



ISSUE BRIEF

Combating Youth Radicalization

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Cover Image: Associated Press

In Southport, England, a 17-year-old killer described by classmates as a “ticking timebomb” launched a stabbing attack at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class, murdering three girls aged between six and nine.¹ His attack was meticulous and bloodthirsty, with the dead victims suffering over 200 stab wounds, and the attacker returned multiple times to ensure the wounds were fatal.² In Zurich, Switzerland, a 15-year-old gravely wounded an Orthodox Jewish man in a stabbing attack, while calling for “battle against the Jews.”³ In Sydney, Australia, a 14-year-old stabbed a University of Sydney student, having been investigated the year before for planning a “Christchurch-style” terrorist attack.⁴

The teenagers, all of whom carried out their attacks in 2024, are part of a global rise of child-led violent extremism that has left counterterrorism practitioners and scholars alike reeling. In October 2024, the Five Eyes

intelligence alliance, comprised of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, released a rare joint report, finding that “A minor can have significant influence within extremist contexts, including undertaking or supporting others to conduct violent extremist acts.”⁵ The United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate similarly warned a year later that “Terrorists’ sophisticated recruitment strategies represent an urgent challenge for Member States from a security and a child protection perspective.”⁶ In a report published in 2023, analysts at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found that youth were playing a growing role across extremist ideologies, as well as violent movements lacking a clear ideological direction.⁷ Another report published the same year by scholars Hannah Rose and Gina Vale at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation similarly noted that “extremist children have proven to be of significant concern in the evolving terrorism threat landscape.”⁸ Meanwhile, a headline

1 Josh Halliday, Hannah Al-Othman, Jason Burke, Vikram Dodd, and Jamie Grierson, “Axel Rudakubana: a ‘ticking timebomb’ who murdered three girls in Southport,” *Guardian*, January 20, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jan/20/axel-rudakubana-a-ticking-timebomb-who-murdered-three-girls-in-southport>.

2 Hollie Bone, “I was in court for Axel Rudakubana sentencing - there are things you can never unsee,” *Mirror*, January 23, 2025, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/i-court-axel-rudakubana-sentencing-34541935>.

3 Jamey Keaten, “Teen suspect in stabbing of Jewish man in Zurich expressed solidarity with Islamic State group,” *Associated Press*, March 4, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/orthodox-jewish-stabbing-switzerland-islamic-state-zurich-a4b8bb5ceb66b6d2efcf2b4a7e9237f0>.

4 Sally Rawsthorne, Clare Sibthorpe, Jessica McSweeney, and Kate Aubusson, “Accused Sydney uni attacker allegedly previously planned terrorist attack,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 2, 2024, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/major-police-operation-one-injured-at-university-of-sydney-20240702-p5jqdl.html>.

5 “Young people and violent extremism: a call for collective action,” *Five Eyes Insights*, October 2024, <https://www.asio.gov.au/system/files/2024-12/Young%20people%20and%20violent%20extremism%20-%20a%20call%20for%20collective%20action.pdf>.

6 “Growing alarm as Terrorist exploitation of children rapidly evolves, outpacing Member State responses,” United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, October 2025, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil.ctc/files/trends_alert_-_children_youth_exploitation_-_2025.pdf.

7 Isabel Jones, Jakob Guhl, Jacob Davey, and Moustafa Ayad, *Young guns: Understanding a new generation of extremist radicalization in the United States* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2023).

8 Hannah Rose and Gina Vale, *Childhood Innocence?: Mapping Trends in Teenage Terrorism Offenders* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2023). See also Gina Vale and Hannah Rose, “Firm Convictions?: Unpicking Framings of

in the *Wall Street Journal* last May declared that “Teenage Terrorists Are a Growing Threat to Europe’s Security,” while a somewhat sensationalist *Telegraph* article that January warned about “The terrifying rise of child terrorists in the UK – and why a ‘successful’ attack looks inevitable.”⁹

Without either a centralized clearinghouse for terrorism-related data or even uniform definitions of “youth,” “terrorism,” or “extremism,” we are left to collate sporadic data to paint a more detailed picture of the scale of the problem. According to Olivier Christen, the French national anti-terrorism prosecutor, “his unit handed terror-related preliminary charges to just two minors in 2022.¹⁰ That number leapt to 15 in 2023 and again [in 2024], to 19.” Ken McCallum, Director General of the United Kingdom’s MI5, reported in October 2024 that 13 percent of his organization’s counterterrorism cases involved minors, “a threefold increase in the last three years,” also reporting that the cases skewed towards the “extreme right wing.”¹¹ Another senior British coun-

Child Terrorism Offenders,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 37, no. 7 (2025), pp. 927-944.

9 Sune Engel Rasmussen, “Teenage Terrorists Are a Growing Threat to Europe’s Security,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 4, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/world/europe/teenage-terrorists-are-a-growing-threat-to-europes-security-78f3c54b>; and George Chesterton, “The terrifying rise of child terrorists in the UK – and why a ‘successful’ attack looks inevitable,” *Telegraph*, January 10, 2025, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/01/10/the-shocking-rise-of-child-terrorists-in-the-uk/>.

10 John Leicester, “Via porn, gore and ultra-violence, extremist groups are sinking hooks online into the very young,” *Associated Press*, April 13, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/technology-parenting-terror-islamic-state-police-security-attacks-4888bab2d10502edadf787d419d45b5b>.

11 Dan Sabbagh, “MI5 chief: UK facing growing threat from Islamic State, Russia and Iran,” *Guardian*, October 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/oct/08/mi5-chief-uk-facing-growing-threat-from-islamic-state-russia-and-iran>.

terterrorism official told *The Telegraph* that “Minors made up a fifth of our arrests last year – that’s four times what it was a decade ago.”¹² The 42 arrests of those 17 and under in the 12 months leading up to June 2025 were a record high.¹³ The director general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) called the data in his country “shocking” and “sobering,” while in Canada, 70 percent of recent deradicalization referrals were minors, with the average age being 13-14.¹⁴ Importantly, youth radicalization is not a problem unique to one region or one ideology. As terrorism scholar Julie Chernov Hwang warns, “Online radicalization of youth is a problem with global reach.”¹⁵

In some cases, youth have proven themselves vulnerable to manipulation and

12 Chesterton, “The terrifying rise of child terrorists in the UK.”

13 “Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search, Great Britain, quarterly update to June 2025,” *GOV.UK*, September 11, 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-tact-2000-to-june-2025/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-and-subsequent-legislation-arrests-outcomes-and-stop-and-search-great-britain-quarterly-u>.

14 Karen Middleton, “AFP and Asio warn of ‘shocking’ numbers of teens in terrorism cases,” *Guardian*, December 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/dec/06/two-australian-teens-convicted-under-counter-terrorism-laws-as-afp-and-asio-warn-of-early-signs-of-radicalisation>; and Mike Hager, “RCMP charge Montreal minor with terrorism offences involving Islamic State,” *Globe and Mail*, August 20, 2025, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-montreal-minor-terrorism-charges-islamic-state-rcmp/>.

15 Julie Chernov Hwang, “The Online Radicalization of Youth Remains a Growing Problem Worldwide,” *Soufan Center*, September 9, 2025, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-september-9/>. For more on the longer history of terrorist recruitment of children, see Mia Bloom and John Horgan, *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

coercion by both state and non-state actors. In Sweden, for instance, a modern form of irregular warfare has descended on city streets, with Iran deputizing Swedish teenagers to commit crimes against its enemies, safe in the knowledge that youths will be treated more leniently by the justice system. According to a CNN study, “The number of youths in Sweden suspected of weapons offenses rose seven-fold in a decade.”¹⁶ Russian intelligence has recruited European teenagers through Telegram to conduct various “state interference” operations (a 17-year-old Dutch suspect was arrested for espionage while he was doing his homework).¹⁷ In Brazil, teens were recruited on social media sites to conduct a terrorist attack on a Lady Gaga concert on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁸

Yet more concerning, cases also appear to be trending younger.¹⁹ In Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police last year warned that online extremist networks were targeting children as young as 8,²⁰ while the

International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in the Hague found that “In Europe, from 20 to 30 percent of the counterterrorism workload now involves minors as young as 12 and 13.”²¹ In Britain, “Every year, nearly 300 children who are 10 or younger are referred to Prevent.”²² In Wisconsin, a 12-year-old associated with a nihilist Telegram chat calling itself “Suicide Hill” was arrested for arson after setting fire to several cars.²³ There may also be a broader trend of youngsters growing increasingly confident in deploying violence, even outside ideologies. In Massachusetts, for instance, two churches were set on fire in September. Both arsonists were under 18, one as young as 12.²⁴ In New Jersey, a 17-year-old was arrested after allegedly mowing down two young girls in his Jeep. The killer had stalked one of the victims and dismissively referred to the killings as a “hoopla” in a livestream the next day.²⁵ And in Seminole County, FL, two girls

16 Pallabi Munsif, Katie Polglase, and Eleanor Stubbs, “Recruited by gangs, exploited by Iran,” *CNN*, April 7, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2025/world/iran-israel-swedish-teenagers-shadow-war-intl-invs/>.

17 Caroline Hawley and Anna Lamche, “Children at risk of being recruited by hostile states, police warn,” *BBC*, July 15, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dgd217glveo>; and Jacqueline Howard, “Two Dutch teenagers arrested in spying case linked to Russia,” *BBC*, September 26, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj1wy3eexyo>.

18 David Nemer and Arthur Coelho Bezerra, “Lady Gaga bomb plot: Thwarted plan lifts veil on the gamification of hate and gendered nature of online radicalization,” *The Conversation*, May 14, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/lady-gaga-bomb-plot-thwarted-plan-lifts-veil-on-the-gamification-of-hate-and-gendered-nature-of-online-radicalization-256199>.

19 Thomas Renard, “Adolescent Radicalisation: It’s Not Just on Netflix,” *European Commission*, April 29, 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/home/items/880571/en>.

20 Karyn Mulcahy, “Police warn of online network targeting children as young as 8 for radicalization,

sexortion and self-harm,” *CTV News*, March 31, 2025, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/edmonton/article/police-warn-of-online-network-targeting-children-as-young-as-8-for-radicalization-sexortion-and-self-harm/>.

21 Pranav Baskar, “How Hate Groups and Terrorists Use Gaming Platforms to Recruit Young Children,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/11/world/europe/online-extremism-gaming-children.html>.

22 Jason Farrell, “How Prevent is tackling young extremism 20 years after the 7/7 bombings,” *Sky News*, July 6, 2025, <https://news.sky.com/story/how-prevent-is-tackling-young-extremism-20-years-after-the-7-7-bombings-13392335>.

23 Michael Corech, “A 12-Year-Old Boy’s Arson Arrest May Be Linked to a Global Terror Network,” *Vice News*, July 22, 2025, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/telegram-extremism-arson-attack/>.

24 Matt Schooley and Logan Hall, “2 young suspects accused of setting separate fires at Massachusetts churches,” *CBS News*, September 29, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/marblehead-massachusetts-church-fires/>.

25 Jeff Goldman and Katie Kausch, “N.J. teen accused of killing 2 girls hosted 22-minute YouTube livestream the next day,” *NJ.com*, October 2, 2025, <https://>

— aged 14 and 15 — were caught laughing in the back of a police cruiser over their plan to murder a classmate and drink his blood. “This is such a bonding experience. I love this,” one commented.²⁶

The rising alarm among counterterrorism professionals is due in no small part to the fact that youth radicalization renders obsolete many of the traditional, kinetic counterterrorism measures — which might crudely be summarized as “kill or capture” — that defined the “war on terror” years.²⁷ Accordingly, counterterrorism practitioners have reacted with a whack-a-mole approach, without equivalent longer-term, political measures to address the crisis. With social media now entrenched fully as the front-line of the extremist threat and artificial intelligence offering new tools to a host of anti-democratic actors, this issue will likely only escalate. This Issue Brief, therefore, seeks not only to understand the causes behind the rise in youth-led violent extremism but to advance actionable and realistic policy solutions.

YOUTH RADICALIZATION: A FIVE-ALARM COUNTER- TERRORISM FIRE

A close study of cases like the Southport stabbing reveals at least three reasons behind the dramatic rise in youth radical-

www.nj.com/union/2025/10/nj-teen-accused-of-killing-2-girls-hosted-22-minute-youtube-livestream-the-next-day.html.

26 Valerie Boey, “Teen girls seen laughing in back of police car after alleged attempt to murder classmate, drink his blood,” *WDBJ7*, March 12, 2026, <https://www.wdbj7.com/2026/03/12/teen-girls-seen-laughing-back-police-car-after-alleged-attempt-murder-classmate-drink-his-blood/>.

27 See, for example, Daniel Klaidman, *Kill or Capture: The War on Terror and the Soul of the Obama Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

ization, each of which is interconnected. Firstly, any analysis of this challenging issue must begin with the revolutionary and intersectional role played by social media. The digital forum, which has eviscerated geographical barriers between extremist groups and movements and their potential recruits, has propelled violent extremists across the ideological spectrum, epitomized both in the Islamic State’s thunderous rise to prominence in the Levant in the mid-2010s and the rise of far-right lone-actor terrorists from Norway to New Zealand.

The pivotal role of social media is supported by research showing, perhaps unsurprisingly, that more time spent online correlates with a greater likelihood of exposure to extremist content.²⁸ Very simply, greater proximity to the grand political debates of the day — as well as their attendant disinformation and conspiracy theories — lubricate the radicalization process. One meta-analysis on juvenile radicalization published in the academic journal *Aggression and Violent Behavior* found that “participating in legal, non-violent activism acts is the strongest risk factor for radicalization.”²⁹ Indeed, beyond violent extremism, youth are also helping drive the resurgence of populist and anti-democratic movements across the Western world.³⁰ This dynamic can be seen

28 Matthew Costello, Rebecca Barrett-Fox, Colin Bernatzky, James Hawdon, and Kelly Mendes, “Predictors of Viewing Online Extremism Among America’s Youth,” *Youth & Society* 52, no. 5 (2020), pp. 710-727.

29 Julie Emmelkamp, Jessica J. Asscher, Inge B. Wissink, and Geert Jan J.M. Stams, “Risk factors for (violent) radicalization in juveniles: A multi-level meta-analysis,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 55 (November-December 2020), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178920301932#s0095>.

30 Paul Hockenos, “Europe’s Youth Are Fueling the Far Right,” *Foreign Policy*, May 13, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/13/europe-eu-elections-youth-far-right-populism/>.

in the fact that multiple different ideologies have benefited from social media. In their UK-specific assessment, Rose and Vale, for instance, found that “Two clear waves of child terrorism offending can be identified. The first, dominated by Islamist cases, runs concurrently with the peak of Islamic State’s territorial ‘caliphate’ until its collapse in 2018. The second wave predominantly comprises extreme-right cases, emerging in 2018 in the context of post-National Action and the decentralisation of extreme-right online networks.”³¹

But modern features of social media platforms particularly augment and accelerate this process. For instance, social media algorithms serve to direct users towards content that is more likely to maximize screen time and therefore company profits.³² Amplified content is often more shocking or upsetting, nudging users into deeper rabbit holes. For instance, a recent study by scholars at University College London found “a fourfold increase in the level of misogynistic content in the ‘For You’ page of TikTok accounts over just five days on the platform, in an algorithmic modelling study.”³³ Indeed, certain social media sites have long known that their recommendation algorithms direct users engaging with relatively benign content towards extreme material.³⁴ Furthermore,

encrypted and anonymized chatrooms facilitate radicalization and mobilization, building a culture of secrecy and proving particularly powerful in advancing operational goals, from communications to attack planning.³⁵

Social media platforms, and especially the conspiracy theories they harbor, also offer a sense of independence, authority, and discovery to young people. “It wasn’t ‘The Man’ telling me these things, and I liked that,” Christopher Cook, an Ohio teenager who was prosecuted for a terrorist plot against power stations, told journalists.³⁶ The terrorist was first drawn into white supremacy at 13, although “radicalization intensified as he ventured deeper into these online worlds.” For others, social media echo chambers often resemble black holes, where members harass and villainize those who dare to seek other outlets. “If you ever talk about trying to improve yourself or to ask a girl out, they will lash out and tell you it’s not worth it,” one former incel reflected.³⁷ The incel movement, which rails

31 Rose and Vale, *Childhood Innocence?*, p. i.

32 Cecilia Polizzi, “The Feed That Shapes Us: Extremism and Adolescence in the Age of Algorithms,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, December 12, 2025, <https://gnet-research.org/2025/12/12/the-feed-that-shapes-us-extremism-and-adolescence-in-the-age-of-algorithms/>.

33 “Social media algorithms amplify misogynistic content to teens,” *UCL News*, February 5, 2024, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/feb/social-media-algorithms-amplify-misogynistic-content-teens>.

34 Brandy Zadrozny, “‘Carol’s Journey’: What Facebook knew about how it radicalized users,” *NBC News*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/facebook-knew-radicalized-users-rcna3581>. See also Kali Hays, Nardine Saad, and

Regan Morris, “Campaigners welcome Meta and YouTube’s defeat in landmark social media addiction trial,” *BBC*, March 26, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c747x7gz249o>.

35 See, for example, “Report: Terrorist Use of End-to-End Encryption - Insights from a Year of Multi-Stakeholder Discussion,” *Tech Against Terrorism*, January 11, 2023, <https://techagainstterrorism.org/news/2023/01/11/terrorist-use-of-end-to-end-encryption-insights-from-a-year-of-multi-stakeholder-discussion>; and Robert Graham, “How Terrorists Use Encryption,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 6 (June 2016), pp. 20-25.

36 Andy Downing and Joel Oliphint, “White Power Outage: Inside a Hilliard Teen’s Fascist Terror Plot to Attack the Power Grid,” *Columbus Monthly*, May 21, 2024, <https://www.columbusmonthly.com/story/life-style/features/2024/05/21/inside-a-hilliard-teen-terror-plot-to-attack-the-us-power-grid/73781671007/>.

37 Julie Jargon and Ben Fritz, “How Two Young Men Got Pulled Into Internet Darkness, and How They Got Out,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 28, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/tech/how-two-young-men-got-pulled-into-internet-darkness-and-how-they-got->

against sexually active women and men who they perceive deny them access to a sexual marketplace, has long epitomized the very online organizing of modern extremist communities.³⁸

Youth radicalization has additionally been driven by a macabre process called gamification, where both extremist ideology and terrorist action adopt elements of video game culture.³⁹ From the platforms on which radicalization takes place (the May 2022 Buffalo shooter kept a diary on Discord and livestreamed his attack on Twitch, both gaming platforms), to the language used to denigrate outgroups, to terrorist livestreams that mimic first-person shoot-em-up video games, video gaming culture and imagery permeate extremist spaces, providing a

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38 For more, see Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware, and Ezra Shapiro, "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 7 (2020), pp. 565-587.

39 For more on the role of video games in radicalization among young extremists, see, for example, Linda Schlegel and Rachel Kowert, *Gaming and Extremism: The Radicalization of Digital Playgrounds* (Routledge, 2024); Jessica White, Claudia Wallner, Galen Lamphere-Englund, Love Frankie, Rachel Kowert, Linda Schlegel, Ashton Kingdon, Alexandra Phelan, Alex Newhouse, Gonzalo Saiz, and Petra Regeni, *Radicalization through Gaming: The Role of Gendered Social Identity* (London: RUSI, 2024); Linda Schlegel, Constantin Winkler, and Lars Wiegold, "Youth Radicalization in the Gaming Sphere: An Exploration of Identity-Based Hate and Extremist Content on Roblox," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, October 28, 2025, <https://gnet-research.org/2025/10/28/youth-radicalisation-in-the-gaming-sphere-an-exploration-of-identity-based-hate-and-extremist-content-on-roblox/>; and Jade Hutchinson, Ruxandra Mihaela Gheorghe, David Yuzva Clement, Kenton Bell, Lorraine Kellum, Michaela Rana, Alex Shuttleworth, Stephanie Scott-Smith, "'Play as a Nazi prison guard': childhood and adolescent exposure to online extremist materials in online gaming environments," *Frontiers in Psychology* (2026), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12920570/>.

sense of familiarity and demystification to newcomers. In fact, whereas online radicalization has traditionally taken place on larger social media platforms, today, smaller gaming platforms like Roblox and Discord play an equally significant role.⁴⁰ In one particularly grim case, an 18-year-old school shooter who killed eight people at a school in Tumbler Ridge, Canada, had in fact created a mall shooting simulation in Roblox.⁴¹ In addition, white supremacist terrorists have long graded their attacks by "high scores," the number of fatalities indicating a more successful attack.⁴² The nascent True Crime Community (TCC), which glorifies school shooters and often seeks to emulate them, similarly celebrates higher death tolls. As scholars Peter Smith, Cat Cadenhead, and Clara Broekaert note, "each TCC-linked violent attack prompts a new wave of fandom content and engagement, which in turn further fuels the legend of TCC, spurring on people seeking to participate, mimic, and expand it."⁴³ The violence takes on a memetic quality, "whereby perpetrators appropriate the aesthetics and methodologies of notorious Western attackers through online

40 Baskar, "How Hate Groups and Terrorists Use Gaming Platforms to Recruit Young Children."

41 Emanuel Maiberg and Matthew Gault, "Tumbler Ridge Shooter Created Mall Shooting Simulator in Roblox," 404 Media, February 12, 2026, <https://www.404media.co/tumbler-ridge-shooter-created-mall-shooting-simulator-in-roblox/>.

42 Graham Macklin, "The El Paso Terrorist Attack: The Chain Reaction of Global Right-Wing Terror," *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 11 (December 2019), pp. 1-9. See also Mark Brown, "Boy planning terrorist acts wanted 'white supremacist utopia', Leeds court told," *Guardian*, January 13, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/jan/13/boy-planning-terrorist-acts-wanted-white-supremacist-utopia-leeds-court-told>.

43 Peter Smith, Cat Cadenhead, and Clara Broekaert, "True Crime Community: Understanding the Depths of Digital Fandom and Performative Violence," *CTC Sentinel* 19, no. 2 (February 2026), pp. 17-26.

exposure rather than ideological commitment,” dramatically lowering the ideological and operational barriers to extremist action.⁴⁴

David Nemer and Arthur Coelho Bezerra explained the mechanics of the gamified radicalization journey in *The Conversation* in the aftermath of the Lady Gaga plot in Brazil, warning that “gamification turns engagement into competition and hate speech into a playful challenge,” making “the entrance into extremism more palatable for young, impressionable people by masking violence behind seemingly harmless mechanics.”⁴⁵ The Belgian State Security Service (VSSE) described the speed of radicalization in this new environment as “nothing short of meteoric.”⁴⁶

Secondly, social media has driven the democratization of extremism and terrorism, resulting in both more individualistic action

and ideology — a dynamic that has proven particularly appealing and accessible for youth. Beginning in the mid-2010s, terrorism across the ideological spectrum began to be driven by lone actors, who most often were radicalized online and outside formal organizations, although a significant offline component to radicalization still existed. Feeding the individualization of extremist violence further, these online actors often shared manifestos or other forms of media with their digital communities. As the lone actor’s predominance on the terrorism stage has deepened, terrorist targeting has meanwhile grown more chaotic and idiosyncratic. As was exemplified by the attacks in Southport, Zurich, and Sydney, highlighted in the introduction, teenage terrorists almost uniformly select soft targets, so termed because of the absence of any real protection. When schools and places of worship (not to mention supermarkets or busy streets) are considered legitimate destinations for violent extremist outbursts, an almost endless array of possible targets emerges, stretching defensive postures impossibly thin. The idiosyncratic targeting was underscored by a 17-year-old Indonesian linked to the True Crime Community who injured 97 people in a bombing attack at a mosque linked to his high school last November.⁴⁷ As the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found, “Lacking supremacist or political goals, those inspired by subcultures of nihilistic violence often choose to attack targets with aesthetic or personal, rather than political or ideological, meaning.”⁴⁸ With young terrorists, especially given their

44 Munira Mustaffa, “Cosplaying Columbine: How Memetic Violence Transformed Southeast Asia’s Extremist Threat,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, December 22, 2025, <https://gnet-research.org/2025/12/22/cosplaying-columbine-how-memetic-violence-transformed-south-east-asias-extremist-threat/>. See also Joe Ondrak and Laura Vitelli, “Participatory Memetic Violence: Legend, Ostension, and Ideologically Diffuse Violence,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, December 18, 2025, <https://gnet-research.org/2025/12/18/participatory-memetic-violence-legend-ostension-and-ideologically-diffuse-violence/>; and Cathrine Thorleifsson, “From cyberfascism to terrorism: On 4chan/pol/ culture and the transnational production of memetic violence,” *Nations and Nationalism* 28, no. 1 (2022), pp. 286-301.

45 Nemer and Coelho Bezerra, “Lady Gaga bomb plot.”

46 Leicester, “Via porn, gore and ultra-violence, extremist groups are sinking hooks.” See also Cecilia Polizzi, “Youth Radicalization: A New Frontier in Terrorism and Security,” in Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2025: Measuring The Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney, March 2025).

47 Smith, Cadenhead, and Broekaert, “True Crime Community.”

48 “Terror without ideology? The rise of nihilistic violence,” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*, May 8, 2025, <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/terror-without-ideology-the-rise-of-nihilistic-violence-an-isd-investigation/>.

expedited radicalization timelines, accessibility to weapons of violence is key.

But the leaderless model is now extending to ideology, too. To simplify a complex phenomenon, extremist ideologies are becoming less coherent, offering a far larger menu of radicalization for a potentially vulnerable youth. Summarizing a development they term “composite violent extremism,” a team of scholars led by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross identified a wave of violence “encompassing attackers who amalgamate disparate beliefs, grievances, and ideological fragments into their worldviews.”⁴⁹ In other words, extremist violence is now perpetrated by a range of teenagers with varying degrees of ideological commitment, from uncompromising radicals to those driven by the violence as an end goal itself, like Southport killer Axel Rudakubana. Describing his radicalization process, the 19-year-old perpetrator of a shooting targeting a gay bar in Bratislava, Slovakia, who began radicalizing at age 15, wrote, “I was a kid cruising the Internet, picking up shit along the way and throwing it away just as quickly.” “As for my ideology, it’s hard to say,” that gunman additionally mused in his manifesto, an extensive screed against Jews and the gay community.⁵⁰ “I can’t tell you my motivations because I have too many reasons in my head,” one French minor, who killed a classmate in April 2025

49 Daveed Gartenstein Ross and Thomas Plant, “An Evolving Threat Landscape: Composite Violent Extremism and Prevention Efforts,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, September 20, 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/09/20/an-evolving-threat-landscape-composite-violent-extremism-and-prevention-efforts/>. See also Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Andrew Zammit, Emelie Chace-Donahue, and Madison Urban, “Composite Violent Extremism: Conceptualizing Attackers Who Increasingly Challenge Traditional Categories of Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 48, no. 12 (2025), pp. 1343-1369.

50 Jacob Ware and Cleary Waldo, “Ideological Leaderless Resistance in the Digital Age,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, October 26, 2022, <https://gnet-research.org/2022/10/26/ideological-leaderless-resistance-in-the-digital-age/>.

after stabbing her 57 times, similarly reflected.⁵¹ As Cleary Waldo and I argued in October 2022, in the wake of the Bratislava shooting, “The modern phenomenon of ideological convergence, however, has harnessed the power of a broader swath of the population’s grievances and biases, transcending the importance of any particular ‘brand’ of hate—and thus inspiring more widespread violence under a broader umbrella.”⁵²

Within this chaotic ideological space, misogyny and male supremacy have emerged as prominent connectors and ideological throughlines.⁵³ The incel movement crystallized misogyny into a coherent movement, but more recently, popular social media influencers like Andrew Tate have built their success on the glorification of rape and celebration of control over women, ensnaring young men into a paradoxical worldview in which men are both victims of a patriarchy but also entitled to sexual dominance (this phenomenon was the central theme of the Netflix phenomenon *Adolescence*, which portrayed a 13-year-old boy murdering a schoolmate, seemingly driven by male supremacist ideology).⁵⁴ Today, misogyny manifests itself most clearly in the 764 network,

51 “Nantes Knife Attack: Bespoke Extremism Requires New Strategies for Ideological Analysis,” *Revontulet*, May 1, 2025, <https://revontulet.co/insights/nantes-knife-attack-bespoke-extremism-requires-new-strategies-for-ideological-analysis>.

52 Ware and Waldo, “Ideological Leaderless Resistance in the Digital Age.”

53 For more, see Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Man Up: The New Misogyny and the Rise of Violent Extremism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025).

54 See, for example, Orly Bareket and Susan T. Fiske, “A Tale of Two Sexisms: Hostility Dominates Women, and Benevolence Guards Men’s Status,” *Society for Personality and Social Psychology*, March 22, 2024, <https://spsp.org/news/character-and-context-blog/bareket-fiske-hostile-benevolent-sexism-male-dominance>; and Astrid Young, “Australia must stop overlooking misogynistic youth extremism,” *ASPI Strategist*, May 15, 2025, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-must-stop-overlooking-misogynistic-youth-extremism/>.

a nihilist and largely neo-Nazi network that ritually sexually exploits its victims, who mostly constitute young girls.⁵⁵

If there is a silver lining to the youth radicalization trend, attack plots devised by minors are less likely to be successful. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace's invaluable annual report on terrorism trends, "plots involving young people tend to be less operationally secure." The report adds that "Minors were more likely to reveal their intentions through careless communication, online activity that attracted the attention of authorities, or behaviour changes noticed by family members, teachers, or peers."⁵⁶

Thirdly, as ideology grows less crystallized, personal grievances — to include mental illness, a history of suffering isolation and bullying, violence or other trauma in the home, romantic frustration, and substance abuse — have risen to the fore. Violent extremists today often display — or even themselves cite — personal factors (or what one team of researchers called "a high sense of relative disadvantage and social deprivation"⁵⁷) alongside their ideological

positions. The story of the teenaged American loner or misfit who launches an act of revenge against his peers is, of course, far from new, but such pathways to violence are increasingly playing roles in more ideological terrorism as well, suggesting a "newly emergent hinterland in which the sadistic mass killer and terrorist meet."⁵⁸ For instance, a Scottish teen with an autism diagnosis planned a terrorist attack on a mosque in Scotland, claiming to have begun radicalizing at age 13 and that he was prepared to "die for my land."⁵⁹ The prevalence of personal vulnerabilities likely contributes to quickened radicalization timelines, with scholars S. Barracosa and A. Cherney finding that "youth radicalisation can occur quickly over short periods of time, particularly when life-course vulnerabilities such as high levels of social isolation and clinical complexity interact with extremist content and associations online."⁶⁰ Heralding rocky waters ahead, research by Sarah L. Carthy and Bart Schuurman also reveals that adverse

Samuel Tomczyk, "Radicalization in Adolescence: the Identification of Vulnerable Groups," *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 28 (2022), pp. 177–201.

58 Simon Cottee, "Why Starmer is right about terrorism: The lines have been blurred for decades," *UnHerd*, March 14, 2025, <https://unherd.com/2025/03/why-starmer-is-right-about-terrorism/?edition=us>.

59 Connor Gillies, "Hitler-inspired boy planned terror attack at mosque, and pretended to convert to Islam to gain access," *Sky News*, August 11, 2025, <https://news.sky.com/story/greenock-mosque-where-teenager-planned-massacre-says-it-acted-as-security-wake-up-call-13409526>. For more on "psychopathology and extremism among young people," see Guillaume Bronsard, Adrian Cherney, and Floris Vermeulen, "Radicalization Among Adolescents," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9125312/>.

60 S. Barracosa and A. Cherney, "An integrated model for youth radicalisation: examining the impact of life-course and situational factors," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2025), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19434472.2025.2554777#abstract>.

55 See, for example, Mackenzie B. Hart, "'Less than a speck of dirt': exploring the manifestos of nihilistic violent extremists," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2026), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19434472.2026.2633403>; Ethel Quayle, Stuart Allardyce, Marcella Leonard, Bethany Jennings, and Robert Richardson, "Extremism and online child sexual abuse: a commentary," *Journal of Sexual Aggression* (2026), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552600.2025.2602791#abstract>; and Marc-André Argentino, Barrett Gay, and Matt Bastin, "Nihilism and Terror: How M.K.Y. Is Redefining Terrorism, Recruitment, and Mass Violence," *CTC Sentinel* 17, no. 8 (September 2024), pp. 22–29.

56 Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the impact of terrorism* (Sydney, March 2026).

57 Carl Philipp Schröder, Jannik Bruns, Lena Lehmann, Laura-Romina Goede, Thomas Bliesener, and

childhood experiences can contribute to radicalization and violent mobilization well into adulthood.⁶¹

Again, romantic, and often very sexual, grievances are central, and in what might be termed an “incel effect” or “school shooter effect,” sexual frustration often meshes smoothly with ideologies emphasizing white or male victimhood.⁶² In a manifesto previewing a January school shooting perpetrated by a 17-year-old Black white supremacist (not a typo) and incel in Nashville, the gunman fused the personal and political by declaring: “Kids nowadays are taught about lies like the Holocaust. Show them what a real schoolcaust looks like.”⁶³ The coronavirus pandemic contributed to this development, driving a new wave of online radicalization, as was succinctly summarized by 18-year-old Buffalo terrorist Peyton Gendron, whose manifesto explained the genesis of his radicalization: “I started browsing 4chan in May 2020 after extreme boredom, remember this was during the outbreak of covid.”⁶⁴ Childhood trauma has also more than likely contributed to the cycle of radicalization that sustains the Islamic State in detention camps in Syria, in-

cluding in the case of a 14-year-old “emir.”⁶⁵ Elsewhere, two minors were arrested for plotting violent attacks as part of a Discord group called the Caliphate Revivalists.⁶⁶ The group spanned across three continents.

Driven by their personal grievances, extremists often cite loneliness and the sense of community offered by extremist spaces as being central to their radicalization.⁶⁷ Community and belonging played a central role in Christopher Cook’s radicalization, for instance, his mother telling the court that “he chose a very dark path” in search of acceptance.⁶⁸ A police photograph of Cook’s home during a search of his residence revealed the poisoned innocence that characterizes youth radicalization — a copy of James Mason’s *SIEGE* sat alongside Lego boxes, a copy of Urban Dictionary, and a stuffed animal.⁶⁹ A similar photo appeared in an exhibit accompanying a detention memo for Nikita Casap, a 17-year-old white supremacist who murdered his parents as part of a plot to assassinate President Trump in order to start a “race war.” In Casap’s case, copies of *SIEGE* and *The Turner Diaries* were found in a dresser alongside a pink-haired troll doll.⁷⁰

61 Sarah L. Carthy and Bart Schuurman, “Adverse childhood experiences, education, and involvement in terrorist violence: Examining mediation and moderation,” *Journal of School Psychology* 106 (October 2024), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022440524000682>.

62 Adam Lankford and Jason R. Silva, “Sexually frustrated mass shooters: A study of perpetrators, profiles, behaviors, and victims,” *Homicide Studies: An Interdisciplinary & International Journal* 28, no. 2 (2024), pp. 196-219.

63 Colin P. Clarke and Jacob Ware, “The Nashville Attack Displayed Several Hallmarks of Modern Terrorism,” *Soufan Center*, January 30, 2025, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-january-30/>.

64 Payton Gendron, “What you need to know,” May 2022. See also Dino Krause, “Europe’s teenage jihadists,” *DIIS*, January 29, 2025, <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/europes-teenage-jihadists>.

65 Anthony Loyd, “The Isis ‘emir’, 14, who rules Syria detention camp by fear,” *Times*, March 27, 2024, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/article/the-isis-emir-14-who-rules-syria-detention-camp-by-fear-9js-d0rxtj?region=global>.

66 Thomas Brewster, “ISIS Kids Planned A Violent ‘Caliphate Revival’ On Discord,” *Forbes*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/the-wire-tap/2025/09/23/isis-teens-planned-a-violent-caliphate-revival-on-discord/>.

67 See, for example, Grace Snell, “Drawn to darkness,” *WORLD*, March 1, 2026, <https://wng.org/articles/drawn-to-darkness-1770260848>.

68 Downing and Oliphint, “White Power Outage.”

69 Downing and Oliphint, “White Power Outage.”

70 Peter Beck and Seamus Hughes, “#133: International Hitmen and Transnational Drug Dealers,” *Court Watch*, July 4, 2025, <https://www.courtwatch.news/p/133-international-hitmen-and-transnational-drug-dealers>. *SIEGE* and *The Turner Diaries* are both important works in the far-right canon.

(In another remarkable incident, Colombian senator Miguel Uribe was assassinated in the summer of 2025 by a 15-year-old contract killer who was wearing Looney Tunes-themed jeans.⁷¹) As scholar of the far-right Craig A. Johnson has explained, ideologies like fascism “appeal” to young people in both senses of the word, both reaching out to youth to leverage and weaponize their apparent innocence, and proving uniquely attractive as transgressive rebellion.⁷²

Concerningly, such vulnerabilities have also been cited as mitigating factors by defense attorneys. “I met a suffering adolescent, not a militant preparing for action,” the lawyer for an 18-year-old who had become the first person in France to be charged with terrorism for incel-related violent planning said.⁷³ Similar excuses were used by the attorney for a 14-year-old boy arrested for plotting a terrorist attack on a mall in Kelso, WA: “A kid who’s isolated just moved to a new school. He’s getting bullied, struggling with his social group, and turns to the internet,” the lawyer insisted.⁷⁴ According to scholars

Tanya Mehra and Merlina Herbach, courts in Europe “consider age, mental health, and rehabilitation efforts as mitigating factors.”⁷⁵ Such lines of defense, while quite possibly fair and valid, further muddy the waters, making it even more difficult for counterterrorism practitioners and analysts to assess real threats from the mere ramblings of desperate youth. In one case in England, even a prosecutor admitted that a 19-year-old white supremacist’s expansive and ambitious plotting appeared “far-fetched and childish.”⁷⁶

The predominance of personal grievances in extremist cases has given rise to new categorizations. The United Kingdom’s prevention program, *Prevent*, began categorizing cases as “Vulnerability present but no ideology or CT risk” in 2020. An extension of a prior category termed “mixed, unstable, and unclear,” the new category would encompass a plurality of cases through March 2024.⁷⁷ And in the United States, the FBI recently added a new category of extremist cases, employing the term “nihilistic violent extremists” to denote “individuals who engage in criminal conduct within the

71 Juan Pablo Penagos Ramírez, “Gustavo Petro solicita ayuda a Estados Unidos en investigación de atentado contra el senador Miguel Uribe Turbay,” *El Tiempo*, June 10, 2025, <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/gobierno/colombia-solicita-ayuda-a-ee-uu-en-investigacion-del-atentado-contra-miguel-uribe-anuncia-presidente-petro-3462132>.

72 “How to Talk to Your Son About Fascism: A Book Talk with Craig Johnson,” *Program on Extremism at George Washington University*, May 13, 2025, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/how-talk-your-son-about-fascism>.

73 “France charges 18-year-old for planning attacks in first ‘Incel’ terrorism case,” *RFI*, July 2, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20250702-france-charges-18-year-old-for-planning-attacks-in-first-incele-terrorism-case>.

74 “Teen accused of plotting mass shooting at Kelso mall couldn’t have pulled it off: attorney,” *KATU*, July 17, 2025, <https://katu.com/news/local/teen-accused-of-plotting-mass-shooting-at-kelso-mall-couldnt-have-pulled-it-off-attorney>.

75 Tanya Mehra and Merlina Herbach, “From Adolescence to Accountability: Prosecuting Teenagers for Terrorist-related Offenses in Europe,” *CTC Sentinel* 19, no. 1 (January 2026), pp. 49-58, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/from-adolescence-to-accountability-prosecuting-teenagers-for-terrorist-related-offenses-in-europe/>.

76 Emily Pennink, “Neo-Nazi teenager snared by MI5 as he tried to buy gun for attack, court told,” *Independent*, June 25, 2025, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/mi5-stratford-morrisons-mayor-thomas-mair-b2776641.html>.

77 “Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2023 to March 2024,” *GOV.UK*, December 5, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-prevent-to-march-2024/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2023-to-march-2024>.

mechanism has played out repeatedly in the now-notorious nihilistic and neo-Nazi group 764, where members seek out vulnerable young people and coerce them into committing acts of sexual and physical self-harm. Two leaders were arrested in April 2025 for “operating an international child exploitation enterprise.”⁸⁵ Later, the 14-year-old Kelso plotter told an FBI agent that “he was bullied and got involved in the ‘764’ chat online after looking for an online community.”⁸⁶ A parent of a victim of the movement described it as “coercive control.”⁸⁷ Elsewhere, a Colombian campaigner for child safety in conflict noted that “A teenager who commits a crime is not only a transgressor or in conflict with criminal law: they are almost always also a victim of poverty, exclusion, violence, recruitment, and exploitation by criminal organizations.”⁸⁸

ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-06/ran_hsc_grooming_for_terror_25042019_en.pdf

85 “Leaders of 764 Arrested and Charged for Operating Global Child Exploitation Enterprise,” *U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Columbia*, April 30, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/leaders-764-arrested-and-charged-operating-global-child-exploitation-enterprise>. See also “‘764’ Extremist Group Leader Pleads Guilty to RICO, Child Exploitation Charges,” *Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Justice*, December 19, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/764-extremist-group-leader-pleads-guilty-rico-child-exploitation-charges>.

86 Ward Jolles and Adrian Thomas, “New evidence in Kelso mall shooting plot called into question by judge,” *KPTV*, June 21, 2025, <https://www.kptv.com/2025/06/21/new-evidence-kelso-mall-shooting-plot-called-into-question-by-judge/>.

87 Odette Yousef, “Nihilistic online networks groom minors to commit harm. Her son was one of them,” *NPR*, August 6, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/06/nx-s1-5479882/teen-forums-violent-extremist-grooming>; and Snell, “Drawn to darkness.”

88 Alfie Pannell, “Teenage assassin sentenced to 7 years for killing Colombia senator Uribe,” *Latin America Reports*, August 28, 2025, <https://latinamericareports.com/teenage-assassin-sentenced-to-7-years>

Yet even those children who were clearly victimized can pose grave threats to their communities, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and trauma.⁸⁹ Research has repeatedly revealed the burgeoning existence of all-child extremist organizations, where minors both establish organizational structures and lead the radicalization of newcomers.⁹⁰ As early as 2020, Estonian police captured a 13-year-old who was leading the Feuerkrieg Division, an international neo-Nazi group advocating for terrorist attacks.⁹¹ The counter-extremism group Hope Not Hate identified a group calling itself the British Hand, which featured individuals as young as 12 and 13.⁹² In Germany, a group of five teenagers in a neo-Nazi group called the “Last Defence Wave” was arrested for plotting terrorist attacks on migrants.⁹³ And in

for-killing-colombia-senator-uribe/12184/.

89 For more on the challenges of balancing agency and victimhood, see Gina Vale, “Exploited for the Cause?: The Potential for a Cross-Harm Approach to Children’s Online Engagement in Terrorism,” *The British Journal of Criminology* (2025), <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/advance-article/doi/10.1093/bjc/azaf121/8383719>.

90 Hannah Rose and AC, “*We are Generation Terror!*: Youth-on-youth Radicalisation in Extreme-right Youth Groups (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2021).

91 Jenipher Camino Gonzalez, “Teen leader of far-wing extremist group found,” *DW*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/far-right-terrorist-ringleader-found-to-be-teenager-in-estonia/a-53085442>.

92 Patrik Hermansson, *Hitler Youths: The Rise of Teenage Far-Right Terrorists* (London: Hope Not Hate, 2020). See also Lizzie Dearden, “Children forming ‘new generation of extremists’ in UK as terror threat shifts, Cressida Dick warns,” *Independent*, September 13, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terror-threat-uk-children-cressida-dick-b1919154.html>.

93 Deborah Cole, “German police arrest teenage neo-Nazis over alleged attacks on migrants,” *Guardian*, May 21, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/21/german-police-arrest-teenage-neo-nazis-for-alleged-attacks-on-migrants>.

the Netherlands, four teenagers, including a 17-year-old, were arrested for a March arson attack on a synagogue in Rotterdam in the wake of the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran.⁹⁴ Additionally, a 14 and 17-year-old were arrested in Heemstede for plotting a separate attack.⁹⁵

The fluidity of the online extremist space seems to support the rapid establishment of terrorist “groups,” which may in fact serve as little more than ephemeral nodes attracting young people (Germany’s Milikolosskrieg may provide another example).⁹⁶ Rose and Vale nevertheless found that “Children did not merely mimic the actions or do the bidding of older individuals, but proved to be innovators and amplifiers in their own right.”⁹⁷ And even fellow youngsters can engage in manipulative recruitment practices. Once he had turned 18, Cook escalated his efforts to recruit youth, whom he deemed less likely to be police informants. “The situation resembled a human trafficking situation, with Cook leading,” one police officer noted after coming across a recruitment meeting.⁹⁸ Cook was also deeply involved in the radicalization of a 14-year-old girl in England, Rhianan Rudd. Rudd faced several terrorism charges that were eventually dropped due to a finding of sexual exploita-

tion, before taking her own life at 16.

In an earlier report for George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, I proposed that we have most recently witnessed a “third generation” of online radicalization, defined by hybrid ideologies, shortened radicalization timelines, the greater prevalence of personal vulnerabilities, and lone actor terrorism with more unpredictable targeting.⁹⁹ The report, published in June 2023, also identified the rising prevalence of youth on the extremism stage, noting that developments in social media culture had “introduced us to new constituencies eager to join the fray,” and that both women and youth had “rocketed to even greater prominence through factions of the far-right.” It bears asking whether the increasing prevalence of youth may be an indication of an emerging fourth generation, characterized by even less organized ideologies and chaotic violent plotting.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

Youth radicalization is garnering more attention from both scholar and law enforcement communities (the Nashville gunman acknowledged precisely this development, writing “The feds are cracking down and taking these things extremely seriously these years due to the influx of recent minor terror attacks worldwide”). Yet the previous study reveals several gaps in our response, which should be closed as a matter of urgency. At least five counterterrorism and countering violent extremism measures appear relevant to the preceding analysis:

- Support creative and outside-the-box counterterrorism thinking

94 Mike Corder, “4 teens suspected of terror offenses in Rotterdam synagogue explosion, Dutch prosecutors say,” *PBS News*, March 16, 2026, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/4-teens-suspected-of-terror-offenses-in-rotterdam-synagogue-explosion-dutch-prosecutors-say>.

95 “Two teenagers arrested in Heemstede over suspected terror plot targeting synagogue,” *NL Times*, March 23, 2026, <https://nltimes.nl/2026/03/23/two-teenagers-arrested-heemstede-suspected-terror-plot-targeting-synagogue>.

96 Michael Corech, “A New Satanic Neo-Nazi Group Is Recruiting Children as Young as 12,” *Vice News*, July 31, 2025, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/a-new-satanic-neo-nazi-group-is-recruiting-children-12-milikolosskrieg>.

97 Rose and Vale, *Childhood Innocence?*, p. ii.

98 Downing and Oliphint, “White Power Outage.”

99 Jacob Ware, “The Third Generation of Online Radicalization,” *Program on Extremism at George Washington University*, June 16, 2023, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/third-generation-online-radicalization>.

focusing less on ideology and more on drivers to violence

- Encourage youth-led initiatives to promote belonging and tolerance, especially online
- Catalyze a significant investment in youth mental health programming and other prevention initiatives
- Enforce content moderation and algorithm reform—up to and including reform of Section 230 in the U.S.
- Criminalize juvenile gun ownership and carrying in the U.S.

Firstly, and most importantly, law enforcement and intelligence agencies must radically reconceptualize their understanding of violent extremist ideology and targeting. Although the aforementioned new categories are commendable, they too can prove limiting, continuing to force often very confused individuals who might not even themselves appreciate their extremist ideologies into boxes. Thinking outside siloes is essential, as a failure of imagination can be a direct cause of bloodshed. For instance, according to the BBC, Southport killer Axel Rudakubana “was referred to Prevent three times between 2019 and 2021 due to his interest in terrorist attacks and school shootings, but there was no evidence of a fixed ideology or motivation.”¹⁰⁰ A review of the case “concluded that too much focus was placed on the absence of a distinct ideology, to the detriment of considering the perpetrator’s susceptibility, grievances and complex needs.” Despite the failed interventions, however, Rudakubana in fact received mental health help for four years before stopping, indicating that even extensive support might be insufficient.¹⁰¹

100 Jonny Humphries, “Prevent closed Southport killer case ‘prematurely,’” *BBC*, February 5, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0rqxpg2ryvo>.

101 Lizzie Dearden, “A U.K. Teen Became Fixated on Extreme Violence. But Was It Terrorism?” *New*

In an opinion article penned after Southport, Britain’s Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation Jonathan Hall boldly pleaded for a new system to deal with possible offenders who did not fit ideological siloes, cautioning that “Today’s reality makes the traditional model of deradicalisation years out of date.”¹⁰² Bettina Rottweiler, Caitlin Clemmow, Austin Doctor, and Brenna Helm agree, arguing that “applying an ideology-centric lens to understand why children and young people engage in violent extremism is ill-suited to countering the current trend. Instead, to effectively respond to the evolving threat landscape, prevention efforts must shift toward a model that addresses the systemic drivers and underlying causes of youth vulnerability to violent extremism.”¹⁰³

A mindset that focuses less on ideological division and more on personal drivers to violence might illuminate new avenues for both prevention and law enforcement interdiction (the “grievance-fueled violence” framing proposed by Emily Corner et al. as well as Joe Ondrak and Laura Vitelli’s “participatory memetic violent extremism” might be helpful¹⁰⁴). Indeed, in their

York Times, January 30, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/30/world/europe/southport-terrorism-prevent-violence-rudakubana.html>.

102 Jonathan Hall, “The Southport case puts our definition of terrorism on trial,” *Financial Times*, January 25, 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/91fc342d-7ccb-4613-b786-90bb4e20484e?syn-25a6b1a6=1>.

103 Bettina Rottweiler, Caitlin Clemmow, Austin Doctor, and Brenna Helm, “Children, Young People and the Emerging Terrorism Threat Landscape,” *Just Security*, September 26, 2025, <https://www.justsecurity.org/121085/young-people-terrorism-threat-landscape/>.

104 Emily Corner, Troy McEwan, and Caroline Logan, “Editorial: Grievance-fueled violence: conceptual and empirical developments,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023), <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1177705/>

aforementioned *Aggression and Violent Behavior* article, Julie Emmelkamp, Jessica J. Asscher, Inge B. Wissink, and Geert Jan J.M. Stams found that the causes of radicalization did not significantly differ between ideologies, indicating “that one similar intervention/prevention approach for religious and right-wing radicalization is likely to be effective.”¹⁰⁵

Importantly, the law enforcement and intelligence response, while essential, should prioritize particularly severe cases of late-stage radicalization, allowing other actors to handle cases further upstream in the “flash-to-bang” timeline. The Five Eyes warning found that “Engaging with minors is more complex than engaging with adults. The unique characteristics of adolescent development require agencies to factor in additional considerations when dealing with minors. Determining intent can be harder for minors than adults, especially for minors who spend a lot of time online.”¹⁰⁶ Such “additional considerations” are probably best suited to be handled through non-securitized approaches.

Secondly, stakeholders should encourage young people themselves to participate in creating a healthier online ecosystem by pushing back against divisive and intolerant narratives and by building communities that promote positive, prosocial belonging.¹⁰⁷ Crucially, these initiatives must be

full; and Ondrak and Vitelli, “Participatory Memetic Violence.”

105 Emmelkamp, Asscher, Wissink, and Stams, “Risk factors for (violent) radicalization in juveniles: A multilevel meta-analysis.”

106 “Young people and violent extremism: a call for collective action.”

107 See, for example, Farah Pandith and Jacob Ware, “Teen terrorism inspired by social media is on the rise. Here’s what we need to do.” *NBC News*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/teen-terrorism-inspired-social-media-rise-here-s-what-we-ncna1261307>.

organic and cannot be seen to advance a government position or employ government resources, both of which may prove fatal to the initiative. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) Youth-Led Action Board, which “aims to mobilize youth and youth-led civil society organizations working to prevent and respond to violent extremism and terrorism,” as well as the government of New Zealand’s recent effort to interview young people about “content that crosses the line,” are both commendable efforts.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, providing space and agency for young people to engage in real policy and activism is critical¹⁰⁹; as one South African youth leader resoundingly declared, “Nothing for children, without children.”¹¹⁰

As much as extremists have adopted a decentralized “leaderless resistance” in advancing their hateful ideologies, counter-extremists should also welcome an organic, grassroots effort. Risk of failure and the possibility of causing offense cannot, in themselves, be seen as reasons to disengage from the digital ecosystem. The case of *Birds Aren’t Real*, a fake online conspiracy theory driven by Gen Z leaders that

108 See “UNODC Youth-led action to prevent violent extremism and terrorism,” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, December 2023, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2023/December/youth-led-action-to-prevent-terrorism-and-violent-extremism.html>; and Classification Office – Te Mana Whakaatu, *Content that Crosses the Line: Conversations with young people about extremely harmful content online* (Wellington: Classification Office – Te Mana Whakaatu, 2024).

109 “Youth Matters: Engaging Young People in Research, Policy, and Practice,” *Georgetown University Collaborative on Global Children’s Issues*, February 24, 2022, <https://globalchildren.georgetown.edu/events/youth-matters-engaging-young-people-in-research-policy-and-practice>.

110 “Nothing for children, without children,” *UNICEF*, October 25, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/press-releases/nothing-children-without-children>.

sought to mock and undermine political conspiracy theories like QAnon, provides one model for such grassroots activism.¹¹¹ Although such efforts are often chaotic and even manipulative, they reflect the fast-paced, humor-filled nature of much online discourse and are far more authentic than any initiative a government could deploy. As the aforementioned Institute for Strategic Dialogue report succinctly puts it, “Meeting the next generation of extremist challenges will require the innovation brought by the next generation.”¹¹² Teenagers have earlier played crucial roles in driving dialogue and action around the world on generational challenges like climate change, gun policy, girls’ education, and police brutality; there is no reason they cannot also drive a new generation of youth-enabled prevention.¹¹³

Thirdly, policymakers in subject countries should lead a significant scaling up of resources devoted to prevention and countering violent extremism (CVE) infrastructure. Treating radicalization as a vulnerability, CVE programs often adopt a psychological or public health approach, seeking to build greater resilience among susceptible youth.¹¹⁴ Adopting this lens,

111 Taylor Lorenz, “Birds Aren’t Real, or Are They? Inside a Gen Z Conspiracy Theory,” *New York Times*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/technology/birds-arent-real-gen-z-misinformation.html>.

112 Jones, Guhl, Davey, and Ayad, *Young guns*.

113 Farah Pandith and Jacob Ware, “The Tortured Teens Department: What the Terror Plot Against a Taylor Swift Concert Tells Us About Youth Extremism,” *U.S. News and World Report*, August 15, 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2024-08-15/the-tortured-teens-department-what-the-terror-plot-against-a-taylor-swift-concert-tells-us-about-youth-extremism>.

114 See, for example, Steven Barracosa and James March, “Dealing With Radicalised Youth Offenders: The Development and Implementation of a Youth-Specific Framework,” *Frontiers in Psychi-*

Carthy and Schuurman found little variation in the vulnerabilities displayed by far-right extremists and jihadists, possibly enabling a prevention infrastructure that “focuses less on identifying who is at risk and more on ensuring protective factors are more widely championed.”¹¹⁵ American law enforcement officials and prevention practitioners might also benefit from reviewing prevention successes among young people abroad. In-depth studies conducted in settings such as Australia, Nigeria, Tajikistan, and Türkiye have typically highlighted that building effective resilience to youth radicalization relies on community building and ensuring the fulfillment of unmet needs.¹¹⁶

atry (2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8795990/#s3>; Hanne M. Duindam, Amanda W.G. van Loon, and Friedrich Lösel, “Protective factors against extremism and violent radicalization in youth: A multilevel meta-analysis,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 85 (2025), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178925000709>; Randy Borum, “Developmental considerations for assessing the risk of extremist violence in adolescents,” *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* (2025), <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2025-87215-001>; and Pierre Sivignon, “Escape The Void: Responding to Youth-Led Nihilistic Violence,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, February 2, 2026, <https://gnet-research.org/2026/02/02/escape-the-void-responding-to-youth-led-nihilistic-violence/>.

115 Carthy and Schuurman, “Adverse childhood experiences, education, and involvement in terrorist violence.”

116 Kristy Campion and Emma Colvin, “Community, More than Conviction: Understanding Radicalisation Factors for Young People in Australia,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2025), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2025.2478957#d1e118>; Adrian Cherney, Emma Belton, Siti Amirah Binte Norham, and Jack Milts, “Understanding youth radicalisation: an analysis of Australian data,” *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 14, no. 2 (2022), pp. 97-119; Michaela Rana, “The Generation of ‘Digital Natives’: How Far-Right Extremists Target Australian Youth Online for Radicalisation and Recruitment,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, October

Prevention always involves a broad range of programs. In this case, programming should prioritize mental health and trauma-informed support to young people, ideally by meeting them where they radicalize: online. Addressing the gaps in belonging, community, and purpose that motivate many young people into noxious online forums is particularly important.¹¹⁷ Additionally, programs should educate parents in the telltale warning signs that their child may be exposed to radicalizing content online, while encouraging parents to engage openly and discuss complex issues with their children to ward off alternative influences — including both extremist and sexually predatory groomers — drowning them out online.¹¹⁸

7, 2025, <https://gnet-research.org/2025/10/07/the-generation-of-digital-natives-how-far-right-extremists-target-australian-youth-online-for-radicalisation-and-recruitment/>; Eka Ikpe, Damilola Adegoke, Funmi Olonisakin, and Folahanmi Aina, “Understanding Vulnerability to Violent Extremism: Evidence from Borno State, Northeastern Nigeria,” *African Security* 16, no. 1 (2023), pp. 5-31; World Bank Group and State and Peacebuilding Fund, *Strengthening Youth Resilience to Radicalization: Evidence from Tajikistan* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2020); and Mashuq Kurt, “Radical Habitus: Trajectories of Youth Radicalization in Turkey,” *Current Anthropology* 64, no. 6 (December 2023), https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/727896#_i12.

117 Joni E Johnston, “Troubled Teens and Online Radicalization,” *Psychology Today*, September 19, 2025, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-human-equation/202509/troubled-teens-and-online-radicalization>.

118 See, for example, Jessica Seaman, “As kids like the Evergreen High School shooter sink into violent online extremism, what can parents do?” *Denver Post*, September 28, 2025, <https://www.denverpost.com/2025/09/28/evergreen-school-shooting-parents-online-extermism/>; “Youth and Online Polarization and Radicalization,” *Children and Screens*, <https://www.childrenandscreens.org/learn-explore/research/youth-and-online-polarization-and-radicalization/>; Greg Barton, “Rates of youth radicalisation are climbing in Australia and abroad. Here’s what to look out for,” *The Conversation*, December 6, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/rates-of-youth-radicalisation-are-climbing-in-australia-and-abroad-heres->

Works like Craig A. Johnson’s *How to Talk to Your Son about Fascism* indicate a growing interest in precisely this question. The author particularly draws a sharp distinction between fighting fascism in public and private realms.¹¹⁹ Combating youth radicalization will primarily involve the private forum, where care, reason, and empathy play a far greater role than anger, judgment, and scolding. As the Southern Poverty Law Center and American University Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL) wrote in a joint guide, “parents and caregivers are the people in the best position to stop radicalization in its tracks.”¹²⁰

what-to-look-out-for-245459; Dexter Ingram, “The Most Dangerous Extremist Movement in America Has No Ideology,” *Cipher Brief*, April 16, 2026, <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/the-most-dangerous-extremist-movement-in-america-has-no-ideology>; Meena Duerson, “These moms had daughters sucked into a deadly online school shooter community. What they need you to know,” *CNN*, April 11, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/04/11/us/mothers-true-crime-community-dangers>; Megan Norris, “Too Young to Drive, Old Enough for Extremism: Youth Radicalization’s New Reality,” *Homeland Security Today*, July 10, 2025, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/too-young-to-drive-old-enough-for-extremism-youth-radicalizations-new-reality/>; and FBI Richmond (@fbirichmond), “Important alert for parents! #FBIrichmond is sharing crucial information about a new threat to kids’ safety.” Instagram video, April 3, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/fbirichmond/reel/DH_I6U-vN0i9/.

119 Craig A. Johnson, *How to Talk to Your Son about Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2025).

120 Southern Poverty Law Center and American University Polarization & Extremism Research & Innovation Lab, *Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization* (SPLC and PERIL, 2022), <https://perilresearch.com/resource/building-resilience-confronting-risk-a-parents-caregivers-guide-to-online-radicalization/>. For more on the challenges of conducting prevention with youth, see Sarah Stevenson and Dr Steve Barracosa, “The Human Cost of Countering Violent Extremism with Youth: The Importance of Reflective and Supportive Practice,” *VoxPol*, December 10, 2025, <https://voxpoleu/cve-practitioner-wellbe->

Unfortunately, the U.S. government has moved in precisely the opposite direction under President Donald J. Trump, massively scaling back its investment in prevention.¹²¹ Instead, investment and patience are crucial. As one French prosecutor reflected in the case of a 12-year-old radicalized into Salafi-jihadist extremism and convicted on terrorism charges, “it will take years and years of work to enable this kid to recover normal bearings.”¹²²

Fourthly, policymakers must push for a long-overdue course correction in digital culture to prioritize safety over the current anarchic system. Young people use social media platforms in dynamic and complementary ways — meaning any counterterrorism measure directed at a single platform (content moderation, for instance) is likely to fall short.¹²³ Instead, policymakers should champion and lead a broader and more ambitious national dialogue to determine not only the kinds of content that may constitute legal free speech, but also develop clearer guidelines for content that might harm or endanger children. Inevitably, this conversation, in the U.S., would

distill to a more specific political dialogue around Section 230, the section of the 1996 Communications Decency Act that protects social media companies from legal liability over content. Given that bipartisan teams of politicians have frequently worked together to pass Section 230 reform, policymakers should at the very least welcome dialogue about this important but badly outdated regulation.¹²⁴

Again, the United States under President Trump has moved in the opposite direction, with his close alliance with X owner Elon Musk pushing the President to oppose content moderation in favor of “free speech” (X’s uniquely lax moderation policies were exemplified in May 2025, when Kanye West released his latest song, “Heil Hitler,” which was only widely available on X¹²⁵). In Europe, the passage of the Digital Services Act in 2023 — which scholar Nicolas Stockhammer has called a “game-changing enforcement tool” — has upended the European Union’s relationship with major social media companies, threatening substantial fines for platforms that do not comply with European data laws.¹²⁶ Australia has opted for arguably an even stricter approach, implementing not just more stringent content moderation but also proposing a ban on social

ing-at-risk-radicalised-youth/.

121 See, for example, Hannah Allam, “‘The Intern in Charge’: Meet the 22-Year-Old Trump’s Team Picked to Lead Terrorism Prevention,” *ProPublica*, June 4, 2025, <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-dhs-thomas-fugate-cp3-terrorism-prevention>.

122 Leicester, “Via porn, gore and ultra-violence, extremist groups are sinking hooks.”

123 Joseph Stabile, “Platform Convergence and the Limits of Technical Solutions to Counter Online Hate,” *Tech Policy Press*, April 14, 2025, <https://www.techpolicy.press/platform-convergence-and-the-limits-of-technical-solutions-to-counter-online-hate/>. See also Valdemar Balle and Anonymous Author, “The Nordic Front of ‘764’: Trends, Drivers, and Countering Youth Exploitation and Radicalisation,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, January 5, 2026, <https://gnet-research.org/2026/01/05/the-nordic-front-of-764-trends-drivers-and-countering-youth-exploitation-and-radicalisation/>.

124 See, for example, “Hawley, Blumenthal Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Protect Consumers and Deny AI Companies Section 230 Immunity,” *Josh Hawley, U.S. Senator for Missouri*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.hawley.senate.gov/hawley-blumenthal-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-protect-consumers-and-deny-ai-companies-section/>.

125 Ben Goggin, “Ye song glorifying Hitler gets millions of views on X while other platforms struggle to remove it,” *NBC News*, May 10, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/ye-song-glorifying-hitler-gets-millions-views-x-platforms-struggle-remove-rcna205905>.

126 Nicolas Stockhammer, “From TikTok to Terrorism? The Online Radicalization of European Lone Attackers since October 7, 2023,” *CTC Sentinel* 18, no. 7 (July 2025), pp. 16-28.

media use for users under 16 (the law has been widely praised).¹²⁷

But combating social media radicalization cannot be only a supply-side effort. Researchers and policymakers should also consider ways to limit demand, both through the aforementioned prevention measures and youth-led initiatives, but also by generally encouraging a healthier user experience with social media sites. Some researchers have, for instance, advocated for education on “healthy digital diets,” which might mimic our efforts to educate young people on their food intake.¹²⁸ Broader efforts to promote digital literacy and foster a healthier, more productive “cyber citizenship” are indeed long overdue.¹²⁹ In a positive update, a resolution passed in July 2025 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe called on “participating States to develop and integrate comprehensive civic education and media and information literacy programs into their educational policies and school curricula, with the aim of fostering critical thinking and digital literacy skills among students at an early age.”¹³⁰

127 Josh Taylor, “Australia’s social media ban is attracting global praise – but we’re no closer to knowing how it would work,” *Guardian*, April 4, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/apr/05/australia-social-media-ban-trial-global-response-implementation>. See also Rozina Sabur, “Britain should copy Australian social media ban, says terror tsar,” *Telegraph*, January 2, 2026, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2026/01/02/britain-copy-australia-social-media-ban-jonathan-hall/>.

128 “Social media algorithms amplify misogynistic content to teens.”

129 P.W. Singer and Michael McConnell, “Want to Stop the Next Crisis? Teaching Cyber Citizenship Must Become a National Priority,” *TIME*, January 21, 2021, <https://time.com/5932134/cyber-citizenship-national-priority/>.

130 “Resolution on Preventing Youth Radicalization to Violent Extremism and Terrorism Through Education, and Media and Information Literacy,” Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe,

Finally, in the United States, laws criminalizing gun ownership for children under 18 should be shored up. Terrorist attacks perpetrated by minors are often crimes of opportunity, perpetrated by individuals who have somehow circumvented federal and state laws that, according to the non-profit Everytown for Gun Safety, generally prohibit firearm purchases under the age of 18 (the author serves as a Survivor Fellow at Everytown for Gun Safety).¹³¹ In particular, innovative legal cases that involve criminal charges against parents who armed their children — successfully pursued after a school shooting in Oxford, Michigan — should be studied and duplicated.¹³² As was revealed in one stunning case in which a Texas mother supplied her 13-year-old

July 3, 2025, <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/ad-hoc-committees-and-working-groups/ad-hoc-committee-on-countering-terrorism/resolutions-and-publications/5318-resolution-on-preventing-youth-radicalization-to-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-through-education-and-media-and-information-literacy-adopted-at-the-32nd-annual-session-porto-portugal-29-june-to-3-july-2025/file>.

131 “Has the state raised the minimum age for purchasing firearms?” Everytown for Gun Safety, January 14, 2026, <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/law/minimum-age-to-purchase/>.

132 John Woodrow Cox, “Guilty: Inside the high-risk, historic prosecution of a school shooter’s parents,” *Washington Post*, July 8, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2024/michigan-prosecutors-crumbley-parents-oxford-school-shooting/>. See also Sarah Lehr, “Case against father of Madison school shooter will move forward after court official finds probable cause,” *Wisconsin Public Radio*, July 24, 2025, <https://www.wpr.org/news/case-against-father-madison-school-shooter-move-forward>; Eric Levenson and Maxime Tamsett, “Father of Georgia school shooter found guilty of murder and manslaughter,” *CNN*, March 3, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/03/us/colin-gray-murder-trial-verdict/>; and Sharyn Alfonsi and Ashley Velie, “How parents are being held responsible after school shootings. Victims’ families weigh in on accountability,” *CBS News*, March 1, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-parents-are-being-held-responsible-after-school-shootings-60-minutes-transcript/>.

son, who held white supremacist views and was believed to be “planning some act of violence,” with ammunition, charges could even be brought *before* an act of violence has already occurred.¹³³ The most serious charges levied against parents include involuntary manslaughter and even cruelty to children.¹³⁴ Such criminal charges will hopefully build deterrence and prevent reckless parents from providing their children with tools of mass murder.

133 Justine McDaniel, “Mom charged after buying ammo for teen son obsessed with mass killings, police say,” Washington Post, May 15, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/05/15/mother-arrested-school-shooting-texas/>.

134 Dalia Faheid, “Charges against teen Georgia school shooting suspect’s father push the boundaries of who’s responsible for a mass gun attack,” CNN, September 6, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/06/us/colin-gray-georgia-shooting-suspect-father-charges>.

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