

# Gender Research Unit



## YEAR IN REVIEW REPORT

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## About the Gender Research Unit

The CARR Gender Research Unit (GRU) aims to address and explore conceptual issues around gender, sexuality, and the far right. Using a variety of perspectives and approaches, members of the GRU interrogate the ways that gender, sexuality, race, and other markers of identity inform and affect far right ideologies and organizations. Members explore questions about the role of women in far right movements, interrogate how masculinity and femininity drive far right ideology, and incorporate historical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, linguistic, computational, and communication-focused perspectives in the analysis of the power of gender in far right recruitment, mobilization, coalition building, and persistence. The role of the GRU is to explore questions about the far right from a gender-focused lens, particularly in regard to its intersections with racial, national, and ethnic identity.

## About the CARR Year in Review Reports

The CARR Year in Review reports feature the latest research from CARR Fellows reflecting back on significant developments over the course of the year, specifically on topics pertaining to the individual Research Units. CARR Year in Review reports aim to provide a useful resource within a broader network of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers focusing on key dynamics of the radical right.

Managing Editor: Dr Eviane Leidig

## About the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right

The Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) is a UK-based research centre and pedagogical outreach initiative focused on the study and countering of radical right extremism and intersecting phenomena (e.g. populism, gender, antisemitism, and Islamophobia) that aims to support a variety of mainstream groups, from government agencies to grass-roots charities, through podcasts, commentary, research reports, presentations, media interviews, and commissioned work.

Website: [www.radicalrightanalysis.com](http://www.radicalrightanalysis.com)

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## **LETTER FROM THE GENDER RESEARCH UNIT HEAD**

It is my great pleasure to introduce the very first year in review report of the Gender Research Unit at the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right. As the founding fellow of the unit, I am elated that CARR is not only acknowledging, but prioritizing, a focus on the role of gender in extremism, particularly among the far right.

In recent years, concerns over the role of gender - especially masculinity - have emerged due to the increasing prevalence of “incel” and male supremacist violence. However, this hyperfocus on incels as a unique and distinct group apart from the larger history of misogynistic violence often misses the mark: misogyny is not a pathology, and has been a driving force of violence, organizing, and discourse among extremist groups for much longer than “incel” communities have been around. I am not arguing that incels are not misogynistic, that is far from the case. Rather, I am asserting the point that one does not need to be a self-identified incel in order to carry misogynistic beliefs and, more importantly, to engage in acts of violence as a result.

Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies* (1987) traces the relationship between misogyny, masculinity, and extreme nationalism of the Freikorps, whose ideology would inform the National Socialist party and continue to have reverberations in white supremacist movements. Of course, the misogyny that drove members of the Freikorp’s ideas about women, sex, and nationalism far preceded their existence, but in the 20th and 21st century, we continue to see how this ideology evolves, morphs, and spreads. In online communities, the prevalence of far right content produced by both men and women points to the ways that gender is not just a variable - it is the main organizing principle. Discourse about gender shapes far right ideology such as in the case of the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, anti-feminism, and violent ethnonationalism.

Gender is not just one point of analysis, but a fundamental building block of extremism. As our fellows’ scholarship shows, the global far right extends beyond white supremacy: in India, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, and many other places outside of the West, gender—in particular, masculinity—is crucial to their ideologies and is a main organizing principle. The goal of establishing and running this unit has always been one thing: to stress the importance of gender in far right studies, and to reveal the ways in which gender, misogyny, nationalism, femininity and masculinity have always been intertwined. From the history of the men’s rights movement, to examining incel

communities, to interrogating the role of gender in Hindu nationalism, and last, but not least, the popularity of “Trad Wife” influencers and the role of women in far right movements, the unit’s members explore the role of gender and the far right in a myriad of ways. In the following pages, we showcase the events, share our publications, and provide commentary that aims to make sense of this tumultuous year.



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## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE GENDER RESEARCH UNIT**

The CARR Gender Research Unit focuses on analyzing how gender and sexuality are implicated in radical right and extremist ideology. More specifically, we examine gender both as a demographic variable (e.g. women's and men's representation in radical right parties, women's and men's role in extremist movements), as well as an ideological component of extremist ideology. Focusing on not just the Anglophone world but bringing in international perspectives of anti-feminism, the role of gender in extremism, and the ways that misogynistic ideology is used as an organizing principle, the members of the GRU are committed to highlighting the ways that gender - and race - are crucial and critical lenses in understanding the far right.

The overarching themes that capture the unit's work are the following:

### **GENDERING EXTREMISM**

Women's participation in radical right parties and extremist movements has traditionally been overlooked by researchers who focus on the front faces of a party, or the more vocal and violent expressions of these movements. More recently, however, women's roles has emerged either in the form of support from the sidelines or in leadership positions. The shifting landscape of women's involvement in the radical right is important as it may indicate both a change in women's societal roles as well as a form of mainstreaming of radical right ideology. Given the rigidly sexist ideology and blatant racism harbored by these movements, women's commitment needs to be analyzed both as a paradox and as a reliable indicator of larger trends in how the radical right positions itself vis-à-vis minorities and marginalized groups. The Gender Research Unit is committed to understanding how shifts in the "gender gap" of women's participation in the radical right have implications for how we understand the construction of femininity and female empowerment.

### **EXPLORING THE MANOSPHERE**

While the larger framework of the radical right is steeped in racist ideology, ranging anywhere from xenophobia to ethnocentrism, white nationalism, white supremacy and Nazism, it is also apparent that these beliefs are closely associated with patriarchal dogmas. In fact, research shows that misogyny is a gateway to white supremacy, with men finding their way into extremism through their collective sense of aggrieved entitlement.

The Gender Research Unit is dedicated to exploring how the growth of the radical right parallels the expansion of the manosphere: incels, MGTOW (men going their own way), PUAs (pick-up artists), MRAs (Men’s Rights Activists) and red-pilled men. Though different in their organizational structure and choice of platform, these loosely associated communities share a pervasive conviction that feminism is the root of both their personal problems and societal ills. The manosphere’s virulent form of misogyny views women as manipulative, uncontrollable, and even predatory in accusations of sexual abuse. The GRU monitors how extremist violence and radical right manifestos exemplify forms of male supremacy that justify acts of terror through claims of victimization. To this end, the GRU maintains close collaboration with the newly founded [Institute for Research on Male Supremacism](#) which offers an intersectional perspective on how male supremacy is channeled through white supremacy, anti-Semitism, anti-gay, and anti-trans ideologies.

#### GENDERED BACKLASH

The Gender Research Unit follows global trends of the so called “anti-gender” campaigns which align ideologically with the manosphere and usually play out at the policy sphere with various levels of success. These campaigns have capitalized on the conservatism of the Christian Right and Hindu Right, and brought into the fold a variety of actors that view women’s reproductive rights, protections for violence against women, and LGBTQ+ minority rights as a threat to the institution of the family. The GRU follows both the institutionalization of these campaigns through conferences (for example, The World Congress of Families) and their exploitation by radical right organizations to garner support. Phenomena related to attacks against university Gender Studies programs, abortion rights, and valorization of “tradwives” are indications of how the concept of the “family” is weaponized by the radical right. The aim of the GRU is to demonstrate links between these ideologies and other forms of extremism.

#### COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

Finally, and most importantly, the members of the Gender Research Unit are committed to examining extremism through the lenses of gender, race, and nationalism to better comprehend and propose ways to engage in restorative justice. Not just focusing on our specific research projects, many of the fellows in the GRU are also committed to ensuring that institutions and organizations engage in best practices in protecting researchers -

particularly women and/or people of color within the research area. To this end, members of the GRU are also committed to examining the role of technology in spreading extremist ideology in regard to gender, supporting fellows when they are the victims of vicious harassment and attacks, and engaging in conversations that aim to better protect researchers who are doing dangerous work.

## **GENDER AND THE FAR RIGHT IN 2020**

This year, the ways that gender drove extremism was highly visible in the U.S. in anti-masking protests which equated masks to femininity, plots to kidnap the Governor of Michigan, and murders carried out by a young man in Wisconsin. In January, a massive rally was held in Richmond, Virginia, in support of gun rights - where many far-right militia groups made an appearance. In the U.S. in particular, guns (and more specifically, violence) and masculinity are closely tied together. In many other parts of the world, this relationship between violence, gender, and nationalism has asserted itself during the Hanau terrorist attack, the New Delhi terrorist attack, and the rise of the QAnon conspiracy theory.

The summer of 2020 was truly the summer of the hypervisibility of the far right militia and the presence of the so-called “Boogaloo Bois.” In addition to this, the Canadian government designated incels as a terrorist threat in May, and in July, a prominent men’s rights activist and lawyer named Roy Den Hollander murdered the son and husband of a prominent New Jersey Federal Judge, Esther Salas, before proceeding to kill himself. This year was not only violent, but deadly, and much of these violent fantasies rested on the role of the white man in preserving masculinity and whiteness. These are just a handful of events that occurred that stress the relationship between gender, masculinity, nationalism, and the far right.

But it was not only these spectacular acts of violence that drew our unit’s attention. Not long after the first waves of lockdowns were announced in the spring in an attempt to halt the spread of COVID-19, wellness and health influencers (overwhelmingly white women) latched on to the QAnon conspiracy theory and pushed the dangerous beliefs associated with it. In addition to this, the rush to nominate Amy Coney Barrett, a pro-life, conservative, “woman for Trump” to replace Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg after her death in September demonstrated the ways that womanhood and femininity are weaponized by the far right(?). Barrett’s appointment further spelled an existential threat to reproductive freedom for Americans, as well as to the LGBTQ community, especially concerning Barrett’s life-long association with a Catholic cult.

These are only a handful of significant events that we feel are exemplary of how gender drives the far right. Of course, there are many more, but in terms of their significance we focused on these. As many readers will notice, much of the focus is on the Anglophone world, especially the United States, and this is due in part to the location and

expertise of the fellows who compiled this report, as well as space constraints. Regardless, we believe that this timeline represents events that reveal how gender is used to enact violence in ways beyond the physical, and the need for focusing on the role of gender beyond mere explicit displays of misogyny (as is the case of hyperfocusing on incels).

## JANUARY

- Roughly 22,000 people descend on Richmond, the capital of the state of Virginia, to protest gun control proposals from the new Democratic majority. Many of the protestors come from places like Texas, Indiana, and other U.S. states to fight against what is perceived as excessive government control over the rights of gun owners and the Second Amendment. Protestors, who are armed, voice that they are “patriotic Americans.” Authorities in the region are concerned over the possibility of white supremacist/militia violence, following arrests of members of the white supremacist anti-government group, The Base, earlier in the month.
  - Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/20/us/virginia-gun-rally.html>

## FEBRUARY

- In New Delhi, India, a 17-year-old opens fire on a crowd, injuring one person who is taken to the hospital and treated. The attacker, who cannot be named due to being a minor per India’s laws, is found to be motivated by extreme Hindu nationalist ideology to engage in his livestream terrorist attack at Jamia Millia Islamia University during a peaceful march to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Mahatma Gandhi, who was assassinated by a right-wing extremist. The teenager’s social media presence indicates that he is indoctrinated by extreme Hindu nationalist political actors, who often target suburban and rural youth.
  - Source: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/jamia-millia-shootout-making-of-a-hindutva-terrorist/>
- In Hanau, Germany, a terrorist shooting spree leaves ten people killed and five injured after a far-right white supremacist targets two shisha bars in the city. The shooter, 43, and his mother are found dead at his apartment where he murdered her and then committed suicide. The perpetrator is not linked to any single terrorist organization or extremist group, but the location and the victims of the shootings,

as well as website evidence, point to a xenophobic, racist motivation. Many news outlets and online users are quick to attempt to name this an “incel” attack due to the shooter’s misogynistic web content, but there is no proof of a formal affiliation or even participation in these forums.

- Source:

<https://apnews.com/article/b5736c3dba1d677e89ef947bcf5ab213>

## MARCH

- The World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a global pandemic and countries around the world start seeing a spike in cases and deaths. Many countries (apart from China, where the pandemic is believed to have originated) at this time start enacting lockdown measures, giving rising concerns of the impact of quarantine and idleness in growing extremism.

- Sources:

- <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19--11-march-2020>
- <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTED-Paper%E2%80%9393-The-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-counter-terrorism-and-counteracting-violent-extremism.pdf>

## MARCH/APRIL

- Online wellness/health and beauty influencers, left without a source of income due to businesses and towns/cities shutting down, turn to shilling QAnon conspiracy theories to attract a wider audience. Many of these women, most of them white, peddle these conspiracy theories in lieu of other brand opportunities to attract a new audience and to generate income. This also sees the aggressive continued “mainstreaming” of the QAnon conspiracy - which had already been growing popular on Facebook and other social media sites. Christian “mommy” influencers in particular are embracing the conspiracy theory and spreading its message.

- Sources:

- <https://www.glossy.co/beauty/i-love-you-my-beautiful-qanon-when-lifestyle-influencers-also-peddle-conspiracy-theories/>

- <https://www.newsbreak.com/news/1541155222518/christian-mommy-influencer-peddling-qanon-coronavirus-conspiracies>
- Members of the male-only paramilitary Hindu nationalist organization RSS in India engage in policing activities, including their presence at manning check points along with police personnel, to ensure that citizens adhere to the government's lockdown orders. Although police deny that permission is granted to the RSS, it raises questions surrounding who has granted them authority to conduct checks.
  - Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/hyderabad/rss-had-no-permission-to-help-at-check-posts-telangana-police-clarify-as-photos-go-viral-6358231/>
- Armed protestors gather at the Michigan state capital of Lansing and storm the statehouse, demanding an end to the statewide lockdowns declared by Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Protestors, a majority of whom are white, demand to be allowed access into the Capitol chambers to “liberate” the state. Militias, Trump supporters, and groups like the Michigan Proud Boys attend these rallies which occur throughout the month of April and continue through the summer.
  - Sources:
    - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/17/far-right-coronavirus-protests-restrictions>
    - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52496514>

## MAY

- The Canadian government formally designates incels as a “terrorist threat,” following growing attacks in recent years where the perpetrators identify themselves with the notorious, extremely misogynistic online communities and movement. Specifically, this designation comes after a 17-year-old boy is charged with carrying out an incel terror attack after he fatally stabs a woman in February.
  - Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52733060>
- A 20-year-old man opens fire at an Arizona shopping mall, injuring three people. It is found that he is motivated by incel ideology (which he identifies himself with) and

the desire to inflict pain on (romantic) couples. The attacker livestreams the shooting on Snapchat, and claims to have been planning the attack for several years.

- Source: <https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/arizona-westgate-glendale-shooter-was-an-incel-who-targeted-couples-armando-hernandez-11471873>
- The trial begins for 22-year-old Philip Manshaus, the Norwegian terrorist who murdered his Chinese-born stepsister before opening fire on a mosque in Bærum the previous year. Manshaus claims that he feels “ashamed” that he did inflict more damage. Motivated by the white supremacist conspiracy theory of the “The Great Replacement” and ideas of “White Genocide,” Manshaus notes that he was inspired by a number of other white supremacist terrorists like Anders Breivik and the New Zealand Christchurch terror attacks.
  - Source: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/norway-terror-attack-philip-manshaus-oslo-mosque-trial-a9505176.html>

## JUNE

- During protests across the U.S. and the rest of the globe in response to the police murder of George Floyd and ongoing police brutality, the summer sees the popularization of the “Boogaloo Bois” and a variety of far-right militias. A California man, who associates himself with the Boogaloo Bois and is an Air Force sergeant, kills a federal officer during a Black Lives Matter protest in Oakland, California and is also found to have killed a sheriff’s deputy earlier in the month. The “Boogaloo,” code for a second civil war, aims to overthrow the U.S. government and kill law enforcement. Although some factions of the movement attempt to align themselves with Black Lives Matter to hide their overt racism, many members espouse far right, white supremacist beliefs and use the protests as opportunities to engage in violence.
  - Source: <https://www.salon.com/2020/06/17/far-right-boogaloo-boy-killed-officer-after-using-black-lives-matter-protest-as-cover-prosecutors/>

## JULY

- Roy Den Hollander, a prominent Men's Rights Activist and lawyer, poses as a FedEx deliveryman and murders the husband and son of New Jersey Federal Judge Esther Salas, whom Hollander has held a misogynistic grudge against for years. Hollander shoots and kills a rival men's rights lawyer a few days before in California, and is found dead after the New Jersey attack in New York after a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Hollander leaves behind a list of more than three dozen possible targets in the car where he is found, and in his final days uploads a 1,000+ page autobiography where he outlines his hatred of women, feminism, and his beliefs about gender discrimination against men. Hollander also notoriously wrote many blog posts where he calls for women to be killed, and is infamous for his lawsuits against nightclubs who host ladies' nights, as well as a lawsuit against Columbia University for having a women and gender studies program.
  - Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/26/nyregion/roy-den-hollander-judge.html>

## AUGUST

- QAnon street protests emerge in the United States and other countries, hiding behind already existing and well known slogans like "Save The Children", and claim that they are a movement against child trafficking. The movement is labeled a domestic terror threat by the FBI the previous year due to a number of high profile violent crimes. Protestors are careful not to explicitly mention QAnon, but signs with QAnon slogans are rampant at these events. The summer also witnesses attempts by QAnon groups to hijack the hashtag #SaveOurChildren in order to not just expose more people to the conspiracy, but also to avert a number of bans of QAnon content on major social media platforms.
  - Sources:
    - <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/qanon-looms-behind-nationwide-rallies-viral-hashtags-n1237722>
    - <https://www.vox.com/21436671/save-our-children-hashtag-qanon-pizzagate>

- A 17-year-old from Illinois, Kyle Rittenhouse, shoots and kills two protestors at a Black Lives Matter protest in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Rittenhouse travels from northern Illinois to Wisconsin to participate in calls to “protect” Kenosha following the police shooting of Jacob Blake. It is discovered that Rittenhouse was driven to Kenosha by his mother, who was aware of the fact that he was carrying an armed weapon bought for him by an older friend. Rittenhouse is found via his social media presence to be active on a number of militia Facebook groups, some affiliated with the Boogaloo Bois.
  - Sources:
    - <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/24/us/wisconsin-kenosha-shooting-lawsuit/index.html>
    - <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/28/us/kyle-rittenhouse-kenosha-shooting/index.html>

## SEPTEMBER

- By September, QAnon spreads globally, and is found to be merely a repackaging of anti-Semitic conspiracies that long pre-date the Internet. Specifically, the QAnon conspiracy is a repackaged digital-age version of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, originally published in Russia and adopted by the Third Reich (even being turned into a children’s book). The QAnon conspiracy and beliefs that children (specifically, white children) are being forced into sexual slavery by supposed Satan-worshipping high-profile Democrats is merely an update of the Protocols.
  - Source: <https://www.justsecurity.org/72339/qanon-is-a-nazi-cult-rebranded/>
- Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dies at the age of 87. A prolific champion of women’s rights, her dying wish is that her seat is not replaced until the new president takes office in January 2021. However, Republicans in the Senate rush to nominate and confirm Amy Coney Barrett - an anti-abortion, conservative, “Woman for Trump” who is discovered to be an active member in a Catholic cult that believes that women should submit to their husbands, even referring to women members as “handmaids.”
  - Sources:

- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/18/politics/ruth-bader-ginsburg-dead/index.html>
- [https://www.salon.com/2020/09/29/amy-coney-barrett-tied-to-far-right-religious-cult-that-believes-women-should-submit-to-husbands\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2020/09/29/amy-coney-barrett-tied-to-far-right-religious-cult-that-believes-women-should-submit-to-husbands_partner/)
- [https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/amy-coney-barrett-people-of-praise/2020/10/06/5f497d8c-0781-11eb-859b-f9c27abe638d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/amy-coney-barrett-people-of-praise/2020/10/06/5f497d8c-0781-11eb-859b-f9c27abe638d_story.html)

## OCTOBER

- At the end of September, Donald Trump tests positive for COVID-19. In October, he is hospitalized and treated, during which he insists on getting into a presidential motorcade to wave to people who come to Walter Reed Medical Center to show their support for the president. By doing so, he puts Secret Service members and other staff at even more unnecessary risk of catching the virus themselves. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the role of toxic masculinity and dangerous heteropatriarchy asserts itself with more men refusing to wear masks due to fears of appearing weak, and downplaying the threat of the virus itself. Indeed, Trump long relies on this rhetoric of being a “manly man,” painting himself as a sort of “alpha male.”
  - Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-leaves-hospital-amid-covid-treatment-revealing-dangers-toxic-masculinity-ncna1242066>
- The FBI arrests a militia group who call themselves the “Wolverine Watchmen”, who planned on deposing and kidnapping Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Members of this paramilitary group are present in the storming of the Michigan Capitol back in April, and it is discovered that many of them had connected via Facebook groups related to these protests and the protests themselves provided networking opportunities. The plan involves not just kidnapping the Governor (a woman and a Democrat), but other members of the government and law enforcement officials. As of writing, roughly 14 people have been charged for being involved in the plot.
  - Sources:

- <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/520189-fbi-says-it-foiled-plot-to-kidnap-michigan-governor>
  - [https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/2-suspects-in-michigan-governor-kidnap-plot-identified-in-pictures-of-heavily-armed-far-right-agitators-who-invaded-the-state-capitol-in-april/ar-BB19UGNn?ocid=msedgntp&fbclid=IwAR1WWTzDt70Fww-SFYINyKMYSaXkwV\\_66qH4RdrE0lrFzh0Gj-lw9NU2jw](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/2-suspects-in-michigan-governor-kidnap-plot-identified-in-pictures-of-heavily-armed-far-right-agitators-who-invaded-the-state-capitol-in-april/ar-BB19UGNn?ocid=msedgntp&fbclid=IwAR1WWTzDt70Fww-SFYINyKMYSaXkwV_66qH4RdrE0lrFzh0Gj-lw9NU2jw)
  - <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/15/us/michigan-governor-plot-charge/index.html>
- Amy Coney Barrett, in a show of extreme hypocrisy on part of the Congressional Republicans who vehemently opposed the confirmation of a Supreme Court Justice during the 2016 presidential election, is confirmed by the Senate as a Supreme Court Justice. Her confirmation signals a real threat to reproductive and LGBTQ rights, and ensures a conservative majority on the highest court in the United States.
    - Sources:
      - <https://reproductiverights.org/press-room/statement-amy-coney-barrett-nominated-supreme-court>
      - <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-54700307>

## NOVEMBER

- Joe Biden is elected president, which causes a massive disinformation and content moderation crisis around the U.S. election. Claims that there are a number of “fake” votes, a rigged election, among others, circulate in Facebook groups, Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms, while the companies attempt to stay ahead of the disinformation being spread from Donald Trump and his administration.
  - Sources:
    - <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/23/technology/election-misinformation.html>
    - <https://www.businessinsider.com/trumps-conservative-pundits-responsible-election-misinformation-avaaz-2020-11>

- A second (potentially) QAnon-linked murder is committed by a “QAMom.” A Kentucky woman murders a legal theorist she enlisted to help her regain custody of her daughters. Earlier in the year, she attempts to kidnap her daughters who are in the custody of their grandmother. She leads an organization that is a part of the “sovereign citizens” movement, whose core belief and organizing principle lies in the belief that they are free to choose which laws they obey and which to ignore. This movement overlaps frequently with QAnon and other anti-government conspiracy groups like paramilitary groups and militias, as well as the anti-vaxxing movement.
  - Source: <https://www.insider.com/kentucky-qanon-woman-arrested-allegedly-killing-legal-theorist-2020-11>

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE FIELD

The fellows of the Gender Research Unit contributed a significant amount of scholarship in 2020 exploring the relationship between gender, extremism, fascism, and beyond. Along with this, the fellows of the GRU provide recommendations below for further reading, particularly highlighting pieces we feel exemplify our core values and mission.

### PUBLICATIONS FROM GRU FELLOWS

- Miranda Christou
  - Christou, M. (2020). The Pride of Prejudice: The Radical Right and the LGBTQ Community. In: E. Leidig, ed., *Mainstreaming the Global Radical Right: CARR Yearbook 2019/2020*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 48-54.
  - Christou, M. (2020). Borders, National. In: D.T. Cook, ed., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 141-144.
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## **CONFERENCES/PROFESSIONAL EVENTS**

### CONFERENCE REPORT:

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COMPARATIVE FASCIST STUDIES ANNUAL CONVENTION, 25-27 SEPTEMBER 2020

Learn more about the conference at <http://comfas.org>

In its third year now, the annual convention of the International Association for Comparative Fascist Studies (COMFAS) is one of the highlights of the intellectual year for English-speaking scholars of fascism; historians, sociologists, and political scientists alike. The convention was held online this year but still managed to attract roughly fifty participants, ranging from seasoned scholars to those still early in their careers. Unusually for a conference on fascism, which is a notoriously male-dominated field, both of the keynote speakers were women. Ruth Wodak (University of Vienna) spoke about her new book, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far Right Populist Discourses* (Sage, 2020), and Julie Gottlieb about 'Seeing Through Women: Gender and British Fascism (in) 20/20', reminding us that women could, and still can be, just as racist and exclusionary as men, while at the same time being particularly vulnerable to abuse from opponents and 'friends' alike.

Three other papers focused specifically on gender and the radical right. Anca Diana Axinia (European University Institute) compared women's involvement in the interwar Romanian fascist movement the Legion of the Archangel Michael, where she noted that women's involvement and a lack of open misogyny still did not create gender equality, and the CasaPound movement in contemporary Italy, which faces quite different challenges when confronting women's roles in the twenty-first century than the Legion did in the interwar period. Analysing gender-based violence in Franco's Spain, Carol Scott (Independent Scholar) argued that both the state and the Catholic Church encouraged violence against women as a way of undoing the more progressive, gender-equal spirit of the Spanish Republic. Turning to contemporary Brazil, Fabio Gentile and Ellen Belém (Federal University of Ceará) examined public policies regarding women under Jair Bolsonaro's government. They noted how the rights of Brazilian women declined rapidly

under Bolsonaro in 2019, and emphasized the continuing struggle of feminist movements for gender equality.

#### CONFERENCE REPORT:

IRMS/CRWS JOINT CONFERENCE, 3-6 AUGUST 2020

Learn more about the conference at <https://crws.berkeley.edu/joint-conference-right-wing-studies-research-male-supremacism>

Learn more about the IRMS at <http://malesupremacism.org>

Learn more about the CRWS at <https://crws.berkeley.edu/>

The Center for Right Studies, housed in the Institute for Study of Societal Issues at UC Berkeley, along with the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism hosted the second annual joint conference - virtually - from August 3 to August 6. Although only in its second year, the conference was a huge success even despite the sudden move to a virtual format. Presenters at the joint conference ranged from scholars engaging in work interrogating gender ideology and LGBTQ rights; attitudes among women who participate in movements that are anti- abortion, immigration and Islam in the right-wing imagination, the role of myth in masculinity and male supremacist movements, and conflicting ideologies of nationalism. In addition to paper presentations, the conference featured sessions where researchers discussed the emotional toll of conducting these types of research, best practices for scholars researching supremacist groups, and the need for more public scholarship to provide critical information about racism, nationalism, and male supremacy and their role in driving politics - particularly in the context of the recent U.S. presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The conference's keynote speaker was Dr. Crystal Fleming, author of the bestselling book *How to Be Less Stupid About Race*. In her address, Dr. Fleming called upon the need for scholars to engage in work that reveals white supremacy and all of its machinations. Noting that scholarship concerning white supremacists often fails to critique the role of race and critical whiteness studies, Dr. Fleming asked the audience to interrogate "what if the far is near, what if extremism is the norm?" Foregrounding the fact that white supremacy is the norm, Dr. Fleming implored scholars in right-wing studies to

engage in work that disrupts white supremacy, and that white supremacy “resurges” rather than “rises.” The conference closed with a keynote panel featuring Dr. Terri Givens (CEO and Founder of the Center for Higher Education Leadership) and Dr. Lawrence Rosenthal (Chair of the Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies) who explored questions about the far right in 2020 and authoritarian mobilization in the United States and Europe. Foregrounding the anti-lockdown protests and Boogaloo Bois, to misogyny, racism, and anti-Semitism on college campuses, the panelists presented work on their previous research into these phenomena as well as their commentary on what they anticipate for the future.

In sum, the conference was a crucial and important event bringing together scholars working on these issues and providing opportunities for engaging in scholarship, community, and networking (through virtual happy hours and more). However, the conference may be in jeopardy due to UC Berkeley’s decision to close the Institute for the Study of Social Issues. To help them in their fight, visit <https://issi.berkeley.edu/save-issi>.

## **GRU DEEP DIVE**

### **TAKING A GENDERED APPROACH TO 2020: EXPLORING RADICAL RIGHT VIOLENCE IN KENOSHA, WISCONSIN**

*ASHLEY MATTHEIS AND SIMON PURDUE*

Gender, as a topic of discussion around terrorism and political violence, is often used to mean adding a focus on women while the role of men (or more properly masculinity) in relation to extremism is assumed to be already understood. These common assumptions about gender are also prevalent in discussions of the radical right and right-wing extremism (RR/RWE). However, gender as a concept encompasses multiple femininities and masculinities, as well as expressions between and beyond the feminine/masculine binary. Gender as a research analytic, then, acts as a framework for thinking about and understanding relations of power between people and groups. To use a gender lens to study extremism is to examine how gender as a construct is implicated in building, maintaining, and advancing specific relations of power, particularly relations which undergird systems of race, class, sexuality, citizenship, and other issues of import culturally, socially, politically, and economically.

To better understand how gender works as a construct and an analytic in this milieu, we explore the recent case of Kyle Rittenhouse, a young man who killed two Black Lives Matter protestors and severely injured a third protestor in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 25, 2020. The Rittenhouse case highlights several very important factors related to gender and politically-motivated violence. An essential aspect that the Rittenhouse case underscores is how ideal constructions of gender are complexly interrelated to constructions of race such that gendered discourses become a platform for mobilizing racialized socio-political divisions into action. This mobilization works along three primary vectors. First, this case shows how gender links RR/RWE specifically through ‘protective’ constructions of (white) male violence as a form of care. Second, it shows how the mobilization of gendered rhetoric acts as a powerful radicalizing pull towards violence. And third, it shows that gender is more complex than news or other reports suggest. Specifically, a focus on gender in this case highlights the need to take a more nuanced

approach to how and why masculinity works as a driver for violence, as well as how and why feminine support is integral to RR/RW extremism.

### **Understanding Violence as a form of Masculine “Care”**

These ongoing protests and counter-protests had mobilized a mixture of white men from a variety of conservative to extreme groups all summer long and in Kenosha, this had the worst possible outcome. Actors organized events in Kenosha on social media platforms, specifically Facebook, ensuring a broad reach across this range of political ideologies around the notion that the Kenosha community, specifically downtown businesses, must be “protected” from leftist and antifa “rioters”, which conservative and radical right media had been promoting for months. These “protectors” – i.e., groups of heavily armed white men – mobilized to do what the government ostensibly could not. Rittenhouse allegedly joined this “protection” mob because of his personal self-identification with police and as a supporter of the “blue lives matter” movement (showcased through his use of the “thin blue line” flag symbol and other social media posts). This masculinist response, the mobilization of white male power to (re)assert control over the “mob,” is not a new phenomenon. Masculinity, and before it “manliness”, have a long tradition of asserting power through control and dominance via discourses of protection in U.S. history. In fact, this is a prime component of “exceptional” American (white) masculinity.

The hegemonic vision of White American masculinity that remains so entrenched in more conservative and rural regions is a key driver of radicalization. This powerful motivating image of the protective provider and patriarch has been modernized to include long rifles and camo rather than a musket or a bow, and the modern militia represents the same thread of masculism that drove the Rooseveltian image of the self-sacrificing frontiersman. White American masculinity is built on a hero complex, and has consistently relied on the existence of enemies who are seen to present a threat to family, property, and nation. Membership in a militia has become the modern expression of this vision of White masculinity, and it is seen as an acceptable and accessible way to protect one’s family and fight against the forces of tyranny, communism, and most recently, Black Lives Matter. The context of a growing political divide and increasingly violent radicalism on the far-right has made this issue more dangerous than ever, and the rhetoric of the ‘treasonous and violent left’ being deployed by many in high office across the country—paired with an overly militarized society and the mainstreaming of violence—has

contributed to the dangerous and rapid radicalization of individuals like Rittenhouse towards deadly violence.

Female support for male violence in RR/RWE contexts often relies on women's furtherance of ideological positions, as well as their socio-political and economic support of white supremacist and radical right movements. These modes of feminine action are often overlooked because they seem, in comparison to violence, to be passive and non-threatening. They are, however, derived specifically from constructions of ideal White American femininity relative to their binary counterpart, White American masculinity (described above). Here the ideal construction of White American masculinity poses men's appropriate role in line with notions of benevolent paternalism, as that of the protector of weaker individuals, particularly women and children. Simultaneously, the ideal construction of White American femininity, in line with notions of sentimentalism, poses women's role as in need of protection, as well as supportive of her protector who is typically her husband, father, or brother. Within these constructions each gendered role performs a duty of care to the other reliant on the supposedly 'natural' capacities of men and women.

In the RR/RWE milieu, gender is viewed as naturally binary-comprised solely of men and women-and that in such a binary system each gender is defined against the other. Thus, in ideal constructions, men are defined by not being like women (feminine) and women are defined by not being like men (masculine). This does not mean that women do not play integral roles in fomenting, supporting, and spreading RR/RWE causes. It means that their roles are different in both tenor and temporality. Women are also radicalized by supposed "threats" to their way of life (property, family, nation), and they participate in events tied to violence even if they are not typically violent actors. Moreover, women keep the movement alive over time through their rearing of children, promotion of histories and heritage, and their preservation of groups/ideologies should male leaders and participants go to prison (e.g. David Lane's ability to publish material from prison because of his wife's support in creating and running the 14 Words press). Attending to women's roles in research is important and increasing. However, we also need to make the leap to study the interrelation between these gendered aspects.

## Gender as a Racialized Relation of Power

This year we have seen American (white) masculinity at its most toxic and, ultimately, its most dangerous. The fusion of martial masculinity and the self-sacrificing hero-complex of American individualism has created an environment in which some men now present a danger to themselves, to their communities, and to the stability of the United States. This danger is also supported and enabled by a traditionalist ideal of American (white) femininity which is posed as the precious and in need of protection—something worth sacrifice.

Whether it be armed militias storming statehouses and plotting to kidnap governors, radicalized teenagers ‘policing’ the streets with rifles, or even just men refusing to wear a mask because they believe it makes them look ‘weak’, hegemonic visions of American masculinity and femininity are pushing men towards situations in which their lives and the lives of others around them are in danger.

Furthermore, this year has highlighted in sharp relief the role that race and racism play in American masculinity and its implied appropriate form of femininity. The frontier mentality and rugged American individualism is inherently racialized, and is built on the idea of protecting whiteness from racialized ‘others’. The images of the gun-wielding McCloskeys ‘protecting’ their St. Louis mansion from a peaceful Black Lives Matter protest provides a stark visual representation of the racialized - and ultimately racist - legacy of the frontier mindset, and the celebration of the couple by the mainstream, let alone radical, right has demonstrated the allure of the violent defense of property in the American imagination. Equally, the defense and even canonization of Kyle Rittenhouse (and his mother) by many on the right—and the promotion of the false narrative that he was hired to protect property—further exemplifies the valorization of racist or ideological violence that finds its roots in this racialized and gendered view.

Rugged American masculinity is inextricably tied to American white supremacy, and consistently relies on both the normativity of whiteness and the othering of people of color. It is, moreover, impossible to maintain rugged American masculinity as a white gendered ideal without a complementary ideal construction of American white femininity. Such femininity is supportive of male strength and positioned as in need of protection. This traditionalist form of American (white) femininity is enacted by white women as proof of their support for white men and white supremacy. Whether protecting businesses, land, rights, or white women and children, the American masculinist mindset poses family,

property, race, and nation as the belongings of white men. As such, all come under the purview of white men's protective violence which has been so evident this year.

This year and these events highlight how crucial analyses of gender and power, inclusive of masculinity, femininity, and genders-beyond-the-binary, are for nuanced studies of radical right politics and right-wing extremism. Understanding how constructions of gender shape daily life and practice, particularly in both enacting and enabling violence, is urgent. And, last but not least, it is essential to explore how researchers', practitioners', and policymakers' beliefs about gender - our own gender biases - have and continue to impact how we see, or rather, do not see gender and gendered roles as primary components of extremist violence.