensuring that
it “was no longer an isolated theory.”41

The Age of Social Media: Inspiring Leaderless Followers Online

Throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, the white supremacist movement continued to expand its virtual
footprint. The far-right grew more reliant on the Internet as a primary means to expand its follower base.

---

hate/extremist-files/individual/tom-metzger
36 Chip Berlet. "When hate went online." In Northeast Sociological Association Spring Conference in April. 2001: 9-
12.
personal.umich.edu/~satran/Ford%2006/Wk%202-1%20Terrorism%20Networks%20leaderless-resistance.pdf
39 Jeffrey Kaplan. Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right. Walnut Creek: AltaMira
40 For example, the 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City carried out by Timothy McVeigh and co-conspirators
“paralleled exactly” the leaderless resistance framework, though the degree to which McVeigh had Beam’s concept
Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2000: 173-185; Keith Schneider. “TERROR IN OKLAHOMA: THE FAR RIGHT; Bomb
41 Jeffrey Kaplan. Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right. Walnut Creek:
AltaMira Press, 2000: 177.
and spread its ideas both within the United States and to other countries. By 2000, several hundred white supremacist websites existed on the internet, a majority of which had direct links to other related websites. One of the biggest hubs of white nationalist activity online, Stormfront, appeared in 1995. It housed a library of white supremacist literature and a host of links to white nationalist group websites. In 2001, Stormfront was re-designed as an interactive message board and thus transformed into “the first form of participatory social media for white nationalists.”

The rise of modern social media in the mid-2000s enabled white supremacists to share their ideas with a wider audience, beyond the set of users that found their way to Stormfront. Social media also quickened the demise of older organizations, like the KKK, that were slow to adapt to the changing virtual landscape. As older groups declined and splintered, new leaders emerged online and utilized social media to share their ideas and recruit followers.

This new online environment facilitated the formation of RMVE movements with decentralized organizational structures and fluid memberships. The RMVE community has capitalized on the ubiquity of Internet access to attract new members and develop common ideologies and goals through virtual interactions (e.g., the sharing of memes). Within the last decade, far-right content has migrated from obscure forums to mainstream websites, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Fueled by the RMVE movement’s growing virtual reach, leaderless movements and groups based in the United States have flourished in the last decade. These entities can largely be divided into two categories: (1) those that deliberately adopted a leaderless structure for its strategic benefits, and (2) those that are organically leaderless due to the highly fluid nature of their network of followers. See Table 1 for a summary of these two types of leaderless movements.

The first category includes groups like the Atomwaffen Division (AWD), a neo-Nazi group founded online in 2015 by a Florida teenager. AWD was organized into a decentralized network of local cells, each of which were composed of several individual members. Much of AWD’s ideology and strategy was drawn from SIEGE, a neo-Nazi text that advocated for a “leaderless, cell-structured terrorism and


47 This conceptualization of modern leaderless resistance structures is somewhat different from characterizations made by the existing academic literature. Scholars debate what exactly should be classified as leaderless resistance, and many studies have conflicting definitions. This report uses a more broad-based conceptualization of leaderless resistance than some existing academic studies. It does so because, even if actions like “lone wolf” terrorism are seen by some scholars to be conceptually different than leaderless resistance, the challenges that these activities create for law enforcement are very similar. This is particularly the case given the that many violent actions carried out by RMVE leaderless entities and by lone wolf terrorists are motivated and/or coordinated online. For more information on the academic debate about defining leaderless resistance, see Matthew M. Sweeney. “Leaderless Resistance and the Truly Leaderless: A Case Study Test of the Literature-Based Findings.” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 42, no. 7 (2019): 617-635.

white revolution.”⁴⁹ The group aimed to inspire and prepare members to carry out violent attacks against the Jewish, Muslim, Black, and LGBTQ communities.⁵⁰

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaderless Structure</th>
<th>Deliberate</th>
<th>Organic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>Group/movement intentionally adopted a leaderless structure for its strategic benefits</td>
<td>Group/movement developed a leaderless structure organically due to its crowd-sourced development and fluid membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formation</strong></td>
<td>Group/movement announced by a particular individual or group of individuals. Recruitment to this group/movement occurs online, and it can be selective. Followers adopt a central set of goals and ideological tenets.</td>
<td>Consumption of online content (e.g., memes) and widely available literature (e.g., <em>The Turner Diaries</em>) generates a shared sense of community and shapes an overarching ideology and set of goals. Any user can identify with the group/movement and contribute to its ideological development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Tactics**          | ● Coordinated campaigns (e.g., swatting)  
● Planned attacks carried out by group cells  
● Lone actor (“lone wolf”) terrorist acts | ● Coordinated campaigns (e.g., Gamergate)  
● Lone actor (“lone wolf”) terrorist acts |
| **Examples**         | Minutemen  
Atomwaffen Division (AWD)  
The Base | Boogaloo Bois  
Groypers  
Users of 8chan /pol imageboard |

AWD’s members largely organized online, but they occasionally met in person at “hate camps” organized by the group to film propaganda videos and provide members with weapons training.⁵¹ After facing pressures from law enforcement, AWD disbanded and reemerged as the National Socialist Order (NSO) in July 2020. NSO adopted the same leaderless structure. In October 2020, NSO posted a video on Telegram that “encouraged followers to ‘educate [themselves]’, ‘identify allies and enemies’, and ‘act’ in order to ‘forge a new world’ from the ‘festering corpse of America.’” The video explicitly encouraged

---


individuals to carry out acts of violence, depicting the bombing of electricity infrastructure and a vehicle ramming protestors.\textsuperscript{52}

While AWD/NSO purposefully adopted a leaderless structure, another class of leaderless movements are organically decentralized due to the crowd-sourced nature of their formation. Examples include the Boogaloo Bois, which was not created by a single person but rather coalesced over time via discussions on fringe websites and channels. The idea of the “Boogaloo” – a term for the coming of a second civil war in the United States – appeared as early as 2012 and circulated on 4chan discussion boards. In 2019, it gained popularity on mainstream websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and began coalescing into a movement.\textsuperscript{53} Individual member posts and memes refined the group’s anti-government and anti-police ideology and helped create a shared set of objectives and tactics.\textsuperscript{54}

Anyone can join or identify with the Boogaloo movement. Many self-proclaimed Boogaloo followers are also members of other far-right organizations in the United States, including domestic militia groups. The fluid and open nature of Boogaloo’s membership has resulted in an ideologically diverse following, which includes white supremacists, libertarians, and Black Lives Matter supporters.\textsuperscript{55} The Boogaloo movement online has inspired many followers to take action offline in support of Boogaloo objectives, including carrying out violence. For example, in 2020, a Boogaloo follower shot and killed two officers in two separate incidents in California.\textsuperscript{56}

There also exist individual extremists that do not identify with any named movement or group. In the past two decades, social media has played “a vital role in self-radicalization and inspiring lone actors.”\textsuperscript{57} Researchers have identified dozens of white supremacist channels on Telegram that glorify “lone wolf” terrorist attacks against racial minorities and provide tactical advice, such as bomb-making instructions.\textsuperscript{58} This online content has translated into offline violence. A study that analyzed lone actor terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe found that 68\% of lone actors “read or consumed literature or propaganda associated with a wider movement” before the attack.\textsuperscript{59}

For example, several racially-motivated shootings and murders have been tied to 8chan, a website known for its discussion boards that share violent white supremacist content. In March 2019, an 8chan user targeted two mosques and killed more than 50 people in Christchurch, New Zealand after posting his


racist manifesto to the site. In April 2019, a man radicalized on 8chan posted a livestream link to the site so that other users could view his planned massacre at a California synagogue. He said of 8chan: “I’ve only been lurking for a year and a half, yet, what I’ve learned here is priceless.” One user responded by telling him to “get the high score” and kill as many people as possible. Another user posted, “He at least did something, that’s respectable.” In August 2019, another 8chan user posted his racist manifesto to the website before going on to kill 23 people in an El Paso, Texas Walmart. One 8chan user responded: “The new guy deserves some praise, he reached almost a third of the high score,” referencing the number of people killed in the shooting.

Overall, these leaderless acts of violence – whether perpetrated by individuals loosely tied to a group, a movement, or to a broad ideology – represent a major threat. The Internet enables individuals to post, share, and consume extremist content at a pace that is difficult to moderate, trace, and pre-empt.

5 Critical Requirements and Capabilities

Extremist movements often rely on a key Center of Gravity (COG) to sustain operations. A COG represents a critical source of power for any movement and is often the critical element needed to maintain not only relevance but survival. Traditional movements typically depend on COGs like a defined piece of territory, leadership, or pool of supporters to achieve their desired end states.

To achieve its end states, the RMVE movement relies on a leaderless resistance structure. In so doing, this network structure facilitates growing the movement, elevating racially-motivated ideas, and undercutting opponents through incremental acts of resistance. By eschewing traditional hierarchical command and control structures, it is harder to dismantle the RMVE movements and creates a separate set of policy challenges for practitioners. Instead, leaderless resistance makes progress towards these end goals through a strategic approach of “death by a thousand cuts.” While individual acts of resistance may not by themselves be enough to result in systematic change, they can collectively impose enough costs or pressures to result in change.

---

64 Center of Gravity is typically attributed to Carl von Clausewitz and his book On War as “the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends.” The center of gravity subsequently influenced US strategic thinking and military doctrine as a way to craft operational responses against adversaries (e.g. Joint Pub 3.0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, and Joint Pub 5.0, Joint Doctrine for Campaign Planning).
The RMVE movement differs from other extremist threats because the movement’s center of gravity is decentralized and polycephalous (hydra-headed). Leaderless network structures imbue the movement with a sense of resilience and indestructibility. Arresting the leader does not remove an individual member’s ability to carry out attacks. Further, leaderless resistance encourages members to carry out attacks wherever and whenever. It creates the conditions for violence by providing independent units the tools to conduct operations on their own. This removes the need for a defined piece of territory to stage attacks. It also creates a high level of unpredictability in the timing and location of violent attacks.

RMVEs pursue two key lines of effort to achieve its goals through leaderless resistance structures. First, RMVEs want to attract and solidify support for white nationalism. They leverage dense communication networks to spread information, tactics, and techniques, mobilize followers, and radicalize individuals to take actions. This helps recruit and sustain popular support for the movement by crafting a mythology around the movement’s legitimacy and providing a sense of purpose.

Second, RMVEs want to inspire followers to take the initiative in conducting attacks. They produce aggressive information operations to spread the narrative and provide basic operational instruction on how to conduct violent attacks. They share key doctrinal concepts through common texts and communication platforms to teach each other when and how to conduct attacks. Accomplishing these lines of effort requires three critical components: common doctrine, shared narrative, and dense communication networks.

### Table 2. Critical Requirements of Online Leaderless Resistance Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Doctrine</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Communication Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>● Provide sense of guiding principles on how to achieve goals</td>
<td>● Provide sense of common identity and purpose</td>
<td>● Share ITT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements</td>
<td>● Coordinated Messaging</td>
<td>● Communicate cause and mission</td>
<td>● Key Influencers (Critical Nodes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Common Texts and Scripts</td>
<td>● Influence and attract followers</td>
<td>● Communication Platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Visibility of Prior Martyrs and Attacks</td>
<td></td>
<td>● Internet Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Trademarks/Signals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactics</td>
<td>● Flooding/Amplification</td>
<td>● “Red-Pilling”</td>
<td>● Issue Linkage (Gamers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Fogging</td>
<td>● Live-Action Role Playing</td>
<td>● College Campuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Doxxing</td>
<td>● Memes</td>
<td>● Internet Platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Stochastic Terror Attacks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>● Spread of Mis- and Disinformation</td>
<td>● VDARE, American Renaissance, National Policy Institute</td>
<td>● Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Viral Videos/Posts</td>
<td></td>
<td>● IronMarch, Fascist Forge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Flash Demonstrations</td>
<td>● Turner Diaries</td>
<td>● Parler, MeWe, BitChute, Telegram, Odysee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Physical Violence, e.g. Brendon Tarrant, Anders Breivik, Robert Bowers</td>
<td>● Ashli Babbitt</td>
<td>● Chan Networks, Dark Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Great Replacement Theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Doctrine

Doctrine provides the RMVE movement a common set of guiding principles on how to achieve its goals. These instructional materials allow followers to independently conduct operations without direct coordination. The movement accomplishes this by sharing key texts, information, Tactics, and Techniques (ITT) across different communication platforms.65

Key instructional texts can provide a “script” for violence. Paramount among these texts are Louis Beam’s Leaderless Resistance, William Pierce’s The Turner Diaries, and James Mason’s SIEGE. William Pierce’s virulently anti-Semitic novel The Turner Diaries is a fantastical text published in 1977 about a young revolutionary attempting to overthrow the current government. In the book, the young man is tasked with detonating explosives outside a federal building and ultimately flying a plane into the Pentagon.66 The Turner Diaries was thought to influence Timothy McVeigh’s decision to bomb the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City due to the similarity in tactics.

A similarly instructional text are the writings of James Mason, a former member of Rockwell’s American Nazi Party (ANP). Mason joined the ANP as a teenager where he became a protégé of William Pierce.57 Frustrated with the failure of the ANP to achieve success in politics, Mason gave up on the political process. Beginning in the 1980s, he published a series of SIEGE newsletters urging white supremacists to adopt terrorism and guerilla warfare tactics to bring about a race war and take down the U.S. government by force.68 Mason’s work came to renewed prominence in 2017 when the Atomwaffen Division published an anthology of the newsletters and filmed an interview with Mason.69 Mason’s ideas, often described “accelerationist” for their emphasis on triggering a race war and the downfall of the U.S. political system, have influenced numerous neo-Nazi groups, including Atomwaffen and the Base. SIEGE also inspired the creation of new communication platforms like Fascist Forge, a successor to IronMarch where members could congregate to share information, tactics, and technology with each other.70

Beyond these texts, followers may take operational direction from previous martyrs and attacks. Internet networks can increase the visibility of transnational attacks and spread violence. For example, Brendon Tarrant’s manifesto reflected scores of Internet memes, terminology, and racial ideas gleaned from online platforms.71 Tarrant’s 2019 Christchurch shooting was live-streamed on Facebook as it happened,

allowing him to broadcast his misdeeds.\textsuperscript{72} The publication of his manifesto was also thought to generate copycat events later that year in El Paso, Poway, and Norway.\textsuperscript{73} Publicizing previous attacks demonstrates the feasibility of conducting these attacks and also serves a key “terror” tactic in advertising the movement’s aims and reasons for violence.

Decentralized resistance structures also create opportunities for followers to make progress towards their goals through alternative tactics like flooding and fogging. Fogging is a tactic in which RMVEs challenge existing explanations, facts, and narratives.\textsuperscript{74} This seeds doubt and creates an environment for alternative narratives to compete. Online networks may describe mainstream narratives as inauthentic or illegitimate. Individuals can facilitate radicalization by spreading doctrinal messaging that causes users to begin questioning mainstream media as a legitimate source of information. Individuals may attempt to paint outliers or singular examples of questionable behavior as part of a broader trend. Individuals may also share anecdotal stories to create a sense of relatability and authenticity. These techniques, along with other types of local fallacies, can spread key doctrinal concepts and undercut oppositional messaging.

In contrast, flooding – sometimes referred to as swarming in the netwar literature – involves the rapid saturation of conversation spaces with particular narratives.\textsuperscript{75} For example, the “Stop the Steal” narrative quickly escalated after the 2020 election as users posted particular new stories or videos on Facebook.\textsuperscript{76} On YouTube, “videos containing ‘Stop the Steal’ or ‘#StopTheSteal’ garnered 21,267,165 views, 863,151 likes, and 34,091 dislikes” between September 1, 2020 and February 2, 2021.\textsuperscript{77} Flooding can also occur in person through large-scale flash protests whereby followers show up at events to protest issues. There have been reports that Identity Evropa, Patriot Front, and League of the South have all used this tactic to raise attention for their cause.\textsuperscript{78}

Overall, the leaderless resistance doctrine provides guidance on how to use violence and attract attention to RMVE goals. However, it is only one critical component of the movement’s overall strategic approach.

---


Narrative

Narratives are a critical component of leaderless resistance networks because they serve multiple purposes. They provide the movement a common sense or common identity and sense of belonging; communicate the group’s cause; and help influence and attract followers. These narratives help morally justify the use of violence and support the group’s cause.

RMVE narratives try to draw meaning out of an increasingly complex and uncertain world. By providing beliefs that rationalize an individual’s grievance as legitimate, it addresses the psychological need for cognitive closure. This can provide a sense of belonging and help radicalize potential followers. RMVE narratives present a legitimation strategy for the use of violence. Ideological messaging helps the movement create a sense of urgency and purpose behind extremist actions. It also helps indoctrinate and radicalize further supports by inculcating them in certain belief systems.

By framing the ideology in these ways, the narratives exploit motivational imbalances. Placing such a high emphasis on commonly acceptable traits like patriotism, duty, and serving the common good encourages individuals to overlook other concerns or considerations. The ideology is also able to effectively indoctrinate and radicalize supporters. By presenting a multi-tiered set of messages that become radical, the RMVE movement slowly and subtly introduces its core beliefs to potential supporters.

Common Themes and Narratives

The RMVE movement uses a number of different mediums to distribute its narrative and recruit followers. RMVE narratives slowly and subtly introduce core beliefs to potential supporters. The “alt-right pipeline” lures followers and exposes them to RMVE ideas until they come to accept fringe beliefs as a legitimating force for extremist activity. This radicalization process is known as “red-pilling,” a movie reference to the 1999 film The Matrix in which Keanu Reeves’ character “Neo” takes a red pill in order to learn the “truth” about reality. It is a gradual and multi-step process in which an individual is repeatedly exposed to extreme ideas until such ideas become normalized and internalized, sometimes referred to as the “normie-to-fascist” pipeline.

These redpill incidents can slowly accumulate overtime. Individuals first tend to slowly question and then reject mainstream political ideas, framing them as part of “PC” (Politically Correct) culture and critiquing “SJWs” (Social Justice Warriors) for promulgating them. There is then a slow embrace of traditionalist views, including anti-feminist beliefs, scientific racism, and at times anti-Semitic views.

Another part of the RMVE leaderless resistance toolbox is the use of conspiratorial narratives as a way to create new meaning in the world. Conspiracy theories serve as a “radicalizing multiplier” because they promise to reveal “hidden meaning” and satisfy an individual’s need for control. Common narratives reflect a combination of anti-state, anti-minority, and revolutionary beliefs.

Other narratives exploit fears about government meddling and overreach. Anti-state narratives date back to at least the 1950s with the John Birch Society and claims of a global communist conspiracy. Over time, fears of a communist conspiracy evolved into deep-seated fears about a “New World Order” and more recently a “Deep State” or secret set of elite cabals controlling the U.S. Government.

RMVE narratives are typically couched around racial fears, such as the narrative surrounding “white genocide theory.” These narratives reflect racial paranoia that espouse anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant worldviews. “The Great Replacement” theory exploits fear of diminishing white power. Within Europe, the refugee crisis and resulting rise in the nativist population has increased support for the “Eurabia” theory. This theory assumes there is an attempt to “Arab-ize” the European continent and diminish the power of white populations. These theories also tap into xenophobic fears about the outsider. By reinforcing in-group and out-group dynamics, these theories can vilify outsiders as the reason for a loss of significance and sense of uncertainty and offer an alternative sense of safety and security for followers.

Table 3. Common RMVE Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Narratives</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-State</td>
<td>Beliefs about government overreach, meddling, and formation of alternative totalitarian government</td>
<td>Shadow Government, Deep State, QAnon, False Flags, New World Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic/Anti-Minority</td>
<td>Beliefs about “white genocide theory” and xenophobic sentiments</td>
<td>Great Replacement, Eurabia, Kalergi Plan, Scientific Racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Semitic</td>
<td>Anti-Jewish beliefs promoting control</td>
<td>Zionist-Occupied Government, anti-Soros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Speech/Rights</td>
<td>Beliefs about restricting free speech and civil liberties</td>
<td>Social Justice Warriors (S JW), Political Prisoners, PC (Politically-Correct) Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Beliefs questioning scientific theories, evidence</td>
<td>Scientific Racism, Anti-Vaccine Theories, Covid Disinformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerationist</td>
<td>Beliefs promoting a doomsday, race war</td>
<td>Cold Civil War, Day of the Ropes, Doomsday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esoteric/Occult</td>
<td>Esoteric beliefs promoting pseudo-religious</td>
<td>Order of Nine Angles, Satanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Revisionism</td>
<td>Beliefs reframing the facts behind historical events</td>
<td>U.S. Revolutionary War (III Percenters), U.S. Civil War, The Holocaust, January 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to amplifying these narratives, RMVEs increasingly use humor, especially meme-ification, as a means to disseminate beliefs and attract online followers. Online memes are a powerful communication tool because they simplify complex ideas into humorous frames of references. By couching racist and misogynistic views in memes, individuals can inject a sense of irony and plausible deniability. For example, in an op-ed for Breitbart, Milo Yiannopoulos justified the memes as harmless “fun” and “simply a means to fluster their grandparents.” It also creates ambiguity about whether followers actually believe in these ideas. This gives them the ability to evade any consequences for their words.

While extremist movements have used humor before, new technological tools have allowed them to reach a broader audience than ever before. Memes help the alt-right project its messages to a broader audience, enabling them to go mainstream. A few extremist platforms like 4chan’s “/pol” (politically incorrect board) and Reddit’s “The_Donald” are the origins of some of the most viral and mainstream memes. In a study of 160 million images on Twitter, Reddit, 4chan, and Gab, researchers showed how extremists took images from more fringe communities like 4chan’s /pol board effectively disseminated messages through more mainstream platforms like Twitter and Reddit.

Memetic communication also allows RMVEs to create a sense of collective identity by creating private jokes, identifying symbols, and signals among members. This can further entrench a sense of belonging and increase people’s ties to the movement. The Boogaloo Bois have effectively embraced the use of memes to promote their accelerationist views. For example, many of the phrases and imagery from The Turner Diaries remain common shorthand in the RMVE lexicon. “Day of the Ropes” or #DOTR is a popular phrase used to describe the day the government will be overthrown and a race war will start, characterized by public lynchings throughout the country. 1488 is also a common reference to the numerical combination of 14 (for the 14 Words) and 88 (shorthand reference to the 8th letter of the alphabet HH, for Heil Hitler).

In some cases, memes can go viral such as the NPC Meme, which makes fun of perceived “Social Justice Warriors.” Pepe the Frog became so associated with alt-right messaging that it soon became labeled a hate symbol by the Anti-Defamation League in 2016. More recently, the “Let’s Go Brandon” chant has become a viral term to project an anti-Biden message.

---

In addition to meme-ification, the RMVE movement also disseminates its ideology by promoting “Live Action Role Playing” or LARP-ing. Live Action Role Playing is a concept from fantasy game culture in which individuals dress up or pretend play. Within the alt-right, LARP-ing is a way for individuals to engage in “mock” discourse and play in which they promote these ideas. By pretending, followers again create a shroud of ambiguity and plausible deniability for their actions.

More recent investigations found different “roleplay” scenarios within prominent games like Roblox and Minecraft that promoted extremist ideas. For example, “one Roblox driving game invited players to ‘become a racist’ and simulate the murder of people belonging to ethnic minorities by running them over in a car.” Following the 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, attendees claimed they did not actually espouse white supremacist beliefs but were role-playing. Similar denials emerged in the wake of the 2021 Capitol Riots. Attendees actively discussed the layout of the Capitol Building in the weeks following up to the January 6, 2021, event as part of a “role-playing” exercise.

*Martyrs, Myths, and Sacred Texts*

A critical requirement for these narratives to work is a mythology of martyrs, myths, and sacred texts. These narratives often present a romanticized view of history to establish that conditions are today worse off than they once were. RMVEs promote a common set of manifestos and sacred texts to unify discussion around its core ideas. Within the United States, these core ideas often includes mythologized views of the Revolutionary War as “true patriots” or the Civil War as the “Lost Cause.” The Lost Cause is today a mobilizing force in neo-Confederate movements like Identity Dixie, which present a less ostentatious view of white supremacy in view of more “moderate” policy positions (such as statue).

References to historical injustices and martyrs also help mythologize the past and legitimate the utility of violence. Common references include the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and historical martyrs. When Timothy McVeigh was captured, he was wearing a shirt of Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth along with a Thomas Jefferson quote that “tree of revolution must be watered from time to time with the blood of martyrs.” Vicki Weaver’s death at Ruby Ridge and Ashli Babbitt’s death at the Capitol Insurrection...

---

https://mediarep.org/bitstream/handle/doc/13282/Post_Digital_Cultures_37-48_Tuters_LARPing_Liberal_Tears_.pdf?sequence=5

https://www.wsj.com/articles/larping-role-playing-from-nerds-to-neo-nazis-1503673316


both galvanized followers to mobilize to avenge their wrongful deaths.\textsuperscript{103} These symbols can provide the movement a sense of purpose and attract followers.

### Table 4. Common RMVE Martyrs, Symbols, and Texts\textsuperscript{104}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Martyrs</th>
<th>Symbols/Phrases</th>
<th>Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert J. Mathews</td>
<td>1488</td>
<td>Turner Diaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki Weaver</td>
<td>Sixteen Words</td>
<td>SIEGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Kaczynski</td>
<td>Sonnenrad</td>
<td>“Leaderless Resistance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy McVeigh</td>
<td>Hyperborea</td>
<td>Camp of the Saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anders Breivik</td>
<td>Day of the Ropes</td>
<td>Le Grand Remplacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Bowers</td>
<td>Pepe the Frog</td>
<td>Metaphysics of War/Revolt Against the Modern World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendon Tarrant</td>
<td>Kek, Kekistan</td>
<td>Alexander Dugin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dense Communication Networks**

The final critical requirement for leaderless resistance networks to work are dense communication networks. The networks are dense in the sense they involve redundant communication systems, amplify common messages, and are resilient to the removal of any one communication platform or critical nodes connecting these platforms. Communication networks allow followers to coordinate, advertise, and attract new followers. Networks are also key to share instructional materials and coordinate operations.

Traditional RMVE leaderless resistance networks had limited growth potential due to their reliance on physical networks to meet. While the contemporary RMVE movement still involves some physical networking (e.g., college campus organizations like the Koch-backed Young American Foundation or Charlie Kirk’s Turning Point USA), the movement increasingly organizes online.\textsuperscript{105}

Individuals often interact with these fringe views through these communication networks in three ways. First, individuals may gain exposure to fringe ideas through gateway social media platforms and algorithms. Second, individuals may become radicalized through interactions with social media influencers or core communities, who amplify fringe ideas. Finally, individuals may share materials and communicate with other RMVE supporters through specific messaging applications.

**Communication Platforms and Algorithms**

Online forums can expose individuals to extreme, but not fringe, content on news sites like NewsMax, One America Network, Breitbart, Daily Stormer, Gateway Pundit, Right Stuff, and American


\textsuperscript{104} This is not a comprehensive list, but captures some of the most commonly-referenced martyrs, symbols, and texts referenced in RMVE networks.

A growing number of users also encounter more fringe views through gateway platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Tiktok, and Instagram. These platforms provide a critical requirement for the far-right to disseminate its ideas beyond a core audience. YouTube, Spotify, Tiktok, and other media sources also underscore a “digital support infrastructure” for the far right.

Mainstream platforms can also inadvertently serve as gateways to RMVE radicalization by tapping into networks of individuals already vulnerable to extremist ideas. For example, Discord originally emerged as an opportunity for the gaming community to communicate and coordinate gameplay with each other via voice, text, or video chat. Today, the RMVE network is active on Discord and recruits gamers. The RMVE network uses Discord because users can institute certain security protections and vetting measures to limit access. For example, Discords can require a user invite, entrance exam, or “proof of whiteness” to gain access. Conversations on Discord generally promote the RMVE narrative rather than distribute instructional materials. Users tend to ask questions about extremist ideologies (fact-finding) and inquire about how to gain access to more materials.

Social media can also inadvertently facilitate exposure to radical ideas by using algorithms to suggest similar clubs, pages, or sites. As an individual begins to come into contact with extremist materials, social media can inadvertently accelerate this exposure. Creating “clickbait”-like videos or manipulating search engine optimization algorithms can also generate “strategic controversy” that boosts the number of views around a video. For example, a multi-hour debate between Richard Spencer and Carl Benjamin on scientific racism was briefly one of the most watched live stream videos on YouTube in 2018 before being taken down.

Social Media Influencers, Hashtags, and Critical Nodes

RMVE influencers and hashtags are critical nodes in a leaderless resistance network. Their social media platforms can introduce a common vocabulary, share doctrinal beliefs, and direct potential supporters to other platforms. By commanding such a large and attentive audience, influencers can connect different parts of these leaderless networks and grow the movement. One of the most common ways social influencers introduce these radical ideas to this is by bringing guests on YouTube shows. For example, Dave Rubin, a former host of the Young Turks YouTube show, launched his own channel “The Rubin Report” in 2013. The show has over 1.55 million subscribers and 340 million views. Although Rubin presents himself as a mainstream conservative, he uses his credibility to often bring on more prominent

---


alt-right guests such as Richard Spencer. By bringing on a wide variety of guests from both mainstream and extremist backgrounds, these YouTube shows can normalize the views of more extreme guests.

Other social media influencers use long-form videos, including hour-long conversations on YouTube and endless social media threads to create a sense of perceived relatability and authenticity. This allows them to introduce more extremist ideas and grow the movement. The YouTuber known as “Blonde in the Belly of the Beast” uses personal stories to explain how she reached specific political beliefs. Joe Rogan’s podcast distributed via Spotify reaches an average of 11 million viewers per episode. While Rogan brings on common celebrities, politicians, and more mainstream figures, he also interviewed Milo Yiannopoulos, Gavin McInnes, and Alex Jones. He interjects his personal beliefs into conversations and leverages his comedic background to appeal to audiences. Dan Bongino’s podcast show, which garners up to 8.5 million weekly listeners, is also a prominent right-wing platform for more extremist views.

Table 5. Key RMVE Influencers and Platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Influencers</th>
<th>Main Program/Platform</th>
<th>Additional Platform Presences (as of Feb. 2022)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Spencer</td>
<td>Radix</td>
<td>Twitter, DLive, Parler, Gab, Telegram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared Taylor</td>
<td>American Renaissance</td>
<td>Personal Website, Twitter (Banned), BitChute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Brimelow</td>
<td>VDARE</td>
<td>Personal Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Jones</td>
<td>Infowars</td>
<td>Facebook (Banned), YouTube (Banned), Spotify (Banned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Fuentes</td>
<td>Odysee</td>
<td>Twitter, YouTube (Banned), Parler, Gab, Telegram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl Benjamin (Sargon of Akkad)</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>Facebook, Instagram, YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Gionet (Baked Alaska)</td>
<td>YouTube then DLive</td>
<td>YouTube (Banned), DLive (Banned), Gab, Telegram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefan Molyneux</td>
<td>Free Domain Radio (Podcast)</td>
<td>Personal Website, YouTube (Banned), Twitter (Banned), SoundClod (Banned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Bongino</td>
<td>Dan Bongino Show (Podcast)</td>
<td>Podcast, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube (Banned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany Sellner (Petitbone)</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>YouTube, Twitter, Telegram, Bitchute, Odysee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Malkin</td>
<td>NewsMax TV</td>
<td>Blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to key influencers, RMVE networks can strategically use hashtags to reach new populations. Some hashtags are straightforward references to well-known conspiracy theories, individuals, or events.

---

such as #eurabia, #brendontarrant, or #dotr. However, some individuals use more generic hashtags so that their posts and videos show up in more traditional circles. For example, on Tiktok far-right videos are often tagged with #based, #conservative, or #trump. Others hijack hashtags associated with other movements such as #blm or use generic promotion schemes like #foryou, #foryourpage, or #fyp. These hashtags can cause extremist messages to appear alongside more conventional posts and again benefit from a perceived normalization.

Messageing Tools and Redundant Systems

Technology companies have responded to RMVE networks by de-platforming certain forums (e.g., 8chan), banning prominent users (e.g., Nick Fuentes), and content moderation which labels or removes posts deemed misinformation (e.g., “Stop the Steal”). In response, RMVE users have organized a series of alternative tech platforms to circumvent these regulations and continue to network with each other. Redundant communication systems ensure the movement’s resilience and continued survival. After Reddit shut down The_Donald channel, a new website emerged known as thedonald.win and then later renamed patriots.win. The .win is a domain name hosted by GRS Domains that can bypass conventionally-accepted hate speech restrictions.

New digital communities have effectively led to the globalization of the RMVE movement and an unregulated ecosystem for online leaderless resistance. Platforms like Gab, Parler, and Telegram enable dedicated RMVE followers and potential recruits to communicate with each other. Gab was originally forced offline by GoDaddy host in 2018 because the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter had posted he was “going in” and other anti-Semitic posts. It was later revitalized by “Epik” CEO Rob Monster who also hosts or provides domain registrations for Parler and 8chan. Similarly, Parler formed in 2018 with money from Trump donor Rebekah Mercer and acts as a Twitter clone. RMVE followers flocked to the site due to its tolerance for hate speech. Telegram is an encrypted messaging app like WhatsApp or Facebook Messengers that is also increasingly popular among RMVE users. It principally allows users to text with each other. Since 2020, Telegram has seen a huge uptick in RMVE messaging. For example, a channel dedicated to the New World Order conspiracy and Holocaust denial idea gained 90,000 users between February-October 2021.

---


121 https://hopenothate.org.uk/an-open-letter-to-telegram/

6 Strengths and Vulnerabilities in Online Leaderless Resistance

Given these critical requirements, we identify several key vulnerabilities to the RMVE’s use of leaderless resistance structures. The first class of vulnerabilities encompass the network’s reliance on a web of interconnected, but independent, units to coordinate operations. Specifically, we suggest that these organizational structures produce three key weaknesses: poor control over members, poor vetting procedures, and poor group cohesion. We summarize these vulnerabilities in Table 6.

Table 6. Strengths and Weaknesses in Online Leaderless Resistance Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Network Feature</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Vulnerabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Leaderless</td>
<td>Adaptability and Resilience</td>
<td>Poor Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Underground/Clandestine</td>
<td>Secrecy, Stealth, and Plausible Deniability</td>
<td>Poor Vetting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Initiative and Autonomy</td>
<td>Independence and Flexibility</td>
<td>Poor Cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>Narratives</td>
<td>Sense of Purpose, Belonging, and Indefatigability</td>
<td>Content Distribution (Accessibility) and Receptivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dense Communication Networks</td>
<td>Redundant and Resilient Coordination Systems</td>
<td>Critical Nodes, Coordination Barriers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizational Challenges

First, leaderless structures can result in poor control over members. By encouraging users to conduct violent attacks on their own initiative, the movement relinquishes control over the targets, tactics, and effectiveness of this attack. In some cases, this can be an advantage to the movement because it creates plausible deniability and allows the movement to evade responsibility for violence. However, it can also create a moral hazard problem if followers use violence in reprehensible ways. For example, Timothy McVeigh’s Oklahoma City Bombing triggered a backlash among the American Militia movement because his attack killed 19 children, a target generally deemed off-limits. Unsanctioned – or morally reprehensible violence – can endanger the movement’s ability to retain existing members, attract new followers, and continue its fight.

Second, leaderless structures can result in poor vetting measures. Leaderless resistance structures are highly susceptible to infiltration. By propagating a “big-tent” ideology and opening membership to anyone who might be interested, the RMVE network sacrifices the ability to properly vet members. The anonymity of the Internet allows people to adopt personas and identities to match whatever a group is looking for.

---

A final and related organizational problem is that leaderless resistance results in poor cohesion. Leaderless resistance encourages individuals to operate independently of one another. This means there is relatively little cohesion among members or unifying ties other than their commitment to a shared ideology. The consequence of this lack of cohesion is that members do not trust each other. This makes the group vulnerable to fragmentation, splintering, and in-fighting.\textsuperscript{124} Since members do not trust each other, a commitment problem can arise. They cannot credibly commit to not divulge information about internal operations because other members have similar incentives to turn to the police. In turn, it allows outsiders to infiltrate these movements or co-opt existing members to become informants.

### Ideological and Communication Challenges

Beyond these organizational vulnerabilities, leaderless resistance is also susceptible to several ideological and communication challenges. In practice, the RMVE’s need to disseminate its ideology and doctrine to inspire follower actions represent a critical point of failure as well.

First, leaderless resistance narratives can falter if they are undercut by either counter-messaging or a perception of vulnerability and frailty. This can impede the movement’s ability to legitimate the use of violence and provide a sense of urgency and momentum to the cause. For example, the failure of the January 6 insurrection had a demoralizing effect on the movement. The inability to prevent Joe Biden’s inauguration cast doubt on the movement’s ability to effectively organize. This led some members to defect and lead the group. The North Carolina Oath Keepers splintered from the mainstream Oath Keepers militia in 2021 believing the riots had crossed a line.\textsuperscript{125} Elsewhere, elements of the chauvinistic Proud Boys organization quickly turned on Trump following the J6 events and mocked him as a “total failure,” a “shill”, and “extraordinarily weak.”\textsuperscript{126} The desire to be part of something bigger and better conflicts with the desire of individuals to be part of a losing campaign. This can lead to defections and people leaving the movement.

While it remains to be seen, the conviction in the Unite the Right Charlottesville trial may represent another blow to the perceived viability of the RMVE movement. The jury found the main organizers behind the Unite the Right Rally liable for $25 million in damages.\textsuperscript{127} The ruling seemed to signal that the federal government was willing to take a stronger stance in prosecuting RMVE extremism within the United States. This could act as a deterrent against future organizers.

Publicizing the failures of RMVE networks can also sow discord and lower morale among the group as to whether violence works. It can seed doubt as to whether the movement will be able to achieve its desired aims and potentially push fringe or weaker supporters to drop off from the movement.

A related vulnerability to the RMVE is its reliance on a unifying ideology to connect followers. This suggests that, if the ideology produced conflicting guidance on how to best carry out its message, then this could undercut the movement and sow internal divisions. Restrictions on extremist materials can make it harder for would-be recruits to discover key texts, manifests, and learn about these ideas.

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{124} Paul Staniland. *Networks of rebellion*. Cornell University Press, 2014.
\end{footnotes}
Amazon, for example, restricted sales of *The Turner Diaries* following the January 6 attack.\(^\text{128}\) It also restricted QAnon merchandise.\(^\text{129}\)

A final vulnerability in leaderless resistance is its reliance on dense communication networks. If networking platforms are harder to yield for communication and coordination purposes, then it will be harder for potential recruits to (1) access information, (2) share information, and (3) publicize or claim responsibility for their attacks. The RMVE’s movement to communicate increasingly online makes members more visible to monitoring and detection efforts. It also creates opportunities for private stakeholders to intervene and address the situation. Online surveillance mechanisms, especially when coordinated in conjunction with private companies, can enable law enforcement to detect these groups.

### 7 Policy Considerations to Combat Vulnerabilities

How can policymakers improve resilience against a hydra-headed network? Traditional counterterrorism procedures centered around law enforcement, litigation, and arrests do have some effect in hampering operational capacity; however, these measures are less likely to cripple a decentralized, leaderless movement than one which relies heavily on a particular leader or territory to operate.

This section outlines a series of policy options to combat critical vulnerabilities in leaderless resistance movements. We highlight case examples, where possible, to demonstrate the efficacy of particular interventions and also note how resistance structures may adapt to circumvent these interventions. We ultimately assess that community-based and industry-based interventions are more likely to succeed than law enforcement-based interventions. The profound distrust of government in these communities limits the potential effectiveness of government-backed interventions and also creates a high potential for unanticipated, counterproductive effects.

#### Table 7. Vulnerabilities and Policy Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerabilities</th>
<th>Policy Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Cohesion and Control</td>
<td>• Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Law Enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Infiltration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ideological Divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative, Perceived Momentum, and Focal Points</td>
<td>• Redirect Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Counter-Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inoculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Content Moderation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Deradicalization and disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Tools, Coordination Networks, and</td>
<td>• De-platforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Nodes (Influencers)</td>
<td>• Proscription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Industry Hash-Sharing Directories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Vulnerability 1: Organizational Cohesion and Control

There are several avenues through which law enforcement actors can effectively respond to the threat of racially-motivated violent extremism. First and foremost, traditional law enforcement operations remain a valuable tool to deter violent extremist plots. Coordination with journalists, far-right researchers, and informants can provide critical information about a group’s procedures, members, and plans as they evolve. A prime example of these methods involves The Order, a white supremacist group active in the 1980s, which was brought down with information provided by a former member, Tom Martinez.\(^\text{130}\) His cooperation with law enforcement culminated in “Operation Clean Sweep,” where ten of The Order’s members were arrested and imprisoned for racketeering and conspiracy charges.

The expanding digital footprint of leaderless resistance networks presents a unique opportunity for law enforcement to infiltrate groups and collect information. Such operations do not need to be costly or time-consuming. In Germany, for instance, an art collective attempted to identify neo-Nazi protestors at a Chemnitz event by asking the public to submit names of people they recognized in photos. The program took an unexpected turn when neo-Nazis “flocked to the site to search their own names…, supplying information about their networks, whereabouts and even their employers in the process.”\(^\text{131}\) This event alone provided information about approximately 1,500 protestors in attendance.

However, law enforcement agencies must address RMVE and paramilitary extremists within their ranks in order to better bolster intervention efforts. The Center for Strategic and International Studies\(^\text{132}\) and the Center for Policing Equity\(^\text{133}\) have documented numerous instances of law enforcement officers being complicit in or actively supporting groups involved in domestic terrorism. In response to this trend, law enforcement must identify, respond to, and remove officers who are in any way affiliated with violent extremist groups. This includes initial and periodic background checks, updating standards on inappropriate online and offline behavior, and conducting necessary investigations on associations with these groups. They must also develop robust institutional policies and practices that raise awareness on the issue and promote nondiscrimination and racial equity. This includes training personnel on recognizing radicalization, conducting investigations on misconduct allegations, and partnering with community members to assist in monitoring activity. Finally, law enforcement approaches may falter due to common mistrust of state authorities within the RMVE movement. Law enforcement actions can backfire, feeding into anti-state narratives and enabling the RMVE movement to capitalize on mistakes to attract new recruits.

Litigation

The freedoms of speech, association, assembly, and petition comprise the collective freedom of expression enshrined in the First Amendment. Apart from a few exceptions, the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the view that all speech, including controversial hate speech, is protected under the First Amendment. Hateful sentiments that threaten or incite criminal action may be punished as a hate crime but not as categorical hate speech.\(^\text{134}\) However, the advent of social media has increased public awareness

\(^{130}\) Nancy Egan, “The Order,” Britannica.
of the dangers of hateful rhetoric, and demands for punishment of hate speech have steadily increased. While it remains unlikely that existing protections for extremist rhetoric will be removed or altered, there are other mechanisms through which litigation can combat extremist organizations and their dangerous influences. The case of the Atomwaffen Division (AWD) illustrates the means through which groups can be dismantled without violations of the First Amendment.

In 2015, Brandon Russell announced the founding of AWD on the now-defunct Iron March forums. In May 2017, Russell’s roommate Devon Arthurs killed two of his other roommates, also members of AWD. Beyond Arthurs’ arrest, law enforcement authorities found arms, explosives, and radioactive materials in Russell’s possession. In September 2017, Russell pleaded guilty to unlawful possession and storage of explosives and was sentenced to five years in prison.

The imprisonment of AWD’s leader prompted an ideological transition under the subsequent leadership of John Cameron Denton. Some members left the group after Denton radicalized the group to embrace accelerationism and Satanism. Various other AWD members have been convicted for crimes outside of overt violence. In October 2019, police seized a cache of guns from Kaleb Cole, the leader of AWD Washington state, under the state’s “red flag” law for individuals deemed to pose a risk to themselves or others. Two months later, when police stopped Cole and other AWD members for speeding in Texas, Cole was charged with violating a court order associated with the red flag law, and the other passenger was charged with possession of ammunition and firearms while using a prohibited substance. Denton, AWD’s leader, was arrested and charged for his role in the organization’s swatting campaign, and four other AWD members were indicted for harassing journalists.

Investigative journalists have also played an important role in revealing and disentangling the members and actions of extremist groups. In 2018, ProPublica exposed the identities of AWD’s fragile central leadership, as well as members in 23 states. This investigation provided essential information for law enforcement to link an AWD member to the murder of a 19-year-old gay Jewish man. Journalists’ repeated infiltrations revealed critical details about the group’s violent activities, ultimately contributing to its disintegration. Through these and other actions, law enforcement, investigative reporters, and the justice system successfully inhibited AWD’s ability to organize and carry out attacks, forcing the group to disband in March 2020.

Several legal cases have prompted the disintegration of far-right groups due to high financial costs. For example, in 1988, three individuals associated with Tom Metzger’s White Aryan Resistance pled guilty to murdering an Ethiopian civilian named Mulugeta Seraw. In a landmark civil trial, Berhana v. Metzger, the Southern Poverty Law Center won a $12.5 million verdict that asserted that Metzger, his son, and WAR were responsible for civil damages from Seraw’s death. The verdict effectively bankrupted WAR, crippling its capacity to sustain operations. Similarly, in 2000, an Idaho state jury ordered Richard

---


140 “Atomwaffen Division,” Southern Poverty Law Center.

141 Brad Bennett, “‘Remember Mulugeta’: 30 years after SPLC lawsuit, life and legacy of man killed by hate group memorialized,” Southern Poverty Law Center, October 25, 2020.
Butler, leader of Aryan Nations, to pay $4.8 million to Victoria Keenan and her son, who had been attacked, beaten, and shot by three security guards outside Butler’s 19-acre property.\textsuperscript{142} Once again, a lawsuit bankrupted one of the largest white supremacist groups of the time.\textsuperscript{143}

Most recently, in November 2021, jurors found leaders of the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, liable for injuries to counter-protesters. The jury awarded the plaintiffs $25 million in damages, to be paid by 13 individuals and five white nationalist organizations.\textsuperscript{144} These punitive verdicts enforce a substantial financial cost of engaging in racially-motivated violence, crippling groups’ abilities to sustain their operations and deterring others from pursuing violence to meet their ends.

Another innovative approach to targeting RMVE groups through the legal system involves categorizing groups as criminal organizations. While a departure from more established methods, the trial of the Golden Dawn party in Greece demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. Founded in the 1980s, the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn political party experienced a renaissance of popularity amid the mass unemployment, austerity measures, and disillusionment following the 2009 Greek financial crisis.\textsuperscript{145} In the 2012 elections, Golden Dawn secured 18 seats in the national parliament, which increased to 21 seats in 2014, making it the third-largest political force in Greece. Despite its public-facing brand as a legitimate political party, however, Golden Dawn’s violent undercurrent ultimately led to its downfall.

Golden Dawn was organized in a paramilitary-like structure where members adhered to hierarchical commands and participated in military training. In September 2013, a Golden Dawn member killed anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas, triggering widespread public outcry and a law enforcement crackdown. Because the Greek constitution affords political parties unique legal protections, authorities instead targeted 68 key party members as leaders of a criminal organization posing as a political group. In the landmark October 2020 verdict, a court convicted 50 people of membership in a criminal organization, including 18 former politicians.\textsuperscript{146} Others were charged with the attempted murder of Egyptian fishermen in 2012, assault, possession of weapons, and employing violence to remove political rivals, migrants, and communists.\textsuperscript{147} While neo-Nazi and neo-fascist parties have not disappeared entirely from Greece, the fallout of Golden Dawn’s conviction has crippled the group’s ability to mobilize public support and orchestrate targeted attacks against their political enemies.

\textit{Proscription and Banning}

Finally, U.S. practitioners may take direction from European governments to guide effective policy responses against the RMVE movement. Several European countries have banned association with certain far-right extremist groups in response to violence and public pressure. For the first time in its history, the British government banned an extremist organization, National Action, in December 2016. Since then, the UK has proscribed four other groups, including the Sonnenkrieg Division (February 2020), Feuerkrieg Division (July 2020), Atomwaffen Division (April 2021), and The Base (July 2021). These proscriptions make it a criminal offense to join one of these organizations, invite or express support for them, or organize any meetings connected with them, with a maximum of fourteen years in prison. It is also a

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} “\textit{Golden Dawn},” Counter Extremism Project.”
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
criminal offense to wear clothing or display items that suggest support for the group, with a penalty of six months in prison and/or a maximum fine of £5,000.\footnote{148} Germany has also banned groups in response to periods of increased far-right mobilization, including the early-mid 1990s, early 2000s, and 2011-2012.\footnote{149} In 2020, Germany banned several additional far-right groups, including Combat 18, Nordadler, and Wolfbrigade 44.

The enduring question is whether proscribing far-right groups is an effective counter-extremism strategy. An assessment on the UK’s banning of National Action found that the action was “undoubtedly successful in its primary aim of dismantling NA organizationally.”\footnote{150} However, while National Action’s proscription deterred some members from further extremist activity, others simply joined different groups or reorganized as the System Resistance Network, which is not yet banned. An analysis in Germany determined that banning extremist groups had a “moderating effect overall on the propaganda, policies, and activities of the organized extreme right.”\footnote{151}

Despite these successes, two key challenges persist. First, proscribing groups does not address the ideological elements of these far-right groups, many of which exist primarily online. Second, bans are “relatively blunt instruments” if they are enacted but not enforced.\footnote{152} The current slow-moving process of proscription and banning neither keeps pace with group dynamics nor addresses their ideological roots.\footnote{153} Such actions must be reinforced with continuous efforts to dismantle both the on- and offline remnants of these networks, wherever they remain.

### Vulnerability 2: Ideological Narrative and Influencers

The most elusive element in countering RMVE is its core ideology. The Department of Homeland Security’s September 2020 Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence dedicates one of its four central goals to preventing terrorism and targeted violence, but the steps outlined in the plan place far too great an emphasis on methods that experts have long warned are inefficient and often poorly implemented.

Ideological radicalization and deradicalization are not linear processes, and the effects of intervention are not reliably visible or measurable. Deradicalization programs and counternarratives, two significant examples from the Framework, have their well-deserved places in counter-extremism strategies, but the efficiency of the former and the typical execution of the latter leave much to be desired. These approaches can be very effective, but their potential for success depends entirely on quality, committed implementation.

#### Disengagement and Deradicalization

A well-established form of intervention involves disengagement and deradicalization programs, which work to reduce radicalized individuals’ involvement with extremism in physical, social, and ideological dimensions.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{148} “Proscribed terrorist groups or organizations,” UK government, Last updated November 26, 2021
\item \footnote{149} Michael C. Zeller, “Germany: Is banning far-right groups enough?,” OpenDemocracy, February 17, 2020.
\item \footnote{150} Graham Macklin, “‘Only Bullets will Stop Us!’ – The Banning of National Action in Britain,” in \textit{Perspectives on Terrorism} vol 12., no. 6, December 2018, p. 116.
\item \footnote{151} Gideon Botsch, Christoph Köpke, Fabian Virchow, “Banning Extreme Right-Wing Associations in the Federal Republic of Germany,” in \textit{Right-Wing Extremism in Europe}, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, p.274
\item \footnote{152} Ibid, p.273
\item \footnote{153} Jacob Davey, Milo Comerford, Jakob Guhl, Will Baldet, Chloe Colliver, “\textit{A Taxonomy for the Classification of Post-Organisational Violent Extremist & Terrorist Content},” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, December 2021.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Disengagement refers to a behavioral change from offending to non-offending actions.\textsuperscript{154} In contrast, deradicalization entails a “cognitive change from criminal, radical, or extremist identities to a non-criminal or moderate psychological state.”\textsuperscript{155} Both approaches involve close, personalized work with radicalized individuals to address the grievances and circumstances that initially drew them into extremist circles.

Many programs provide housing, therapy, and medical assistance to mitigate the immediate needs that can feed into ideological grievances. Various programs also include consenting family members in disengagement and deradicalization processes in order to build a social support structure outside extremist networks and remind deradicalizing individuals that they have not been abandoned. These efforts help alleviate feelings of marginalization and helplessness that often sustain social connections with other extremists and, at their extreme, can drive individuals to violence.

Additionally, effective disengagement and deradicalization programs remove individuals from extremist milieus, both physical and social, and help to construct a personal identity and narrative divorced from prior extremist beliefs and life. During radicalization, individuals experience a “depluralization process,” wherein their core, personal beliefs are gradually reframed to align with extremist narratives (e.g., the moral permissibility of violence), values are redefined (e.g., “freedom” as extending only to the ideological in-group), and concepts are rejected (e.g., universal human rights). Repluralization refers to the process of dismantling these extremist narratives and redefining the values they pervert. Disengagement and deradicalization programs commonly incorporate counseling and ideological discussions to facilitate this process and forge a path forward.

\textbf{Case Study: EXIT-Germany}\textsuperscript{156}

EXIT programs emerged in the 1990s in Europe in response to the rise in extremist far right and neo-Nazi extremism. EXIT-Germany was established by criminologist Bernd Wagner and former Ingo Hasselbach in the summer of 2000. In addition to individual deradicalization programming, the program counsels institutions, communities, governments, and service providers on deradicalization program awareness, processes, and implementation.

EXIT-Germany challenges and counters extremist ideologies while actively engaging with the deradicalizing individual. In addressing the need element EXIT-Germany provides security and protection to clients who had long-term involvement and high-rank in extremist groups. They also provide psychological, educational, and employment support. To address the narrative aspect, the program providers facilitate personal reflection and introduce different perspectives on right-wing extremist movements and ideology to create an alternative worldview. For the network element, the program requires individuals to sever all connections to the group while also supporting family counseling. The program has contact with former right-wing extremists to motivate and mentor the deradicalizing individual.

A unique element of EXIT assistance is that the individual must be the first to reach out, demonstrating their genuine motivation to leave extremism behind. The program is widely accessible through phone, e-mail, text message, or letter. In addition, within this program, “exit” is not only leaving the extremist group—disengagement—but also when ideology and purpose of the group are challenged and become obsolete. According to their view, only a complete behavioral and cognitive split from the group will result in successful reintegration.

\textsuperscript{154} Daniel Koehler, Understanding Deradicalization, Contemporary Terrorism Studies, (New York: Routledge) p. 3.
\textsuperscript{155} Daniel Koehler, Understanding Deradicalization, Contemporary Terrorism Studies, (New York: Routledge) p. 3.
\textsuperscript{156} “EXIT-Germany: We Provide the Way Out,” EXIT-Deutschland.
A comparative study by the German Government between EXIT-Germany and the de-radicalization program by the German Internal Intelligence Service found that EXIT-Germany achieved lower recidivism and an almost four times higher overall number of received and handled cases. Since 2000, 500 individuals have completed the program with only a 3% recidivism rate.

Several best practices have emerged from decades of evaluating disengagement and deradicalization programs both at home and abroad. Among them are the involvement of former extremists, coordination across public service sectors, and ease of accessibility.

Involving former extremists at the early stages of intervention helps to establish credibility and build rapport with radicalized individuals seeking to exit the extremist milieu. Having already experienced the deradicalization process themselves, former extremists often take on mentorship roles. These former extremists are uniquely able to work with their radicalized mentees from a position of lived experience and understanding that cannot be otherwise taught.

Effective programs also coordinate across a variety of sectors, including healthcare, education, social services, and law enforcement, which must all operate in tandem to address multidimensional needs. Additionally, while law enforcement authorities play an important role in mitigating public safety risks throughout the deradicalization process, intelligence-gathering and surveillance of individuals should be curtailed whenever possible.

Finally, programs must be readily accessible to those in need. Radicalized individuals, as well as concerned friends, family, and community members, should be able to access support through hotlines, email, and in-person appointments with trusted and trained community leaders. There should be as few barriers as possible between individuals in need and the support, advice, or intervention they require.

The challenge of disengagement and deradicalization efforts demands both a broad national strategy to address violent extremism and localized interventions that place local resources and communities at the center of each operational stage. In order to achieve an appropriate balance between these two levels of focus, federal efforts should be directed toward empowering and working alongside established, productive organizations like the Free Radicals Project, 157 Life After Hate, 158 and Parents for Peace. 159 These and other private sector organizations have had considerable success in their efforts fighting extremism and radicalization in their many forms. Rather than spending resources recreating and overshadowing these groups, federal and donor funds should be directed toward successful private sector efforts to support their disengagement and deradicalization work. Developing a streamlined, central process to collect and provide both financial and operational support for existing, successful counter-extremism projects will more efficiently address the needs of at-risk individuals and should be an immediate priority.

**Inoculation and Counternarratives**

At its core, radicalization functions as a persuasion process: targeted individuals are exposed to narratives that, over time, alter their beliefs and attitudes to align with an extremist ideology. The challenge, therefore, is to disrupt this process and limit its effectiveness. One method of doing so is through attitudinal inoculation.

---

159 “Parents for Peace.” Last updated 2022. https://www.parents4peace.org/about
According to inoculation theory, individuals are more resistant to persuasion if they recognize an attempt to challenge their beliefs and are prepared with information to refute that challenge. During attitudinal inoculation, an individual is warned that they will receive a message that challenges their beliefs (e.g., extremist content). After, they are provided information to oppose the original message. This format can be applied to a broad range of belief systems and prepares individuals to refute and defend against related extremist rhetoric if they encounter it in the future. More broadly, inoculation can effectively reduce susceptibility to fake news and reduce adherence to conspiracy theories. Although more research is needed to evaluate the robustness and limits of inoculation, it nonetheless remains a valuable tool to counter extremists’ efforts to spread and reinforce their narratives.

### Case Study: The Danish Approach to Preventing Violent Extremism

The Danish approach to preventing and countering violent extremism has garnered international attention for its “soft security” approach. The program addresses all types of radicalization, based on “systematized multi-agency collaboration between various social-services providers” including the educational system, the health-care systems, the police, and the intelligence and security services. The program does not replace more “hard security” approaches, but is related to cases where punitive action is not applicable, but a potential threat from an individual persists.

The Danish approach integrates top-down and bottom-up approaches. The national level comprises the Security and Intelligence Service and the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, and Housing. These actors cooperate with regional and local levels, at least in an advisory capacity. There are pre-existing networks of schools, psychiatric health care, social services, and police in most municipalities. Unique to the Danish approach is “Info-Houses,” which are “a framework for local cooperation between the police and municipal social service administrations and providers.” They are established in all twelve Danish police districts to assess concerns about radicalization, coordinate between actors, and refer at-risk individuals to necessary service providers.

There are three levels of the Danish “Prevention Pyramid:” the General level focuses on awareness and capacity-build for society, the Specific level prevents further radicalization of individuals and groups identified as extremist, and the Targeted level obstructs specific events by providing intervention to individuals assessed as extremist. General-level activities include providing information about radicalization to the public, conducting outreach to actors in contact with at-risk individuals, and dialogue workshops for schools. Activities at the Specific level include mentoring, educational and career coaching, guidance for parents and relatives of the individual. Targeted-level activities are similar but focus on individually-tailored programs to address the conditions that led to radicalization.

While the Danish approach experiences its share of challenges and criticism, overall, it underscores the effectiveness of locally-based interventions nested within national agencies. These are lessons to be drawn from the professionalization and institutionalization of this approach that has led to its success.

Counternarratives, another well-known practice in countering violent extremism, involve the dissemination of content that challenges common extremist narratives and talking points. One well-publicized example of this strategy is the Department of State’s “Think Again, Turn Away” campaign,
which sought to deter individuals from becoming foreign fighters for the Islamic State. Despite its many iterations and considerable budget, the campaign was criticized as overly sarcastic, ineffective, and alienating to its target audience.\footnote{Helene Cooper, “U.S. Drops Snark in Favor of Emotion to Undercut Extremists,” The New York Times, July 28, 2016.} The program’s various shortcomings highlight three central aspects that counternarrative campaigns must carefully develop: the content itself, the messenger behind the content, and the anticipated response of the audience.

At its most basic level, effective counternarrative content appeals to the emotions of its audience. Violent extremists leverage grievances and dissatisfaction—feelings of resentment, marginalization, or a need to regain a sense of personal significance, for instance—to radicalize others. Successful counternarrative content responds directly to these sentiments not with snarky comments, but with compassion and understanding, in order to present relatable, familiar content that at-risk individuals are more likely to meaningfully engage with. Counternarrative campaigns must therefore be tailored to the specific types of information, values, narratives, and grievances most prevalent among its audience.

Counternarratives Case Study 1: Against Violent Extremism and Jigsaw\footnote{Tanya Silverman Christopher J. Stewart Zahed Amanullah Jonathan Birdwell, “The Impact Of Counter-Narratives,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016.}

In October 2015, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue’s Against Violent Extremism (AVE) network of former extremists and survivors of extremism partnered with Alphabet’s Jigsaw, an incubator that uses technology to address global challenges to pilot three counter narrative campaigns. The three objectives of the project were to develop and disseminate counter-narrative content to target audiences on social media through small non-profit organizations; analyze the effectiveness of the social media platforms in reaching and engaging the target audiences; and provide guidance to small non-profit organizations on developing effective counter narrative content.

To target audiences interacting with far-right extremist content, the project partners with Exit-USA, a U.S.-based non-profit organization founded by former extremists that facilitates disengagement from the violent far-right.\footnote{“We Can Help,” EXIT USA.} The counter narrative campaign the EXIT-USA developed with AVE was designed to discredit far-right extremist groups, ‘sow the seeds of doubt’ among far-right extremist individuals, and promote their program as a “way out” for individuals and their concerned families and friends. It’s four videos featured EXIT and AVE staff who were former extremists, where they shared their stories and debunked the “false truths” disseminated by groups. The reflective and sentimental tone of these videos provides a non-confrontational but potent challenge to the ideas extremist group’s use to foment radicalization.

Analysis of the three counter narrative campaigns yielded several notable insights. First, while a different organization had higher video views overall, EXIT-USA’s videos had the highest retention rate on average across all videos, underscoring the importance of sustained engagement. Second, Twitter garnered the highest number of total engagements across all campaigns, highlighting this as a useful platform for future campaigns. Finally, for the EXIT-USA campaign, Facebook generated the greatest quantity of impactful engagement, as demonstrated by the number of comments on the videos posted on the platform and the eight cases of individuals reaching out to EXIT-USA for deradicalization support via Facebook Messenger. Overall, even the antagonistic comments and reactions to the videos illustrate that directly addressing the ideas, concerns, and ideological elements of far-right groups effectively reaches the target audience and sows the “seed of doubt” and critical thinking that can eventually create a cognitive opening for deradicalization.
Effective counternarratives must also be presented by actors which the target audience view as credible and trustworthy. Former extremists and their family members, for instance, are generally recognized as credible counternarrative messengers. Campaigns sponsored or disseminated by government agencies, law enforcement, or countering violent extremism practitioners are particularly likely to exacerbate feelings of marginalization. Additionally, extremists often tout government-sponsored counternarrative content as evidence of perceived political or social persecution. Effective counternarratives, therefore, are presented in a manner that minimizes their potential to reinforce extremist narratives.

**Counter Narrative Case Study Case Study 2: Moonshot CVE & The Redirect Method in Canada**

Moonshot CVE is a UK-based tech startup established in 2015. Their work centers around connecting individuals vulnerable to online radicalization to safer content, counselors, and other service providers. Moonshot and Google’s Jigsaw pioneered The Redirect Method in 2016, which uses targeted advertising to connect people searching the internet for violent extremist content with constructive alternative messages.

Moonshot launched The Redirect Method with the Canadian Centre for Community Engagement and Violence Prevention from February 2016 to March 2020. The campaign targeted individuals based on their Google keyword searches linked to extremist content and redirected them by placing ads for alternative content in the search results. Moonshot collaborated with local partners, former extremists, translators, and subject matter experts to create a 3-language (English, French, Arabic) database with over 72,000 keywords associated with violent extremism. If an individual searches for one or some of the keywords, the Redirect Model generates ads with non-confrontational but informative content.

Canada Redirect collected search traffic associated with a range of violent far-right groups to expand and refine their database to over 26,000 search terms in English and 31,000 in French. The campaign achieved 155,589 impressions (number of times an ad appeared) and 2,234 clicks for violent far-right content. Moonshot also gathered users’ demographic and geographic data and analyzed the content they were frequently searching for, including slogans and symbols (ex. “Hitler was right”), conspiracy theories (“Le Grand Remplacement”), and hate music.

This program revealed several insights on online counter narrative initiatives. First, users aged 25-34 were most interested in violent extremist content, demonstrating the importance of reaching this target audience. Second, individuals searching for far-right extremist content were more likely to engage with alternative content than individuals searching for Islamic State and Al-Qaeda-related content, illustrating the effectiveness of this method to redirect potentially far-right extremists. Third, music playlists had the most sustained engagement, indicating the types of content that interventions should deploy to counter extremist subcultures.

Finally, counternarrative campaigns must have a defined objective and measure of success: what is the ideal response to the counternarrative content? While desired outcomes vary between campaigns, common central goals include exposing audiences to appealing alternative content and directing them to deradicalization resources.

Vulnerability 3: Dense Communication Networks

Content Moderation

The final vulnerability in leaderless resistance networks is their reliance on dense communication networks to coordinate. An important strategy then is to counter extremist networking is to limit individuals’ ability to share and publicize their actions. Platforms may try to restrict videos, remove manifestos, or ban accounts promoting or disseminating propaganda after an attack or violent demonstration takes place. However, it is incredibly easy to manipulate and repost content to continue spreading it. Although Facebook Live removed the live video of the Christchurch shooting shortly after it occurred, many supporters took copies of the recording to YouTube, LiveLeak, BitChute, and various archival sites. Content moderators struggled to redact and remove the various posts, and users carefully manipulated the video by adding watermarks, changing the video quality, and re-recording the video to help evade easy detection.172

Other evasion techniques include restricting comments to avoid potential reporting, communicating in private and hidden groups, creating multiple accounts, and using slightly misspelled hashtags to avoid algorithmic detection. An August 2021 investigation into extremist speech on TikTok found users quickly adapted to the banning of hashtags like #BrentonTarrant by using #BrentonTarrent instead. Similarly, while the Islamophobic hashtag #RemoveKebab was blocked, #RemoveKebob was not.173 Social media platforms commonly employ algorithmic and human content moderators to look for “posts explicitly calling for white nationalism or white separatism,” permitting a glut of extremist content to slip by undetected as long as it avoids direct use of certain buzzwords and phrases.174 Such a limited scope of content moderation allows groups and individuals to persist undisturbed on social media platforms despite constantly espousing dangerous or hateful rhetoric.175

Deplatforming

Deplatforming refers to the banning of controversial figures or speech on social media platforms. This tactic of countering violent extremism has emerged over the last few years as extremist movements have utilized online platforms to operationalize their narratives, networks, and offline action. In 2019, Telegram and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation completed two Action Days targeting Islamic State propaganda videos, publications, and social media accounts supporting terrorism.176 The 2019 disruption had a profound impact: within one month, there was a 65.5% decline in the number of organic posts and a 94.7% decline in the number of forwarded posts.177 While Islamic State supporters did migrate to alternate platforms, the group’s ability to recruit, coordinate, and plan was diminished due to sustained action.178

---

177 Ibid, p. 6.
Similar patterns emerge when deplatforming the far-right. A case study analysis on three deplatformed extremists on Twitter—Alex Jones, Milo Yiannopoulos, and Owen Benjamin—found that references to each influencer declined by an average of 91.77% after they were banned.\(^{179}\) Deplatforming minimized these figures’ influence, limited the spread of their anti-social and conspiratorial ideas, and reduced the activity and toxicity of their supporters.\(^{180}\) However, sects of these communities consistently migrate to alternative platforms or new accounts to share more toxic, radical content. “Alt-tech” platforms, which include websites like patriots.win and apps like Gab and Telegram, function as safe havens for the deplatformed. This category of digital infrastructure is characterized by permissive Terms of Service and few content moderation rules, providing an atmosphere for extremists of nearly every vein to communicate and organize across the digital landscape.

To combat these vulnerabilities, leaderless resistance may leverage closed groups or Dark Web portals to hide their activity. However, Facebook and other social media platforms have devised methods to detect fraudulent or extremist activity. For example, Facebook can shut down a closed group if members repeatedly post or engage with fake news stories.\(^{181}\) If users report content inside the group, then Facebook can take it down for violating its Community Standards protocol.\(^{182}\) In extreme cases, social media sites might deplatform – or forcibly remove – organizations from their servers. In these cases, the prominent adaptation is for groups to move to more “Dark Web” sites such as the move from The_Donald Reddit channel to patriots.win.

Private platforms have the authority to circumvent freedom of speech laws to moderate and deplatform hate speech under Section 230 of the U.S. Communications Decency Act,\(^{183}\) and research demonstrates that social media platforms play a pivotal role in curbing the spread of extremist content. In the wake of the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attacks, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern established the Christchurch Call, a pledge by governments and tech companies to counter violent extremist content online.\(^{184}\) The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) is a platform through which governments operationalize this pledge. It implements directives from the U.S., Europe, Australia, and New Zealand for extremist content removal, engages with over 120 tech companies, and updates its hash-sharing database of known terrorist-produced images and videos.\(^{185}\) Platforms including Zoom, Tumblr, Amazon, and Discord have joined Meta, Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube in contributing to GIFCT’s hash-sharing database. Notably, TikTok has not yet joined.\(^{186}\) While deplatforming is ultimately a short-term measure and should not be relied upon as a blanket solution, GIFCT and the Christchurch Call remain excellent examples of a sustainable and transparent approach that involves collaboration between the private sector, governments, and civil society.\(^{187}\)

\(^{179}\) Shagun Jhaver, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Deplatforming as a Moderation Strategy on Twitter,” Medium, October 1, 2021.

\(^{180}\) Shagun Jhaver, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Deplatforming as a Moderation Strategy on Twitter,” in Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, vol.5, no. 381, October 2021, p. 21


\(^{183}\) “Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act,” Electronic Frontier Foundation.

\(^{184}\) “Christchurch Call,” New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.


\(^{186}\) “Zoom Joins Meta, Microsoft as the Newest Member of Tech Industry Counterterrorism Group,” Gadgets360, last updated December 16, 2021.

Case Study: Deplatforming Iron March

Iron March was a Neo-Nazi online forum established by a Russia-based individual dubbed “Slavros” in 2011 and disbanded in November 2017. It was structured as a standard web forum that allowed users to read materials, view posts, share messages on board threads, and privately communicate. Iron March’s users became increasingly radicalized as they read and discussed texts such as *SIEGE*, *The Turner Diaries*, and *Mein Kampf*.

Iron March was a hub for international neo-Nazi groups during its six years of activity. It had about 1,200 regular users and a transnational reach with at least nine affiliated neo-Nazi groups, notably Atomwaffen Division in the U.S., National Action in the UK, and the Scandinavian Nordic Resistance Movement. Slavros and U.S. Atomwaffen co-founders Devon Arthurs and Brandon Russell collaborated to recruit young people from Iron March. They also used the platform to coordinate their activities, such as stickering campaigns on university campuses. There have been several murders, violent plots, and weapons charges associated with members of Atomwaffen and far-right individuals. These developments indicate how Iron March drew teenagers in through video games, and Atomwaffen leaders radicalized them to commit “active measure” roles.

When Iron March shut down, it had more than 195,000 public posts and 4,500 private conversations. The level of activity on the site corresponded to events related to the far-right in the U.S. and worldwide. Some Iron March users have speculated that Slavros received international pressure to disband Iron March after Arthurs killed two of his roommates who were also active on the site. Some former Iron March users have now migrated to the small but expanding site, Fascist Forge. The rise and downfall of Iron March is a vivid example of the role of digital sub-cultures in radicalizing and recruiting individuals, but also the potential for hacktivist groups and law enforcement to observe and expose these sites.

8 Conclusion

This paper introduced a multi-layered systems approach to deal with the challenge of online leaderless resistance networks. New digital tools have led to a globalization of RMVE which seems unlikely to disappear. However, the RMVE’s reliance on online spaces also creates a new set of vulnerabilities. These challenges can undercut the perceived legitimacy, momentum, and growth of the movement. Based on a historical examination of leaderless resistance structures and comparative case studies of policy interventions in the United States, Denmark, Greece, and other European countries, we identified several different policy considerations to exploit these vulnerabilities. Specifically, we suggest an effective counter-RMVE strategy should draw on previously tested policy interventions including:

- **Law Enforcement-Based Interventions**: Proscription, Arrests, and Litigation
- **Community-Based Interventions**: Inoculation Theory, Counter-Messaging, Disengagement, De-Radicalization

---

189 Ibid.
- **Industry-Based Interventions:** Deplatforming, Content Moderation, Redirect, and Hash-Sharing Directories

We ultimately assess that community-based and industry-based interventions are more likely to succeed than law enforcement-based interventions because the profound distrust of government in these communities limits the potential effectiveness of government-backed interventions and creates a high potential for unanticipated, counterproductive effects.