www.eictp.eu

EXPERT PAPER

Nicolas Stockhammer

Between Terrorism and Amok: Hybrid Extremism, Digital Radicalization and Stochastic Violence

Case Studies on the Magdeburg Christmas Market Attack (2024) and the Graz School Shooting (2025)

September 2025

E·I·C·T·P

IMPRINT

The European Institute for Counter Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP) is a research association operating worldwide and with its headquarters in Vienna, Austria. As a non-profit institution the focus of EICTP is on key topics around security policy-related issues. It carries out projects with renowned partners in Austria and abroad, maintains close relationships with high-level research organizations and a network of prominent experts and scholars, offers profound sets of actions, consultations and strategies related to counter-terrorism, hybrid conflicts, and de-radicalization measures and aims at creating policy-related recommendations based on research and expert assessments for decision-makers.

Address:
European Institute for Counter Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP)
Esslinggasse 17/5, AT-1010 Vienna
www.eictp.eu

Media owner, editor, producer: EICTP

Place of publication: Esslinggasse 17/5, 1010 Vienna

Proof-reading and formal editing: EICTP

Graphic Design: Citypress GmbH

Print: Citypress GmbH

Disclaimer of liability: The contents of this publication have been researched and created with utmost diligence and care. EICTP provides no guarantee for the correctness, completeness and topicality of the information given. Neither EICTP nor other parties involved in the creation of this publication shall be held liable for damages of any kind arising from the use, application or circulation of the provided information. Should this publication contain references to other media of third parties and over which no influence can be exerted by EICTP, no liability whatsoever of such contents shall be assumed. The relevant media owner shall be responsible for the correctness of the contents of the information provided. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of EICTP and is solely the option of the respective author(s).

Copyright: All of the content published in this summarized research report is copyrighted. Without prior written consent of EICTP any type of duplication, distribution, modification, or reproduction is not permitted, both against payments and for free.

Content

INTRODUCTION 5

1. TERRORISM AND RAMPAGE – SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO VIOLENCE 6

1.1. Similarities 7

1.2. Differences 7

1.3. Research background and relevance 8

2. CONCEPTUAL BASIS FOR THE DISTINCTION 9

2.1. Terrorism 9

2.1.1. Problems of definition and key characteristics 9

2.1.2. The intentionality of violence 10

2.1.3. Ideology as a trigger or catalyst for violence 10

2.2 Amok 10

2.2.1. Psychological and social dynamics 11

2.2.2. Act of passion vs. calculated violence 12

2.2.3. Indeterminate choice of victims, often with a suicidal outcome 12

2.3.4. Classification as personalized revenge without political objectives 12

2.3. Hybrid extremism and stochastic forms of violence 15

2.3.1. Hybrid, multidimensional extremism 15

2.3.2. Definition of stochastic violence 15

2.3.3. "Salad bar extremism" and ideological patchworking 16

2.3.4. Erosion of clear distinguishing criteria or categories for radicalized lone perpetrators 17

3. CASE STUDY I: THE MAGDEBURG CHRISTMAS MARKET ATTACK (DECEMBER 2024) 18

3.1. Description of the crime 18

3.2. Perpetrator profile: age, radicalization process, digital traces 18

3.3. Ideological patchwork? Evidence of salad bar extremism. 19

3.4. Dynamics of the act: spontaneity vs. planning 20

3.5. Media reception and political discourse 21

3.6. Implications for analysis, prevention, and protection concepts 21

4. CASE STUDY II: THE SCHOOL SHOOTING IN GRAZ (JUNE 2025) 22

4.1. Course of events: sequence of events, weapons, victims, suicide 22

4.2. Perpetrator psychology: Possible affective motives, victim narrative, online subculture 23

4.3. Digital gamification and fascination with school massacres 23

4.4. Reactions and political debate (gun laws, etc.) 24

4.5. Distinction from terrorist violence 24

5. COMPARATIVE CASE ANALYSIS 26

5.1. Similarities 26

5.2. Perpetrator type: Male lone actors 26

5.3. Digital radicalization (online forums, first-person shooter games, extremist subcultures) *26*
5.4. High degree of unpredictability and eruptive violence *26*
5.5. Stochastic elements: "It could hit anytime, anyone" *27*
5.2 DIFFERENCES 27
5.2.1 Ideological vs. affective motivation *27*
5.2.2. Perpetrator communication and message (political vs. individual psychological symbolism) *28*
5.2.3. Degree of planning vs. impulsive act *28*
5.2.4. (Non-)existence of a strategic goal *28*
6. CONCLUSION 29
The comparative analysis shows that both cases are linked by digital radicalization and unpredictability, but differ in motivation and objectives: ideologically multidimensional terrorism vs. affective rampage. *29*
ABOUT THE AUTHOR 31
BIBLIOGRAPHY 32

Introduction

While terrorist attacks are traditionally understood as ideologically motivated, strategically planned acts of violence, and rampages, on the other hand, are considered individual, impulsive eruptions of violence without a clear political agenda, current case studies in Europe and the US show increasing convergence and decreasing selectivity in the categorization of both phenomena. The attack on the Magdeburg Christmas market in December 2024 and the school rampage in Graz in June 2025 illustrate this hybridity in several ways. Do lone wolf terrorist attacks, whose ideological basis is ambiguous, multidimensional, or "hybrid," now share fundamental tactical and operational approaches and dual radicalization processes with rampages such as school shootings? As will be shown, this question of clear categorization has significant implications for prevention, operational counterterrorism, and jurisdiction. One thing is clear: at first glance, school rampages and terrorist attacks by self-radicalized lone perpetrators appear to be completely different phenomena, but in terms of the course of events, the perpetrators' self-presentation, and the underlying causes, there are increasing similarities in certain types of cases.[1]

The recent case of a school shooting in Minneapolis (Minnesota, USA) exacerbates this problem of categorization and classification, but it is also paradigmatic of the fundamental gray areas between stochastic, ideologically hybrid lone-wolf terrorism and rampages with selective targets or victims.

In a shooting attack on Annunciation Catholic Church, 23-year-old transgender perpetrator Robin (originally Robert) W. opened fire on several parishioners, killing two children and injuring numerous others before taking her own life.[2] Although the act can be characterized by classic rampage characteristics—impulsive outburst of violence, narcissistic perpetrator staging, suicide—it is classified by the authorities as both an act of "*domestic* terrorism" and a hate crime.[3] The perpetrator left a disturbing digital footprint on social media consisting of violent fantasies, glorification of school shooters, and symbolically charged drawings. This overlaps an individual pattern of pathology with ideological enemy images and politically effective objectives, which, strictly speaking, falls within the narrow borderline between terrorism and rampage.

The observable convergence points to a changing threat scenario of ideologically diverse acts of violence, in which rampage and terrorism may no longer be analyzed as strictly separate

forms of violence. Instead, a hybrid field of extremism is emerging in which self-radicalized lone perpetrators without clear organizational ties are increasingly able to carry out serious mass killings with legally acquired weapons or everyday objects. The boundaries between ideologically motivated violence, narcissistic-impulsive self-dramatization, and stochastic outbreaks of violence are becoming increasingly blurred. The aim of this analysis is therefore to examine two phenomena of (usually) indiscriminate violence with mass killing ambitions, solitary terrorism and rampage, using the Magdeburg Christmas market attack and the Graz school rampage as examples, in order to highlight the intertwining of both types of hate crimes as expressions of impulsive violent outbursts and to discuss possible implications for research and prevention.

1. Terrorism and rampage – similarities, differences, and their relationship to violence

In European research tradition, terrorist attacks and rampages are rightly treated as structurally distinct phenomena of violence.[4] Scientific discussion has so far largely ignored the fact that both phenomena are constantly changing and that the psychopathological disposition of the perpetrators can be a key factor in bringing them closer together. In addition, the modus operandi of relevant criminal acts observed in the recent past (e.g., "vehicular" variants in which a vehicle is driven indiscriminately into a crowd of people[5] , or scenarios involving the use of multiple firearms, which indicate indiscriminate mass murder targeting[6]) often show remarkable convergences, which in retrospect has repeatedly triggered discussions about whether an event should be classified as a terrorist act or as the rampage of someone in existential despair. Even if a terminological distinction based on the criterion of extremist motives seems plausible at first glance, a clear differentiation between the two phenomena of violence proves to be complex in the light of concrete case analyses and remains characterized by considerable classificatory uncertainty.[7] While terrorism is generally defined as a strategically based form of ideologically (i.e., politically and/or religiously) motivated violence, rampage is considered a spontaneous, individualized, and non-ideologically motivated, eruptive act. On closer inspection, however, especially in light of hybrid, ideologically fragmented forms of extremism, there is a growing overlap, even to the point of a hybrid variant, which I refer to as "terrok"[8] , making clear analytical differentiation increasingly difficult or seemingly pointless.

1.1. Similarities

What both phenomena have in common is the central function of expressive violence as a preferred means of compensation, in order to exact "legitimate" revenge for one's own victimhood.[9] The openly displayed violence functions both as a performative act and as a means of communication: it generates attention, terror, and resonance. Both rampage killers and lone terrorists use violence for self-empowerment and self-promotion[10] , with the act itself often understood as the ultimate expression of trauma and powerlessness.[11] In both cases, there is a noticeable increase in the individualization of the act—terrorists are increasingly acting outside of fixed organizational structures (*leaderless resistance* or *leaderless jihad*[12]), motivated by personal crises, experiences of marginalization, and the externalization of guilt, i.e., its projection onto a hostile counterpart. In the case of rampage killers, this focus on the individual is the fixed rule and, at the same time, the determining criterion.

1.2. Differences

Nevertheless, there are still structural differences that justify a conceptual differentiation between "terror" and "rampage." Terrorist violence—especially in hybrid, patchwork forms—remains supra-individual or transcendent: it is mostly symbolically oriented, aims to spread a political message, and regularly strives for an effect that transcends the immediate context of the act.[13] Violence here functions as a strategic means of communication to intimidate opponents, mobilize sympathizers, and legitimize one's own ideological narrative.[14] Rampages, on the other hand, are usually more focused on the individual environment, respond to subjectively experienced humiliations, and usually remain rooted in personalized motives of revenge.[15] In this case, violence is primarily an end in itself—a final escalation that is self-justifying and does not necessarily refer to an overarching ideological agenda.

In the course of hybrid radicalization processes, however, these differences are becoming increasingly blurred. The radicalized lone perpetrator, who combines elements of jihadist, right-wing extremist, or conspiracy ideologies with biographical frustrations, moves in the field of tension between terror and rampage. Their actions combine individual crisis management with ideological exaggeration, whereby violence can be a personal catharsis (i.e., a liberating

cleansing process), a performative act, and a strategic signal. This erodes the classic categories of distinction and creates a gray area between terrorism, rampage, and individually radicalized violence that is difficult to analyze and creates new challenges for security policy.

In this form, it is precisely this kind of hybrid extremism—with its mixture of ideological fragments, conspiracy narratives, and subjective motives—that is increasingly shaping the terrorist threat matrix in Europe. An examination of the intersections between terrorism and rampage violence makes it clear that in both cases, violence is more than just a means to an end: it is an expression, a form of communication, and an escalation all at once—and thus the central link between two similar phenomena.

1.3. Research background and relevance

In recent years, research into terrorism and extremism has focused on the analysis of transnational networks, classic organizational structures, and ideological traditions, thereby undoubtedly enabling clear distinctions to be made in the fields of investigation described. Nevertheless, new phenomena—such as hybrid forms of extremism, ideological patchworking, or stochastic violence—require a conceptual expansion.[16] The shift of radicalization-related processes to digital spaces, the fragmentation of worldviews that can be clearly assigned to individual phenomena, and the increase in lone perpetrator dynamics mark a new development that has often been given only marginal consideration in previous research. In particular, the finding that, in the lone actor segment, violent actors are increasingly combining hybrid forms of ideological set pieces with conspiracy narratives that are not typical of the phenomenon *at first glance* and are socialized in diffuse online subcultures highlights the need for further systematic research. In contrast, the phenomenon of rampage killings has been disproportionately underrepresented in security and violence research to date. Although numerous psychological and criminological case studies are available, there is a lack of systematic integration into the overarching discourses on terrorism and politically motivated violence. Amok is often understood as a marginal, individualized phenomenon of violence, which obscures its overlaps with forms of escalation caused by radicalization. However, the increasing gray areas in manifestations—such as radicalized lone perpetrators whose actions exhibit elements of both amok and terror—make it clear that acts of amok must be included more strongly in comparative violence research. Research on stochastic violence also has blind spots.[17] It has been discussed primarily in the context of

right-wing extremist radicalization, where diffuse online agitation and extremist narratives are the primary triggers for violent acts. Less attention has been paid to the fact that similar dynamics are also at work in jihadist and, increasingly, hybrid milieus characterized by mixed ideologies. As a result, analysis often remains one-dimensional, even though it is becoming apparent that stochastic forms of violence could be an overarching characteristic of contemporary extremism.

2. Conceptual basis for the distinction

2.1. Terrorism

2.1.1. Problems of definition and key characteristics

Due to its political exploitability ("...one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter...") and inflationary use, the concept of terrorism is one of the most controversial categories in modern violence research.[18] The more than 300 competing definitions by political institutions, states, researchers, and commentators illustrate the continuing terminological disagreement, which is shaped and further driven by differing political interests, normative perspectives, and historical circumstances.

The central question is the legitimacy of violence. Terrorist actors deliberately violate the norm of the state's monopoly on the use of force by attacking unarmed civilians or civilian targets. Alex P. Schmid therefore refers to terrorism as a "peacetime equivalent of war crimes."[19] Herfried Münkler also points to the asymmetrical nature of non-state violent actors, who compensate for their structural inferiority through psychological effects.[20]

Recognized scientific definitions highlight three central elements of terrorism: First, the use or threat of violence is both a constitutive means and a tactic[21] ; second, the political or ideological objective, which is often underpinned by religion, is relevant; and finally, there is the aspect of strategic communication. Terrorist violence is always communicative due to the propaganda of the act. The deliberate spreading of fear and terror, which is intended to reach a wider public beyond the immediate victims, aims to intimidate.[22] Terrorism is therefore less about physical violence itself than its symbolic and psychological impact. Violence functions as a central element of a communication strategy that exerts pressure on societies, governments, or certain population groups and is intended to provoke state power. Similar to the famous fly in the elephant's ear in the china shop, which can only indirectly have a major effect with its

buzzing. Terrorism can be defined as the targeted use of threats of violence or violence against civilians or civilian targets in pursuit of ideological (extremist) goals and with the aim of exerting pressure on societies and decision-makers by spreading insecurity.[23]

2.1.2. The intentionality of violence

Terrorism is characterized by the deliberate, targeted use of violence. In this respect, violence is never random, but intentionally chosen as the preferred option in order to achieve the greatest possible strategic effect.[24] The aggression is not primarily directed against the immediate victims, but addresses the secondary level, the "interested third party," so to speak.[25] The target is a higher-level audience—society as such, politics in the broader sense, or certain defined population groups. The act of violence is thus determined less by its immediate physical destructive power than by its indirect purpose—the intended psychological and symbolic effect.[26]

2.1.3. Ideology as a trigger or catalyst for violence

In most terrorist contexts, the central driver of violence is the seemingly legitimizing extremist ideology.[27] It provides the actors with a morally exaggerated interpretive framework that is intended to justify violent action. Dogmatic ideas—whether religious-jihadist, nationalist, right-wing or left-wing extremist—transform individual frustrations or collective grievances into a political mission.[28] This not only rationalizes indiscriminate acts of violence, but also presents them as a moral duty. Ideology thus acts as a catalyst, enabling perpetrators or relevant organizations to portray violence against uninvolved parties as justified or even necessary.[29]

2.2 Amok

Unsurprisingly, the term amok is just as vague as that of terrorism. Etymologically, it apparently goes back to the Malay word "amuk" (raging or furious), which emphasizes the essential impulsive dimension of such acts.[30] Amok is generally understood as a sudden, uncontrolled outbreak of violence that is carried out with high intensity and maximum force in a short period of time and often only ends with the intervention of security forces or the suicide of

the perpetrator. A characteristic feature is the seemingly random selection of victims, with whom the perpetrator usually has no immediate personal relationship.

In contrast to terrorism, which is geared toward political objectives and strategic communication, rampage is predominantly explained in psychological terms.[31] The act appears to be an extreme reaction to frustration, humiliation, or stressful life circumstances. The central motives are often anger, hatred, and revenge; many perpetrators have personality disorders or mental health issues. Studies show that young male lone perpetrators who have experienced social isolation, narcissistic injuries, and identification with previous rampage killers are at particular risk.[32]

Even though psychopathological factors are not exclusive to rampage killings—as research on lone-wolf terrorism suggests—the impulsive, emotionally driven dynamic that distinguishes rampage killings from strategically planned acts of terrorist violence still prevails.[33] While terrorism pursues an instrumental strategy of violence, rampage killings focus on the immediate release of pent-up aggression.

However, the causes remain complex and are the subject of interdisciplinary debate. Psychological, social, and developmental factors interact without there being a clear explanation. Thus, rampage killings, like terrorism, prove to be a multi-layered phenomenon of violence—albeit with different driving forces, structures, and escalation mechanisms.

2.2.1. Psychological and social dynamics

Amok acts are often rooted in a complex mix of individual and social factors. Psychologically, patterns such as narcissistic insults, persistent humiliation, or a deep sense of marginalization can be identified.[34] These internal conflicts often culminate in an explosive act of violence, which the perpetrator subjectively perceives as the ultimate form of self-assertion.[35] In addition to mental disorders—such as personality disorders or depressive symptoms—impaired affect control also plays a central role.[36]

On a social level, rampages are often embedded in experiences of isolation, exclusion, or bullying.[37] A lack of social ties, limited access to support structures, and a perceived lack of prospects reinforce the perpetrator's retreat into their own world of enemy stereotypes.[38] This area of tension gives rise to dynamics that, in extreme cases, can lead to an escalating outburst of violence.

2.2.2. Act of passion vs. calculated violence

A characteristic feature of rampages is the spontaneous, emotionally driven use of violence.[39] In an acute crisis, the perpetrator loses control of their actions and reacts with disproportionate, excessive violence.[40] These acts of violence are usually characterized by a high degree of impulsivity, which clearly distinguishes rampages from strategically planned forms of violence.[41]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in some cases elements of calculated violence can also be found. Some perpetrators prepare their actions to a limited extent—for example, by obtaining weapons or determining a location. Nevertheless, the core character of amok remains affective escalation: a spontaneous outbreak of violence that is not primarily strategically or instrumentally motivated.

2.2.3. Indeterminate choice of victims, often with a suicidal outcome

A central feature of rampages is the indeterminacy of victim selection.[42] The violence is not directed against specific, clearly identified enemies, but rather against random bystanders.[43] This indifference toward the victims makes it clear that the perpetrator's actual goal is less to punish individuals than to symbolically release his pent-up aggression.

In many cases, a rampage ends with the perpetrator committing suicide or attempting to be shot by the police. This pattern points to the close link between rampage and suicidal dynamics. The act can thus be understood as an extended form of suicide, in which violence is directed outward before it strikes back at the perpetrator himself.

2.3.4. Classification as personalized revenge without political objectives

Scientifically, amok is regularly described as a form of "personalized revenge" that does not pursue any political or ideological goals.[44]

While terrorist violence aims at social or political transformation, amok remains rooted in private and individual experience. The violence serves to express personal resentment and to attempt to avenge subjectively suffered injustice in a drastic manner.[45] This distinction is crucial in order not to confuse amok with terrorism in analytical terms. Although there may be overlaps in individual cases—for example, when a perpetrator of amok subsequently refers to

political narratives—the structural core remains individual and personalized. Amok should therefore be understood primarily as an extreme escalation of personal crises, not as part of a collective or strategic project.

However, it would be extremely important for legal practice and, in particular, for the relevant case law to make as clear a distinction as possible. The analysis of the Graz "rampage" on June 20, 2015[46] , in which a 26-year-old Austrian of Bosnian origin killed three people and seriously injured 36 others by racing through the city center at high speed, shows striking parallels to similar cases. During the trial, experts diagnosed him with severe schizophrenia. However, this diagnosis overshadowed another line of investigation that also considered an Islamist motive to be understandable and plausible. His ex-wife testified that he had forced her to wear a burqa[47] and had become increasingly radicalized in the run-up to the crime. His proximity to the alleged IS preacher Fikret B., who himself was planning a jihad trip to Syria and wanted to join IS, also weighs heavily against him.[48] Why the court very quickly accepted the "mental illness" scenario[49] , but at the same time rejected or did not pursue the hypothesis of Islamist radicalization[50] , remains a mystery in retrospect. In the author's view, there is strong evidence in this case that the "death drive" in Graz should be classified as a terrorist act rather than a "normal" hate crime/homicide (in the sense of a rampage).[51]

Of particular interest in this context is the terrorist attack in Barcelona on August 17, 2017. An Islamist-motivated perpetrator of Moroccan origin drove a small van unhindered into an unsuspecting crowd on the La Rambla promenade in the city center.[52] Fourteen people were killed and at least 118 injured. While fleeing, the attacker stabbed another person to death. The "Islamic State" claimed responsibility for the attack shortly afterwards. [53]

This reveals a questionable pattern: similar acts, but fundamentally different legal classifications. In practice, the decisive factor is the weighting and evaluation of the available evidence by the courts – which determines whether the act is classified as a rampage or a terrorist attack. However, this decision is often made without explicit consideration of the respective distinguishing criteria and usually without recourse to relevant scientific expertise.

DIMENSION	TERRORISM	AMOK
Objective	Ideological, i.e., motivated by extremism (religious, nationalistic, etc.), strategic communication	No overarching political objective; acts are usually an expression of personal crises, frustration, or emotional release
Choice of victims	Civilians or symbolic targets, deliberately instrumentalized to send messages	Victims often random or accidental; relationship between perpetrator and victim usually irrelevant
Degree of planning	High degree of organization and preparation (clandestine planning, tactical considerations)	Spontaneous or only prepared at short notice; impulsive dynamics dominate
Motivation	Ideological-political, strategic, and instrumental	Psychological-emotional: anger, hatred, revenge for humiliation, personal crises, striving for redemption
Communication logic	Violence as a symbolic message to a broad audience (public, politicians, opponents)	Violence primarily an end in itself; external communication not central
Relationship to the state/law	Attack on the state's monopoly on the use of force; challenge to the political order	Personal outbreak of violence without ideological claims
Duration/dynamics	Repeatable, potentially part of longer-term campaigns	Short-term, abrupt, usually ends in suicide or police intervention
Risk profiles of perpetrators	Politically or religiously radicalized, often involved in networks; increasing relevance of lone perpetrators	Often socially isolated, mental disorders, narcissistic or paranoid personality traits
Typical classification	Asymmetrical, strategic form of violence; peacetime equivalent to war crimes	Affective mass violence, usually with psychopathological connotations

Table: Distinction between terrorism and rampage
Source: Author

2.3. Hybrid extremism and stochastic forms of violence

2.3.1. Hybrid, multidimensional extremism

Current manifestations of extremism are increasingly characterized by hybridization and multidimensionality across phenomena.[54] While jihadist or left-wing and right-wing extremist manifestations of anti-constitutional and anti-democratic worldviews have thus far mostly been based on relatively clearly defined ideological foundations, there is now a clear tendency toward the mixing, overlapping, and mutual referencing of different currents.[55] Whether consciously or due to their striking ignorance, young actors no longer exclusively adopt the coherent elements of a single ideology, but selectively draw on different narratives, symbolic worlds, and interpretations.[56] In some cases, jihadist notions of salvation can even be "easily" combined with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, esoteric-ecological doomsday scenarios, or right-wing extremist "Great Replacement" narratives.[57]

This development is closely linked to digital communication spaces, which have become the central arenas of radicalization in recent years. Platforms such as TikTok, Telegram, RocketChat, Discord, and relevant gaming forums create low-threshold availability of extremist content and, at the same time, a resonance space in which adolescents and young adults develop hybrid identities. Hybrid extremism thus means not only an ideological but also a performative and aesthetic blending: music, memes, visual codes, and lifestyle elements are combined and adapted across scene boundaries.[58] The hybrid character results in flexible identification options that are particularly appealing to young people's fragmented, often crisis-ridden self-identification.

2.3.2. Definition of stochastic violence

The term *stochastic violence* or *stochastic terrorism* describes a form of violence that cannot be traced back to specific organizational structures, chains of command, or direct instructions, but rather arises contingently from the spread of extremist narratives.[59] This means that the constant repetition, emotionalization, and increased reach of extremist messages increase the likelihood that individuals who are receptive to them will take action—without the need for direct contact or explicit instructions from third parties.[60]

Stochastic violence thus differs fundamentally from the classic, meticulously planned acts of terrorism orchestrated by jihadist organizations such as al-Qaeda or the "Islamic State."

Instead, acts of violence are increasingly occurring in a diffuse climate of extremist incitement, in which attackers feel part of an imagined (online) community or subculture, even if they have no real organizational ties.[61] These forms of violence are therefore difficult to predict, often spontaneous, and can only be prevented in exceptional cases by traditional intelligence tools.[62] In security policy practice, stochastic violence therefore poses a considerable challenge because the threshold between radical beliefs and violent action is significantly lowered and possible points of intervention are only recognizable at short notice and are therefore difficult to identify.

2.3.3. "Salad bar extremism" and ideological patchworking

Between 2014 and 2023, Europe saw a dramatic increase in terrorist attacks carried out by lone actors who were associated with a specific ideology but did not operate as part of a particular group or organization.[63] Such ideologically motivated terrorist attacks rose from 20 percent of terrorist acts in the West in 2014 to a peak of 76 percent in 2020.[64] Almost all of these attacks were carried out by individuals with a clear jihadist, left-wing extremist, or right-wing extremist motive. In 2024, there was a remarkable break in this trend: in that year, 65 percent of terrorist attacks in Western countries could no longer be attributed to a specific ideology (certainly not according to the categorization of phenomena commonly used by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution), with the ideological motivations of the individual attackers sometimes being composed of different, sometimes obviously contradictory sources and narratives, as the current "Global Terrorism Index" clearly shows.[65] Part of this increase may simply be due to a lack of information about the background to certain attacks, but the statistics could also reflect the increase in ideologically unclear terrorist attacks, which could be symptomatic of the broader political and social uncertainty that is spreading in the West due to increasing social polarization. Lone-wolf terrorists construct their own ideologies by piecing together elements from different, sometimes contradictory worldviews or fragments thereof. This mixing of ideologies represents a departure from the principle of strict allegiance to a single group or cause, and rather reflects an attempt to justify violent actions through ideological constraints.

In this context, the term *"salad bar extremism"* (or *patchwork extremism*) has become established in research.[66] It describes the phenomenon of individuals putting together their own extremist worldview, similar to a salad bar: From a wide range of ideological set pieces,

conspiracy theories, and identity politics narratives, they pick out those elements that fit their own experiences, personal grievances, or search for belonging.[67] The result is an individualized, often inconsistent ideology, which, however, can be particularly powerful due to its high degree of adaptation to the subject.

This ideological patchwork means that extremist actors can no longer be clearly assigned to an organization or scene, but instead construct their own version, virtually tailoring their worldview to suit themselves.[68] The classic focus of extremism research on coherent ideologies and self-contained, homogeneous movements is therefore becoming less and less relevant. Instead, hybrid mixed forms are now increasingly dominant (the Austrian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence [DSN] uses the term "heterodox extremism"[69]), which adapt and transform flexibly and emphasize different facets or aspects of ideologies or their set pieces depending on the environment. They can be combined particularly well with conspiracy narratives or even arise from them. This model of "custom extremism" is becoming increasingly attractive, especially to impressionable young people who are socialized in fragmented digital subcultures, because it allows for individual forms of expression while also providing the emotional energy of collective radicalism.[70]

2.3.4. Erosion of clear distinguishing criteria or categories for radicalized lone perpetrators

The developments described above are contributing to the increasing erosion of traditional analytical and, ultimately, security policy categories. While terrorism was traditionally defined by factors such as organizational embedding, political objectives, and strategic communication beyond the immediate terrorist act, and rampages were primarily understood as an expression of individual crises and psychopathological factors, these boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred today.[71] Radicalized lone perpetrators operate in the area of tension between the categories described: they adopt elements of terrorist symbolism and rhetoric, but increasingly act without organizational ties and often on the basis of highly personal motives.[72]

The result is a growing gray area between terrorism, rampage killings, and other (mixed) forms of individually motivated violence, in which clear classifications are hardly possible anymore.[73] This poses a fundamental challenge for security authorities and prevention actors: counterstrategies that are geared toward classic organizational structures or clearly

identifiable areas of extremist activity are ineffective when perpetrators come from hybrid online subcultures and their acts of violence combine both personal and ideological dimensions. It is highly likely that such hybrid extremism will increasingly dominate the current terrorist threat matrix in Europe and force counterterrorism institutions and security agencies in general to further develop their analytical categories and prevention and intervention tools. The atomization of extremist violence has also led to an individualization of ideological foundations and motives.

3. Case study I: The Magdeburg Christmas market attack (December 2024)

3.1. Description of the crime

On December 20, 2024, a deadly rampage involving a vehicle ramming attack occurred at the local Christmas market in Magdeburg (Saxony-Anhalt). At around 6 p.m., a black BMW X3 sped through an emergency access road on Ernst-Reuter-Allee near the local main train station, which was not protected by bollards, and crashed into the crowd of people visiting the Christmas market without braking.[74] Within a minute and along a 400-meter-long, bloody trail of destruction, the vehicle struck numerous people before coming to a halt due to the force of the impact and the driver was quickly arrested by the security forces who rushed to the scene.[75] Several fatalities were confirmed that same evening; a few days later, the death toll stood at six. Several hundred people suffered injuries, some of them serious, and/or psychological trauma.[76] The attack targeted a Christmas market, a symbolic target, a culturally and religiously charged "space" in the Western Christian tradition. [77]

3.2. Perpetrator profile: age, radicalization process, digital traces

Unlike the vast majority of attackers in Germany over the past five years, the suspected driver Taleb al-A. was already 50 years old and a Saudi citizen at the time of the attack.[78] He had been living in Germany since 2006 and practiced as a psychiatrist specializing in the treatment of addicts, which also does not correspond to the usual profile of terrorist attackers in Western Europe. According to reports in *the Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* and other media outlets, there were doubts among hospital staff about his professional competence.[79] He had also worked at the Salus specialist clinic, but was reportedly no longer employed there after incidents in which he allegedly repeatedly prescribed potentially life-threatening medication to patients.[80] Since

October 2024, he had been on continuous vacation or sick leave, and his dismissal was apparently imminent. At the time of his arrest, he was not under the influence of alcohol or drugs. In August 2025, the public prosecutor's office brought charges of six counts of murder, hundreds of counts of attempted murder, and grievous bodily harm.

At first glance, the attacker did not seem to fit the pattern, and numerous commentators—journalists and extremism researchers alike—found it difficult to immediately classify the crime and the attacker. Was it a case of terrorism or a rampage? Was the alleged attacker—a Shiite on paper, an atheist by his own admission—an Islamist? In an interview, Peter Neumann stated that he had *"never seen such a perpetrator profile in 25 years*."[81] Digital traces point to a dual "onlife" radicalization process (digital and analog): despite alleged contacts with the milieu (which naturally raises the question of the purpose), the evidence does not suggest any Islamist connection, but rather a pattern of selective radicalization in the virtual online space. The perpetrator consumed and shared content that conveyed Islamophobic or anti-Saudi narratives, anti-systemic resentment, and reactionary, far-right positions.[82] On December 12, 2024, just under a week before the attack, he appeared in a video interview for an Islamophobic US blog from the Maritim Hotel in Magdeburg.[83] In it, he expressed admiration for entrepreneur Elon Musk and obscure American conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. He also claimed that the Federal Republic of Germany was allowing Syrian Islamists to enter the country while at the same time deliberately destroying the lives of ex-Muslims from Saudi Arabia. According to his account, the German police were conducting a covert worldwide operation to persecute these individuals, acting in a manner he compared to practices from the Nazi era.[84]

In various online forums and social networks, he repeatedly expressed distrust of state institutions and spread derogatory comments about migrants and religious minorities—but above all against the politics and authoritarian regime of his homeland, Saudi Arabia.[85] At the same time, he displayed increasing bitterness, authoritarian thinking, and a growing distance from social ties in his personal environment in the real world.[86] After the crime, investigators found material stored on his devices that documented this ideological fragmentation—a digital mosaic of hatred, conspiracy theories, and anti-system narratives.[87] During questioning, A. stated that his motive was his "*dissatisfaction with the treatment of Saudi Arabian* refugees."[88]

3.3. Ideological patchwork? Evidence of salad bar extremism.

The available evidence points to a self-constructed ideological patchwork. Various fragments—Islamophobic rhetoric, anti-immigration narratives, anti-systemic topoi—were selectively integrated into an individual justification and enemy image scheme. This corresponds to the pattern of eclectic elements of do-it-yourself extremism, the "salad bar extremism" already presented, in which disparate elements are combined at random without forming a coherent worldview: ideological set pieces of different origins and characteristics that are selectively adopted depending on personal circumstances.[89] This ideological hodgepodge indicates that it was not so much the dogmatic coherence of a consistent ideology that legitimized his violence, but rather the functional connectivity of arbitrarily drawn extremist narratives, a colorful mosaic of radical thought patterns that offered him self-empowerment and enemy images.[90] In a sense, it was both a worldview and an enemy image construction.

The phenomenon of hybrid extremism, in which different ideological strands—from religious fundamentalism to left-wing and right-wing extremist conspiracy ideologies—can be combined, illustrates the increasingly fluid dynamics of radicalization in the present day, which are becoming an ongoing preventive challenge.

3.4. Dynamics of the act: spontaneity vs. planning

The crime had both spontaneous and planned elements. The perpetrator used a rented SUV and chose the scene and time of the crime so as to achieve maximum damage and attention. The scene of the crime, an emergency access road on Ernst-Reuter-Allee that was not secured by bollards or mechanical barriers, offered the attacker a dense crowd and unhindered access.[91] At the same time, the logistical complexity of both the preparation and execution of the crime remained low: a single act carried out with simple means and a degree of spontaneity. Investigators also found a document written by the attacker ("testament") that suggests deliberate self-staging and long-term preparation for the crime.[92] A. had previously rented the BMW X3 used for the rampage from a well-known car rental company. This hybrid form of rudimentary planning and situational implementation corresponds to a recurring effective pattern that has also been observed in other so-called inspired lone wolf attacks in Europe. In terms of *the* "*operational* simplicity" of ideologically motivated acts of violence, the Magdeburg attack is thus exemplary of a low-threshold form of terror that does not require complex logistical resources but at the same time attracts a high level of attention from the general public.[93]

3.5. Media reception and political discourse

Media coverage fluctuated between cautious wording ("suspected attack") and hasty attribution as an "(Islamist) act of terror," with false reports and misleading posts circulating in some cases, intended to incite large sections of the population.[94] Conservative voices called for tighter security and migration measures, while liberal and left-wing opinion pages emphasized the importance of prevention.[95] Government representatives warned against hasty attributions, but at the same time criticized attempts at political instrumentalization.

3.6. Implications for analysis, prevention, and protection concepts

The Magdeburg case reveals the increasing difficulty of identifying the growing number of hybrid forms of terrorism that combine ideological motives with individually motivated, performative violence. Several lessons can be learned for practical application: first, the observation of radicalization indicators beyond classic patterns; second, the adaptation of security architectures in public spaces (barriers, access controls) to prevent vehicular attacks[96] ; and third, closer cooperation between the judiciary, security authorities, and health care providers.

4. Case study II: The school shooting in Graz (June 2025)

On June 10, 2025, a rampage took place at the Bundesoberstufenrealgymnasium (BORG) Dreierschützengasse in the Lend district of Graz, during which a 21-year-old former student killed eleven people – ten students and one teacher – and injured eleven others before taking his own life.[97] This tragic incident, the first school shooting of its kind in Austria, not only caused deep sadness, but also sparked intense debates about gun laws, prevention, and the psychology of mass shooters.

4.1. Course of events: sequence of events, weapons, victims, suicide

The rampage began at 9:43 a.m. on Tuesday when the alleged perpetrator, Arthur A., entered the school building. He was carrying a backpack with weapons and ammunition and prepared for his rampage in a bathroom on the third floor. At 9:57 a.m., he opened fire in a fifth-grade classroom on the second floor, where he indiscriminately shot at the victims in the room. He then returned to the third floor, shot the lock on a seventh-grade classroom door, and continued firing there. A total of about 40 shots were fired within seven minutes. The police were alerted shortly before 10:00 a.m. – triggered by a report from the perpetrator's mother, who had received a farewell video from him. Officers arrived at 10:06 a.m. and entered the building at 10:08 a.m. At 10:07 a.m., the perpetrator committed suicide in the bathroom with the weapon used in the crime. His death was confirmed at 10:13 a.m. The building was evacuated and the situation was secured around noon.[98] Over 300 police officers were deployed, including special forces.

The weapons used were legally purchased: a semi-automatic Glock 19 pistol (purchased at the end of May 2025) and a sawed-off Mercury shotgun (purchased at the beginning of April 2025). The perpetrator had legally owned a gun license since April 2025, but did not have a permit to carry a weapon. He was also carrying a hunting knife, shooting glasses, and ear protection.[99] In his apartment, police found a non-functional pipe bomb and plans for an alternative explosive attack, which he had apparently discarded.

The victims included ten students and a teacher, who later died in the hospital. Eleven other people were injured, at least three of them seriously. The murdered teacher had previously taught the perpetrator, and one of the girls who was killed reportedly lived in the same building as him. A total of 30 people received emergency medical treatment, five of whom were initially

in critical condition. The perpetrator avoided confrontation with armed forces. The incident only ended with the perpetrator's suicide, which is typical for rampage killings.

4.2. Perpetrator psychology: Possible affective motives, victim narrative, online subculture

The perpetrator, Arthur A., was a 21-year-old Austrian with an Armenian father who lived with his single mother in Kalsdorf near Graz.[100] He had left school in 2022 without a degree, was unemployed, and had been rejected by the Austrian Armed Forces as "mentally unfit."[101] Nevertheless, he passed a psychological test for a gun license in March 2025, which sparked debate. He had no criminal record and had not previously attracted negative attention at school – he was considered introverted and a passionate gamer, with first-person shooter games, i.e., mainly those focusing on the use of armed violence, being his preferred choice.[102] The emotional motives remain unclear, as there is neither a manifesto nor any reliable evidence that could shed light on this. In a farewell video to his family, he apologized but mentioned bullying (unconfirmed) as a possible contributing factor.[103] Mass shooters are often described as people with a desire for revenge: they see themselves as victims of injustice, humiliation, or social isolation and seek a form of retribution through their actions.[104] Such a "victim narrative"—a feeling of being disadvantaged—drives them to punish society or specific groups (in this case, students and teachers).[105]

The perpetrator showed an intense interest in school shootings and a conspicuous admiration for US mass shootings and their perpetrators. On his social media accounts (including Reddit and X), he posted pictures of his weapons and profiles with photos of Columbine perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.[106] He referenced US mass shootings and posted a photo from the school shortly before the crime. These subcultures in forums and platforms glorify violence and provide an echo chamber for isolated individuals, reinforcing the victim narrative.[107]

4.3. Digital gamification and fascination with school massacres

The fascination with school massacres and the corresponding radicalization[108] is usually reinforced by digital elements, as in the case of Arthur A., who played first-person shooter games intensively. Such virtual worlds gamify violence[109] : points for hits, rankings, and immersive scenarios simulate real attacks, which can promote desensitization. For some, reality then becomes blurred and killing becomes a game for the future perpetrators who have

been socialized in the gaming world. This "digital gamification" – inspired by US role models such as Columbine – makes rampages appear like a "game" in which perpetrators strive for "high scores" in order to achieve fame.[110] The perpetrator planned the act for months, including shooting practice, and saw it as a "voluntary act," which points to a gamified perception: the school as a "level," the victims as "targets."[111] Online communities on platforms such as Reddit reinforce this through threads in which massacres are discussed and glorified, which can radicalize isolated individuals. In the Graz context, the perpetrator posted references to Columbine online, showing how digital subcultures create a "fascination" inspired by real violence and encourage imitation in real life.[112]

4.4. Reactions and political debate (gun laws, etc.)

Following the horrific act, the political debate was dominated by calls for stricter gun laws: On June 16, Chancellor Stocker announced tightening measures—such as raising the minimum age for purchasing firearms from 21 to 25, extending the waiting period ("cooling-off period") from three days to four weeks, stricter psychological tests, and better data exchange between authorities (since the perpetrator was able to legally purchase weapons later despite being rejected by the Austrian Armed Forces for psychological reasons).[113] The SPÖ called for further restrictions, including a ban on handguns for private individuals and stricter social media rules for young people.[114] The Greens supported a ban on handguns, while the FPÖ rejected this, pointing to the adequacy of existing legislation.[115] Plans were announced to double the number of school psychologists by 2028. The incident sparked a national debate in Austria on prevention, bullying, and youth violence.[116]

4.5. Distinction from terrorist violence

Unlike terrorist violence, which is ideologically motivated and spreads a political message (e.g., through manifestos or membership in groups), the Graz rampage was, according to current findings, primarily a personally motivated act without any overarching ideological agenda. While terrorists aim to bring about social or political change, rampage killers usually seek individual revenge without any ideological component—without any connection to extremism. The security authorities correctly classified the Graz school massacre as a rampage killing, not an act of terrorism, as the focus was on the perpetrator's personal frustration as the motive.[117]

In this context, it is important to mention the growing trend of non-ideological extremism, which is characterized by a specific form of online radicalization that glorifies past rampages and their perpetrators and promotes performative violence. Rampages are a variant of this non-ideological terrorism. Matthew Kriner of the Accelerationism Research Consortium warns against *"violence for violence's* sake," which is promoted by online subcultures such as true crime communities and a "saints culture" that glorifies mass murderers.[118] The latter venerates mass murderers such as right-wing terrorist Dylann Roof as "saints" and celebrates high death tolls in their violent crimes. The founder of Behavioral Science Applications, Steve Crimando, distinguishes between "*aspirational* violence" (the pursuit of recognition in virtual communities) and ideological violence (the promotion of a cause).[119] Non-ideological nihilists adhere to apocalyptic thinking ("doomerism"), characterized by hatred, loneliness, self-hatred, envy, and a morbid mood of doom and gloom.[120]

5. Comparative case analysis

5.1. Similarities

Both cases show significant parallels that point to currently dominant forms of radicalization and the assassins' eruptive violent ambitions. Each of the hate crimes compared here points to fundamental new challenges in a digitalized society with regard to the prevention of extremism and crime.

5.2. Perpetrator type: Male lone actors

Both Taleb al-A. and Arthur A. acted as male lone actors, i.e., individuals without direct support from a group or underlying structures. Nevertheless, both used virtual space to exchange ideas and find inspiration. Al-A. acted alone, despite evidence of online contacts with extremist content and its creators or distributors. Arthur A., an unemployed young man, also planned and carried out the act in isolation, lived with his mother, and had no known accomplices. This type corresponds to a common pattern of recent indiscriminate perpetrators of violence: men in personal crisis situations who are driven by experienced or perceived frustrations and do not need or make use of an organized structure to carry out their violent acts.

5.3. Digital radicalization (online forums, first-person shooter games, extremist subcultures)

Digital influences played a central role in both cases. Al-A. became radicalized primarily online, posting videos on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube in which he expressed anti-German, anti-Israeli, and anti-Saudi sentiments. He also consumed content from extremist subcultures that glorify violence. Arthur A. was active in online forums where he discussed school shootings, played first-person shooter games, and maintained profiles with references to the Columbine perpetrators. Both mass murderers used digital platforms for self-affirmation and inspiration, which reinforced their respective radicalization in isolated subcultures—from extremist forums to nihilistic gaming communities where the glorification of violence is openly practiced.

5.4. High degree of unpredictability and eruptive violence

The acts were highly unpredictable and resulted in explosive, random violence. In Magdeburg, al-A. used an emergency lane to drive an SUV unhindered into the crowd, causing total chaos within minutes. In Graz, Arthur A. entered his former school, shot indiscriminately into classrooms, and killed ten and eleven people within seven minutes, respectively. Both attacks came without any immediate warning signs, despite earlier indications (e.g., mental health issues in Arthur A. or numerous complaints about al-A. and his practice as a psychiatrist). The eruptive nature of the sudden outbreak of violence – from zero to a hundred – made timely intervention by the security authorities virtually impossible in both cases.

5.5. Stochastic elements: "It could hit anytime, anyone"

Both incidents embody stochastic violence in its purest form. This is particularly evident in the random selection of victims, which conveys the feeling that "it could happen anytime, to anyone."[121] In Magdeburg, it struck unsuspecting visitors to a Christmas market – families, children, bystanders. In Graz, it was students and teachers who became targets of violence purely because of their presence. At most, a connection to the perpetrator could be established in the case of a teacher who was killed, as she may have taught him in the past. This randomness intensifies the horror effect, as it is not a specific group that is attacked, but an uninvolved collective, which creates a subjective feeling of insecurity among the population.

5.2 Differences

Despite the similarities outlined above, the cases diverge in terms of motivation, communication, and execution, which underscores the necessary distinction between terrorism and rampage.

5.2.1 Ideological vs. affective motivation

The Magdeburg attack was undoubtedly ideologically motivated: Al-A. acted out of hatred for Germany and Saudi Arabia, influenced by conspiratorial and Islamophobic ideas, despite describing himself as an ex-Muslim. His videos addressed political conflicts such as the Gaza War, the authoritarian regime in Riyadh, and asylum frustrations. In contrast, the Graz rampage is more likely to be understood as affective: Arthur A. was driven by a thirst for personal

revenge, oppressive isolation, and a fascination with rampage massacres, possibly exacerbated by his own experiences of bullying. This reflex is not attributable to a political agenda, but rather to an emotional release that apparently dominated the affective impulse behind the act.

5.2.2. Perpetrator communication and message (political vs. individual psychological symbolism)

Al-A. communicated explicitly and publicly: he posted videos with political messages, criticized Germany and his country of origin, and at the same time demanded attention for global injustices—a symbolic act to send a message. Arthur A. left a farewell video for his family, which was limited to personal apologies without any deeper symbolism or explanatory value regarding his motive for the act. His online posts referenced school shootings as an individual fantasy of violence, not as a political statement.

5.2.3. Degree of planning vs. impulsive act

The Magdeburg case requires a relatively high degree of planning: Al-A. rented the car, specifically chose the scene of the crime, and posted cryptic videos in advance, whose possible connection to the later crime only became apparent in retrospect, suggesting months of preparation. Graz was also planned (procurement of weapons, pipe bomb, shooting practice), but was even more interspersed with impulsive elements: the act lasted only minutes, and the shooter committed suicide immediately afterwards. Nevertheless, the rampage in Graz was less strategic and more emotionally driven, while the deadly rampage in Magdeburg appeared to be more calculated, at least in terms of the run-up to the crime.

5.2.4. (Non-)existence of a strategic goal

The attack in Magdeburg apparently had a strategic goal: to destabilize society through terror in order to force political change (e.g., Islam policy, foreign policy vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia or Israel, etc.). Al-A. wanted to cause "maximum pain." In Graz, there is no evidence of such an agenda: there was no overarching goal beyond personal revenge; the rampage ended in suicide. From the perpetrator's point of view, this seemed to fulfill the intentionality of the violence.

6. Conclusion

The comparative analysis shows that both cases are linked by digital radicalization and unpredictability, but differ in motivation and objectives: ideologically multidimensional terrorism vs. affective rampage.

The present study aims to substantiate the fact that, despite different ideological and motivational frameworks, rampage and terrorism increasingly overlap in their manifestations:

1. It has been argued that both phenomena are characterized to a high degree by a manifest intention to use violence, a high degree of indiscriminateness in the choice of victims, and broad media coverage.
2. It is understandable that both terrorist and amok-like acts of violence follow a perfidious dynamic that oscillates between personal grievance, social marginalization, and ideologically charged justifications.
3. The aspect of staging violence as communication comes to the fore here: fear and insecurity are not merely side effects, but central objectives, both for terrorists and for perpetrators of rampage killings. In the latter case, however, this is due more to an enormous thirst for revenge and less to transcendent ideological concerns.

The analytical added value of the concept of stochastic violence lies in its systematic capture of this hybrid gray area. It allows us to describe the inherent unpredictability, indiscriminateness, and symbolic dimension of such acts without having to adhere to rigid categorizations (terrorism vs. rampage). The approach thus not only sharpens the conceptual definition, but also increases the possibility of sensitizing prevention and security research to new forms of violence.

Another increasingly significant explanatory approach is the recent phenomenon of so-called "salad bar extremism," i.e., hybrid worldviews or fragments thereof that are eclectically fed by different ideological set pieces and allow for a tailor-made, precisely fitting ideology for each individual. Lone perpetrators or small groups draw on a broad spectrum of right-wing extremist, Islamophobic, conspiracy-prone, anti-elitist, or apocalyptic narratives without belonging to a clearly defined ideology. These hybrid forms enable flexible, individually tailored radicalization that attaches itself to personal grievances and subjective, mostly paranoid experiences of threat, as the Magdeburg attack on the Christmas market has very

aptly illustrated. It is precisely this selectivity and arbitrariness that makes salad bar extremism more unpredictable in terms of future acts of violence, as it can hardly be categorized in traditional ideological terms and deviates from normative concepts.

At the same time, they exacerbate the problem of strategically based risk forecasts because they expand the spectrum of potential threats to almost limitless proportions and increasingly undermine traditional early warning indicators.

These considerations call for differentiated case analyses based on security research that go beyond binary attributions and familiar patterns analogous to classic phenomena. Neither the label "terrorist" nor the attribution "amok" alone can do justice to the complexity of the phenomena. What is needed instead is a multidimensional risk assessment that takes equal account of psychosocial dispositions, ideological foundations, communication strategies, and situational escalation dynamics. Only through such an integrated approach can our understanding of impulsive violent eruptions be deepened. On the other hand, this approach allows us to derive reliable, strategically sound, probability-based forecasts for the future and, ideally, even to develop an effective prevention strategy that takes into account the emerging multidimensionality.

But until then, according to the author's pessimistic fears, there will unfortunately be many more cases that are as difficult to categorize as those in Magdeburg or Graz.

About the author

Dr. Nicolas Stockhammer is a political scientist specializing in extremism, terrorism research, and security policy. From 2004 to 2006, he was a postdoctoral researcher at the Chair of Political Theory (Prof. Herfried Münkler) at Humboldt University in Berlin. He later served as a researcher in the Office for Security Policy at the Federal Ministry of Defense. From 2014 to 2021 Nicolas Stockhammer has been a senior post-doc researcher of the research group Polemology and Legal Ethics at the University of Vienna.

Since 2021, he has led the research cluster "Counter-Terrorism, CVE (Countering Violent Extremism), and Intelligence" at Danube University Krems (Austria). He is also a Senior Researcher at the European Institute for Counter-Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP) in Vienna, where he oversees the publication series Vienna Papers on Transnational Terrorism, featuring contributions from internationally recognized scholars on terrorism and extremism. Nicolas Stockhammer serves on the Editorial Board of the renowned academic journal *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, which is edited by Prof. Bruce Hoffman (Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.).

His recent publications include:

- Counterterrorism and the Prevention of Extremism: An Introduction (with Stefan Goertz), Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2023.
- Trügerische Ruhe: Der Anschlag von Wien und die terroristische Bedrohung in Europa, Amalthea Verlag, Vienna, 2023.
- Routledge Handbook on Transnational Terrorism (editor), Routledge, London, 2023.
- Together with Colin P. Clarke, (2025): "The August 2024 Taylor Swift Vienna Concert Plot". In: Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point "CTC SENTINEL", Volume 18 (1)/ 2025: 8-18, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/CTC-SENTINEL-012025.pdf.
- "Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War on World Order and the Future of Counter-Terrorism", In: Sadik, Giray (ed.): The Effects of The Russia-Ukraine War on Countering Terrorism, NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT), Ankara, https://www.coedat.nato.int/publication/researches/20-UKR_RUSwarEffectsCT.pdf.
- „From TikTok to Terrorism? The Online Radicalization of European Lone Attackers since October 7, 2023", in: Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point „CTC SENTINEL", 18 (7)/ 2025: 16-28, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/CTC-SENTINEL-072025_article-3.pdf

Bibliography

Note: All links listed below were checked again on September 1, 2025, to ensure they were up to date and functional.

[1] Weiser, U. (2025): "What connects terrorism and school shootings," *Die Presse* (June 20, 2025).
[2] Patil, A. (2025): "What We Know About the Minnesota Catholic School Shooting," *New York Times* (August 27, 2025).
[3] Shapiro, E. (2025): "Minneapolis shooting: 8-year-old and 10-year-old killed, 17 others hurt at Catholic school," ABC News, (August 28, 2025).
[4] See Goertz, S./Röttinger, R./ Stockhammer, N. (eds.): *Terrorism and Rampage. Threats and Prevention,* Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag (forthcoming).
[5] Rodde, A./Olmstead, J. (2025): "Into the Crowd: The Evolution of Vehicular Attacks and Prevention Efforts," *CTC Sentinel (*West Point), March 2025, 18 (3), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/CTC-SENTINEL-032025_article-5.pdf; Houser, R. (2023): "Democratization of Terrorism: An Analysis of Vehicle-Based Terrorist Events." *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine,* 38, p. 1 (2023).
[6] Fischer, M. /Pelzer, R. (2016): *The Logic of the Attack: On the Target Selection of Jihadist Terrorists in Europe,* Frankfurt /M.: Campus Verlag, p. 160.
[7] See, for example, Pfahl-Traughber, A. (2016): "Terrorism – Characteristics, Forms, and Problems of Delineation," *APuZ,* 66th year, 24–25/2016, June 13, 2016, pp. 10–20, https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/228899/terrorismus;
Seidenbecher, S., Steinmetz, C., Möller-Leimkühler, AM. *et al.* (2020): "Terrorism from a psychiatric perspective," *Nervenarzt* 91, pp. 422–432. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00115-020-00894-0
[8] Stockhammer, N. (2022): *Hate, Rampage, and Terror. The Perspective of Counterterrorism.* In: Gappmayer, W.: *Hate, Rampage, Terror, and Countering Them with Legal Means,* Vienna: Manz Verlag, pp. 359–371.
[9] *See* Pinker, S. (2011): *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, NY: Penguin Books, pp. 292ff. on "spree killings."
[10] Klein, G.R. (2025): "Terrorism as a Strategy of Retribution," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) Analysis,* https://icct.nl/publication/terrorism-strategy-retribution.
[11] See Bannenberg, B./Bauer, P./Kirste, A. (2014): "Manifestations and causes of rampage killings from a criminological, forensic psychiatric, and forensic psychological *perspective," Forensic Psychiatry, Psychology, Criminology,* Issue 4/2014, p. 229.
[12] Michael, G. (2012): *Lone Wolf Terror and the Rise of Leaderless Resistance.* Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press; Sageman, M. (2008): *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
[13] See Dienstbühl, D. (2016): "Amok, Suicide Bombing, or Terrorist Rampage?" in: *Criminal Police – The Magazine of the Police Union,*
https://www.kriminalpolizei.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=225:amok-selbstmordattentat-oder-terroristischer-amoklauf&catid=17&Itemid=159.
[14] See Waldmann, P. (2011): *Terrorism. Provocation of Power,* Hamburg: Murmann Verlag; Weimann, G. (2008): "The Psychology of Mass-Mediated Terrorism," *American Behavioral Scientist, 52(*1), pp. 69-86. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764208321342
[15] Bannenberg, B. (2016). *Amok and Amok Runners: Psychological and Criminological Analyses.* Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.
[16] See Stockhammer, N. (2025): *European Trend Report on Terrorism 2025,* European Institute for Counter Terrorism and Conflict Prevention – EICTP Vienna (April 2025), https://eictp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/FINAL__EICTP_Trend_Report.pdf , hereinafter referred to as "EICTP Trend Report." See in particular Trend 8. "*Emergence of Patchwork / Salad Bar Ideology among Extremi*sts," p. 51ff; Trend 9 "*Rise of Conspiracy-Driven Terror*ism," p. 53ff; Trend 18 "*Increasing Likelihood of Stochastic Terrorism*," p. 73ff.
[17] See Schwarz, K. (2024): *Stochastic Terrorism: Mass Media Escalation against Victim Groups as a Radicalization Platform for Terrorist Individual Perpetrators,* in: Stockhammer, N. (ed.): *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Terrorism,* Oxon/New York, pp. 192–196; Goertz, S./Stockhammer, N. (2023): *Counterterrorism and Extremism Prevention,* Wiesbaden: Springer, pp. 219ff.
[18] Ganor, B. 2000): *Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?* Herzliya, Israel: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism [ICT].

[19] Schmid, A. P. (2023): “Defining Terrorism,” *ICCT Paper,* The Hague, p. 13, https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-03/Schmidt%20-%20Defining%20Terrorism_1.pdf
[20] Münkler, H. (2014): "*The Strategy of Terrorism and the Defenses of the Democratic Constitutional State*." In: Schneiders, T.G. (ed.): *Salafism in Germany: Origins and Dangers of an Islamic Fundamentalist Movement,* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, p. 373ff.
[21] See Hoffman, B. (2019): *Terrorism: The Undeclared War. New Dangers of Political Violence,* Frankfurt/Main: Fischer; Ganor, B. (2015): *Global Alert. The Rationality of Modern Islamist Terrorism and the Challenge to the Liberal Democratic World,* New York: Columbia University Press.
[22] Ette, M. (2024): "Performing terror, communicating fear: Analyzing terrorism as performance of violence." *Media, War & Conflict,* 0*(*0). https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241268709
[23] See Hoffman 2019: 81.
[24] See Law, R. D. (2016): *Terrorism: A History.* 2(nd)ed. Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press.
[25] Münkler, H. (1980): "Guerrilla Warfare and Terrorism," *Neue politische Literatur,* Vol. XXV, Issue 3, pp. 299–326.
[26] See Rothenberger, L. (2023): *Terrorism as Communication: Stocktaking, Explanations and Challenges.* Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
[27] See Schmid, A. P. (ed.) (2011): *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research.* London/New York: Routledge, pp. 86 and 122.
[28] Crenshaw, M. (1981): "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics 13(*4), pp. 379–399.
[29] Roy, O. (2017): *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State.* London: Hurst & Company.
[30] Kluge, F. (2011): *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache (Etymological Dictionary of the German Language).* 25th edition. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, p. 29.
[31] See Newman, K. S., Fox, C., Harding, D. J., Mehta, J., & Roth, W. (2004): *Rampage: The social roots of school shootings.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[32] Bannenberg, B./Bauer, P./Kirste, A. (2014): "Forms and causes of rampages from a criminological, forensic psychiatric, and forensic psychological perspective," in: *Forensic Psychiatry, Psychology, Criminology,* Issue 4/2014, p. 229f.; Diehl, F. (2014): "Simple explanations of rampages are dangerous. A book review of Jonathan Fast's "Ceremonial Violence – Understanding Columbine and other School Rampage Shootings," *ZIS* 13/2014, pp. 728-736.
[33] See Newman et al. 2004; Ganor 2015; Crenshaw 1981; Münkler 2014.
[34] See Bannenberg 2016.
[35] See Sarma, K. M./ Carthy, S. L./ Cox, K. M. (2022): "Mental disorder, psychological problems and terrorist behavior: A systematic review and meta-analysis." *Campbell Syst Rev. 18(*3) Aug. 10, 2022.
[36] See Gill, P./Horgan, J./Deckert, P. (2014): "Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists." *Journal of Forensic Sciences, 59(*2), pp. 425–435.
[37] See Bannenberg/Bauer/Kirste 2014.
[38] See Seeh, M. (2025): "Extremism researcher Stockhammer: 'Amok killers don't want to die alone'," Die Presse (June 13, 2025).
[39] Hoffmann, J. /Roshdi, K. (2013): "Threat of rampage: Prevention strategies in the event of imminent violence," *Kriminalistik,* 67(5), pp. 295–302.
[40] See Robertz, F. / Wickenhäuser, R. (2007): *Der Amoklauf: Hintergründe, Entwicklungen und Strategien zur Prävention (The rampage: Background, developments, and prevention strategies*). Verlag für Polizeiwissenschaft, p. 34.
[41] See ibid.
[42] Hoffmann / Roshdi 2013: 297.
[43] Peter, E. / Seidenbecher, S. et al. (2019): “Mass murders in Germany – classification of surviving offenders based on the examination of court files.*” The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* (*30)*, pp. 1-20.
[44] See Langman, Peter F. (2009): *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
[45] Robertz / Wickenhäuser 2007: 36.
[46] "Amokfahrt durch die Grazer Innenstadt: Drei Tote, 34 Verletzte" (Amok drive through Graz city center: Three dead, 34 injured), *Der Standard* (June 20, 2015).
[47] Brnada, N. (2016): "The act of the rampaging driver," *Der Falter* 23/2106 (June 8, 2016).
[48] See Stockhammer 2022.
[49] Holzer-Ottawa, E. (2016): "Life imprisonment for driver on rampage," *Kurier* (September 29, 2016).
[50] See Wetz, A. (2025): "Graz: Authorities investigate contacts of the rampage driver," *Die Presse* (June 22, 2015).
[51] For details, see Stockhammer 2022.

[52] Del Ser, G. (2017): "What is known about the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils," *EL PAÍS* (August 23, 2017).
[53] "Terror cell planned even bigger attack in Catalonia," DW (Deutsche Welle), August 22, 2017.
[54] EICTP Trend Report, p. 13 and p. 93.
[55] See ibid.
[56] Köhler, P. (2022): "Crowds at the salad bar," in: *Neue Gesellschaft /Frankfurter Hefte* 1(2) 2022, p. 43f., https://www.frankfurter-hefte.de/artikel/gedraengel-an-der-salatbar-3346.
[57] See EICTP Trend Report, p. 13 and p. 93.
[58] See Clifford, B. / Powell, H. (2019): "Encrypted Extremism: Inside the English-Speaking Islamic State Ecosystem on *Telegram," Program on Extremism,* George Washington University.
[59] See Angove, J. (2024). Stochastic terrorism: critical reflections on an emerging concept, *Critical Studies on Terrorism, 17(*1), pp. 21–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2024.2305742.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Deutschlandfunk Kultur (2022, September 10): Stochastic terrorism – incited lone perpetrators.
[62] Nederveen, F. /Zürcher, E. et al (2024): "Van woorden naar daden: Een verkenning en kritische beschouwing van het concept 'stochastisch terrorisme'": [An exploration and critical review of the concept of 'stochastic terrorism'], Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2024, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3232-1.html.
[63] Global Terrorism Index 2025, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf
[64] See ibid.
[65] See ibid.
[66] The Soufan Center (2021): Intel Brief: The Counterterrorism Challenge of "Salad Bar" Ideologies, (March 29, 2021), https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2021-march-29; Hemmila, T. / Perliger, A. (2024): "Hybridization or Salad Bar Ideology? Testing Ideological Convergence Within the American Violent Far Right", in: *Crime & Delinquency,* 0(0), https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287241271288; Kidwai, S. A. (2024): "Salad Bar Extremism," in: *Modern Diplomacy* (September 26, 2024), https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/09/26/salad-bar-extremism.
[67] See EICTP Trend Report, Trend 8. "*Emergence of Patchwork / Salad Bar Ideology among Extremists*," p. 51ff
[68] See Gartenstein-Ross, D. et al. (2022): "Composite Violent Extremism: A Radicalization Pattern Changing the Face of Terrorism," *Lawfare*, November 22, 2022, https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/composite-violent-extremism-radicalization-pattern-changing-face-terrorism.
[69] Directorate for State Security and Intelligence (DSN) (2025). *Constitution Protection Report 2024,* p. 40ff.
[70] See Gartenstein-Ross, D., et al. (2022), "Will 'Salad Bar Extremism' Replace 'Old-School World' Terrorism?", *The National Interest*, July 14, 2022, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/will-%E2%80%98salad-bar-extremism%E2%80%99-replace-%E2%80%98old-school-world%E2%80%99-terrorism-203516.
[71] See Stockhammer 2022.
[72] See Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2022.
[73] See Stockhammer 2022.
[74] "Taleb Al Abdulmohsen left a will in the attack vehicle," *Der Spiegel* (December 24, 2024).
[75] Gross, J /Chutel, L. (2024): "Germany Bulked Up Christmas Market Security. An Attack Still Happened", *New York Times* (December 21, 2024).
[76] Brüggemann et al (2024): *"*Taleb A. to be brought before magistrate*," Der Spiegel* (December 21, 2024-ongoing).
[77] Kampf, L et al (2024): "Three Minutes," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (12/22/2024).
[78] "Attack in Magdeburg: This is the situation," *ZDF Heute* (December 28, 2024).
[79] Adam, T. (2024): The staff called him "Dr. Google": Is the Magdeburg attacker really a doctor?, *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung.* December 23, 2024.
[80] Doubts about medical suitability: "We call him Dr. Google": Former colleagues spill the beans on Taleb A., *Focus Online (*December 26, 2024).
[81] Völkner, P. (2024): "Right-wing extremist, left-wing extremist or Islamist? After the Magdeburg attack, an expert assesses the perpetrator's profile," *Frankfurter Rundschau (*December 23, 2024).
[82] Howard, J. /Kirby P. (2024): "What we know about Magdeburg market attack suspect Abdulmohsen," *BBC* (December 23, 2024),
[83] See Kampf et al 2024.
[84] Taleb Al Abdulmohsen left a will in the attack vehicle," *Der Spiegel* (December 24, 2024).
[85] See Kampf et al 2024.
[86] See Adam 2024.
[87] See Brüggemann et al. 2024.
[88] See ibid.

[89] See Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2022.
[90] "Attack in Magdeburg: What is known about the perpetrator Taleb A.," MDR Saxony-Anhalt (August 28, 2025).
[91] Gross/Chutel 2024.
[92] "Taleb Al Abdulmohsen left a will in the attack vehicle," *Der Spiegel* (December 24, 2024).
[93] For detailed information on "low-level" terrorism, see EICTP Trend Report, Trend 12: *Continuing Dominance of Low-Level Terrorism, pp*. 61-65.
[94] See, among others, Siggelkow, P. (2024): "Christmas market in Magdeburg. Right-wing extremist disinformation about attack," *ARD-Tagesschau* (December 21, 2024).
[95] "Further investigations into possible errors by the authorities," *ARD Tagesschau* (December 27, 2024); "Sixth person dies after attack in Magdeburg," *Die ZEIT* (January 6, 2025).
[96] Gross/Chutel 2024.
[97] ORF.at/Agencies (2025): Eleven dead in Graz: Perpetrator planned sequence of events "down to the last detail." *news.ORF.at.* (June 12, 2025).
[98] See ibid.
[99] "The gunman's headset was hearing protection," *ORF Steiermark* (June 15, 2025).
[100] Kurakin, T. (2025): "In the attacker's hometown, people are searching for the why," *Kleine Zeitung* (June 11, 2025).
[101] Weichhart, J. (2025): Why the gunman failed the army's psychological test. *Kurier* (June 12, 2025).
[102] Karner, M. (2025): "Graz gunman glorified Columbine perpetrators online," *PULS 24 News (*June 13, 2025).
[103] "Graz gunman sent video to his mother – she notified the police," *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* (June 11, 2025).
[104] See Böckler, N. / Seeger, T. (2010): "Amok im Kopf. Zur Genese und Struktur von Amokfantasien bei Jugendlichen" (Amok in the mind. On the genesis *and structure of rampage fantasies in young people*), *S+F Sicherheit und Frieden, 28(*2), pp. 94–100.
[105] See Böckler, N./ Seeger, T./ Sitzer, P. / Heitmeyer, W. (2013): *Amok: Ursachen, Prävention, Gegenmaßnahmen (Amok: Causes, Prevention, Countermeasures).* In W. Heitmeyer, H. Dollase, & O. Backes (Eds.): *Handbuch des Rechtsextremismus (Handbook of Right-wing Extremism),* pp. 485–498. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
[106] See Karner 2025.
[107] See Larkin, R. W. (2009): "The Columbine legacy: Rampage shootings as political acts." *American Behavioral Scientist, 52(*9), pp. 1309–1326. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209332554.
[108] Schlegel, L. (2021): "The Role of Gamification in Radicalization Processes," *ZAD Working Paper* 1/21, https://modus-zad.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/modus-working-paper-12021.pdf, id. (2020): "Jumanji Extremism? How games and gamification could facilitate radicalization processes," *Journal for Deradicalization,* Vol. 23, https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/359/223.
[109] Evans, R. (2019): "The El Paso Shooting and the Gamification of Terror," in: *Bellingcat,* https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2019/08/04/the-el-paso-shooting-and-the-gamification-of-terror.
[110] See ibid; Larkin 2009,
[111] "Amoklauf in Graz. Täter plante Tat minutiös, trug Headset" [Shooting rampage in Graz. Perpetrator planned crime meticulously, wore headset], PULS 24 (June 12, 2025).
[112] See ibid.
[113] Böhmer, C. (2025): Gun laws: "Cooling-off period extended to four weeks," *Kurier (*June 18, 2025).
[114] https://www.spoe.at/aktuelles/spoe-setzt-massive-verschaerfung-des-waffenrechts-durch (Austrian Parliament).
[115] Austrian Parliament (2025): "Greens call for fundamental change in gun laws" (July 10, 2025); Austrian Parliament (2025): "National Council: Urgent motion by the Greens to significantly tighten gun laws rejected," PARLIAMENTARY CORRESPONDENCE NO. 677 of July 10, 2025.
[116] "Amok run in Graz with 11 dead: Government plans prevention," *Kurier (*June 18, 2025).
[117] See ORF.at/Agencies 2025.
[118] https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/latest-news/today-in-security/2025/march/nonideological-extremism/
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] See Lankford, A. (2013): "Mass Shooters in the USA: Predictors of Lethality and 'Suicide by Mass Murder'." *The Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 28,* pp. 79–86.