

11  
August  
2023



World Risk Register

# EXTREMISM QUARTERLY

## NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

### THREATS POSED BY THE EXTREME LEFT & RIGHT

#REFINEDINSIGHT

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# INTRODUCTION

On 6 January 2021, the **US** was shocked by a deadly riot which gripped the capital Washington DC. Catalysing the unrest were far-right extremist groups, several of which co-operated with each other to co-ordinate their actions. Following an investigation by the US House Select Committee on the 6 January attack, the former president, Donald Trump, was indicted on 1 August 2023 on felony charges related to his alleged attempt on 6 January to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. This marks the third time in four months that Trump has been criminally charged; at least one other indictment is likely between August and September. **In the build-up to the 2024 presidential election and in the context of Trump’s extraordinary legal circumstances, it is possible that the former president’s fervent far-right supporters will carry out acts of extremist violence against federal government and/or Democratic Party personnel or facilities in the coming months.**

This Extremism Quarterly report aims to assess the overall threat posed by far-right extremist groups in **North America** more broadly, as well as in **Europe**, where there has been a notable increase in the number of groups which deny the legitimacy of functioning states as federal republics. More worryingly, we assess that the far-right threat in Europe will be exacerbated by the war in **Ukraine**. There is a realistic possibility that movements which currently pose a low threat across the continent due to the robust intelligence services therein will be bolstered by far-right extremists who have seized the opportunity to gain battlefield experience in Ukraine; their existing connections to organised crime will likely drive weapons proliferation risks across Europe when the war ends or if it freezes.

**However, a comprehensive assessment of the threat posed by actors inhabiting one extreme end of the political spectrum cannot be achieved without exploring the other.** In the wake of an unprecedented spate of climate-related disasters across the world in recent months, far-left extremists’ collaboration with traditional climate activists will elevate security risks for companies perceived to facilitate climate change. In addition, anti-capitalist and/or anti-technology ideologies will drive cross-sectoral risks for businesses and their leaders.

Furthermore, an uptick in far-right activity will likely encourage far-left extremist entities to engage in violence, either through planned attacks or spontaneous unrest during counter-protests at political rallies. As ever, the risks facing businesses will increase in tandem with any such developments; these range from bystander risks for individuals and assets located in the vicinity of unrest to reputational (as well as physical security) risks for firms which are perceived to espouse values or beliefs traditionally associated with one end of the political spectrum or the other.

This report will also assess the cyber angle, as well as how social media platforms and cryptocurrencies are used by extremist entities to organise and fund their activities.

Remote chance	Highly unlikely	Unlikely	Realistic possibility	Likely or probable	Highly likely	Almost certain
0-5%	10-20%	25-35%	40-50%	55-75%	80-90%	95-100%

Sibylline’s forecasting is underpinned by specifically chosen probability terminology, which aims to quantify levels of certainty throughout our assessments.

## THE EXTREME LEFT: NORTH AMERICA

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### Key points

- Far-left movements will seek to spur individuals motivated by anti-police sentiment as well as environmental concerns, drawing on networks active within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, among others.
- There is a sustained risk of vandalism, property damage and harassment facing organisations associated with law enforcement entities perceived to target environmental protesters.
- Incidents of police violence, especially lethal force, against environmental protesters will possibly trigger fresh waves of rioting across the US.

### Context

On 18 January, state troopers in Atlanta (Georgia) worked to clear environmental 'Stop Cop City' (SCC) protesters from the construction site of a planned training facility for local law enforcement in South Atlanta Forest, located about ten miles (16km) from the city centre. During the operation, an activist known as 'Tortugita' was fatally shot by law enforcement after he reportedly reached for an officer's weapon and shot a state trooper. The initial incident sparked several episodes of domestic unrest and vandalism in Atlanta.

On 21 January, a protest briefly descended into violence in downtown Atlanta; some participants set fire to police vehicles and threw bricks at buildings. Georgia Governor Brian Kemp subsequently enacted a state of emergency and deployed around 1,000 national guard troops. In early March, another protest at the construction site resulted in violent clashes with law enforcement, improvised arson attacks (involving fireworks and Molotov cocktails) and the vandalism of heavy machinery. In all, 35 people were arrested in connection with the incident.

### Forecast

Minor clashes between protesters and the police will likely continue at the site of the construction project. The use of excessive force by law enforcement will also likely trigger large-scale protests in downtown Atlanta, which will possibly spark smaller satellite demonstrations in other US cities where SCC has garnered traction (e.g. New York City).

The broader activist movement has stoked more extreme co-ordinated activity by fringe elements. In late July, a group in East Hartford (Connecticut) which calls itself the Green Mountain Sacred Delinquents (also aligned with SCC) vandalised the offices of a firm contracted for the construction of the training facility. The assailants vandalised buildings and vehicles belonging to the company, and spray painted slogans such as 'Stop Cop City' and 'Avenge Tort' (referring to the activist who was killed). A far-left website dedicated to the SCC movement published letters purportedly written by the assailants; they reportedly warned that any contractor working with the Atlanta police department 'will have to answer to bold people who are sick and tired of the system'.

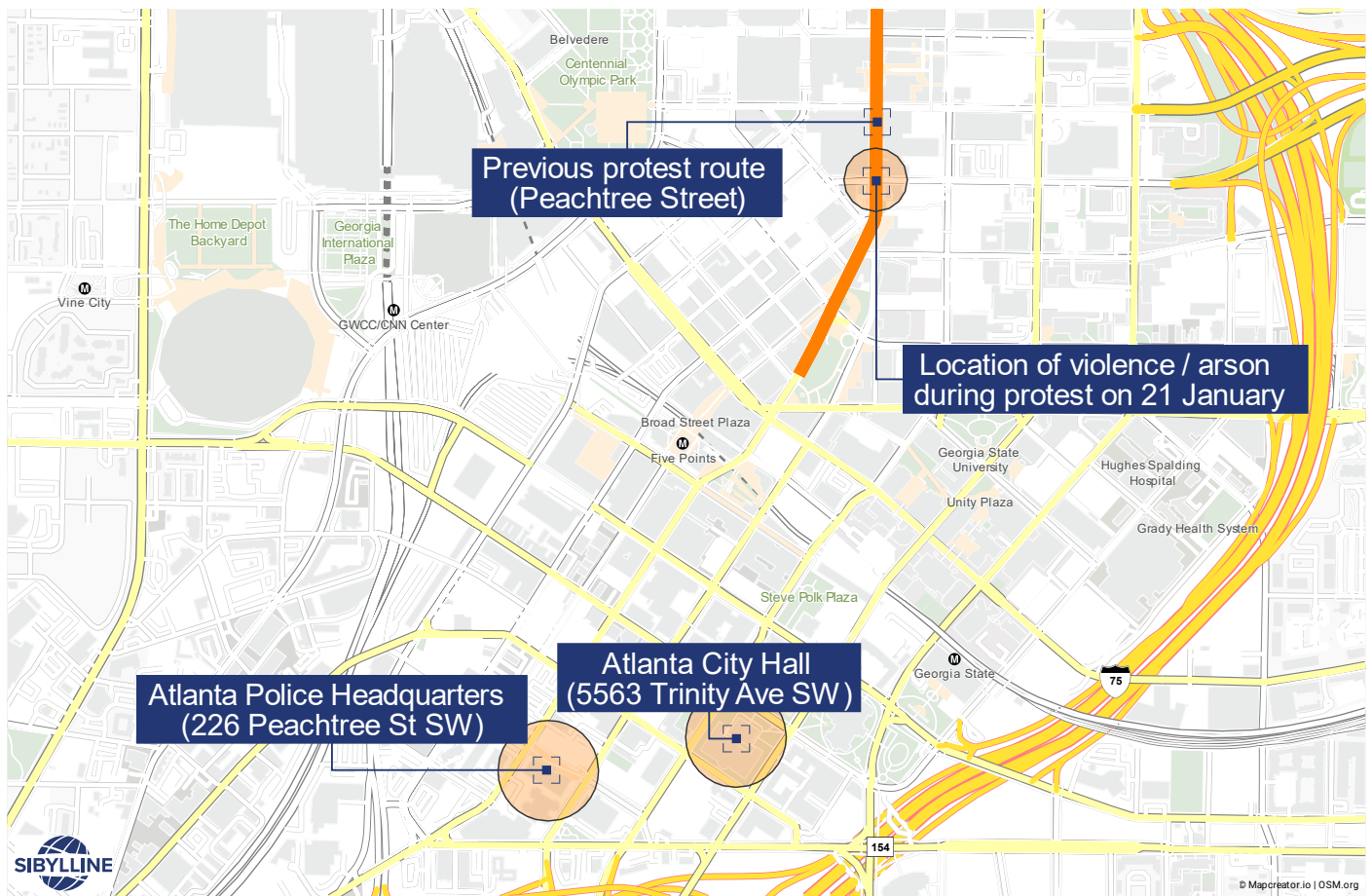
There is a sustained risk of vandalism, property damage and harassment facing organisations associated with the Atlanta police department, including those participating in the construction of the training facility and which support the Atlanta police force via financial donations.

The SCC movement has galvanised individuals motivated by anti-police sentiment as well as environmental concerns. It has partly drawn on networks active within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. SCC activists have mobilised and boosted their campaign efforts following incidents of police brutality. However, there is an important distinction to draw; the movement should be regarded as having two contingents:

1. Environmental activists
2. Ecological extremists who are prepared to carry out violence

The latter is likely to continue targeting private companies perceived to be aligned with the Atlanta police. Any further incidents of police violence, especially lethal force, against environmental protesters will trigger fresh waves of rioting (possibly across the US), as well as attacks against the property and infrastructure of firms with links to the Atlanta police and law enforcement more generally.

There is a growing trend of ‘naming-and-shaming’ firms which provide financial support for projects like the so-called ‘Cop City’. Protesters in South River Forest identified 15 large firms which have contributed to the Atlanta Police Foundation. These include financial firms, airlines, retailers and local sports teams. All such firms face a heightened threat from activists, including from those who conduct ‘glue-ons’ and ‘lock-ons’, and especially from those who engage in vandalism and/or arson.



Likely locations of future protests in Atlanta (Georgia) based on past incidents

## THE EXTREME LEFT: EUROPE

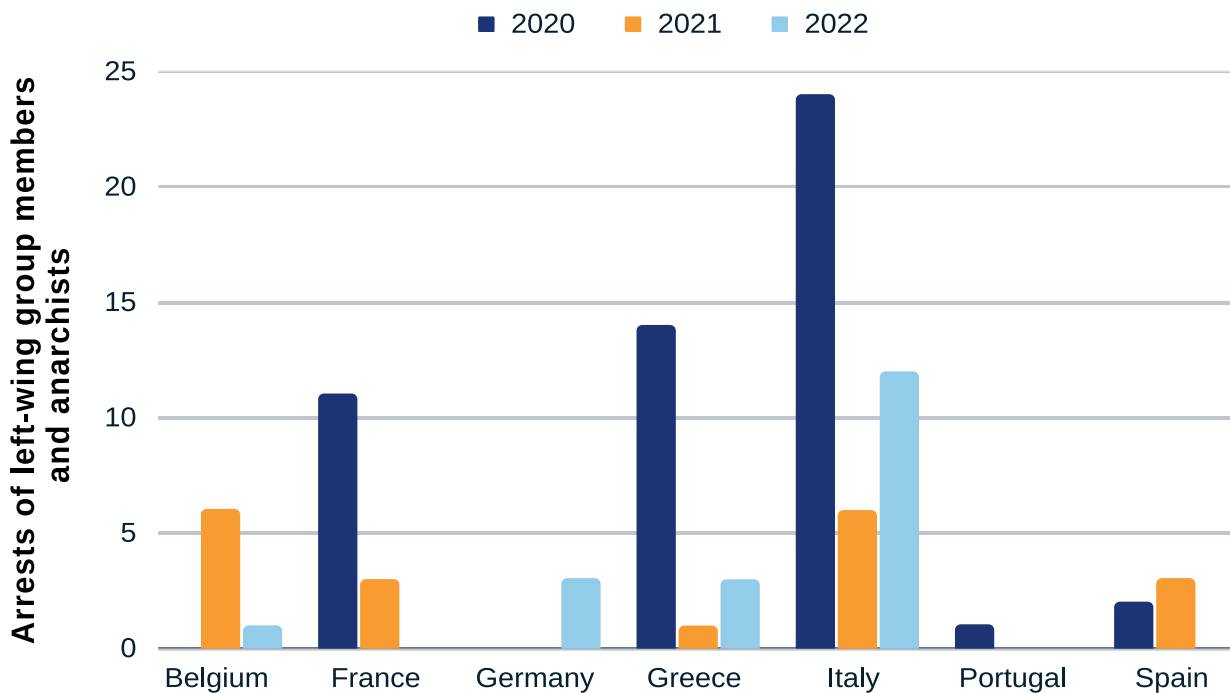
### Key points

- Extreme far-left and anarchist groups will highly likely continue targeting government facilities, personnel and the security forces on a sporadic basis for the remainder of 2023.
- Left-wing extremists' collaboration with traditional climate activists will elevate security risks for companies perceived to facilitate climate change.
- Anti-capitalist and/or technology ideologies will drive cross-sectoral risks for telecommunications and automobile companies, among others.

### Context

Left-wing and anarchist groups carried out the highest number of terror attacks in the EU of any single-issue entities in 2022, according to Europol. However, unlike jihadist and/or far-right attacks, these far-left incidents did not result in any deaths. Of the 18 attacks (completed, failed and foiled) categorised as far-left and anarchist terrorism incidents, 12 were carried out in **Italy**, four in **Greece**, one in **Belgium** and one in **Spain**. Arson was the main modus operandi employed in these attacks, which largely involved the use of improvised incendiary devices (IIDs), improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and fire accelerators. Blunt weapons and physical force were also commonly used during clashes with the security forces.

### Arrests related to left-wing and anarchist terrorist activities in EU



Arrests relating to left-wing and anarchist terrorist activities across EU member states in 2020-2022;  
source: Europol Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2022



## Forecast

### ***Far-left and environmentalist collaboration will elevate security risks for the energy, cement and construction sectors***

In Q2, growing evidence of collaboration between traditional environmental activists and extreme far-left actors underlined the realistic possibility of violence in the coming quarters, particularly in **France** and **Germany**. This collaboration has largely focused on single-issue environmental grievances, with participants typically targeting companies or sites they believe facilitate global warming. On 17 June, the proposal for a high-speed Lyon-Turin rail link triggered protests near the village of Saint Remy-de-Maurienne (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, France), which resulted in violent clashes between the security forces and around 3,000 activists. The authorities made reference to 300 'hardcore' protesters, a likely indication that far-left anarchists were involved in the demonstrations.

#### Escalation indicators and triggers

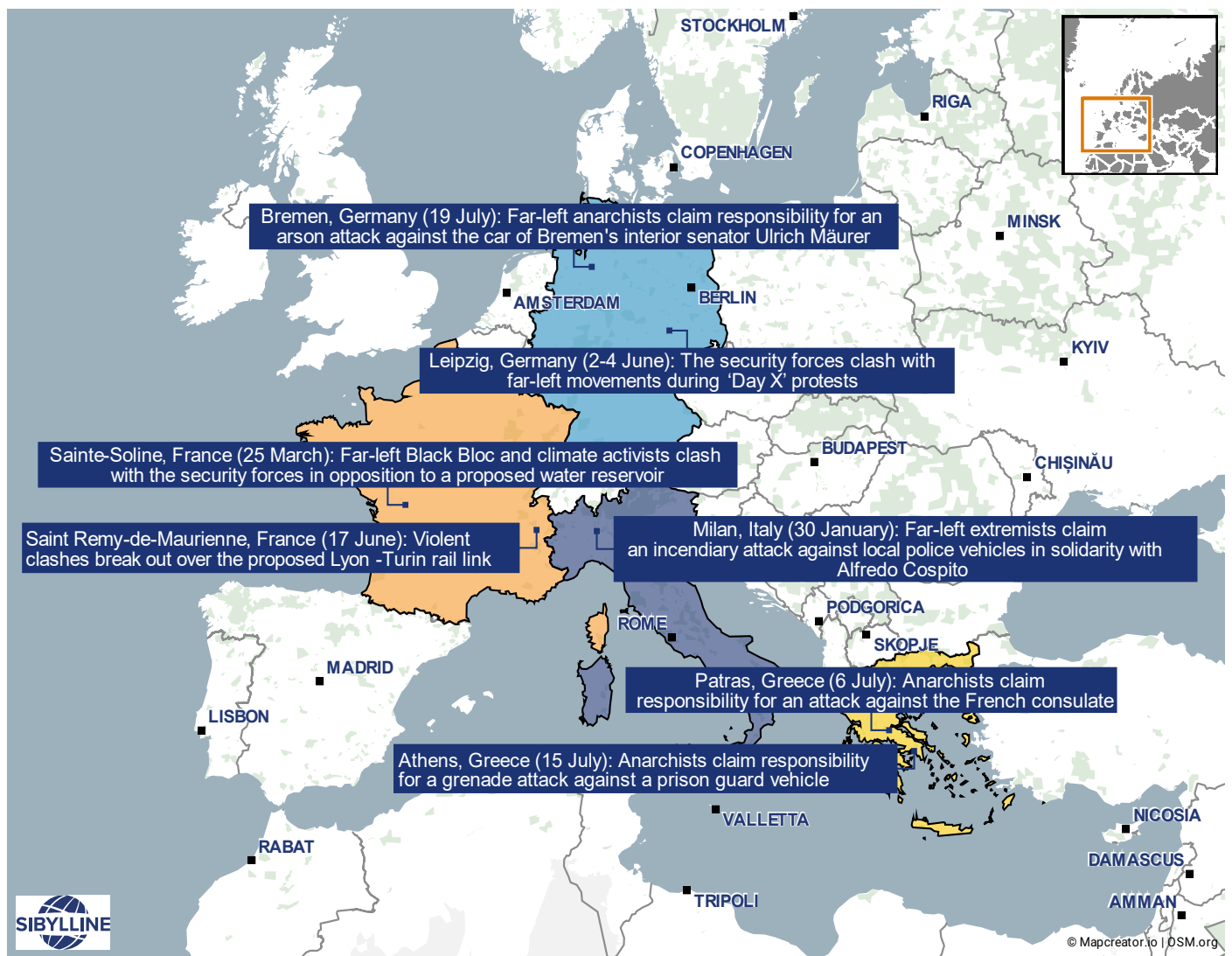
- An increase in the frequency of extreme weather events drives single-issue grievances surrounding environmentalism
- Further investments in fossil-fuel projects and/or an expansion of existing developments drive protests
- More frequent collaborations between far-left extremists and traditional activists result in an escalation in violence and sabotage

Following a series of disruptive protests orchestrated by the 'Les Soulèvements de la Terre' (Earth Uprising), the French government decided to dissolve the group in June. French Minister of the Interior Gérald Darmanin claimed the outfit encouraged 'the commission of sabotage and material damage, including by violence'. Following this dissolution, the authorities arrested 18 members of the group on suspicion of participation in highly destructive action against a Holcim factory in December 2022. The government's decision to shut down the group is unlikely to deter protesters, who will likely continue (and evolve) their operations, possibly under a different name.

While it is arguable that the group cannot be categorised as an extreme far-left organisation, it has provided a platform for more extreme actors to conduct violence across **France**; furthermore, the methods of these groups are becoming increasingly violent and sophisticated, as illustrated by the Holcim factory incident. Given the recent uptick in environmentalists' focus on water scarcity across France, water-intensive industries, such as the cement and construction sectors, will face elevated risks of targeted protests. However, most of these incidents are likely to be peaceful; violent incidents are typically extremely rare.

In **Germany**, activists attempted to sabotage a coal-fired power plant in the capital Berlin on 12 June in solidarity with a Colombian indigenous community and also against coal mining in that country. They glued an IID to the coal plant as part of a plan to impact the power supply to the industrial and commercial areas around Wiesendamm. Activists calling themselves 'Friends of the Last Generation' posted a claim of responsibility for the incident on the left-wing media outlet Indymedia; this further points to a growing crossover between climate and far-left activism.

Individuals also sabotaged a drainage pipe at the Vereinigtes Schleehain (United Schleehain) lignite opencast mine in Saxony state overnight on 15-16 April. The line was rendered unusable and was forced to shut down as a result. In a letter claiming responsibility for the sabotage, unknown individuals expressed solidarity with the far-left ANTIFA movement, citing disproportionate persecution. The alleged persecution of ANTIFA was a likely reference to the trial of the alleged far-left militant 'Lina E' at the Higher Regional Court in Dresden (Saxony). This will remain a key trigger for far-left activity in Germany in the coming quarters.



Significant far-left and anarchist activity across the EU in 2023



### **Government facilities and the security forces will remain key targets for far-left actors**

Demonstrations in the **German** city of Leipzig (Saxony) between 2 and 4 June underscored the threat posed by far-left actors to the security forces and business assets. Far-left movements organised a protest ('Day X') in solidarity with the alleged far-left militant Lina E, who was given a suspended prison sentence on 31 May. Although a major police operation mitigated the threat of significant unrest across the city, the left-wing stronghold of Leipzig-Connewitz district suffered serious and costly damage due to arson attacks, which affected a bank branch (among other buildings).

#### **Escalation indicators and triggers**

- Perceptions of deteriorating governance standards drive domestic unrest
- Arrests of influential anarchist and/or far-left figures drive unrest, as do protests in solidarity with imprisoned extremists
- Exploitation of far-left groups during large-scale anti-government protests provide opportunities for violence

Far-left 'Black Bloc' activists were almost certainly involved in anti-government riots across **France** in Q2 (and possibly also in solidarity protests in **Belgium** and **Switzerland**). This highlights the security risks posed by violent actors during such protests, as well as the potential for far-left extremists to inject violence into peaceful demonstrations. Just as Les Soulèvements de la Terre provides a platform for far-left actors during environmental protests, anti-government demonstrations also allow groups to engage in violence. According to French interior ministry data, rioting between 27 June and 4 July caused more damage and prompted a higher security force deployment compared to the three-week-long riots in 2005. According to the French business association Mouvement des Entreprises de France, the recent riots cost almost EUR 1 billion (USD 1.1 billion) in damage.

Finally, the prolonged detention of convicted **Italian** anarchist Alfredo Cospito underscores the threat posed by far-left actors to governmental facilities and diplomatic personnel across Europe. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani stated in January that the government would increase security at Italian embassies across the world in response to any perceived increased threat of anarchist attacks. The likelihood of such attacks is increasing in **France, Greece, Germany** and Italy, where European anarchist groups are especially active. Prominent symbols of the state – both public officials and facilities – will highly likely remain key targets for far-left anarchist groups in the coming quarters. Possible arrests of influential anarchists and/or far-left figures will act as triggers for sporadic unrest, as will protests conducted in solidarity with imprisoned extremists.

Country	2020	2021	2022
Belgium	0	0	1
France	1	0	0
Germany	0	1	0
Greece	0	0	4
Italy	24	0	12
Spain	0	0	1

Far-left and anarchist terrorist attacks (including completed, failed and foiled attempts) across EU member states in 2020-22; source: Europol Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2022

### ***Anti-capitalist ideology poses multi-sectoral security risks***

Far-left anti-capitalist groups often focus on the telecommunications and automation sectors, among others. A far-left group claimed responsibility for an arson attack against two SUVs in Munich (Bavaria state, **Germany**) on 7 July. The unknown perpetrators claimed the attack was linked to the alleged unjust treatment of Last Generation climate activists in Germany. Elsewhere, an incendiary attack in February targeted a telecommunications cell tower in Turin (Piedmont region, **Italy**) in support of the aforementioned Cospito. The persistent targeting of infrastructure, particularly 5G antennae, will likely sustain sabotage risks for the telecommunications sector in the coming quarters. Arson will remain the most likely form of sabotage.

While government facilities and personnel will likely remain the predominant target of far-left and anarchist extremists in 2023, sporadic protests targeting various sectors will continue to drive broader security risks. Nevertheless, the likelihood of these groups using firearms or other means of deliberate lethal force (such as knife attacks and car rammings) remains very low; this will moderately reduce the bystander risks in the coming quarters.

## **THE CYBER ANGLE**

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### **Key points**

- Far-left groups utilise social media platforms (namely X/Twitter and Facebook) and end-to-end encrypted messaging applications (such as Telegram and WhatsApp) to communicate with each other and to co-ordinate physical operations.
- In a departure from far-right groups' capabilities, we have observed far-left single-activist groups conducting more low-level cyber operations as part of their wider activities.
- Although the cyber capabilities of far-left and anarchist groups are more advanced than those of the far-right, they are still relatively immature; the exception is the hacktivist collective known as 'Anonymous'.

## Context

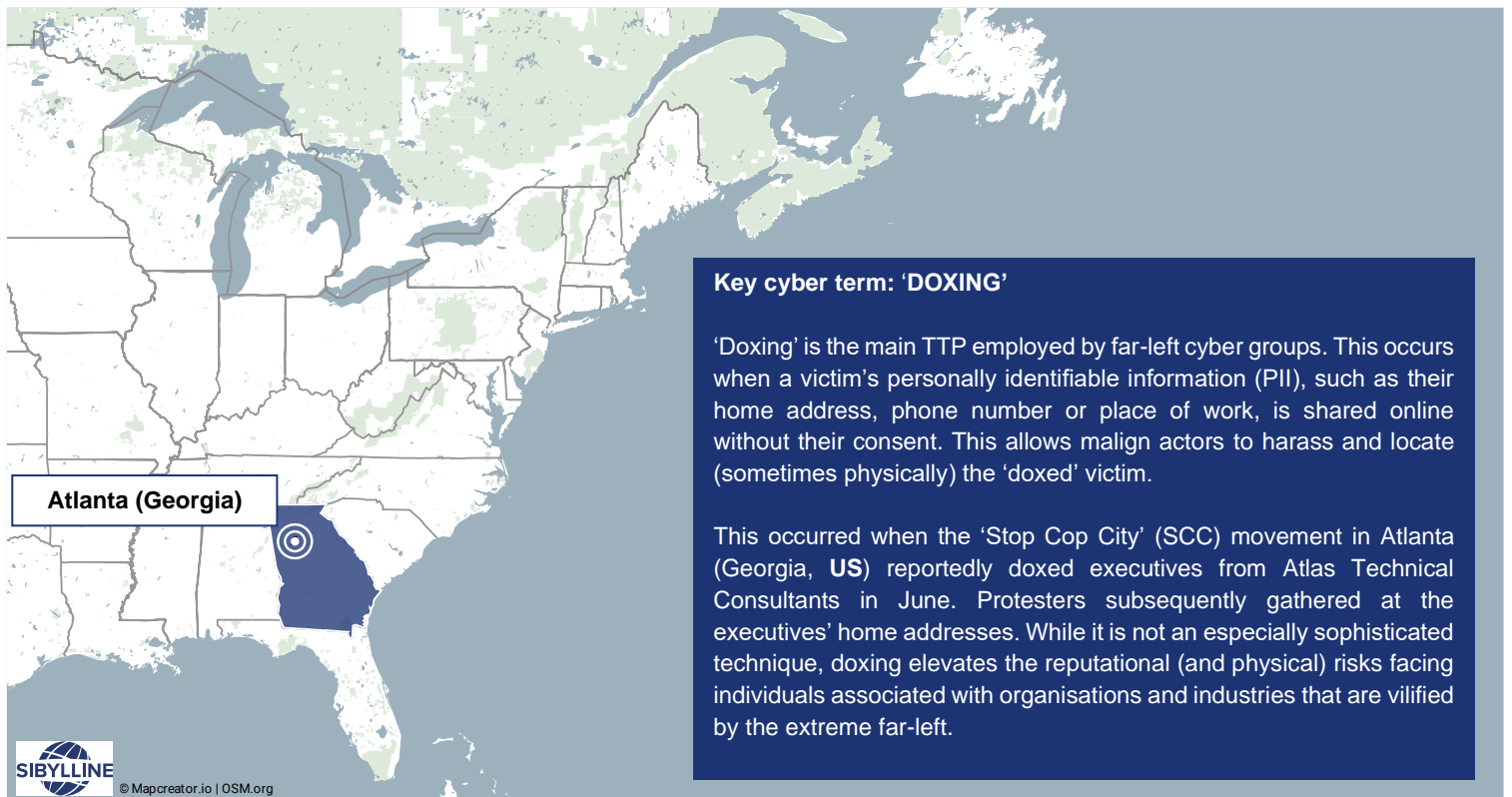
Anonymous is the most prominent left-wing / anarchist cyber group. It has been conducting hacktivist campaigns since 2008. The collective targets various global and political institutions and is one of the more sophisticated anti-government cyber outfits operating today. Most of its operations in recent years have targeted governments and organisations which do not align with the group's beliefs.

## Cyber threat examples

Most recently, Anonymous has targeted an array of **Russian** organisations in response to Moscow's invasion of **Ukraine** in February 2022. It has also attacked various Republican Party members in the **US** for their perceived anti-LGBTQ+ and restrictive abortion policies. Among others, the collective hacked a Texas government website due to what it claims are the state's restrictive laws on gender-affirming care in late June.

Anonymous often conducts distributed-denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks to disrupt internal and external websites, and therefore businesses' operations. Anonymous and its supporters also often deface websites to inflict reputational damage. Since **Russia's** invasion of **Ukraine**, an increasing number of its affiliates have engaged in hacktivism to steal sensitive data and leak information concerning targeted organisations. As Anonymous is decentralised and there is no single identifiable figurehead, the group conducts a variety of cyber operations across the globe which vary in potency and sophistication.

We assess that the collective possibly assists less sophisticated groups and individuals to help elevate the impact of future far-left cyber operations. This will increase the number of threats facing cross-sectoral organisations in the coming quarters. Anonymous and its affiliates' cyber capabilities are more robust compared to other far-left and anarchist groups; the collective will highly likely remain the most prominent politically motivated cyber threat group in the coming months.




**Atlanta (Georgia)**

**Key cyber term: 'DOXING'**

'Doxing' is the main TTP employed by far-left cyber groups. This occurs when a victim's personally identifiable information (PII), such as their home address, phone number or place of work, is shared online without their consent. This allows malign actors to harass and locate (sometimes physically) the 'doxed' victim.

This occurred when the 'Stop Cop City' (SCC) movement in Atlanta (Georgia, **US**) reportedly doxed executives from Atlas Technical Consultants in June. Protesters subsequently gathered at the executives' home addresses. While it is not an especially sophisticated technique, doxing elevates the reputational (and physical) risks facing individuals associated with organisations and industries that are vilified by the extreme far-left.

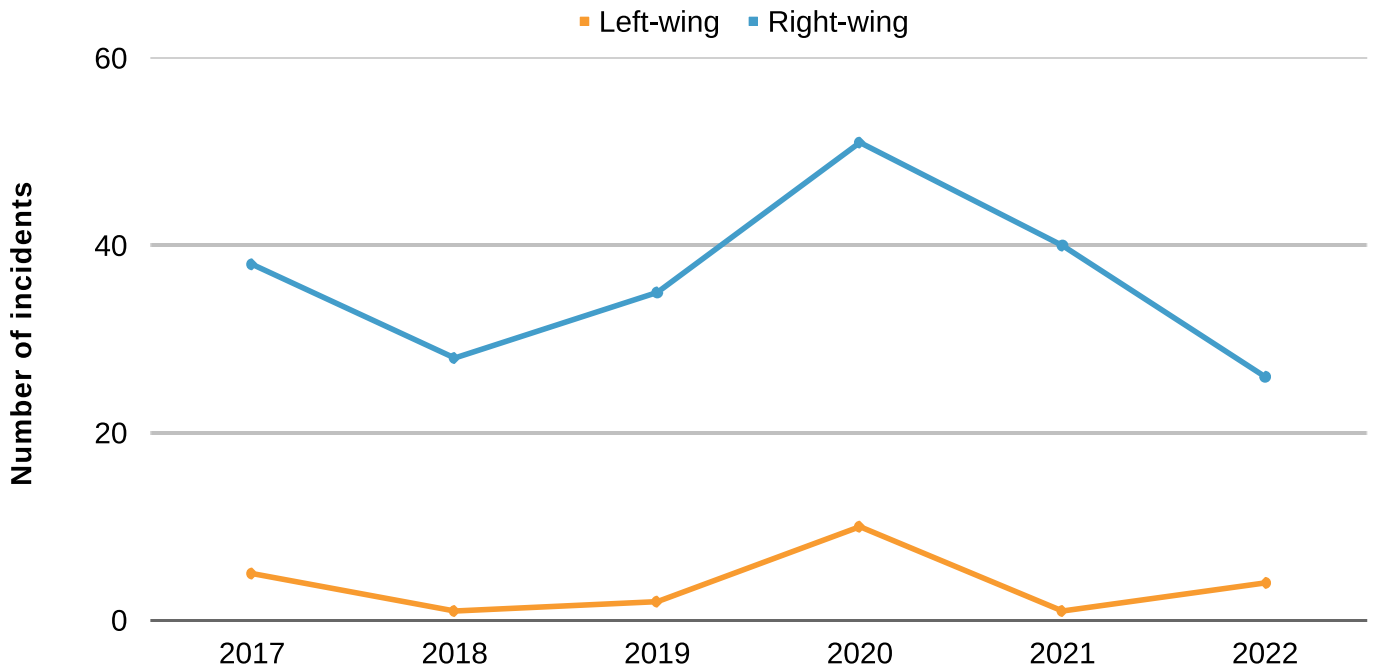
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## THE EXTREME RIGHT: NORTH AMERICA

### Key points

- For many far-right militant neo-Nazi organisations in the **US**, bringing down the federal government is a primary objective; targeting elected officials and government agencies will therefore be a likely tactic, technique and procedure (TTP) for such groups in the coming months.
- It is unlikely that the neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division (AWD) will seek to spark mass mobilisation or incite rioting; its members are most likely to carry out isolated attacks targeting government entities and critical infrastructure.
- There has been sustained activity among the ultra- and white-nationalist milieu in online forums; in response to record high migration to the US emanating from South and Central America, there has also been a growing number of incitements to commit violence against immigrants.
- Should any case against the former US president, Donald Trump, result in a conviction, there will possibly be a large-scale far-right mobilisation in solidarity with the former president, raising the possibility of rioting and violent clashes with the police.

### Total right- and left-wing incidents in the US (2017-2023)



Graph comparing rate of right- and left-wing incidents in the US between 2017 and 2023

## Context

The AWD was re-established in 2020 as the National Socialist Order (NSO). The UK government designated the movement as a terrorist group in April 2021. It is one of a growing number of white supremacist groups now ascribing to 'accelerationist' ideology, whose adherents purportedly work to bring about chaos and provoke a race war to trigger civilisational collapse. Its adherents also seek to expel or exterminate racial and religious minorities, and to exercise antisemitism. The AWD has said that other white supremacist groups are insufficiently extreme. Under a decentralised structure, its members are encouraged to carry out violent high-impact attacks as sole perpetrators or by co-operating as a small cell.

The AWD has increasingly demonstrated an interest in attacking critical infrastructure, in particular the electricity grid. On 6 February, the **US** Justice Department (DOJ) charged Brandon Russell, the founder of the group, with conspiracy to destroy an energy facility in Maryland after plotting with an accomplice to target five electricity substations in an attempt to cause chaos and destruction in the city of Baltimore (Maryland). The DOJ also confirmed the plot was racially motivated, but did not disclose further details. Media reports in April subsequently indicated that Russell was active within the telegram channels of the Australian affiliate of NSO and that he even circulated a manual on how to conduct electricity substation attacks.

Furthermore, in early July, the Royal Mounted **Canadian** Police (RCMP) stated that an individual in the capital Ottawa is likely to face charges related to terrorism for facilitating propaganda and recruitment videos on behalf of the AWD. The RCMP stated this case marks the first time a Canadian has been charged with terrorism and hate propaganda. Most recently, AWD members have circulated material instructing how to build a letter bomb on far-right online channels.

## Forecast

These developments underscore the persistent risk of cross-border co-operation within the neo-Nazi movement in North America, especially with regard to recruitment and TTPs. They also underscore the persistent impact of digital communication and online forums in fomenting violent terrorist plots (see THE EXTREME RIGHT CYBER ANGLE below), though it is possible that law enforcement agencies have been able to leverage online forums and closed groups to conduct surveillance and combat imminent threats to homeland security.

### ***White-nationalist forums will likely spur sole-perpetrator attacks, possibly against immigrant communities***

Several ultra- and white-nationalist groups have suggested carrying out attacks with improvised armed drones and small arms. The prevalence of such sentiment online underscores the risk of radicalisation and sole perpetrator attacks carried out by people who are not formally affiliated with any particular white supremacist group. In Dallas (Texas, **US**) in early May, a shooter killed eight people at a shopping mall before being shot by the police at the scene. Law enforcement stated that the shooter shared neo-Nazi ideology and disparaged racial minorities and women on alt-right social media platforms.

The attacker's internet search history reportedly revealed that he sought to target the most diverse Dallas suburb. During the attack, the shooter reportedly wore a patch bearing the slogan 'Right Wing Death Squad' – a moniker previously worn by leaders of the Proud Boys. Extreme, white supremacist rhetoric is likely to continue radicalising individuals, and to encourage them to conduct sole-perpetrator attacks with small arms fire and improvised tactics; places of worship, schools and populated public venues face sustained risks.

***Criminal cases against the former president will likely provoke calls to violence, though mass mobilisation is unlikely***

Donald Trump's indictment on 1 August following the Special Counsel's investigation into his conduct in the wake of the **US** 2020 election has prompted significant support for the former president and calls for violence. These are marked by acute anti-government sentiment among individuals who subscribe to ultra- and white-nationalist ideology. The various trials are highly likely to spark further inflammatory rhetoric which will possibly prompt sole-perpetrator attacks targeting government officials and entities, including the DOJ. This trend will likely continue through the 2024 presidential election. Should any case result in a conviction against Trump, there will possibly be a large-scale mobilisation in solidarity with the former president, raising the possibility of rioting and violent clashes with the police and counter-protesters.

The concurrent criminal cases against Trump have spurred online incitements to commit violence, with ultra-nationalist groups continuing to advocate for mass mobilisation in the style of the 6 January 2021 attack at the US Capitol. Related online discussions often take place on a website called 'The Donald', which was previously removed from two web hosts for violating content guidelines and terms of service. Notably, before Trump made an appearance at his first indictment in New York City in March, far-right groups called for their followers to block bridges in an attempt to besiege the city.

Prior to Trump's indictment, his supporters were promising 'another' 6 January incident to '[burn] DC to the ground'. However, no significant protest activity or unrest took place during his court appearance in the capital Washington DC on 3 August. This is likely due to their stated concern that the authorities are seeking to entrap Trump's supporters.

***Far-right activity will likely increasingly take place within local 'networks'***

Members of the far-right Patriot Front have increased propaganda and recruitment efforts in many regions of the **US**, including in Colorado, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Virginia, among others. The group is increasingly organising its operations and activities by regional chapters, which are referred to as 'networks'. Similarly, the umbrella White Lives Matter group has boosted its recruitment activities in **Canada**, particularly in British Columbia province, though its activities have remained low-level to date; it will likely focus on localised campaigns to distribute flyers and stickers.

There is also a growing trend of meet-ups and 'networking' events involving a range of local white-nationalist and/or neo-Nazi groups. Notably, a new group referred to as The Traditionalists emerged in Q2. So far, it has expressed violent, anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric online and engaged in recruitment efforts in several states while fraternising with other white-nationalist groups. The group has incited violence against drag queen story hours and has also demonstrated antisemitic sentiment; both issues typically characterise the broader ultra-/white-nationalist milieu. This underscores the proliferation of many smaller groups and local networks galvanised by a common far-right extremist agenda. Several have begun 'combat training' purportedly for the purpose of 'street-fighting' Black Americans. However, the degree to which this will be leveraged to carry out large-scale, real world violence remains to be seen.



## THE EXTREME RIGHT: EUROPE

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### Key points

- There has been a notable increase in the number of far-right groups emerging in **Austria** and **Germany** which deny the legitimacy of these states as federal republics; 'state denial' movements are a growing concern in Central Europe and the DACH region (Austria, Germany and **Switzerland**).
- Far-right mobilisation efforts are especially likely to increase across Central and Western Europe, posing possible physical security risks for the hotel and catering industries.
- The capabilities of far-right groups in Europe are limited compared to the generally robust state intelligence services; the overall threat posed by the far-right in Europe is therefore low.

### Context

The extremist threat posed by far-right state denial movements in Central and Western Europe was underscored in December 2022 when the **German** authorities arrested members of a far-right terrorist group who were plotting to overthrow the federal government. Meanwhile, there are indications that the broader far-right scene across Europe is becoming increasingly active in response to increased irregular migration.

### Forecast

***Anti-state, far-right extremism will likely continue to grow in the DACH region, though the capabilities of related groups will remain limited***

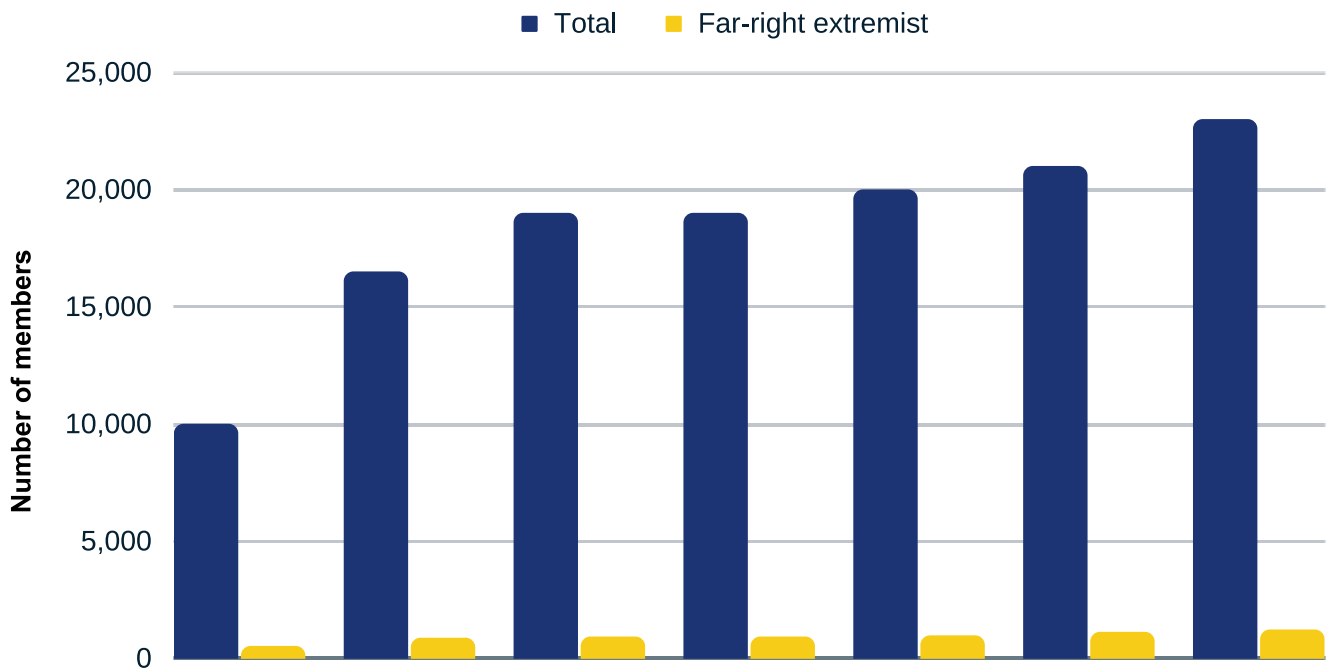
Between 2020 and 2022, Covid-19 restrictions in **Austria** and **Germany** facilitated the rapid growth of movements containing far-right elements fundamentally opposed to these federal republics. These movements have continued to grow. Developments in Q2 have underlined the physical security threats which they pose.

### Escalation indicators and triggers

- The number of far-right followers in the Reichsbürger movement continues to grow
- The number of politically motivated crimes by Reichsbürger movement members outside Bavaria increases
- Co-operation between 'state denial' movements in the DACH region increases

In **Germany**, the growth of the right-wing Reichsbürger (Citizens of the Reich) movement is a key concern for the authorities. Although only a small proportion of its adherents are classified as far-right, prejudices such as antisemitism and/or support for the Second and Third Reichs are common among these more hardline elements. Data released by the Office for Constitutional Protection (BfV) demonstrates that the number of far-right extremists in the Reichsbürger movement has more than doubled since the authorities began monitoring the group in 2016. Extremist Reichsbürger adherents will continue to pose a (limited) security threat, but mainly towards government personnel and state institutions.

## Expansion of the Reichsbürger movement



The total number of Reichsbürger followers expanded from around 10,000 to over 23,000 between 2016 and 2022; the number of far-right extremists more than doubled from around 500-600 to about 1,250 in the same period; source: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV)

However, extremists will possibly also pose a threat to energy assets. Followers of the United Patriots group were arrested in **Germany** in April 2022 for planning to attack electrical substations and power lines so as to trigger a civil war and/or create the conditions for 'Day X'. Extremists like the United Patriots believe that on Day X, an unspecified future date, the state will collapse and the far-right will step in to restore order. This notion is common among far-right extremists and relates to ideas around 'accelerationism' across Europe. It is possible that future coup plotters will attempt to attack energy infrastructure in order to trigger unrest and create what they think are the ideal conditions for bringing about this so-called Day X.

Among the individuals arrested in December 2022 were (then) current and former members of the **German** security forces; ammunition, weapons and military equipment were also seized, underscoring the potential (albeit limited) threat they pose. Details of the coup plot released by the Federal Court of Justice (BGH) in July revealed that a former member of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party led the plotters through the capital Berlin's government district to scope the area as part of a plan to storm the Bundestag. While the far-right infiltration of the security forces is not unique to Germany, numerous plots involving members of the German security forces have shown that it is more acute in that country by regional standards.

In **Austria**, far-right extremists opposed to the modern state are also a growing concern. In July, the authorities carried out raids against the radical right-wing Bundesstaats Preußen (Federal State of Prussia) movement, which typically tries to paralyse state institutions by filing baseless legal complaints. Although the group has proven less violent and extensive than the **German** Reichsbürger movement, we assess that both entities almost certainly co-operate and co-ordinate through established networks; this is a relatively common feature that defines far-right movements in both Austria and Germany.

Although far-right state deniers in **Switzerland** are much less common or dangerous, the Reichsbürger movement has possibly infiltrated eastern parts of the country so as to operate outside the purview of the **German** intelligence agencies. As Berlin intensifies its focus on the movement, an uptick in its followers emigrating to Switzerland is possible (though they will likely still focus their activities on Germany). Elsewhere, state deniers in the **Czech Republic** who regard themselves as part of the former Czechoslovakia are far less dangerous than their German counterparts. However, the attempted occupation of the Prague City Court in May has likely prompted the intelligence services to intensify their surveillance efforts.

### ***Far-right groups across Europe will continue to mobilise supporters in opposition to increased irregular migration***

Far-right groups across Europe will highly likely continue to try to mobilise supporters in opposition to irregular migration (which reached its highest level in H1 2023 since 2016). This assessment mirrors the pattern of the 2015-16 European migration crisis which fuelled a surge in violent far-right attacks in **Germany** and prompted the rise of far-right movements such as the pan-European Identitarians and the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamification of the Occident (PEGIDA). During the past two quarters there have been several notable far-right immigration-related protests; these events often entail physical risks for the hotel and catering sectors involved in the accommodation of asylum seekers.

#### **Escalation indicators and triggers**

- Irregular migration to Europe continues to increase
- Far-right actors increasingly exploit cases and/or accusations of immigrant violence
- A right-wing populist resurgence (coupled with a centre-right 'cordon sanitaire' around populist parties) fuels extremist movements

However, there are also indications that far-right actors in **Germany** are becoming increasingly aggressive in their TTPs. In late July, masked men (one of whom wore clothing displaying the imperial German flag) broke into a refugee hostel in Saxony where they attacked and injured a resident. Amid growing anti-immigrant sentiment among the extreme far-right, hotels and/or residential buildings perceived to be housing migrants and/or refugees will therefore remain possible targets of violent attacks in the coming quarters.

In **Ireland**, far-right activists set fire to a makeshift migrant camp in the capital Dublin in May following months of protests, some of which occurred outside Dublin Airport (DUB). In **France**, the mayor of Saint-Brévin-les-Pins (Pays de la Loire region) resigned in May following a far-right backlash against plans to move an asylum centre next to a primary school. The radical right-wing Reconquête party led protests against the plans for months; the mayor received death threats and his house was targeted in an arson attack, highly likely by far-right activists. These incidents point to the physical security risks facing officials involved in policymaking perceived to accommodate asylum seekers, as well as the incidental risks for bystanders in the vicinity of related gatherings.

In the **UK**, opposition to the housing of asylum seekers in hotels has continued to draw protests which are sometimes infiltrated or instigated by far-right groups such as Britain First. The Patriotic Alternative Group, which has previously targeted hotels, reportedly split in 2022, resulting in the emergence of what is possibly a more extreme group called Homeland.

In **Austria**, it is possible that the Identitarian movement (IBÖ) founded by one of Europe's most influential far-right figures, Martin Sellner, will experience a resurgence in support in the coming quarters. In July, IBÖ drew around 500 supporters to a 'population exchange' protest in the capital Vienna (though they were outnumbered by counter-demonstrators). Sellner and IBÖ will almost certainly work together in the coming weeks and months to encourage a resurgence of European far-right movements centred on opposition to immigration.

In **Germany**, protests against (and attacks targeting) refugee accommodation centres are likely to continue at a heightened rate for the rest of 2023. According to the federal government, there were at least 80 politically motivated attacks against refugee accommodation centres in H1 2023, most of which were carried out by suspected right-wing activists; this compares to 52 such crimes in H1 2022. As in the **UK**, far-right groups will continue to instigate and infiltrate protests that are often attended by ordinary citizens frustrated by the perceived impact of immigration on their local communities.

## THE CYBER ANGLE

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### Key points

- Although hacktivism operations are often conducted for political purposes, many far-right organisations' cyber capabilities remain relatively immature compared to far-left entities, such as the Anonymous collective (see THE EXTREME LEFT CYBER ANGLE above).
- Far-right groups mainly utilise the cyber space to recruit and radicalise individuals, as well as to spread rhetoric, communicate with each other and to organise events; it is also possible they will take advantage of the increased use of cryptocurrencies to finance their activities.
- While far-right groups' activities are typically physical in nature, such as protests, counter-protests and attacks (among others), their use of cyber to distribute propaganda and recruit new members will almost certainly remain a key TTP for the foreseeable future.

### Context

Far-right groups have utilised a variety of deep web platforms for the past several years, a trend which is ongoing. Due to being ostracised from more open social media platforms like Facebook and X/Twitter, these groups have migrated to channels such as Discord, Telegram, 4chan and Reddit, as well as gaming chat rooms. They also use decentralised platforms such as Mastodon to communicate, recruit, spread propaganda and organise legal (and illegal) activities. The ubiquitous nature of these online platforms enables groups and individuals to radicalise others at a global level, as netizens from around the world who share similar beliefs are able to come together via these forums.

### Cyber threat examples

The **German** far-right group 'Reconquista Germanica' utilised the closed messaging platform Discord to influence the 2017 German Bundestag election in favour of the right-wing populist AfD (see THE EXTREME

RIGHT: EUROPE above). It posted content at preset times to manipulate social media algorithms. It also exploited online platforms like YouTube to spread propaganda videos targeting political opponents. Similarly, a man from Ottawa (**Canada**) faced terrorism and hate crime charges in July after allegedly creating and distributing propaganda and recruitment videos for the neo-Nazi AWD (see THE EXTREME RIGHT: NORTH AMERICA above). This further highlights the critical role social media plays in distributing malign messaging, a trend which will almost certainly continue.

Far-right groups exploit a variety of emerging technologies to enable their physical activity. There is a realistic possibility that these groups will employ (or are already employing) artificial intelligence (AI) and deepfake technology to produce more realistic propaganda content, especially videos promulgating increasingly convincing misinformation and 'fake news' campaigns. While we cannot confirm the use of this TTP thus far, the accessibility of AI tools like ChatGPT means it is increasingly likely that far-right groups will employ such tools to augment the apparent authenticity of their propaganda, and thereby recruit would-be members with significantly greater ease.

The increased use of cryptocurrencies across the globe has elevated the possibility of far-right groups using decentralised currencies to fund their legal and illegal activities. In 2020, various jihadist groups financed their operations via cryptocurrencies; one group even allegedly posed as a charity on social media to attract Bitcoin donations. Many far-right groups do not trust centralised banks; cryptocurrencies therefore likely provide an attractive alternative financing solution. It is possible that far-right groups, like the aforementioned jihadist outfits, will increasingly use cryptocurrencies to finance their activities; the 'laundering' of funds via crypto exchanges will make tracing the origin of money and exposing extremists significantly more challenging.

## THE EXTREME RIGHT: THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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### Key points

- Far-right extremist groups and paramilitaries continue to play a significant role on both sides of the conflict, including in the recruitment of foreign volunteers.
- The war has provided far-right extremists ample opportunity to gain battlefield experience; existing connections to organised crime will likely drive weapons proliferation risks across Europe when the war ends or if it freezes.
- While transnational far-right networks will pose long-term radicalisation risks, pro-Russia far-right extremists currently present notable security threats across Europe.

### Context

Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of **Ukraine** in February 2022, the Donbas conflict was a major hub for far-right actors from both sides of the conflict, as well as further afield. The Ukrainian Azov Battalion and the **Russian** Imperial Movement (RIM) are two examples of prominent paramilitary entities which fought in the Donbas conflict and which maintain far-right, neo-Nazi, white supremacist, ultra-nationalist and/or neo-fascist affiliations. Both sides sought to leverage the conflict to attract foreign far-right fighters (to varying degrees of success). However, since February 2022, the war in Ukraine has influenced these and many other far-right entities, impacting how the wider transnational far-right movement conducts activity across Europe.

### ***Prominent far-right groups have been incorporated into the Ukrainian armed forces since 2014***

The Ukrainian Azov Battalion was originally founded as a volunteer militia by the white supremacist Andriy Biletsky in 2014; it was born out of the ultra-nationalist Patriot of Ukraine gang and the neo-Nazi Social National Assembly (SNA). Ukraine's Ministry of the Interior initially recognised the Azov Battalion by incorporating it into Ukraine's National Guard in November 2014; it has played a prominent role in the fighting and has since been renamed the Azov Regiment.

Given its connections with the wider far-right Azov movement, various international entities have sought to classify the regiment as an extremist organisation; Facebook designated it as a 'dangerous organisation' in 2016. However, efforts to lobby the **US** State Department to designate the regiment as a 'foreign terrorist organisation' failed in 2019, while Russia's full-scale invasion has further rehabilitated the outfit.

On 24 February, the day of the invasion, Facebook reversed its designation of the regiment; the **US** also subsequently lifted its 2015 ban on its armed forces supporting or training the regiment. While the invasion has (to an extent) rehabilitated the regiment, its neo-Nazi affiliations and its integration into the National Guard of Ukraine have featured heavily in Moscow's justifications for the 2022 invasion and its alleged aim to 'denazify' Ukraine. However, far-right paramilitaries are possibly more prominent on the Russian side.

### ***Far-right paramilitaries continue to play a key role in Russian recruitment efforts***

Russian far-right groups have been involved in the conflict in Ukraine since 2014; their role has continued to evolve since the full-scale invasion in 2022. Given the high attrition rate and its desire to avoid ordering another highly unpopular wave of mobilisation, the Kremlin will likely become more reliant on far-right recruitment efforts (alongside other crypto-mobilisation initiatives) to generate manpower for its attritional war in Ukraine.

The most notable Russian far-right groups include the Rusich group and RIM; the latter includes an armed branch, the Russian Imperial Legion (RIL). Since the beginning of the war, both groups have intensified the recruitment of volunteers and established recruitment centres and training camps near St Petersburg. In April 2020, the **US** State Department designated RIM as a Specially Designated Global terrorist entity, while the founders of the Rusich group were sanctioned in 2015 by **Canada**, the **EU** and the **UK**.

Unlike the Azov Regiment in Ukraine, RIM/RIL has a more complex relationship with the Russian state, given it has at times been openly critical of the government. Nevertheless, Moscow has tolerated RIM/RIL given the group has focused on deploying far-right fighters to the Donbas since 2014. Russia's initial leveraging of semi-independent militias in the Donbas has provided ample opportunity for far-right paramilitaries to operate in Ukraine. While the Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) has recently sought to centralise control over such organisations, various units retain strong links to RIM/RIL and wider neo-Nazi, ultra-nationalist and white supremacist movements – often with open support from the military.

### ***Ukrainian intelligence will continue to exploit anti-Kremlin far-right radicals***

In a reflection of the complex and split loyalties of the European far-right scene, pro-Ukrainian far-right extremists in Russia have also been active in the conflict. The Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK) is led by Denis Nikitin (real name Kapustin), a well-known neo-Nazi and prominent figure among the European transnational far-right. Although he was born in Russia, Nikitin has long maintained links with Ukraine's far-right; he reportedly played a prominent role in the Azov movement's international 'outreach' programmes.



Nikitin declared in May that the RDK would join forces with the Freedom of Russia Legion (LSR), another prominent Russian group with far-right connections. Their aim was to topple the Putin regime. Kyiv will likely continue to cultivate and exploit recruitment efforts by disaffected far-right extremists inside Russia. However, while they will serve a military and propaganda purpose during the war, such groups will compound existing radicalisation risks for the region, particularly when the war ends (or freezes) and fighters return to 'civilian' life.

***The war has allowed far-right groups to gain valuable combat experience, though it has also likely diluted some of the most radical units***

In February 2022, the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs expanded the Azov Regiment into a brigade, a move which almost certainly diluted the group's neo-Nazi component. The unit's size has likely varied since the beginning of the war (oscillating between 900 and 2500 personnel) and its far-right credentials have been openly challenged from within its own ranks. Yet even though the Azov Regiment's performance during the siege of Mariupol has been used by senior Azov members to downplay the group's historic neo-Nazi affiliations, it is clear that far-right extremists continue to fight in the unit, and are gaining notable combat experience.



Key assessments and the main illicit weapons markets in Ukraine before and after Russia's invasion; source: Global Initiative Against Organised Crime

In particular, Azov fighters will continue to gain proficiency with modern Western-made military equipment. Tweets in August 2022 relayed footage showing Azov fighters operating US-made FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank weaponry. In March 2022, UK parliamentary officials acknowledged that the Azov Regiment had access to British-made weapons. However, these officials downplayed the risk of weapons proliferation among Ukraine's far-right actors given the Ukrainian MoD's alleged oversight of the Azov Regiment.

However, the proliferation of weapons among the far-right remains a serious long-term risk for the wider European continent after the war ends or freezes. Numerous far-right groups on both sides retain deep connections to organised crime groups (OCGs); the war and its aftermath will provide widespread opportunities for these groups to fund their illicit activities and to traffic weapons to other far-right outfits across Europe, including those in **Austria** and **Germany** (see THE EXTREME RIGHT: EUROPE above).

### ***Radicalisation risks will remain high for foreign volunteers, driving security risks when they return home after the war ends or freezes***

Despite widespread recruitment efforts, the overall number of foreign far-right fighters in Ukraine almost certainly remains relatively low. An investigation by the New York Times in March assessed that there are as few as 1,500 foreign volunteers overall. While it is impossible to confirm what proportion of these volunteers can be designated as far-right extremists, the radicalisation risks are significant given the historic role of Ukrainian and Russian far-right groups in recruiting foreign fighters.

Both the Azov movement and RIM are among the most active far-right organisations to have cultivated an extensive international network, both before and following Russia's invasion. RIM operates a training base near St Petersburg, where far-right actors from across **Europe** and **North America** travel to receive weapons training and indoctrination. While the full-scale invasion has likely disrupted these networks, many international far-right movements are split between pro-Moscow and pro-Kyiv sympathies; efforts on both sides of the war to cultivate ties with European and North American far-right actors will remain a long-term security risk.

### ***Transnational far-right networks pose ongoing security risks beyond the battlefield***

These transnational far-right connections will drive hard security risks beyond the battlefield. For example, Anton Thulin, a **Swedish** national, was designated as a terrorist by the **US** government in 2022 due to his reported ties to RIM; the US has also placed sanctions on Stanislav Shevchuk, a RIM member reportedly based in Europe. Shevchuk travelled to the US in 2017 to forge ties between RIM and various US far-right groups.

Significantly, investigations into a spate of letter bombs in **Spain** in November and December 2022 revealed that Russian intelligence agencies highly likely ordered RIM members to work with their far-right European allies to conduct the bombing campaign. This is the most notable example of Russian-led far-right collaboration in Europe since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. It is also possible that Russian far-right actors and their **Bulgarian** sympathisers were involved in a spate of sabotage bombings in Bulgaria in 2023 targeting military-industrial sites supplying equipment to Ukraine. Growing indications of far-right collaboration will elevate credible security threats to Kyiv-allied entities across Europe in the short-to-medium term, even before the war ends and fighters return home.

**The World Risk Register**

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