



Analysis #16

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Manifestos Madness; The Manifesto Maketh the Man

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This brief will examine the surge in lone actor offenders communicating their grievances and ideology by way of online messaging and manifestos. The resurgence in contemporary manifestos conveying political or ideological rhetoric escalated after Anders Breivik's 1500-page tract was emailed and uploaded to YouTube, outlining his motivation for the Norway attacks that killed 77 people in 2011. Breivik's manifesto provided inspiration for countless other deadly terror attacks, including Tarrant's 2019 Christchurch Mosque shooting that was livestreamed and resulted in 51 casualties. The livestream was stylized using a helmet camera to depict the appearance of first-person shooter games, adding competitive elements to the lethality of copycat offenders. The publication of manifestos on mainstream and encrypted platforms became the exemplar for lone actors seeking not only to emulate these acts, but to surpass the acts of those they idolized. The discourse within these manifestos predominantly outlined racist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic and incel ideologies, with various other nationalistic and white supremacist narratives interwoven with personal grievances unique to each offender. Mass shooter manifestos and messaging have become symbols or communicative signifiers of ideological allegiance to the extreme-right. It is through these so-called manifestos that otherwise unknown individuals commit heinous acts, emulating those they idolised in the belief that they too shall be venerated, and, thus, the manifesto maketh the man.

The origins of the word manifesto can be traced back to 17th Century Italy, meaning a public statement or view,¹ written for the purpose of advancing a set of ideas, opinions or ideology.²

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1 BBC, "The Vocabularist: Where did the word 'manifesto' come from?", BBC news. 16th April, 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-3230>

2 Munro, A. "Manifesto", Encyclopedia Britannica, 25th November, 2019 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/manifesto> better reference - try propaganda and persuasion by Howlett in csu library or any text or similar

Historically these declarative documents have criticised the established political or social state of affairs and sought to inspire novel or fundamental societal change on behalf of the oppressed or unconventional non-conformist element.³ Manifestos the likes of Marx and Engel's 1848 'Communist Manifesto' and Lenin's 1901 'What is to be Done?' promoted communism as a means of abolishing capitalism and the class system. Hitler's 1924 autobiographical manifesto 'Mein Kampf' (My Struggle) promoted his anti-Semitic racist ideology and grievances, becoming the forerunner of the Nazi regime.⁴ The manifesto evolved from being a blueprint for social and political revolution to being an exploitive communicative propaganda strategy, aiming to gain personal notoriety and to justify and promote fringe ideologies. Ted Kaczynski, who infamously earned the moniker 'Unabomber' due to his mail bombs that killed 3 and injured 23 others between 1978 and 1996⁵, coerced the NY Times into publishing his 56-page manifesto with the threat of another attack should his demands not be met. The misogynistic and racially charged manifesto resonates with the perceived grievances of the contemporary extreme right milieu and served to express his anti-technological and environmental ideology, while also attempting to energise or radicalise like-minded individuals.⁶ Despite Kaczynski's letter bomb campaign lasting 18 years, the attacks alone had failed to effectively communicate and propagate his ideology. The public dissemination of his manifesto demonstrated the power of this communicative tool. As a result, Kaczynski's use of the media to disseminate his manifesto influenced the evolution and reliance on social media and mainstream news organisations in the contemporary era of western mass violence and extremism.

This paper will demonstrate how the distribution of extremist messaging and manifestos has come to act as a definitive component of contemporary terrorism, especially in the extreme right-wing milieu. Louis Beam's concept of the leaderless resistance calls for individuals to "take their cues from others who precede them",⁷ inspiring not only lone actor attacks, but providing a signature from which their ideological connections can be assessed on the basis of the existence of a manifesto. The real emergence of the contemporary manifesto can be attributed to Breivik's 1500-page manifesto '2083 – A European Declaration of Independence'. This proved to be instrumental as a prototype for extremist narratives published online by far-right lone actor offenders.⁸ A digital copy of the manifesto, containing a link to a 12-minute YouTube slideshow of the primary themes contained in the manifesto, was distributed by email to 1003 recipients in the UK and Europe 90 minutes prior to the Oslo attack. The 2019 Christchurch shooter sought to emulate the anti-immigration, anti-Islamic themes within his 'Great Replacement' manifesto, clearly meeting the criteria indicated by Berger for a manifesto as requiring "a clear statement of ideology".⁹

Those following in the wake of the deadly acts of terrorism committed in Norway and Christchurch sought not only to honour the acts of these terrorists, but to use violence and manifestos to achieve

3 Ibid

4 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum "Mein Kampf", Holocaust Encyclopedia <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/mein-kampf>

5 Barnett, Brett. "20 Years Later: A look back at the Unabomber Manifesto", Perspectives on Terrorism, Volume 9, Issue 6. <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2015/volume-6/5-20-years-later-a-look-back-at-the-unabomber-manifesto-by-brett-a.-barnett.pdf>

6 Ibid

7 Southern Poverty Law Centre, "Louis Beam", SPLC Southern Poverty Law Centre, Louis Beam | Southern Poverty Law Center (splcenter.org)

8 Taylor, M. "Breivik sent 'manifesto' to 250 UK contacts hours before Norway killings" The Guardian, 27th July 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/26/breivik-manifesto-email-uk-contacts>

9 Kirby, J. "The New Zealand shooter wrote a manifesto. An extremist expert explains what it means", Vox, 18th March 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2019/3/18/18267682/new-zealand-christchurch-shooter-manifesto-online-extremism>

the same notoriety. Media coverage of the November 22, 2022 mass shooting at a Virginia, USA, Walmart reported the shooter responsible for killing 6 people before taking his own life had left a manifesto on his phone in addition to a kill list found in his home.¹⁰ The so-called manifesto contained personal grievances regarding his workplace and colleagues, without any ideological statements or connections to previous ideologically related incidents. A colleague of the shooter who reported him previously commenting “if he ever got fired, he would retaliate and people would remember him.”¹¹ Other reports of the shooting more precisely refer to the communication found in his phone as a ‘note’ or ‘death note’.¹² Unlike other mass shootings and terrorist acts, the shooter did not post his communication online, with the self-titled “Death Note” found during a forensic analysis of the phone located at the scene.¹³

The manifesto moniker has become misused as a catch all term used to describe communications made by offenders in conjunction with actual or planned acts of mass violence and terrorism. Messages, memes or online posts are universally being referred to as manifestos, despite containing no ideological content or intent. The manifesto terminology has come to represent any message or communication associated with mass shootings or mass violence events. The signature messaging or manifestos that accompany these lethal attacks raise the profile of the incidents amongst other commonplace school shootings that are becoming a weekly occurrence across the USA. Contemporary manifestos (in the broadest sense of the term) serve as a signifier for the perpetrator’s ideological allegiance and motivation that are generalised under the right-wing banner, despite this becoming a catch all term applied to many non-jihadist violence. The manifesto in itself is a performative symbol, both in the embedded ideology and the strategic use of the online environment for widespread and live distribution. The use of livestream and video uploads to platforms like YouTube have made the manifesto and first-person communication become a pivotal manifestation in the enhanced digital tech and online space. The communicative piece aims to not only justify their radicalisation process and proclaimed motivations, but to highlight the perpetrators tactical implementation, target / location selection and weaponry.¹⁴

The manifesto became the signature of attacks loosely connected under the fluid extreme right ideology that comprises of anti-Semitic and misogynistic attitudes, holocaust denial and strong ties to online gaming.¹⁵ Anti-feminist, misogynistic and incel (involuntary celibate) ideologies have also demonstrated a strong connection to glorifying acts of other incels that produced self-titled manifestos and other online material.¹⁶

¹⁰ Kessler, B. “Shooter was ‘hunting’ specific colleagues in Walmart massacre”, New York Post, 24th November, 2022. <https://nypost.com/2022/11/24/walmart-shooter-andre-bing-was-hunting-colleagues-witness/>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Olson, E. “Virginia Walmart gunman left a ‘death note’ saying he felt harassed by co-workers”, NPR, 25th November, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/11/25/1139205402/virginia-walmart-shooting-andre-bing-death-note>

¹³ Hammond, S. “Chesapeake Police unveil manifesto note in Walmart mass Shooting.” 13Newsnow, 25th November, 2022. <https://www.13newsnow.com/article/news/crime/suspect-manifesto-note-chesapeake-mass-shooting-investigation/291-241098ee-342a-4238-bd43-2bb56083a0af>

¹⁴ Kupper, J. “Forensic Linguistic Assessment: Manifestos of Right-Wing Extremists.” Julia Kupper, 2020. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cec499f3c1faf0001ca94d1/t/60a2becf58c2ed6bdecfb6ca/1621278422378/Infographic_Comparison+of+Five+Manifestos_Julia+Kupper.pdf

¹⁵ Koehler, Daniel. “The Halle, Germany, Synagogue Attack and the Evolution of the Far Right Terror Threat”. CTC Sentinel. December 2019, Volume 12, Issue 11. The Halle, Germany, Synagogue Attack and the Evolution of the Far-Right Terror Threat – Combating Terrorism Center at West Point ([usma.edu](https://www.usma.edu))

¹⁶ Hoffman, B. Ware, J and Shapiro, E. “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. Vol 43, No. 7, 565 – 597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459>

The online environment and the idiosyncratic communities that honour and seek to replicate acts of violence have played a vital role in the popularity of producing manifestos and related forms of communication. The ease with which this material can be accessed and shared is unique to the contemporary era, however, traditional published formats such as 'Mein Kampf' continue to be published and distributed globally.

'Mein Kampf' was republished in an annotated version in Germany in 2016 for the first time since World War II, selling 24,000 copies and reaching the best seller list in seven weeks.^{17 18} The annotated version provided thousands of notations and commentary debunking the propaganda and falsehoods contained in Hitler's notorious manifesto.¹⁹ The book had previously been available internationally and various versions were available online, however, the copyright was owned by the Bavarian state, effectively banning its publication until the time the copyright expired.²⁰ Despite German efforts to ban Nazi paraphernalia and texts spreading anti-Semitic and racist ideology, the continued ability to access such material in the contemporary digital era demonstrates the limitations available to authorities to prevent access to these materials and the acts of mass violence that are inspired by these publications. New Zealand's swift enactment of terrorism laws in the wake of the Christchurch massacre included the banning of semi-automatic weapons and criminalising the possession of the shooter's manifesto and livestream of the terrorist attack.²¹

The online environment has played a significant role in the increase of attacks, the use of messaging to gain online and international notoriety and the escalation in the lethality of attacks. White Supremacist websites the likes of 'Stormfront' are responsible for inspiring racist, white nationalist hate crimes, with close to 100 murders connected to the website's users between 2010 and 2015.²² The online environment acts as an echo for extremist ideas amongst likeminded individuals and provides an expansive pool from which these people can be radicalised and encouraged to commit acts of violence. Manifestos and white supremacist material produced by the likes of Louis Beam and William Luther Pierce's Turner Diaries are venerated within these communities and act as instructional guides or "Handbook for White Victory".²³ This material is widely available online and has been responsible for inspiring terrorists the likes of Breivik, who in turn created his own white supremacist propaganda in the manifesto he uploaded online.

The reported 300,000 users comprised of an estimated 200,000 from the USA alone²⁴, are also heavily active on other forums including 4Chan, 8Chan, gaming site Twitch and social media sites Facebook and Twitter. An analysis of White Nationalist movements and themes of 'white genocide' and 'white race' have increased by 600% between 2012 and 2016 as indicated by Berger.²⁵

17 Range, P. "Hitler's racist manifesto is a bestseller in Germany now. That's actually good news." The Washington Post, 10th March, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/03/10/hitlers-mein-kampf-is-a-bestseller-in-germany-heres-why-thats-good-news/>

18 Breeden, A. "Hitler's 'Mein Kampf' gets New French Edition, with each lie Annotated", The New York Times, 2nd June, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/02/world/europe/france-hitler-mein-kampf.html>

19 Ibid

20 Range, P. "Hitler's racist manifesto is a bestseller in Germany now. That's actually good news." The Washington Post, 10th March, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/03/10/hitlers-mein-kampf-is-a-bestseller-in-germany-heres-why-thats-good-news/>

21 Van Sant, S. "Accused Shooter In New Zealand Mosque Attacks Charged with Terrorism", NPR, 21st May, 2019. <https://wamu.org/story/19/05/21/accused-shooter-in-new-zealand-mosque-attacks-charged-with-terrorism/>

22 Cohen, R. "Charleston Shooter's Manifesto Reveals Hate Group Helped Radicalize Him", SPLC Southern Law Centre, 20th June, 2015. <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2015/06/20/charleston-shooter-s-manifesto-reveals-hate-group-helped-radicalize-him>

23 Counter Extremism Project, "the Turner Diaries' Ties to Extremists", Counter Extremism Project, 2023. The Turner Diaries' Ties to extremists (counterextremism.com)

24 Cohen, R. "Charleston Shooter's Manifesto Reveals Hate Group Helped Radicalize Him", SPLC Southern Law Centre, 20th June, 2015. <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2015/06/20/charleston-shooter-s-manifesto-reveals-hate-group-helped-radicalize-him>

25 Berger, J.M. "Nazis vs ISI on Twitter: A Comparative study of white Nationalist and ISIS online Social Media Networks." George Washington University, 5th September, 2016. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Nazis%20v.%20ISIS.pdf>

The use of Facebook and Twitch livestreaming to portray attacks in First Person Shooter style associated with video games is another connection to these attacks that seek to replicate and surpass the 'kill score' of their predecessors. The Poway, California Synagogue shooter attempted to emulate the March 2019 Christchurch massacre in April 2019, armed with tactical vest and camera which failed to stream the attack.²⁶ Similarly, the German Halle Synagogue shooting in October 2019 was livestreamed on gaming site Twitch in an attack that killed 2 people.²⁷ The attack was described by Peter Neuman as being a deliberate attempt to attract an international audience, as both the livestream and his accompanying manifesto were in English despite this not being his first language.²⁸ The 11-page manifesto contained anti-Semitic, Jewish world conspiracy and Holocaust denial ideology, with the attack coinciding with Yom Kippur, regarded as the holiest day of Jewish faith.²⁹

The broad scope of ideologies encompassed under the extreme right banner has been embraced by perpetrators seeking notoriety in an otherwise anonymous online environment. The variety of individual grievances and bias against other minorities is amplified within the online echo chamber of equally isolated or aggrieved personalities within the gaming and Chan communities.

Conclusion

The term 'manifesto' has become a catch all term used by perpetrators and the media reporting any communications that accompany acts of mass violence and terrorism. Historical autobiographical and political manifestos published by revolutionaries and dictators made way for the Unabomber's 35,000-word manuscript, published by The Washington Post in 1995. These manifestos contained clear statements of ideology and views of the author published in traditional written statements, notwithstanding the Unabomber's manuscript being published under threat of further bombings. The online environment and technological advances proved critical in the resurgence of manifestos being published and shared online. Accessibility to online social media and gaming sites has enabled manifestos to become the pivotal element that facilitates the distribution piece of this performative act. The presence of these actual or communicative pieces represented as manifestos have increasingly become indicators of right-wing motivations since the contagion effect created by the 2011 Norway terrorist attacks. The reporting of these attacks by mainstream media provides the offenders with the publicity required to communicate personal grievances and ideology, and, in doing so, creates an identity which they have predominantly lacked outside of their online communities. This notoriety or infamy provides a persona forever linked to the loose group ideology, and through the manifesto, permanently places their name amongst the ranks of those who have been elevated to the rank of sainthood by so many likeminded individuals within online and gaming communities. In order to deny these individuals, the notoriety they seek, not only is it important to condemn their violent actions through responsible media reporting and oversight of online platforms that publish and disseminate these manifestos, but as a society reject these narratives and proactively address these perceived grievances and injustices to prevent these narratives becoming the new normal.

²⁶ Marantz, A. "The Poway Synagogue Shooting Follows an Unsettling New Script." The New Yorker, 29th April, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-poway-synagogue-shooting-follows-an-unsettling-new-script>

²⁷ Baumgartner, M. Becker, S et al. "Deadly attack Exposes Lapses in German Security Apparatus." Spiegel International. 11th October, 2019. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/far-right-terrorism-in-germany-shooting-exposes-lapses-in-security-apparatus-a-1291075.html>

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ BBC News, "Halle synagogue attack: Germany far-right gunman jailed for life", BBC News, 21st December, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55395682>

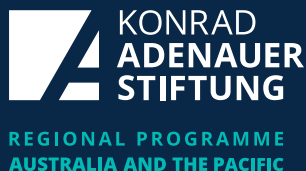
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Sgt Kristy Milligan VA (Ret) was a member of the New South Wales Police Force for 16 years until 2021. Kristy completed her Masters of Terrorism and Security Studies with Distinction through the Australian Graduate School of Policing, Charles Sturt University and will begin her PhD in 2022. Her PhD, with Victoria University, Melbourne, will focus on the evolution of symbolism in the XRW digital era. Her other areas of research include XRW idiosyncratic actors, including the Sovereign Citizen Movement, and symbolism in terrorist propaganda. Kristy has contributed to research on the exploitation of extremism during the Covid pandemic, and presented the paper's findings to the 2021 AVERT symposium. She presented to CSU's 2021 Threat Briefing series and the AFP's CT Investigators Program, discussing the role of symbolism in terrorism and extremism. She is combining her operational and academic knowledge to create professional development programs on terrorism and extremism. Kristy is currently involved in the development of technology designed to aide law enforcement and government agencies in combating terrorism and extremism.

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