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# Critical terrorism studies and the far-right: beyond problems and solutions?

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**ABSTRACT**

Recent years have witnessed increasing academic, media, and political attention to the threat of far-right terrorism. In this article, I argue that scholarship on this threat has suffered from two limitations, each with antecedents in terrorism research more broadly. First, is an essentialist approach to this phenomenon as an extra-discursive object of knowledge to be defined, explained, catalogued, risk assessed, and (ultimately) resolved. Second, is a temptation to emphasise, even accentuate, the scale of this threat. These limitations are evident, I argue, within scholarship motivated by a problem-solving aspiration for policy relevance. They are evident too, though, within critical interventions in which a focus on far-right terrorism is seen as an important corrective to established biases and blind spots within (counter-)terrorism research and practice. In response, I argue for an approach rooted in the problematisation and desecuritisation of the far-right threat. This, I suggest, facilitates important new reflection on the far-right's production within and beyond terrorism research, as well as on the purposes and politics of critique therein.

## Introduction

The prominence of far-right terrorism and extremism has grown considerably within terrorism studies in recent years as evidenced by special issues (such as this!) (also Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018); published bibliographies (Axelsen 2018; Tinnes 2020); research networks, centres and projects; and even university degrees (Schooling 2021). This scholarship, I argue below, is important, dynamic and heterogeneous. It is methodologically plural and thematically diverse, housing vibrant critical interventions drawing on postcolonial and feminist traditions, as well as more obviously policy-relevant analyses rooted within positivist traditions. Although other types of terrorism continue to generate greater attention (Schuurman 2019, 470), the far-right is now very far from being a marginal or peripheral concern in this field.

Notwithstanding these contributions, my argument here is that this research remains characterised by two limitations evident within, and inherited from, the wider field of terrorism studies. The first is a tendency to essentialise far right-violences and groups as if their existence were extra-discursive and amenable to objective identification,

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explanation, and measurement. The second limitation is a tendency to emphasise, and perhaps accentuate, the threat posed by these entities. These tendencies, I argue, appear in problem-solving research explicitly motivated by an attempt to assist policymakers in countering the threat of far-right individuals, organisations and ideologies. They are also, significantly, evident in critical contributions approaching the threat of far-right terrorism as an important data-point from which to highlight, and perhaps correct, biases and exclusions within terrorism studies more broadly, not least given the field's longstanding emphasis on religious (and typically Islamist) terrorisms (Gunning and Jackson 2011; Meier This issue). Thus, while policy-relevant and critical contributions share an emphasis on the far-right as a significant threat, the latter go further and see it also as a *solution* to longstanding academic and political inconsistencies. This, I will argue, has its own antecedent within critical literature on state terrorism.

In this article, I therefore set out an alternative to these research tendencies, calling for the problematisation and desecuritisation of far-right terrorism, extremism and their (many) equivalents and adjacents. Such an approach, I argue, involves, first, resisting the temptation to describe right-wing individuals, groups or events as "extremist" or "terrorist". And, second, it involves declining to emphasise the scale of this problem, even for strategic normative or political purposes. By drawing on existing work within critical terrorism studies (CTS) and critical security studies (CSS), I argue that these alternatives offer important benefits while staying closer to the spirit of prior critical scholarship. First, analytically, they encourage reflection on the precarity and instabilities of these labels. Second, politically, desecuritization may reduce anxiety around this ostensible threat. And, third, normatively, they open space for engagement with those securitised as "far-right terrorists" and the consequences thereof (see also Toros This issue).

The article's contribution is, therefore, fourfold. First, descriptively, it offers a critical review of existing scholarship on the far-right. Second, conceptually, it re-theorises far-right terrorism away from the essentialisms of existing research. Third, going forwards, it provides the contours for a new research agenda for (critical) terrorism studies and the far-right. And, fourth, it uses this discussion as an opportunity for reflecting again, and perhaps reflecting anew, on the purposes and politics of critique in the context of political violence.[1]

The article proceeds in five stages. I begin by sketching the "problem" of far-right terrorism and extremism, highlighting the political and media prominence thereof. A second section offers a critical literature review of terrorism scholarship on the far-right. This, I argue, is characterised by four significant themes: (i) conceptual and methodological debate; (ii) reflections on causality and context; (iii) threat assessments; and (iv) critical incursions. A third section critically analyses this work, and the fourth elaborates my argument to more consistently problematise and desecuritise the far-right threat. The article concludes by addressing potential objections to the approach taken here.

## The problem of far-right terrorism

It is increasingly hard to escape the impression that far-right violences and extremisms constitute a profound problem, even a security threat. Four dynamics, in particular, contribute to this. First, and most obvious, is a spate of high-profile attacks widely identified as "right-wing", "far-right", or "white supremacist" terrorism. Such attacks

include Anders Breivik's 2011 killing of seventy-seven people in Oslo and Utøya; Dylann Roof's 2015 murder of nine black worshippers at the Emanuel AME church in Charleston, Carolina; the murder of eleven by Robert Bowers in a 2018 attack at a Pittsburgh synagogue; and Brenton Tarrant's 2019 killing of fifty-one at two Christchurch mosques in New Zealand. Such horrific events – and, of course, many others – call forth earlier atrocities, including David Copeland's 1999 nail bombings in London which killed three and injured 140, and Timothy McVeigh's 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, widely described as the then deadliest act of terrorism on American soil.

The positioning of such attacks within a coherent trajectory of far-right terrorism is a product, in part, of their protagonists' political commitments, social relations, and self-identification. For brief illustration, Tarrant and Breivik both published "manifestos" detailing their far-right motivations; Breivik has performed the Nazi salute in court hearings (Independent Online 2017); and Bowers shared anti-Semitic content on social media ahead of his attacks (Dearden 2018). Despite variation in the targets, tactics, and motivations of these attacks (consider, for instance, the varying articulations and imbrications of anti-government hostility, white supremacism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia within the above), they together contribute to a sense (and a narrative) of a significant, even escalating, far-right threat.

A second factor is the extent of far-right criminality of less dramatic magnitude than these mass-casualty attacks (see also, Fernández de Mosteyrin and Martini, this issue; da Silva *et al*, this issue). This includes patterns of hate crime against minority and migrant communities in states such as the UK (Townsend and Iqbal 2020) and Germany, where, as *Reuters* reported in May 2021: "Far-right offences were up nearly 6% from the previous year at 23,064, and accounted for more than half of all politically motivated crimes, the highest level since police started collecting such data in 2001" (Nasr 2021). Newsworthy stories of individual convictions contribute to this sense of creeping, pervasive, threat, such as the April 2021 prosecution of a serving British police officer for membership of the neo-Nazi group, National Action (Quinn 2021), or the UK's conviction of its "youngest ever terrorist" in February 2021 who had "become the British head of an international online neo-Nazi group called Feuerkrieg Division" (CPS 2021). Rises in anti-Semitism have been reported in Western Europe, North America, and beyond (Matza 2021; Morton 2021). Most prominent of all, though, was the 6 January 2021 attack at the US Capitol, an attack connected, at least in part, to far-right groups including the Proud Boys (Beckett 2021). An important wider context of that attack – in which five people died – is, of course, the global rise of right-wing populism, characterised often by an ideological claim to defend "the people" (Mudde 2004) and an anti-political scepticism towards established institutions and processes.

A third trend is the wide range of governmental actions and initiatives aimed at reducing the far-right threat. One example is the symbolic banning of far-right groups, including the UK's proscription of Sonnenkrieg Division in February 2020; Germany's banning of Sturmbrigade 44 in December 2020; Canada's designation of the US-based Proud Boys as a terrorist entity in February 2021; and France's banning of the anti-immigrant Génération Identitaire (Generation Identity) in March 2021 (see Jarvis and Legrand 2020; Sullivan 2020 on the politics of proscription). The increased use of counter-radicalisation programmes to target those identified as susceptible to far-right extremism has been prominent too (see James This issue): far-right referrals under the UK's Prevent

programme, for instance, almost doubled over a three-year period to 1389 cases in 2019 (Pickard and Gray 2019). Also significant here are significant policy and funding commitments, from Germany's 2020 commitment of one billion euros to combat racism and right-wing extremism (Bundesregierung 2020), to President Biden's new *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism*, which argues:

> one key aspect of today's domestic terrorism threat emerges from racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists and networks whose racial, ethnic, or religious hatred leads them toward violence, as well as those whom they encourage to take violent action. These actors have different motivations, but many focus their violence towards the same segment or segments of the American community, whether persons of color, immigrants, Jews, Muslims, other religious minorities, women and girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, or others (U.S. National Security Council 2021, 8).

Fourth is a still-wider discourse on the pervasive far-right threat. Media headlines and press releases emphasise the danger it poses, especially to states and their citizens in the global North: "Far-Right Groups Are Behind Most U.S. Terrorist Attacks, Report Finds", as *The New York Times* reported on a CSIS report in October 2020 (Gross 2020); or, "Far-right attacks in the West surge by 320%" as a Vision of Humanity report noted of their 2019 Global Terrorism Index (Vision of Humanity n.d.). Significant research institutes and projects are now dedicated to investigation of the far-right. The University of Oslo's Center for Research on Extremism, for instance, has a "Right Now" blog focused on "contemporary far-right politics, including party politics, subcultural trends, militancy, violence, and terrorism" (C-REX n.d.). In the UK, the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) describes itself as a "research centre and pedagogical outreach initiative focused on the study and countering of radical right extremism and intersecting phenomena" (CARR n.d.). Conference panels, funding calls, university modules, summer schools and the like hold out promise for greater understanding of this phenomenon. Films, television series and other artefacts of popular culture – from *Welcome to Leith*, to *White Right, Je Suis Karl*, and *The Joker* – document, fictionalise, or allegorise far-right threats. Meanwhile, the public prominence of neologisms and portmanteaus from "alt-right" to "incel" and beyond concretises the contemporary far-right as a pervasive and evolving threat.

Taken together, such developments indicate the far-right's increasing prominence within contemporary discourse on, responses to, and fears around terrorism, extremism and radicalisation. Indeed, underpinning much of this activity is a widespread claim to this threat's neglect or underestimation; for instance: "The rise of the far-right has been ignored for too long" (Financial Times 2019); or (more vividly) in the left-leaning *New Statesman*, "A Nazi-satanist cult is fuelling far-right groups – overlooked by the UK authorities" (Lowles 2020). As a prominent researcher commented of President Biden:

> So why focus on "domestic violent extremism" and not, specifically, on white supremacy or, perhaps better, the far right? I know that there are other "violent extremisms" in the US, but with the exception of the far right, they have not been ignored or minimized by the state. The threats from leftwing extremism, from antifa to the Animal Liberation Front, and Muslim extremism too, have been overemphasized for decades by intelligence agencies and politicians of both parties. *It is far-right extremism, including white supremacy, that has generally been ignored*. (Mudde 2021, added emphasis).

There is a paradox in this particular repressive hypothesis given the considerable political and media engagement with the far-right discussed above. In the following, I argue that this paradox is apparent too in terrorism scholarship, which plays an important contributory role in producing the far-right as a significant yet ostensibly neglected threat to be studied, explained, and resolved.

## Terrorism research and the far right

In this section, I offer a critical review of contemporary terrorism research on the far-right. The sheer volume of this work renders exhaustive review impossible, so I focus on four prominent themes which – importantly for what follows – echo prominent concerns within terrorism studies more broadly (Jarvis 2009): (i) conceptual and methodological contributions; (ii) causal explanations; (iii) threat assessments; and (iv) critical incursions. My intention here is, first, to illustrate the breadth of this research; second, to offer orientation for (critical) scholars new to the field; third, to demonstrate its vitality and vibrancy through highlighting internal controversy and contestation; and, fourth, to ground my subsequent analysis of this work's limitations and alternatives.

### *Conceptual and methodological reflection*

Conceptual and methodological reflection is prominent within terrorism scholarship on the far-right. In the first instance, we see definitional engagements with terms such as far-right terrorism and extremism, either in conceptual pieces focused specifically on this task, or in the preliminary framing of empirical research (see also Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, 6–7). Many engagements highlight the contestability of such terms (e.g. Koehler 2018, 74; Koehler and Popella 2020, 1675–1677), often attempting to resolve the definitional trial this poses, if only provisionally (e.g. Perry and Scrivens 2016, 821–822; Bouhana et al. 2018; Freilich et al. 2018, 39–40). Much work acknowledges the breadth, porosity, or fluidity of labelling here (e.g. Simi, Bubolz, and Hardman 2013, 655; Ravndal 2021, 3; Knupfer and Matthes 2021, 3); yet, it is not uncommon to see terms within this lexicon used interchangeably (e.g. Chermak and Gruenewald 2015, 136).

  Where some contributions deal with these conceptual challenges by deferring to the definitional decisions of relevant databases (e.g. Chermak and Gruenewald 2015, 140; Parkin and Freilich 2015), others develop their own understandings, often through engagement with prior work (e.g. Bouhana et al. 2018, 152–153; DeLeeuw and Pridemore 2018, 3; Freilich et al. 2018, 39–40; Koehler 2014, 51, 2018, 74; Scrivens, Wojciechowski, and Frank 2020, 3–4). Importantly, and in contrast to much critical work on other forms of terrorism (see Jackson, Jarvis, Gunning, and Breen-Smyth, 2011, 50–73 for an overview), research focused on representations or perceptions of far-right terrorism tends – with few exceptions (e.g. Graef 2020) – to explore the (in)accuracy thereof, viewing such representations *as distinct from* the "reality" of this threat, rather than productive or constitutive thereof. Rich's (2020) analysis of cinematic depictions of far-right terrorism, for instance, compares these with the issue's "real" political significance and threat. In Knupfer and Matthes's (Knupfer and Matthes 2021, 15) study of media representations of far-right terrorism, relatedly, "Understanding the implications of media effects of RWT is vital for finding appropriate journalistic practices to respond to RWT".

Scholarship on the far-right is also, as the above suggests, marked by methodological heterogeneity and innovation. As in terrorism studies more widely (see Jarvis 2009), it spans qualitative approaches prioritising rich, textured description (e.g. Manthe 2021), to quantitative analyses of existing or new data (Chermak and Gruenewald 2015; DeLeeuw and Pridemore 2018). The field contains analyses of single case studies (e.g. Hutchinson 2021), as well as comparative work on diverse cases within the far-right universe (e.g. Ravndal 2018b) and in relation to groups outwith (Rousis, Richard, and Wang 2020). It encompasses creative engagements in methodological bricolage to allow analysis of fragmentary and often variable data (e.g. Perry and Scrivens 2016, 823; also Blout and Burkart 2021), as well as the adaption of methodological toolkits and experiences from other fields of study (e.g. Richards 2019; Graef 2020); and the establishment and sharing of new datasets, databases, and tools for analysis of the far-right (e.g. Ravndal 2016).

## *Causality and contexts*

The breadth of conceptual and methodological research considered above is matched by a thematic one in terrorism scholarship exploring the drivers of far-right violence (see also Skoczylis and Andrews This issue). Work on the importance of social contexts, for instance, stresses factors including economic disadvantage (Abbas 2017), demographic trends (Doering and Davies 2019), public grievances (Schoenteich 2004), national histories, and political cultures (Ravndal 2018b). Scholarship emphasising ideational factors points us towards the significance of religious commitments (Koch 2021); narratives around martyr-dom (Barkun 2007; Am and Weimann 2020), self-sacrifice (Griffin 2003), victimhood, and imperilment (Marcks and Pawelz 2020); the promotion of conspiracy theories to encourage violence (Rousis, Richard, and Wang 2020); and core ideological or philosophical commit-ments of those responsible for far-right violence:

> Breivik's worldview is . . . mainly influenced by the Islamophobic tradition, cultural conserva-tive nationalism, and antifeminism, combined with substantial elements from White Power thought, selected aspects of right-wing evangelical theology, and material from the Knights Templar tradition, all imbued with romantic male warrior ideals with its call for heroism, bravery, and sacrifice (Gardell 2014: 132).

Such reflection links to analyses of the wider ecologies within which far-right ideas are generated, transmitted and received, including the role of digital technologies and media, such as online forums (Gardell : 148; Scrivens, Wojciechowski, and Frank 2020) and social media platforms (Marcks and Pawelz 2020). In common with wider literature on terrorism and the internet (Macdonald and Mair 2015), the latter is often seen to perform multiple roles in perpetuating far-right movements, from enabling content sharing to coordinating collective behaviour (Gaudette, Scrivens, and Venkatesh 2020, 14). Related work, finally, also traces the socialisation of individuals into right-wing extremisms through subcultures concentrated around clothing, music and other markers of shared identity (Cotter 1999; Pisoiu 2015).

### Threat assessments

As the above indicates, research on the causes of far-right extremism and terrorism is often multi- or inter-disciplinary, drawing insight from theoretical models across political science, sociology, criminology, and beyond. Much of this work has a multicausal emphasis, and many of the above examples are illustrative of specific claims within wider analytical frameworks. Scholarship on the threat of far-right violence is, I now argue, similarly heterogeneous, and characterised by a diversity of focus and apprehensiveness. Such differences, again, mirror debate in cognate literatures (e.g. Jarvis, Macdonald, and Nouri 2014), while reflecting, in part, the specific empirical concerns of particular studies.

At one extremity is research on the prospects of far-right terrorism employing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) agents. While Brister and Kollars (2011, 66), for instance, deem the use of such weapons by the US Christian Patriot movement "improbable", Koehler and Popella (2020) identify 31 incidents of far-right CBRN terrorism in Western states since 1970. These incidents, importantly (and to preface themes below), include hoaxes, proto-plots and failed attempts such as a two-man conspiracy involving "the scifi-esque construction of a technically unfeasible 'death-ray'" (Koehler and Popella 2020, 1864)!

Less dramatic, but related, are explorations within terrorism research of more commonplace threats posed by the far-right. As Cotter (1999, 136) argued twenty years ago now:

> Despite the anti-government rhetoric, skinheads are much more "opportunistic" attackers, who are likely to prey on more vulnerable targets, such as immigrants and homosexuals. The weapons of choice are rather crude – fists, boots, and baseball bats, instead of planned bombings of governmental institutions.

Where Schoenteich (2004) is similarly sceptical about the extreme right's capacity for sustained violence in post-apartheid South Africa, Doering and Davies (2019, 1) offer a more recent example of contemporary apprehensiveness, seeing right-wing extremism as a relatively neglected, yet "increasingly prevalent threat to security both in North America and Western Europe". Other analyses focus on the threat's mobility, such as through the return of "foreign fighters" (Koch 2021), or via international inspiration, such as in Enstad's (2017) analysis of Anders Breivik's importance for the Russian far-right. Related work, too, highlights inconsistencies in the attention afforded far-right and other violences (Brister and Kollars 2011; Abbas 2017, 58; Freilich et al. 2018, 40), as well as the wider socio-political consequences of far-right terrorism, including for multiculturalism (Solheim 2020).

As we have seen, several authors urge circumspection in assessing the far-right threat. And yet, work focusing explicitly on this threat's construction remains relatively rare in the literature – certainly in comparison to critical work on "Islamist" or "jihadist" terrorism. Ravndal (2018a, 846) is an important exception here, suggesting, "anti-racist groups and journalists tend to exaggerate the threat, often through use of anecdotal evidence rather than systematic events data", and contrasting this to the downplayed assessments of states and their security services. As he argues elsewhere (Ravndal 2018b, 787), greater political engagement with the far-right may prove more sagacious than stigmatising such groups and their concerns

one should perhaps be more careful about how these types of actors and opinions are treated publicly. . . . by dismissing concerns about high immigration as hateful conspiracies, racism, or some form of irrational phobia, Western elites and policymakers (unintentionally) make these threats more real in the eyes of far-right activists, because they regard the elites as an active part of the underlying conflicts. Telling someone who is afraid that his or her fears are groundless generally does not help much, especially if you personify the very thing they fear.

For the purposes of this article, differences between specific threat assessments such as those considered in this section matter less than a common concern with evaluating the threat of far-right groups or movements. It is the question, put otherwise, that concerns me here more than the diverse answers it generates (see Burke 2008). For, the question itself – and its continuing prominence – highlights the emphasis on policy-relevant research within this literature, much of which speaks directly to policymakers, their interests, and errors (e.g. Abbas 2017; Ravndal 2018a, 2018b).

## Critical incursions

As we have seen, there now exists a significant literature seeking to explain and address the threat of far-right terrorism and extremism. Although internally heteroegeneous, we can discern a relatively coherent focus on the conceptualisation, causes, and consequences of far-right violence that is beginning to address a widely-shared sense of this phenomenon's historical neglect (Schuurman 2019, 465). To conclude this part of my discussion, I now highlight a smaller, but important (and – as evidenced by this Special Issue – growing) critical scholarship in this area. This scholarship occupies itself with rather different questions, even if – as I will argue – it suffers from its own limitations.

A first contribution of critical work in this area is to spotlight far-right violences in order to problematise the contingency of established constructions of terrorism, including through highlighting the omission thereof from important sites of knowledge (see Dixit and Miller This issue). Priya Dixit's (2016) study of the Militant Imagery Project database and the National Counterterrorism Center's Counterterrorism Calendar, for example, offers important analysis of the very specific figure of the "militant" as "brown-skinned and almost always male" (Dixit 2016, 104) therein. Such a framing, she argues, contributes to the securitisation of such bodies, while "white persons and the violence they are implicated in are written out of these understandings of 'militant' and 'terrorist'" (Dixit 2016, 112). Schuurman, similarly, reviewing terrorism scholarship, highlights the importance of epistemological exclusions for our conceptions of terrorism, arguing, "What we study under the rubric of terrorism and what we leave out of our analyses matters" (Schuurman 2019, 465), because:

. . . the overwhelming focus on jihadism has left our understanding of other types of terrorism underdeveloped. What we define and study as terrorism, and particularly what we do not, has an influence on how politicians, the media and broader society conceptualize this form of political violence and its potential future permutation.

As he continues:

The marked underrepresentation of right-wing extremist terrorism and state terrorism, for example, has arguably helped foster a perception of terrorism as something that is solely the domain of non-state actors and virtually synonymous with jihadists. This is not only incorrect,

but a potentially dangerous blind spot as it allows non-jihadist forms of extremism to develop and be carried out relatively unnoticed. Moreover, such biases can contribute to societal polarization by feeding the appearance that terrorism stems from one particular community only. . . . There is much to be gained both academically and societally from looking beyond jihadism, particularly where it comes to growing concerns about right-wing extremism and terrorism

Related work – such as Mehta's (2015) analysis of female agency in the Hindu right-wing movement – engages with neglected case studies to problematise dominant (here, Eurocentric) conceptions of the far-right, rather than to unpack wider constructions of "terrorism". In examples such as these, the neglect of far-right terrorism matters not (only) because it renders individuals and communities less secure from this threat (although it may do this). Rather, the neglect itself is important precisely because it demonstrates the pervasiveness of fundamental biases or distortions in established ways of understanding and addressing terrorisms and extremisms.

This emphasis on discursive inconsistencies in constructions of "terrorism" links to a further contribution of critical scholarship which is to expose *political* inconsistencies in the response to far-right vis-à-vis other terrorisms (e.g. Da Silva *et al* this issue; Meier This issue). Norris and Grol-Prokopczyk (2018, 259–260), for instance, contrast US "sting operations" post-Oklahoma and post-9/11 to demonstrate dramatic differences in the use of this mechanism in different contexts:

> The social construction of the domestic terrorism threat as primarily jihadi, the in-group leniency effect [in which conservative white lawmakers may act more charitably toward perpetrators of shared demographic background], and the translation of these factors into incentives for agents to focus on jihadi prosecutions, likely explain to a large degree the much lower number of investigations and entrapment cases involving right-wing defendants.

In a more recent piece, Norris (2020, 520) contrasts the use of terrorism offences for right-wing and Muslim perpetrators of crime:

> although numerous right-wing terrorists have been prosecuted in federal courts, only a small handful were charged with terrorism offences, and only three have been convicted of a terrorism offence since 9/11 . . . By contrast, hundreds of Muslims since 9/11 have been charged with terrorism-related offences . . . The failure to charge all terrorists with terrorism offences perpetuates misconceptions about the nature of the terrorism threat, encouraging Islamophobia while reducing vigilance against all types of terrorism.

This matters, for Norris (2020, 539), because political and legal consistency has both symbolic and instrumental importance, including for public understanding, social relationships, and the actions of responders:

> US authorities should be careful to consistently label all right-wing terrorists as terrorists for all administrative and publicity purposes, whether or not they are charged with terrorism, and charge them with terrorism offences whenever applicable, even if there will be no effect on sentencing. Such symbolic changes could potentially have important impacts on public perceptions of terrorism, law enforcement priorities, and prejudice against Muslims – perhaps achieving many of [the] goals envisioned for new legislation. In jurisdictions where it is already possible to charge right-wing terrorists with terrorism, it is important that authorities apply these charges whenever appropriate, rather than reserving the terrorism label for Muslim offenders . . . if the government labels one type of ideologically-motivated violence as terrorism, it should do so consistently for them all.

Far-right terrorism, then, is something that may be misrecognised as well as ignored or forgotten, such that: "Due to stereotypes associating terrorism with Muslims, many fail to perceive ideological violence by non-Muslims as terrorism" (Norris 2020, 523). This, I suggest, is why overtly critical literature on the far-right often effectively mobilises around demands for greater consistency: greater consistency in (i) the attention given to particular violences and actions; (ii) the labelling of those violences and actions; and, (iii) political, legal and other responses to distinct threats.

## Towards a critique: unpacking assumptions in far-right research

The above – inevitably incomplete – review demonstrates the vibrancy of contemporary research on the far-right. Collectively, this work offers a refreshing counterpoint to familiar case studies which still dominate terrorism scholarship, compelling researchers to engage with neglected histories and geographies of violence. Underpinning this work, I think, are two powerful energies to which I now turn: one problem-solving, and one broadening (see also Jarvis 2009). Where the former concentrates on explaining and addressing the far-right threat, the latter aims at expanding this field's empirical and conceptual horizons. Although each no doubt has its place (see Cox and Sinclair 1996, 53), my argument here is that these energies render scholarship such as the above vulnerable to two criticisms. First, is a risk of reproducing the paradigmatic concerns (and limitations) of so-called "traditional" terrorism studies (Jackson 2009; Jarvis 2009), with its typically narrow epistemological, geographical and political orientation. Second is a risk of reproducing the limitations of earlier critical efforts to escape dominant paradigms within terrorism research through emphasising the importance of neglected types of terrorism (see Jarvis 2009; Jarvis and Lister 2014).

A useful starting point is to highlight a temptation to approach far-right actors and their violences as specific, concrete examples of terrorism or extremism (although the boundary between these is, as we have seen, often blurred). This is most clearly the case in quantitative efforts to identify, explain, measure, or compare far-right violences (e.g. Post, Ruby, and Shaw 2002). But, a temptation towards – or a desire for – denotational clarity is apparent, too, in qualitative and conceptual pieces (e.g. Auger 2020; Hart 2021), as well as in more overtly critical work which seeks to bring the far-right (back) into terrorism research (e.g. Norris 2020).[2] Existing scholarship is not, as we have seen, unaware of the conceptual challenges confronting analyses of the far-right; as demonstrated above, it includes considerable reflection on definitional difficulties and obstacles (e.g. Rich 2020, 161–162). Much as with wider debates on "terrorism", however, such reflection often simply prefaces an attempt to pin down this object of knowledge through identification of generative characteristics or common features distinguishing far-right terrorisms or extremisms from others (see Jackson, Jarvis, Gunning, and Breen-Smyth, 2011, 150–173). For much terrorism scholarship (critical and otherwise), then, the existence of far-right terrorism and extremism is ontologically distinct from the labelling of specific actors, events or threats thus. This means that the fundamentally discursive existence of those actors and events is rarely explicitly acknowledged. And neither, moreover, is the *productivity* of research(ers) in helping to create and sustain the existence of far-right terrorism, despite wider recognition of the role played by terrorism expertise in creating and shaping the problem of terrorism (e.g. Stampnitzky 2013)

From this common starting point, though, terrorism research on the far-right begins, as we have seen, to bifurcate, if unevenly. More overtly problem-solving contributions – which dominate the literature – typically approach the far-right as an external object of knowledge to be explained (through causal analysis), catalogued (through typologies and comparative tools), assessed (for the threat to various referents) and, ultimately, resolved. This, in itself, is unsurprising; such an orientation has long-permeated terrorism studies (Jarvis 2009). As Gunning (2007, 371–372) noted in one of CTS' earliest statements, terrorism research often tends towards short-term threat assessments reflecting statist priorities that reduce epistemological space for researcher reflexivity:

> The problem-solving approach is positivist and objectivist, and seeks to explain the "terrorist other" from within state-centric paradigms rather than to understand the "other" inter-subjectively using interpretative or ethnographic methods.

For Jackson (2009, 77), similarly:

> The problem-solving character of the field is illustrated most prosaically by the ubiquitous efforts of virtually every terrorism studies scholar to provide research that is "policy relevant" and which will assist the state in its efforts to defeat terrorism, and by the widespread tendency to accept the state's categorisations, definitions, dichotomies and demonisations.

Although work on the far-right contains, as we have seen, descriptively rich and contextually sensitive scholarship, the same critique may be posed again in this context. Specifically, the prominence given to defining, explaining, and addressing the threat of far-right terrorism has diminished the space available for different types of far-right research – research with radically different premises about far-right terrorism's ontological existence, and/or research with radically different understandings of the purposes of scholarship. Far-right terrorism remains, in short, overwhelmingly approached as a phenomenon to be identified, isolated, and explained by researchers and policymakers attempting to:

> fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination. (Cox and Sinclair 1996, 88).

Beyond reproducing a particular model of scholarship, this emphasis on policy-relevant research has a very specific, and important, consequence. With very few exceptions (e.g. Mehta 2015; Enstad 2017), it directs our attention to violences and victims of terrorism *in the global North*, focusing on cases in North America, Europe, or other liberal democracies. This focus on the threat to Western states, institutions, and communities, I argue, risks (re) instituting a perennial imbalance between the attention of terrorism researchers and the distribution of violences widely-deemed "terrorist". For all of their differences, critical and "traditional" scholars alike tend to agree that terrorism is overwhelmingly concentrated within the global South (E.g. Enders and Sandler 2006; Jackson, Jarvis, Gunning, and Breen-Smyth 2011). The 2020 Global Terrorism Index, to illustrate briefly, situates eighty percent of terrorist fatalities for 2019 within only ten countries: Afghanistan, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Somalia, Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Syria, and Mozambique (Institute for Economics and Peace 2020, 13). In directing our attention away from such contexts and (back) to the global North, then, this problem-solving emphasis reproduces a long-standing and well-documented bias within terrorism studies

which has always historically concentrated precisely on those countries and regions that dominate the attention of far-right researchers (see Silke 2009, 47). Although it is true that the critical scholarship to which I return below has important potential to reveal and unpack racialised histories, sociologies and politics *within* the global North, there is a risk here that greater emphasis on the far-right within terrorism research hinders contemporary efforts to decolonise terrorism studies (e.g. Mohammed 2021) by reproducing the field's traditional – and, arguably, traditionally myopic – gaze. The relevant section of the most recent *Global Terrorism Index* (2020: 60–66), for instance, focuses explicitly on "far right terrorism and the West". And, although the West's contestability is acknowledged in this discussion, its appropriateness as a focus for analysis of the far-right is not problematised.[3]

What, then, are we to make of the above critical outliers with their rather different research priorities? As indicated already, this work often takes a similarly essentialist starting-point in which the far-right and its violences become extra-discursive objects to be identified and researched. In Stump and Dixit's (2012) terminology, drawing on Jackson's (2008) distinction, this work maintains an ontological dualism in which far-right terrorism/extremism exists as a "real thing" "out there" in the world – an entity (in principle at least) independent of our understanding and labelling thereof. Indeed, generating further recognition of this entity's importance is crucial to so much of this critical work. It is crucial, on the one hand, in order to address this threat in its own right, not least given its discriminatory targeting against marginalised communities, and its harmful reinforcing of existing inequalities and power relations:

> Minority ethnic communities victimised by far-Right violence contend not only with occasional spectacular campaigns of violence directed at them, such as the David Copeland nail-bombing campaign in London in 1999, but also with ongoing low-level harassment which inflicts a different but no less powerful form of terror. There are strong arguments for considering all racially motivated violence as a kind of terrorism; it certainly fits the standard definition of terrorism as violence aimed at instilling fear in a population to advance a political cause (... the preservation of a racially unequal society or the creation of an ethnically homogenous society). (Kundnani 2012, 29).

It is crucial, too, though, for critical scholarship because greater attention to the far-right may also help address those analytical and political inconsistencies discussed above. From a similar ontological foundation, then, far-right terrorism emerges now as a solution as much as a problem. It does so because, (re)focusing attention on the far-right – and describing far-right actors and violences *as* terrorist – may help to combat profound unfairnesses and injustices perpetuated by incomplete and inadequate conceptions of terrorism. Understood thus, much critical commentary mobilises an identifiable broadening energy aiming, ultimately, to expand our understanding of terrorism/extremism/violence beyond the usual targets of these labels. Yet, just as explanatory work on the far-right reproduces the questions and priorities of "traditional" terrorism research, my fear is that this critical work – with its broadening emphasis – risks reproducing the assumptions and limitations of an earlier (critical) debate: on state terrorism (see Jarvis 2009).

Critical scholarship on state terrorism offered an important early rejoinder to traditional conceptions of terrorist violence. It did so by challenging the collocation of terrorism with non-state actors; by comparing the harm of non-state terrorisms to the violences of states; by unsettling established intellectual imaginaries including around the distinction

between state and non-state actors; and, by encouraging an active, and determinedly critical orientation amongst researchers (Jarvis and Lister 2014, 48–50). Such contributions are apparent too in recent work on the far-right. This literature as a whole clearly challenges the typical collocation of terrorism with specific groups – jihadist or "Islamist" – simply by pulling attention to the far-right. It encourages reflection on the significance of better researched forms of terrorism by juxtaposing these against often-overlooked violences. Critical work on the far-right, in particular, unsettles established intellectual imaginaries, by encouraging us to rethink relatively stable assumptions around the politics of counter-terrorism, national interests, and identities. And, much of this work also encourages an overtly critical research stance by calling out the above-discussed inconsistencies. Both debates, in short, seek to broaden the horizon of terrorism research for the same "attractive and doubly emancipatory promise: a promise not only to free scholars from outdated concepts, but also to free the direct or indirect victims of violence from nefarious political manoeuvrings" (Jarvis 2009, 17). Yet, they both do so by essentialising and reifying their ostensible object: state terrorism, and far-right terrorism, respectively (Jarvis 2009).

To summarise briefly, far-right terrorism is typically approached as a fully-formed threat to be identified, assessed, and addressed. In this sense, the literature, unsurprisingly, reproduces guiding assumptions and questions within terrorism research with its traditional emphasis on policy-relevant, problem-solving work. Collectively, it expands the focus of terrorism studies to potentially neglected or overlooked violences. For many critical scholars, moreover, this broadening energy has a normative imperative which is to destabilise the inconsistences within dominant ways of conceptualising, researching and responding to violence. Beneath this emancipatory appeal, though, is a shared essentialism in which far-right terrorism exists "out there" as an object of knowledge to be discovered and studied, whether as a "problem" in its own right, or (in critical work) as (also) an entry-point for exploring solutions to wider problems.

## Problematising and desecuritising the far-right

I finish this article by sketching two research strategies that are, in my view, better suited to a critical engagement with the far-right than the above-discussed problem-solving and broadening aspirations. The first is to problematise "far-right terrorism", "extremism" and the like in order to render visible their existence as constructs within wider political discourses. The second is to desecuritise the threat of far-right terrorisms and extremisms.[4] My aim here is to reflect on the value of each strategy, and to sketch some concrete research tactics through which work motivated thus might proceed (see also Jarvis 2019). In so doing, I highlight and draw upon sources of inspiration already available to us within critical terrorism studies, critical security studies, and beyond.

The problematisation of far-right forms of terrorism and extremism stands as a direct alternative to their overwhelming conceptualisation as extra-discursive phenomena within the academic literature considered above. Rather than seeking to isolate such phenomena as fully-formed entities awaiting explanation, problematisation focuses on how it is that they have been, and can be, discussed *as such* (Bacchi 2012, 1). Doing so mobilises a broadly constructivist logic emphasising the contingency – and therefore contestability – of the world and its constituent parts, recognising, put otherwise, that

that which is presently taken for granted is neither necessary nor inevitable (Hay 2002, 201). Such a logic has important implications for the focus as well as the methods of (critical) research on the far-right. To adapt Hülsse and Spencer's (2008: 576) early petition for a constructivist terrorism studies, it involves shifting our gaze so that: "the primary source of terrorism research must be the discourse in which the social construction of [far-right] terrorism takes place, that is, the discourse that constitutes a particular group of people as [far-right] "terrorists"'.

Anyone familiar with developments in critical terrorism studies (CTS) across the past fifteen years or so will recognise its population with scholarship motivated by such an emphasis (for overviews see Heath-Kelly 2016; Jarvis 2016). Indeed, this constructivist ethos has been the target of sympathetic (Stokes 2009, 89; Herring and Stokes 2011) and rather less sympathetic (Jones and Smith 2009, 295–296) critique of CTS as an academic and political project. Taking our lead from that work, and from related scholarship elsewhere, to problematise "far-right terrorism" or "extremism" involves asking how these phenomena are constructed or produced within specific discourses or dispositifs. What rules and competences govern the production of these entities as seemingly stable categories of terrorism? And what power relations work through the discursive production of far-right terrorism/extremism, and the attribution of these labels to specific individuals or groups?

Answering questions such as these might involve archaeological research tracing the spaces or "surfaces of emergence" in which these phenomena are constituted (Foucault 2002, 45–46); exploring who has authority to speak of these phenomena, and the kinds of classificatory system employed to make sense of actors and violences as far-right terrorists and terrorisms by academics, policymakers, the media and others (see Foucault 2002, 46–57). It may involve genealogical analysis historicising contemporary productions of the far-right and their emergence from past "struggles, conflicts, alliances, and exercises of power, many of which are nowadays forgotten" (Garland 2014, 372). Discourse theoretic work might trace the relations of equivalence and difference (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) – the constructions of sameness and distinctiveness – through which "far-right terrorism/extremism" are articulated via comparison and differentiation. "Thinner" constructivist work could look at the political instrumentalization of language, drawing methodological inspiration from scholarship in International Relations and beyond (see Milliken 1999). Terrorism scholars might draw productive inspiration too, from a surprisingly small body of related scholarship on the narration or construction of the far-right in specific contexts, such as Graef's (2020) narrative hermeneutic analysis of the German media's storying of the National Socialist Underground.

These examples are brief and far from exhaustive. What they share, though, is an effort to "question the question" (Burke 2008, 38): an effort to question the ontological status *of* far-right terrorism before attempting to study, map or resolve it (Burke 2008, 38). Such a disposition would be facilitated, I think, by the complexities, caveats, and inconsistencies within existing work on the far-right considered above which often seems to be approaching, yet never quite arriving at, a satisfactory stabilisation of its object of knowledge. Rather than seeking to adjudicate between conceptions of far-right terrorism, and rather than argue for a broader or alternative conception of this entity, our focus should begin precisely *with* these complexities and fluidities. As Burke (2008, 38) had earlier argued, "Any 'critical' terrorism studies must keep this radical instability and inherent

politicization of the concept of terrorism at the forefront of its analysis". This is as accurate, I argue, of "far-right terrorism" as it is of "state terrorism", "Islamist terrorism", "new terrorism", "religious terrorism", "cyberterrorism" or any other category within our ever-expanding orrery. Indeed, drawing on Jackson, Jarvis, Gunning, and Breen-Smyth, (2011, 159–164), the category of "far-right terrorism" – like those other, far more widely critiqued, concepts – is at equal risk of essentialising its object by decontextualising its constituents and their differences. It is as likely, moreover, to slip from descriptive to causal claim by implying its constituents act as they do *because of* their (purported) ideological beliefs. It is as likely to suffer from challenges of empirical verification around who is to be included and excluded from this category. It is also, indeed, as intimately bound up within relations of power/knowledge as its predecessors, even if those relations may differ from those within which, say, "Islamist terrorism" emerges. Such challenges have been neglected, I think, in part precisely because of the critical temptation to use far-right terrorism to reorientate terrorism research away from (important) biases and blindspots.

The second analytical strategy I propose is to desecuritise far-right terrorism and extremism in order to reflect more thoughtfully on their threat and the countering thereof. The concept of desecuritisation comes to us from the "Copenhagen School" of critical security studies, referring initially to "the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere" (Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde 1991, 4). Desecuritisation's desirability, in early contributions to this literature, was a product of the exceptionalism and urgency associated with securitising issues – from migration, climate change, terrorism and beyond – logics seen to impede the working *and* deleteriously shape the outcomes of (ostensibly "normal") democratic politics (Aradau 2004). This is because securitising issues – treating issues as (existential) threats to something or someone that is valued – tends to facilitate secretive and unaccountable decision-making often involving rigid boundary drawing between self and other(s), with frequently ineffective outcomes (Roe 2004, 282: 284).

Securitisation theory has evolved considerably since its earliest articulations, including via internal debate (see CASE Collective 2006; Balzacq and Guzzini 2015; Bigo and McCluskey 2018), and criticism of the theory's own perceived biases (e.g. Hansen 2000; Wilkinson 2007; Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2020). The concept of desecuritisation has itself received considerable critique, with prominent claims including its under-theorisation, inconsistent employment, and normative failings (Hansen 2012, 527–528). For my purposes here, I use the term to refer to the broad, powerful, insight that security issues (are) brought into being or constructed (and) can (therefore) equally be undone or deconstructed. A security issue, put otherwise, can be transformed into something other than a threat, which will have important implications for that issue's management. Desecuritisation, then, involves an unpacking, contestation and unmaking of constellations of threat and response that may involve preventing "normal" political issues from reaching the realm of security, or, indeed, returning security issues to the realm of "normal politics" (Donnelly 2015, 915). Roe (2004, 285–287), drawing on Huysmans (1995), discusses three routes through which the latter – which concerns us most here (given the far-right's already widespread securitisation within terrorism research) – might take place. The first route is objectively to contest an issue's framing as a security challenge in order to convince a relevant audience to understand that issue differently. Second, is

a constructivist highlighting of the processes underpinning an issue's framing as a security threat. Third is a deconstructivist approach in which security stories are inverted and told from the perspective of the securitised other, for instance:

> desecuritization is the telling of the story of the migrant in such manner that is not the recounting of a security drama: the migrant is not just the migrant, but someone with multiple identities – woman, teacher, mechanic, father, etc. The migrant is revealed as being someone who is just like us, just like one of the natives. (Roe 2004, 286).

In the case of the far-right, then, an objectivist approach would contest the threat posed by such organisations, perhaps arguing "that the problem can be comprehended or managed within the rubric of normal politics" (Salter 2008, 324). This might involve countering securitising moves with statistical evidence on attacks, fatalities, and the consequences of far-right violence, including in absolute terms or relative to other harms (e.g. Ravndal 2021, 23–24). This, of course, has already been a powerful strategy within other critical work on terrorism, hence the proliferation of comparisons between terrorism deaths and other (often ostensibly mundane) violences (e.g. Mueller and Stewart 2014, 2021).Yet such work has made relatively few inroads into research on the far-right which instead tends towards emphasising, and accentuating, the threat thereof for the diverse reasons discussed above. To focus, for instance, on terrorism casualties, the 2020 Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics and Peace 2020) identifies *a total of* 332 incidents and 286 fatalities from far-right terrorism in the West (taken to comprise North America, Western Europe and Oceania) between 2002 and 2019, with 128 (or almost 45%) of those fatalities attributable to two incidents: Christchurch, 2019 and Norway, 2011. Without trivialising this suffering, and indeed while recognising the partiality of this figure which neglects more quotidian forms of far-right harm and criminality, this is a threat – calculated thus – generating fewer than sixteen fatalities per year across three continents.

A second, constructivist, approach to desecuritization would highlight the conditions under which far-right terrorism has been produced *as a threat* to specific referents from human lives to communities, multiculturalism, liberalism, national security, the West, and beyond. It would build on strategies such as those discussed in relation to problematisation above to unpack linguistic, visual and other productions of threat, whether in political speeches, academic articles, think tank reports, advocacy organisations, academic research, popular culture or beyond. Doing so involves asking, as Matt McDonald (2009, 116) puts it, who gets to define responses to (far-right) terrorism? And, whose interests are served – or who benefits – from specific framings of danger? A deconstructivist approach, finally, would shift our attention to the stories of those securitised as far-right extremists and terrorists. This is not, of course, to justify their actions or legitimise their ideas. But, rather, it is to question the simplicity through which such individuals and communities are explained and acted upon as (only) radical, threatening, others to the values and peoples of liberal democratic states. Such research could help delegitimise dominant framings of this threat (Scheel 2020), by centring the experiences of those identified or associated therewith. It might profitably build – methodologically, at least – upon ethnographic and narrative work on the far-right in fields distinct from, but relevant to, terrorism studies (e.g. Virchow 2007).

Researchers will, of course, differ in the extent to which they believe far-right terrorism has been (successfully) securitised, and the agents and interests behind efforts to do so. Indeed, different routes to answering such questions remain at the heart of ongoing conceptual debates within securitisation theory (Scheel 2020, 4–7). It is, though, worth briefly reflecting on potential benefits of desecuritisation in this case, especially as we are discussing individuals or groups with views, values and politics likely so far removed from many researchers working in this area.

First, desecuritisation may provide some reassurance to those feeling endangered by the far-right. As Mueller (2005, 497) argued of the war on terror's early years: "a sensible policy approach for confronting terrorism might be to stress that any damage terrorists are able to accomplish likely can be absorbed and that, while judicious protective and policing measures are sensible, extensive fear and anxiety over what at base could well prove to be a rather limited problem is misplaced, unjustified, and counterproductive". We may not yet have reached this level of alarmism in relation to the far-right, but threat assessments from the US Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2020, 18, my emphasis) situating "white supremacist extremists" as "*the* most persistent and lethal threat in the [United States] homeland" indicate, I suggest, a trajectory towards increasing securitisation. Desecuritisation may be less reassuring or appropriate for the lived experiences of communities directly targeted by the far-right, and their experiences of racism, criminality and violence.[5] Yet, as we saw in the opening section, the far-right terrorist threat is often articulated in far wider general and abstract terms within political and media debate, with additional implications for individuals and communities – as well as for policy and politics .[6]

Second, desecuritisation might open space for better engagement with, and even empathy for, individuals identifying with – or identified *as* identifying with – the far-right, and their own multiple identities, insecurities, and interests (see Sandberg 2013). Such an engagement may have added urgency in the case, say, of structurally disadvantaged, or young individuals at risk of targeting by counterterrorism or counter-radicalisation initiatives concentrated on reducing this threat. And, third, again to develop an argument common within wider CTS research, desecuritising far-right terrorism might also facilitate a shift of attention – even resources – to more pressing issues of public policy, whether relating to health, environmental or other forms of insecurity (Jackson, Jarvis, Gunning, and Breen-Smyth 2011, 263–264).

There is a risk that such arguments are taken to trivialise the racisms, misogynies, or homophobias associated with the far-right; or, indeed, to trivialise the suffering of victims of violence. None of this is intended, just as arguments to desecuritise, say, "Islamist" terrorism are not justifications for, or trivialisations of, the conservatisms or violences of Al Qaeda or ISIS. Instead, the above attempt to develop existing literatures within and beyond CTS stands, ultimately, as an appeal for greater meta-theoretical, analytical and political reflection on how violences and groups designated "terrorist" are understood, studied, and addressed within (critical) terrorism research.

## Conclusion

This article has explored contemporary terrorism scholarship on the far-right; a growing concern, as we have seen, within the field. By highlighting the prominence of specific research questions (of definition, causality, threat, and response), and

specific epistemological motivations (for policy-relevant and broadening research), I argued that this work often reproduces longstanding and problematic assumptions and paradigms within terrorism studies, including those of earlier critical efforts to expand the field's horizons. Policy-focused *and* critical approaches to the far-right, I argued, typically lack engagement with this phenomenon's construction by approaching it as an extra-discursive object of knowledge. Moreover, while both tend to see this threat as a problem, critical work sees it also as a potential solution to other problems, exclusions and biases within terrorism research and counter-terrorism policy. In response to these limitations, I argued for increased problematisation and desecuritisation of this threat, suggesting there might be analytical, political and human reasons for pursuing such alternatives. My argument, here, ultimately is twofold. First, that critical scholars (and, ideally, others!) should exercise real caution in describing far-right individuals, groups or events as "extremist" or "terrorist". Or, at a minimum, should acknowledge and reflect on their role in producing such individuals, groups and events thus. Second, and perhaps more importantly, such scholars should also resist the temptation to emphasise – and certainly to exaggerate – the scale of this phenomenon, even for normative or political purposes.

As noted above, none of this is intended to diminish the insecurities experienced by individuals and communities subject to violences widely understood as "far-right terrorism" or "extremism". Nor is it intended to diminish or flatten differences in the social, political and economic contexts that are generative of, and sustained (or challenged) by, particular ideas, organisations and actions. The persuasiveness of my argument depends, in large part, on our aspirations for critical terrorism studies, as well as on competing conceptions of the strategies, logics, and purposes of critique (see Jarvis 2016, 2019). While the deconstructive approach advocated above is analytically consistent with important earlier work within critical terrorism studies, I recognise it may not satisfy those committed to a more emancipatory ethic. In this sense, I hope that this article opens space for future reflection on our ambitions for critical terrorism research in relation to the far-right and, indeed, beyond.[7]

## Notes

1. My thanks to both reviewers for pushing me to think more closely on this.
2. This phrasing draws on Ruth Blakeley's (2007) influential discussion of state terrorism.
3. None of this, of course, is intended to suggest that work on other forms of terrorism suffers any less from racialised or other biases. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to nuance this section.
4. Although I approach these as complementary, they are not necessarily so. It would be perfectly possible, as we shall see, to desecuritise far-right terrorism/extremism without accepting the discursive nature thereof.
5. There is a risk (that is of course to be guarded against) that a refusal to securitise through the language of far-right terrorism becomes a refusal to acknowledge lived experiences of violence and discrimination.
6. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for their comments on this point.
7. My thinking in this paragraph (and elsewhere throughout the article) was greatly shaped by the comments of an anonymous reviewer. My sincere thanks.

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## Disclosure statement

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