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Why the 'salad bar of ideologies' does not help us understand contemporary violent extremism

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This paper considers the apparent rise in what is being called 'salad bar' extremism. Behind the popularity of this and a plethora of related terms is not just a recognition of certain terrorist actors appearing to align with multiple, sometimes contradictory ideological content, but also confusion over what this means for everything from classification to response. We reflect on developments to date and conclude that while there is little merit in the term 'salad bar' for understanding recent developments in terrorism, extremism, or related issues, there remains an urgent need for conceptual clarity and terminological consistency in navigating today's rapidly changing threat landscape. We believe this popular term overstates the novelty of most of what is purportedly captured by it, and contextualize the recent proliferation of terms by emphasizing the need to understand rapidly changing online ecosystems, the diminishing influence of strict, hierarchical organization(s), and the central role of conspiracy in driving and sustaining many if not most forms of violent extremism today. Though we are currently hampered by a lack of empirical evidence on the phenomena encompassed and implied by 'salad bar' extremism, we offer a simple alternative typology for researchers and practitioners alike, concluding with modest recommendations for navigating these issues as this evidence base continues to emerge.

Keywords: extremism, ideology, salad bar, terrorism, violence

1. INTRODUCTION

In September 2020, then-FBI Director Christopher Wray appeared before the U.S. Senate's Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, where he briefed senators on threats to the United States (Threats to the Homeland, 2020). In response to questions from Oklahoma Senator James Lankford about groups that may be instigating violence at otherwise peaceful protests across the country, Wray described the challenge of clear delineation between actors. He highlighted how "anarchist violent extremists" and "Antifa adherents" collaborate and organize, before drawing attention to what he called the "more militia types", adding:

"...I think trying to put a lot of these things into nice, neat, clean buckets is a bit of a challenge because one of the things that we see more and more in the counterterrorism space is people who assemble together in some kind of

mish-mash, a bunch of different ideologies. We sometimes refer to it as almost like a 'salad bar of ideologies,' a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and what they are really about is the violence."

Wray's testimony highlighted the possibility that contemporary perpetrators of violent extremism may no longer resemble what was at least thought of (traditionally) as ideologically coherent extremists. Whether his 'salad bar' characterization captures a genuinely new phenomenon (e.g. those whose *primary* interest is committing violence, then subsequently seeking to justify or rationalize that act by selecting pieces of ideological content) or reflects longstanding variation and diversity that was previously ignored, downplayed or simply undetected, remains unclear. Nonetheless, Wray's concerns captured the attention of analysts, researchers, and practitioners worldwide, some of whom were already documenting the perceived rapid shift in the nature and content of ideologies as well as actors appearing to lack a single, clear, and coherent extremist belief system (Brace et al., 2023; Faust & Masellis, 2023; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023; Gilmour, 2024; Hoffman & Ware, 2020; Olson, 2025; Petersen & Johansen, 2025; Ramakrishna, 2024; Rousseau et al., 2024; Schlegel et al., 2025; Stewart, 2023; Ware, 2024).

A clear definition would make for a useful point of departure, yet we do not have one. Wray's use of the term 'salad bar' highlighted how some offenders appear to pick and choose their ideology(ies), sometimes not because of any meaningful affinity with the content or ideas associated with those ideologies, but because choosing a particular ideology, or selective content from an ideology, might hold some fleeting interest or serve some other function for the offender in question (e.g., to legitimize their actions, or simply seek additional notoriety by affiliating with some extremist worldview). Taken at face value, this implies a relatively casual, low-commitment relationship between the offender and ideological content. The degree of intentionality that people are assumed to display in mixing ideologies is certainly unclear, as is whether those 'mixed' ideologies are all more or less similar (perhaps united by some 'master' ideology) or all more or less different and seemingly incoherent, at least to an outside observer. None of any of this is clear. Chace-Donahue and colleagues (2022) interpret the FBI's concern as centering on "mass attackers who appear to be mobilized by multiple – and at times seemingly contradictory – beliefs, interests, and grievances" (para. 2). Wray's usage of the 'salad bar' analogy conveys "a degree of intentionality on the extremist's part: people at a salad bar deliberately choose the combination of [food]...rather than consuming them haphazardly" (Chace-Donahue et al., 2022, para. 7).

We will address each of these issues in turn, but we must first acknowledge how quickly Wray's comments generated widespread attention. Alongside efforts to document cases in which the perpetrator exhibits some level of such mixed ideological beliefs (Bellaiche, 2021; Clarke, 2021; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023; Guhl et al., 2022; Kutner, 2020; Miller-Idriss & Hughes, 2021), a growing cluster of terms has emerged with remarkable speed. Table 1 below does not offer an exhaustive list and is merely an illustration of the proliferation of labels associated with, to varying degrees, 'salad bar' extremism.

2. A PROLIFERATION OF TERMS (AND MEANINGS)

While Wray's 'salad bar' remark catalyzed increased attention to these issues, analogous terms addressing the same issues predated his testimony. As early as 2009, Thomas Hegghammer examined "ideological hybridization" among jihadi groups. In 2016, Paige Pascarelli wrote about "ideology á la carte," highlighting how lone-actor terrorists "choose and fuse ideologies," notably also fusing "the personal and the political." She argued that merely focusing on group ideology rarely revealed much about individual psychology (a point we will revisit later).

By 2018, the United Kingdom's Home Office introduced the term "Mixed, Unclear, and Unstable" (hereafter MUU) to refer to "radical political worldviews that (1) coalesce a number of sometimes disparate ideological components (mixed), (2) dynamically evolve as specific ideological components gain/lose prominence over time (unstable), and (3) whose resulting

Table 1
Examples of terms associated with "Salad Bar" extremism.

Term	Definition or Context	Source	Source Type
Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Extremism	"[T]oday's extremists encounter their ideas through self-radicalizing networks and echo chambers online…[E]ven within the domestic violent extremism spectrum, ideological views are fragmenting and reassembling in unexpected ways."	Braddock, Hughes, & Miller-Idriss (2021)	Academic
Composite Violent Extremism (CoVE)	"Composite violent extremists are violent extremists whose worldview appears to be composed of multiple distinct ideologies, sentiments, grievances, and fixations."	Gartenstein-Ross, Zammit, Chace-Donahue, & Urban (2022)	Academic
Conspiracy Smoothie	"Less a conspiracy theory than a conspiracy smoothie, the Great Reset has managed to mash up every freakout happening on the internet – left and right, true-ish, and off-the-wall – into one inchoate meta-scream about the unbearable nature of pandemic life under voracious capitalism."	Klein (2020)	Academic
Cross-Pollination	"[T]he dynamic intentional or accidental meeting of ideas, which are left changed by this process" (p. 2).	Gill (2021)	Academic
Cumulative Extremism	"[T]he way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms" (p. 205).	Eatwell (2006)	Academic
DIY Ideology	"[P]eople who don't really have a specific extremist ideology but believe in lots of different facets of extremist ideology" (para. 9).	Hussein (cited in Stickings, 2023)	Practitioner
Fringe Fluidity	"[N]ot just a process of inter-cultural borrowing and sharing of animosities that facilitate a congruence of extremist perspectives between neo-Nazi and extremist Islamist elements. Rather, fringe fluidity should be regarded as its own individual-level pathway into Islamist militancy" (p. 556).	Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman (2022)	Academic
Fused Extremism	"[A] process in which members of a violent extremist in-group (1) derive inspiration from one or more out-group forms of violent extremism; (2) integrate the terminology and symbolism of out-group violent extremists within their existing (in-group) discourse; (3) support the actions of out-group violent extremists and promote their propaganda, and (4) legitimize collaboration with out-group violent extremists based on shared interests and in order to fight a common enemy" (p. 1176).	Koch (2022)	Academic
Hybridization	"[A] process in which the mixing of different ideologies, world views or communities leads to the creation of new extremist narratives and modus operandi among individuals, groups or communities" (p. 8).	Centre for Terror Analysis (2023)	Practitioner
Ideological Confluence	"[The] culling and cherry-picking [of] ideologies that fit a particular individual's preconceived notions of the world, allowing for multiple permutations that could be used to characterise a right-wing extremist, whose ideology is often underpinned by conspiracy theories" (p. 2).	Ong (2020)	Academic
Ideological Convergence	"[T]he blending of different extremist ideologies – incels adopting white supremacist language and iconography, fascists claiming concerns about environmental degradation, the far-left and the far-right coming together to protest police violence and advance militant anti-government positions, and even accelerationist neo-		

	Nazis worshipping jihadist pioneers such as Osama bin Laden" (para. 18).	Hoffman & Ware (2020)	Academic
Ideological Fusion	"Ideological fusion entails blending seemingly different elements and beliefs from often competing organizations within the same broader ideological framework" (para. 10).	Pascarelli (2016)	Academic
Ideological Hopping	"Ideology hoppers change beliefs from one extreme ideology to another" (p. 26).	Bast & DeSimone (2019)	Academic
Ideological Hybridization	"An ideologically hybridized group is one whose behavior and ideological discourse display influences of more than one type of ideal rationale in near equal measure. [T]hey are groups that defy ideological classification – for example, as global jihadist or as revolutionary jihadist groups, simply – because their enemy hierarchies are unclear" (p. 4).	Hegghammer (2009)	Academic
Ideology Mixers	"Embrace multiple, sometimes contradictory ideologies that they perceive address personal grievances and justify violence."	National Counter Terrorism Center, Department of Homeland Security, & Federal Bureau of Investigation (2023)	Practitioner
Ideological Promiscuity	"Today's terrorists are just as likely to be ideologically promiscuous, grasping and groping at whatever ideas, from wherever they may find them, suit their own grievances" (p. 55).	Horgan (2023)	Academic
Idiosyncratic Terrorism	"Terrorism that is somewhat innovative or creative is not idiosyncratic unless it is a significant departure from the norm or the common sense of the time. Idiosyncratic terrorism, in turn, can be defined as a violent attack motivated in some way by ideology, and which is idiosyncratic in at least one dimension" (p. 4).	Norris (2020)	Academic
Mixed, Unclear, and Unstable (MUU)	"This category reflects instances where the ideology presented is mixed (involving a combination of elements from multiple ideologies), unstable (shifting between different ideologies), or unclear (where the individual does not present a coherent ideology, yet may still pose a terrorism risk" (p. 8).	Home Office (2018)	Practitioner
Side-switching	"[C]ertain individuals decide to engage in another (previously considered hostile) form of violent extremism and terrorism when confronted with push-and-pull factors that might otherwise lead to full disengagement or deradicalization" (p. 504).	Koehler (2020)	Academic
Reciprocal Radicalisation	"Reciprocal radicalisation (and related terms, including cumulative extremism and co-radicalisation) is the idea that extremist groups fuel one another's rhetoric and/or actions, including violence" (p. 4).	Knott, Lee, & Copeland (2018)	Academic

incoherence makes them hard to comprehend and situate (unclear)" (Brace et al., 2023, p. 103).[a] In 2022, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Madeline Blackman referred to "fringe fluidity" in describing people who "transitioned from one [ideology] to another or simultaneously embraced both" (p. 555). While their definition appears to capture both the processes of hopping from one ideology to another as well as combining multiple ideologies, the authors suggest that "fringe fluidity" refers to a singular "distinct radicalization pathway" (p. 555).

Since Wray's 2020 testimony, many more terms have emerged. Though these terms vary in their definitions, they all seem to want to capture or at least acknowledge the increasing confusion surrounding ideological boundaries and commitments. Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware (2020) used "ideological convergence" to encompass both the FBI's "salad bar" term and Gartenstein-Ross and Blackman's "fringe fluidity."

While many of these terms imply a 'mixing' of ideologies, in 2021, Daniel Koehler called attention to the process of "side-switching," whereby extremists "move between seemingly opposite extremist environments that can sometimes overlap and influence each other" (p. i). Similarly, but still distinct, in his 2022 analysis of the Order of the Nine Angles (ONA), Ariel Koch introduced the term "fused extremism" to refer to "the convergence of extremist ideologies." Specifically, Koch's (2022) analysis highlighted how members of an extremist group "derive inspiration from one or more out-group forms of violent extremism [and] integrate the terminology and symbolism of out-group violent extremists within their existing (in-group) discourse" (p. 1176).

In the United States, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) made a critical distinction, characterizing "ideological fluidity" as comprising both ideology *mixers* and ideology *hoppers*. The mixers "embrace multiple, sometimes contradictory ideologies that they perceive address personal grievances and justify violence" (2023, p. 1), while the hoppers "deliberately discard old beliefs in favor of new ones or abandon one ideological movement for another" (ibid).

That distinction is important as it suggests the existence of at least two different processes – mixing vs. hopping. But a less obvious and equally important dimension to this is whether (for either scenario), the person is mixing ideologies that are convergent (i.e. they only *seem* different but in reality are largely similar elements of what could be a 'master' ideology) vs. divergent (i.e. they seem different because their ideological components are in conflict or competition with each other, thus appearing incongruent). We will return to these elements in more detail later.

One of the deeper efforts to impose structure on this new landscape is the Composite Violent Extremism (CoVE) framework developed by Gartenstein-Ross and colleagues (2023). This term and accompanying framework reflect what they say is one problem with the "proliferation of labels", notably the "risk [of] conflating what are in fact different types of extremism." (p. 1343). Their framework delineates and explores "ambiguous, mixed, fused, and convergent" violent extremism(s). This delineation is not just helpful but serves to disentangle what may be overlooked completely in the uncritical use of the 'salad bar' (and associated) labels.

Tess Hemmila and Arie Perliger (2025) explored "the convergence of multiple ideologies and the lack of cohesion in the ideological drivers" among far-right violent extremists in the US, questioning whether it represents what they call "hybridization *or* [emphasis ours] Salad Bar Ideology" (p. 830).

Despite various attempts at systematization, consensus remains elusive, with very few empirical investigations of the "salad bar" and related phenomenon currently available to inform or challenge our understanding. Until that changes, analysts are likely to continue to struggle with a growing terminological universe that lacks clear parameters. Numerous labels gesture toward ideological blending or convergence, yet upon closer inspection, they often describe different drivers, mechanisms, and manifestation, and may conflate conversion,

co-optation, collaboration, and what Jacob Astley (2025) called an "expressive bricolage of loosely aggregated ideological motifs" (p. 388) At a minimum then, and before we offer one potential alternative schema, we must disentangle these processes for both conceptual and practical purposes by considering the contexts in which 'salad bar' ideology and related terms are most readily found.

3. WHO, OR WHAT, IS EXHIBITING A 'SALAD BAR OF IDEOLOGIES?'

Across intervention programs, criminal justice systems, and online extremist ecosystems, a growing subset of individuals does appear to be presenting with an affiliation to ideologies that defy traditional categorical boundaries. A clinical team in Montreal, Canada, documented an apparent rise in subjects presenting with ideologically mixed or unclear belief systems among individuals attracted to or involved in violent extremism (Rousseau et al., 2024). Similar configurations have been documented among European and North American individuals appearing in de-radicalization/disengagement programs, terrorism-related arrests, and politically motivated violent attacks (Brace et al., 2023). In the United Kingdom, the majority of referrals in 2021 and 2022 to the Channel arm of the Prevent program were designated as ideologically "mixed, unstable, or unclear", representing what they called their fastest-growing area of concern (Ramakrishna, 2024). What limited literature is available suggests several overlapping patterns in who, or what, is exhibiting this pattern.

3.1. The Far-Right

Although "salad bar" extremism appears conceptually broad (e.g. encompassing both *complementary* influences as well as *competing* ones), reporting and analyses often situate it within contemporary far-right violent extremism (Deliso, 2023; Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman, 2022; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023; Hemmila & Perliger, 2025; Meier-Vieracker, 2024; Meleagrou-Hitchens & Ayad, 2023; Ong, 2020; The Soufan Center, 2021). American manifestations such as the Boogaloo Bois movement, the Proud Boys, and Oath Keepers provide canonical examples (Hemmila & Perliger, 2025; Swalwell & Alagood, 2021). Analysts describe a recruitment environment in which far-right actors merge white supremacism, anti-government discourse, misogynistic grievance, conspiracy theories, and accelerationist views into a flexible ideological "array" (Cochrane et al., 2024; Kupper & Meloy, 2021; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021; The Soufan Center, 2021).

With misogyny widely considered an "extremist gateway" (United Nations Development Programme, 2021), there is increasing evidence of integration between far right and incel ideological ecosystems (Rousseau et al., 2024). Examples include the 2014 Isla Vista attack and the 2020 Hanau attack, in which the perpetrators' manifestos were riddled with incel, racist, and conspiratorial beliefs (Brace et al., 2023), and the 2023 Allen, Texas attacker, whose trajectory reflects a "fuzzy" and "bizarre" combination of far right and incel beliefs (Mattheis et al., 2023). Incel ideology is largely propagated online in the 'manosphere,' which describes a decentralized online network "imbued with a heavy sense of misogyny and significant overlap to other violent ideologies, including right-wing extremism and white supremacy" (Clarke & Turner, 2020).

Over the past two decades, perhaps the most intensively scrutinized ideological hybrid is the documented convergence between far-right white supremacists and militant Islamist actors (Bellaiche, 2021; Koch et al., 2024; Michael, 2006; Olson, 2025; Ramakrishna, 2024). Far right ideological movements, such as neo-fascist accelerationists, and militant Islamists, such as Salafi-jihadists, have long shared apocalyptic and violence-embracing norms (Argentino et al., 2022), although most far right extremists and militant Islamists continue to view one another in an adversarial manner (Koch et al., 2024). Nonetheless, analysts note overlapping outgroup configurations, historical ties, cases of individuals moving across these two ideological milieus, and the sharing of symbols, tactics, and language (Argentino et al., 2022; Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman, 2022).

Through the lens of Koch's (2022) framework of fused extremism, "White Jihad" is suggested to be exemplary of sincere cross-pollination

(Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023). "White jihad" describes a scenario in which neo-Nazis and white supremacists embrace militant Islamist phrases, symbols, and strategy, simultaneously amplifying jihadist messaging and promoting cooperation with jihadist actors (Koch et al., 2024; Weimann et al., 2025). Koch and colleagues (2024) suggest that the fused extremism framework supports "White jihad" as a unique, contemporary extremist ideology that arises from the genuine union of divergent ideological milieus, and not an incidental encounter or surface-level interest. Related, in an analysis of a popular online gaming forum, 'Mod DB,' Schlegel and colleagues (2025) documented the presence of the ideological "salad bar" in the form of overlap between right-wing extremists and militant Islamist ideology, demonstrating the expanding reach of mixed right-wing, jihadist, and antisemitic content. The violent far-right are also linked to a general appreciation of "all forms of apocalyptic of nihilistic violence, of which Jihadism is one very prominent example (e.g., in the different highly explicit execution videos of ISIS)" (Weimann et al., 2025, p. 4).

3.2. Lone Actors

The FBI has consistently identified lone actors as a foremost terrorism threat during congressional testimony each year between 2020 and 2024 (Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2022, 2023, 2024; Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: The January 6th Insurrection, Domestic Terrorism, and Other Threats, 2021; Worldwide Threats, 2020). Idiosyncratic beliefs, motivations, and the presence of multiple personal grievances tend to be common among lone actors (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023), and although the processes and dynamics inherent in 'salad bar' extremism manifests at both the individual and organization levels, analysts consistently emphasize its prominence among lone actors (Ebbrecht & van Wieringen, 2024; Kupper & Meloy, 2021; Lankford & Silva, 2025).

Some of this is not especially surprising. The manifestos offered by many lone attackers – our most immediate and detailed glimpse into the kinds of ideas and content they want us to see - typically combine personal grievances with segmented ideological fragments, incorporating white supremacist, incel, anti-government, and conspiratorial sentiment (Kupper & Meloy, 2021; Siggery et al., 2023; Swalwell & Alagood, 2021). Through their manifestos, and other means of dissemination, lone actors also attempt to persuade others to take up their niche, ego-centric ideological views (Siggery et al., 2023). Such narratives tend not to be under any kind of central control or influence, and so it stands to reason that observers would see much more fluidity in material that is produced or presented by the individual.

Whether the primary focus on lone actors in the context of 'salad bar' ideologies is because mixing ideologies may well be an inherent feature of lone actor involvement today, or more simply, because lone actors are more visible (and more examined) when it comes to ideological affiliation, we cannot say. We should also acknowledge that from an offender's perspective, the mixing of ideologies may also rather simply be a reflection of rudimentary efforts to navigate and learn about different ideologies, particularly in the *early* phase of the development of extremist thought (i.e. and not just about the post-hoc selection of ideological content to rationalize a decision to commit an act of violence). This could explain why contemporary discussions about 'salad bar' ideologies tend to be focused on younger people, rather than older offenders. That focus certainly mirrors contemporary trends in violent extremism, with younger offenders appearing more in successful and disrupted violent plots worldwide. In the United States alone, data collected by researchers at the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) revealed that young individuals radicalized in the absence of formal ties to designated extremists or terrorist organizations has increased 311% in the past 10 years, compared to the past 5 decades (Jones et al., 2023; Rassler et al., 2025).

4. THE ROLE OF CONSPIRATORIAL THINKING

While there are unquestionably novel developments in the violent extremism space (we are

not contending otherwise), there is also much (perhaps more) to the 'salad bar' confusion that we feel is *not* new. We will highlight some relevant issues here, especially those that we believe represent shared themes, qualities, and features associated with what is purported to be new, as well as diverse. We want to highlight several issues around conspiracy theories and conspiratorial thinking, polarization, and misinformation, before drawing attention to how the online ecosystem may well provide the changing context to (if not outright cause of) much of the current confusion.

Petersen and Johansen (2025) situate conspiracism as a persistent feature of extremist worldviews. Conspiracy theories have long functioned as justificatory tools within extremist milieus, enabling groups to delegitimize and dehumanize opponents, validate violence, and reinforce in-group cohesion (Obaidi et al., 2022). Cassam's (2021) distinction between *what* extremists believe and *how* they believe may help in evaluating hybridization claims. And though conspiratorial thinking in violent extremism is not new, the current threat landscape reveals certain changes in both the visibility and increasing centrality it plays in driving violent extremism. The relationship between extremism and conspiracism has undoubtedly intensified, with conspiracy thinking now shaping both the content and organizational structure of contemporary extremist movements (Petersen & Johansen, 2025).

A growing body of scholarship links rising conspiracy belief, political polarization, and pervasive misinformation to the broader emergence of "salad bar" extremism, particularly in the post-COVID-19 global context (Kristinsdottir et al., 2025; Levinsson et al., 2021; Serdenes et al., 2023; Van de Cruys et al., 2023). Rather than operating within discrete ideological silos, extremist actors now increasingly move along their own individualized pathway toward violence fueled by a conglomeration of conspiracy theories, disinformation, and polarized political narratives (Comerford & Jones, 2023).

Furthermore, Duindam and colleagues (2025) characterize "salad bar" ideology as not just a way to characterize apparent interest in multiple, different pieces of ideological content, but rather as its own product - a hybrid, conspiracy-driven belief system that blends components from multiple ideological traditions and conspiratorial narratives. They point to cases such as QAnon-inspired mobilization during the storming of and insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and arson attacks on 5G infrastructure motivated by COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs as emblematic of this phenomenon. Other scholars suggest that conspiracy beliefs can independently motivate violence or be co-opted by ideological actors to reinforce and radicalize pre-existing belief systems (Ekman, 2022; Jackson, 2017; Rottweiler & Gill, 2022; see also Meleagrou-Hitchens & Ayad, 2023; Zihiri et al., 2022).

Similarly, Petersen and Johansen (2025) identify the proliferation and growing centrality of conspiracy theories as a defining feature in the current hybridization manifestation. This understanding aligns with official threat assessments. The Centre for Terror Analysis (2023), under the Danish Security and Intelligence Service, defines hybridization as "a process in which the mixing of different ideologies, world views or communities leads to the creation of new extremist narratives and modus operandi among individuals, groups, or communities" (p. 8). Crucially, these narratives are "built on established ideological and religious ideas, but are supplemented with perceived enemies, conspiracy theories and methods that are not necessarily aligned with these ideas" (p. 8).

Multiple other examples reinforce this. Gill (2021) documented "fascist cross-pollination" within Australian Telegram communities, where conspiracy theories circulate fluidly across ideological boundaries. The 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand, attacker's manifesto similarly exemplifies ideological eclecticism, combining conspiracy narratives with anti-Semitic, environmentalist, and white supremacist themes (Siggery et al., 2023). QAnon's central role in the "Pizzagate" incident (Ware, 2024) further underscores the capacity of conspiratorial movements to mobilize violence while defying conventional ideological classification (see also Ebner et al., 2022; Enders et al., 2022).

These developments must not be overlooked, both in relation to contemporary and future forms of violent extremism. In fact, Basit (2021) situates their prominence within a broader transformation of terrorism, arguing that the intersection of conspiracy theories and violent extremism is producing novel forms of radicalization that require inclusion within prevention and countering violent extremism frameworks (see also Dryden, 2021).

Finally, the contemporary online ecosystem has undeniably revolutionized the nature, direction, and opportunities associated with conspiratorial thinking, and violent extremism. For our purposes here, it has reshaped the contours of extremist communication, participation, and ideological expression in ways that directly facilitate the emergence of hybridized extremism. There is consensus that, regardless how one defines this new manifestation of violent extremism, the rapid growth of the online ecosystem is a significant driver of *changes* in violent extremism (Hemmila & Perliger, 2025; Koch, 2026). Digital spaces have disintegrated traditional ideological boundaries (Finlayson, 2021; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023; Koch et al., 2024; Lankford & Silva, 2025; Olson, 2025). The compound nature of online violent extremism now requires researchers and practitioners to consider a vast spectrum of digital content, much of which defies traditional ideological classification (Petersen & Johansen, 2025).

We are inevitably limited at present in knowing what kinds of online experiences lead to an individual constructing eclectic belief systems online as opposed to that being a product of increased online access in certain spaces. Without the underlying evidence base we are unable to identify or distinguish selection from causation here, at least for now. We do know that in general people who express a commitment to one type of conspiracy theory tend to also believe in others (e.g., see Williams et al., 2022), but online whether this primarily reflects individual-level predisposition (e.g. Uscinski et al., 2022) or is a feature of particular online ecosystems is debatable.

5. OVERSTATING NOVELTY

Most observers would agree that the contemporary threat environment is marked by unprecedented ideological seepage, eclectic and diverse motivational profiles, and long-standing cross-movement borrowing of ideologies, aesthetics, language, and much more. Even a cursory examination of terrorism's history is replete with examples of groups, organizations, and movements that successfully transcend (or downplay) ideological barriers for the sake of mutually beneficial interests or share the common adhesiveness of conspiracy theories (both with respect to process and content). Although recent scholarship highlights the increasingly porous boundaries across extremist subcultures and the rising salience of conspiracism, these patterns nevertheless exhibit deep historical precedent, at least at the level of groups and movements. A critical question, therefore, is whether analysts are observing the emergence of a substantively new issue or simply rediscovering dynamics long inherent to violent extremism (albeit in new contexts) and primarily at the level of individual actors?

At the organizational level, ideological convergence, or ideological 'hopping' (or 'side switching') is not novel; that these processes have not enjoyed academic attention until recently does not mean that the phenomena themselves are recent. The historical record is rife with evidence of collaboration and cooperation among ideologically divergent violent extremist organizations, as well as between extremist organizations and state actors or other non-state (but not ideologically driven) entities, particularly trans-national criminal organizations (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, 2024). Terrorism scholarship has long documented cases of logistical collaboration, shared training, joint operations, and resource exchange (Horowitz & Potter, 2014; Phillips, 2014, 2019) between terrorist actors.

For example, Michael (2006) identified tactical arrangements between militant Islamist actors and elements of the extreme far right in the post-9/11 period, preceding the contemporary discussions surrounding ideological hybridization and convergence. Bellaiche (2021) similarly observes that "some far-right extremists have

also expressed admiration for jihadi groups and have sought operational knowledge from jihadi sources on occasions" (para. 2). These relationships illustrate that cross-ideological cooperation may be a recurring feature of extremist ecosystems in one form or another, rather than a contemporary deviation from the norm.

Examples of far-right extremists engaging with militant Islamists range from David Myatt's conversion to Islam (Koch et al., 2024) to Ethan Melzer's provision of classified military information to assist militant Islamist actors (Office of Public Affairs, 2020). These and other cases underscore that symbolic, ideological, and operational crossovers have durable historical roots. Importantly, analysts have also highlighted how cases mentioned by Wray in congressional testimony ironically, "demonstrate a lack of clarity about what salad bar extremism means," pointing to a case of an American anti-government movement whose members were arrested and convicted for "providing material support to Hamas" (Chace-Donahue et al., 2022, para. 9). Rather than signifying a blending of ideologies, perhaps, as Chace-Donahue and colleagues suggest, a simple desire to raise funds is what lay behind the cooperation.

Collectively, these patterns suggest that cross-ideological interaction, particularly in the pursuit of some tactical advantage, is a structural feature of the behavior of violent extremist movements. One could certainly argue about whether longer-term collaboration as opposed to short-term engagement might force us to distinguish 'meaningful' convergence from something more transactional and temporary, but the point here is that, at least from a group, organization, and movement-level perspective, these issues are not nearly as new as they may seem.

Contemporary examples of apparent hybridization likewise risk being overstated. Superficial collaboration within the American violent far right during events such as the "Unite the Right" rally or the January 6 insurrection is better interpreted as "coalition-building" than as evidence of stable ideological fusion. Hemmila and Perliger (2025) demonstrate that violent far-right streams continue to maintain distinct priorities, adversarial identities, and divergent operational and political goals. These movements' internal boundaries limit the extent to which hybridization can be portrayed as a coherent or unified trend (Hemmila & Perliger, 2025). Olson's (2025) analysis of neo-fascist accelerationists' endorsements of militant Islamists on Terrorgram underscores that episodic cooperation, symbolic appropriation, and tactical alignment do not necessarily equate to durable ideological convergence or mutual radicalization. This critique is in opposition to more expansive claims of a fused ideology amongst right-wing extremists and militant Islamist ideologies, as is the case in the concept of "White Jihad" (Koch et al., 2024), which suggests more than a surface-level ideological convergence or tactical use of seemingly contradictory ideologies.

However, recent examinations of "White Jihad" seem to suggest that it is not a reflection of mutual, reciprocal ideological fusion, but rather a strategy in which bits and pieces of jihadist motifs are selectively incorporated into the propaganda and communication of far-right extremists (Weimann et al., 2025). Weimann and colleagues (2025) sought to disentangle the domains (e.g., ideological, propaganda, and operational) where far-right extremist and jihadist ideologies interact and how. Through a systematic comparative content analysis of extremist magazines published by Terrorgram and by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Weimann and colleagues (2025) identified significant differences in perceived enemies, operational instruction to followers, and the manner in which they characterize themselves (e.g., as martyrs, soldiers, and/or warriors) between the ideological milieus. This makes sense – if ideological convergence is not extensive even within the American violent far-right, it feels far-fetched to imagine that violent far-right groups are fusing with militant Islamist ideologies. Again, Weimann and colleagues (2025) point to more superficial appropriation of symbols, as opposed to genuine ideological convergence.

If it is not difficult to understand how multiple groups associated with an overarching ideology might converge, let us consider what might

appear to be very different movements altogether. The borrowing of ideology, symbols, imagery, and terms seems especially visible online. The overarching trend, as mentioned above, appears to be far-right actors posting in support of militant Islamist movements. Those associated with (sometimes very disparate) extreme ideological out-groups can be used by members of an extremist group for a variety of tactical reasons, chief among which may be recruitment, which extremist organizations rely on to survive (Yayla, 2021). However, one puzzling trend concerns why some extremists endorse or praise their ideological enemies, while others do not. To explain this process, Laryš (2024) explored the concept of intra-extremist outbidding. At the core of this process is a goal by extremist groups to attract the most high-quality recruits, i.e. those who will be devoted members. Groups must compete with one another for influence, followers, and attention and may turn to the strategic use of jihadist content to construct a base of the most extreme, violent adherents willing to take action for the cause (Laryš, 2024).

Intra-extremist outbidding refers to the strategic use of symbols, content, and images from *antithetical* ideological beliefs, in this case, the use of jihadist content by right-wing extremist groups (Laryš, 2024). At a cursory glance, an observer may see a member of an extreme right group glorifying jihadis, presenting them as the prototype for successful violent action, and form the opinion that extreme right wingers seem to be adopting jihadists views, which appears irrational. But, according to Laryš, this may not be indicative of a true ideological evolution. Rather, it is merely a tool, meant to recruit extreme members, or inspire their current base. This explanation of the seemingly contradictory use of jihadist content is echoed by Olson's (2025) analysis of neo-fascist accelerationist endorsements of militant Islamists on Terrorgram, where ideological convergence is again explained to be a strategic tool.

Related to this, the need for innovation, or the "adoption of new patterns of behavior," (Crenshaw, 1987, as cited in Lubrano, 2021) to survive is not a new concept. Changes in recruitment strategies or tools to mobilize followers may reflect what Lubrano (2021) refers to as "operational" innovation (previously referred to as "organizational" innovation by Crenshaw, 1987). Operational innovation describes the pursuits an organization must engage in to maintain the functioning of the group, including recruitment and propaganda. Lubrano (2021) describes operational innovation as "substantial shifts that redefine one or more of the activities that are meant to sustain an organization's activity and, therefore, to determine its operative status" (Lubrano, 2021, p. 253). This type of innovation includes changes in how a group recruits new members, or how they communicate (Lubrano, 2021). In essence, on the group or movement level, ideological convergence may be more appropriately characterized as a form of operational innovation, designed to recruit a more extreme, loyal base (Laryš, 2024), or mobilize their current base to take more decisive violent action (Olson, 2025). When framed in this light, the focus in prevention shifts more to the online ecosystem and pathways to violence, where this type of operational innovation is flourishing, and less on the daunting task of understanding ideological commitment, which may be less important.

So given the lack of novelty at the group/organizational level, this leads us back to individual level actors. Is this where we are *most* likely to see actors characterized as exhibiting 'salad bar' ideological commitment? Unsurprisingly, not all is as new as it might seem here either. The relationship between individual terrorists and their respective ideologies has, at least at the individual level, been nothing if not tenuous. In 1999's *The New Terrorism*, historian Walter Lacqueur reminded us that terrorists generally speaking are "not the people most deeply convinced of the righteousness of their cause" (p. 274). Such a statement might seem unusual. After all, a defining characteristic of terrorism is that it is ideologically motivated violence. Perhaps some confusion has been around just how *much* of that motivation has, or needs to be, ideological in nature for it to be considered terrorism (at least in the absence of other meaningful measures of affiliation)? Perhaps it is just a matter of 'salad bar' ideology being easier to attribute to individual actors, and

certainly when it comes to lone actors who push out their messaging in the form of manifestos, diaries or other writings. Jessica Stern (2023) noted that lone actors often craft *personalized* ideological blends, incorporating personal grievances, religious themes, and political hostility (see also Norris, 2020). A critical reminder, Norris (2020) offers, is that such idiosyncrasy is not limited to lone-actor terrorist but seems "to be frequent among group-based terrorists as well" (pp. 4-5). Norris highlights the Lord's Resistance Army, The Symbionese Liberation Army, and the White Panther Party (2020, p. 5).

Taken together, these examples suggest caution against overstating the novelty of salad bar extremism at any level – whether individual, organization, or movement. While hybridization may be occurring on some level across some ideological milieus, the behaviors associated with it exhibit clear historical precedents at all levels. What may be new is not the underlying phenomenon or dynamics per se, but the analytical lens through which practitioners and analysts are now interpreting (voluntarily or otherwise) such behaviors.

As mentioned earlier, the "salad bar" phenomenon, at least in the context of 'mixing' ideologies, appears to manifest largely in younger subjects. If this is accurate, then several potential explanations may account for it. MUU cases within the UK's Channel program increasingly involve individuals under 20 years of age, a new trend mirrored in terrorism-related arrest statistics in 2022 (Home Office, 2022). Clinicians working with youth who are involved in violent extremism describe the "fragility and fuzziness" of young people's ideological commitments, documenting worldviews that are rapidly assembled, loosely adhered to, and susceptible to reconfiguration (Rousseau et al., 2024).

The apparent over-representation of young people in these cases parallels another contemporary development, that of so-called Nihilistic Violent Extremism, or NVE. NVE recently emerged as a new classification of violent extremism by the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI (Gill, 2025; Hughes & Beck, 2025). According to the FBI, nihilistic violent extremists are "individuals who engage in criminal conduct within the United States and abroad, in furtherance of political, social, or religious goals that derive primarily from a hatred of society at large and a desire to bring about its collapse by sowing indiscriminate chaos, destruction, and social instability" (U.S. Attorney's Office Eastern District of Michigan, 2025). At the core of this form of extremism is an anger toward and hatred of society and a desire for the destruction or destabilization of civil society fueled by hopelessness (Baumgartner & Jonas, 2025; Gill, 2025). Similar to descriptions of those associated with 'salad bar' extremism, perpetrators engaged in several types of NVE community are often young individuals who live their lives online (Gill, 2025). Spreading throughout the online ecosystem, NVE communities have taken to recruitment via gaming platforms, social media platforms, and telecommunications services, allowing them to not only further reach, but especially to children and adolescents (The Soufan Center, 2025). Furthermore, similar again to descriptions of "salad bar" extremism, these individuals are part of loose, decentralized online communities (Gill, 2025; Kunst et al., 2026).

From the outside looking in, the actions taken by those described as nihilistic violent extremists is confusing - there is often a blending of activities that are variously criminal, commercial, sexual, and ideological (Taylor et al., 2026) - and seems to have no clear meaning or purpose (Gill, 2025). Some point to the COVID-19 pandemic as a social catalyst for the rise in 'salad bar' ideological manifestations – the same may well be true of nihilistic violent extremism, as the online subcultures aestheticizing nihilism that define NVE have rapidly proliferated in the wake of COVID-19 (Davies et al., 2021; Purdue, 2022). Former Director Wray's testimony reflects the idea that what we have previously described as "salad bar" extremism or one of the many adjacent terms, might at least refer to some cases that today would be referred to as nihilistic violent extremism - "... what they are really about is the violence." In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Keir Starmer reflects a similar sentiment about the evolving threat landscape, describing a rising group of "loners, misfits, young men in their bedroom accessing all manner of material online, desperate for notoriety,

sometimes inspired by traditional terrorist groups, but fixated on that extreme violence, seemingly for its own sake" (Prime Minister's Office, 2025).

Although the concept of nihilistic violent extremism is very new, and the literature and academic commentary thus far limited, there are some preliminary ideas that point to the possibility that what previously was deemed to merit the label "salad bar" extremism, may also be at play in labeling certain phenomena as nihilistic violent extremism. Whether NVE as a label is currently falling victim to some of the same issues that surrounded the 'salad bar' is certainly debatable – for instance while some decentralized online communities embrace nihilism as an organizing world view, many others do not, instead fusing antigovernment, accelerationist principles with neo-Nazi and other ideologies. We are not seeking to equate 'salad bar' extremism with nihilistic violent extremism - if anything is clear from the post-'salad bar' proliferation of terms it is that for both salad bar extremism and NVE, both these terms are used to encompass quite varied cases with distinct issues, processes, pathways, and dynamics. The cost of the conceptual confusion and label proliferation is the failure to disaggregate discrete processes, pathways, and experiences. We also recognize that many researchers share understandable skepticism about the term NVE – after all, there is just as similar a temptation to use the NVE label to a very wide range of cases that also just seem difficult to categorize.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On an issue currently poorly understood, offering recommendations for analysts, researchers, and responders alike seems premature. At the same time, it would be unfair to highlight all these issues without offering at least some suggestions on how to navigate the unfolding terrain. Perhaps most obviously, we believe the 'salad bar' term is unhelpful – it is imprecise, conceptually dubious, conflates multiple distinct and overlapping processes, and overstates novelty while simultaneously failing to acknowledge what *is* new and what *has* changed regarding the context to violent extremism. We thus urge caution around any case characterized as 'salad bar' or otherwise for several reasons. Not unlike how previous terms, labels, and phenomena tend to be treated as the latest bright and shiny object for researchers, it is quite possible that observers are making far too much of Wray's analogy, and related, potentially overstating its importance, as well as (and perhaps in the process) conflating several issues most of which arguably are not new, that need to be disentangled. On this issue, we concur with similar conclusions offered by Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2023) that it "could be argued that nothing new is occurring, and that this is merely an old phenomenon gaining new attention" (p. 1356).

Part of the challenge is that in addition to not being entirely sure what to call such cases, we also have no clear idea of how much of a problem this actually is. Gartenstein-Ross and colleagues (2023) themselves point to "nearly three times as many cases in our dataset…[suggesting] it is likely that a real change is occurring" (p. 1356). They highlight that mere increased *attention* to mixed-issue ideology may reflect improved detection practices – in other words, are we only seeing more of this because the number of cases are increasing, or is it because we are getting better at identifying them? Conversely, McKenzie and O'Brien's (2024) analysis of Toronto, Canada's violent extremism prevention program "Estimated Time of Arrival" (ETA) found that, between April 2022 and March 2023, less than 5 percent of clients were classified as a "Mixed Issue" client, a category described as synonymous with "salad bar" or "composite" extremists," adhering to multiple ideologies, regardless of the level of overlap or divergence.

This simple contrast across settings must at a minimum encourage us to develop practitioner-engaged research on if, why, where and when, such classifications are made and whether it truly reflects a rise in this phenomenon (or at least in certain places), as opposed to changes in how practitioners are classifying cases as part of their workload. It is certainly likely (and almost certainly happening), that there are

knowable factors (which may constitute the novel element here) contributing to the confusion, whether through implicit biases, general lack of knowledge or training, or simply increased workload, for practitioners tasked with classifying such cases. Until we know more about the workplace decision-making that is leading to the observation that more cases are appearing, we cannot say for sure what might be explaining this. Related, Delphi studies of researchers, as well as practitioners, may prove valuable in helping reach consensus on shared meaning, let alone definitions. In the meantime, we ought to acknowledge that many potential explanations might account for the increase in reporting. It is also conceivable, at least in some jurisdictions, that more targeted training on understanding the role of ideology (if not more awareness training around specific types of ideologies) may ameliorate how such cases are being recorded. In this context, some researchers suggest that the emphasis on 'mixing' is overstated because the underlying process may be fundamentally misunderstood. Just as Bellaiche does, Meier (2023) attempts to refocus some of these issues, highlighting not so much the diversity of thought and worldview, but instead what violent ideological beliefs have in common. A major blind spot, Meier asserts, is that some ideologies only appear mixed "when analysts fail to take white supremacy seriously as a power structure" underlying what she argues may otherwise only appear to be distinct. This observation may well stand not just within ideologies, but across different types also.

Again, because we are attempting to impose clearer thinking on an evolving phenomenon, we can only speculate when it comes to some of these issues. The proliferation of terms may reflect a lack of consensus on how to characterize what is happening, lack of consensus on what is actually happening, lack of understanding on what is new, or some combination of these (and more), and a failure to appreciate shared themes. It seems paradoxical and deeply frustrating that never before have researchers had such easy access to the writings of violent extremists, yet reaching consensus on their motivation appears to be an ever-more difficult task. We can certainly say that (based on Wray's testimony and the academic discourse) the complexity is faced both by law enforcement officials and academic researchers alike. Current analyses lack historical and scholarly context to realize that not everything 'new' is actually new; and consequently, we must always strive to disentangle what is new from what is not. Future research on these issues warrants a potential re-evaluation of historical cases if they may further illustrate how the novelty of individual-level cases may also be overstated.

A broad interpretation of the proliferation of the 'salad bar' label and associated terms is that we continue to struggle with fundamental issues, notably ideology, and its relationship with the related but distinct issue of motivation. It can be very tempting to consider ideology a general proxy for motivation, and per our earlier points, even more tempting to invoke this at an organization or movement level as opposed to the individual level. We rarely so critically question the issue of motivation when a person is associated with a clear ideological worldview, as opposed to when a person is associated with several. Even the most cursory examination of "why terrorists do what they do" is forced to acknowledge the influence of multiple factors (and types of factors) at multiple, inter-related levels. And, as Aaron Zelin (2020) cautions, we should ignore any analysis that attempts to boil terrorist motivation down to a single factor. From the perspective of an individual engaged in terrorism, ideology is just one of multiple motivating influences, the nature, influence, extent and control of which will vary from person to person and within the same person over time. For some, ideology may be the primary driver of their initial involvement. For others, it may not even be relevant. For some, ideological commitment is less a risk factor for involvement than it is a byproduct of sustained engagement with fellow travelers or an online community. It might seem odd to consider that, for some people, ideology has no role in their development or progression into a movement and simply does not matter for them at any point – but terrorist groups have long accommodated members whose ideological commitment was tenuous at best. These issues warrant a more extensive consideration, but for now, we concur with

Norris (2020, p. 5) that while "motives and ideologies are often conflated [they] should be analytically separated." Ideology should not be seen as synonymous with motivation and should be considered merely one variable in both driving and sustaining commitment.

The proliferation of terms associated with ideological confusion may be a tacit reflection of how terrorist motivation *appears* to be getting more complicated, but we do emphasize that it may only appear that way. It is very possible, if not likely, that the term 'salad bar' extremism has contributed to this problem. A related consequence of the 'salad bar' construct is an implied preoccupation with the content of ideologies as opposed to how they function as a process. As psychologist Max Taylor (1988, 1991) has long argued, we must do far more to understand the psychological qualities of certain ideologies, and how certain shared and underlying features, like conspiracy theories, transcend individual ideologies, while being very effective in mobilizing people into action.

We also must encourage far greater specificity in the terminology being used. There is a clear need to disaggregate and distinguish discrete phenomena and processes while simultaneously identifying their shared properties and qualities (e.g., conspiratorial thinking, per our earlier discussion). There are different ways we can do this, not least via some terminological housecleaning. One suggestion is to abandon the term 'salad bar' extremism and simultaneously reduce the number of terms where certain terms are clearly synonymous (e.g., hopping and side-switching). Another course of action lies in the development of alternative language, or typologies. For example, Jesse Norris (2020) proposes multiple additional terms such as: "psychologically influenced mixed motives" (where, for example, mental illness may be present); "personal-political mixed motives" (where in addition to ideology, there may be "additional objectives like personal vengeance" - p. 5); and finally "opportunistic/impulsive mixed motives" where, despite the presence of some ideological influence, the perpetrator's *main* motive (emphasis ours) was, for instance, "suicide or anger about a domestic argument" (p. 5). We highlight 'main' here because efforts at establishing a main motive may well be a root cause of the subsequent confusion and proliferation of terms. The analytical error here, we caution, is the assumption that there must be a 'main' motive, and while Norris helpfully encourages us to disentangle motivational differences, that is not necessarily synonymous with ideological influence.

We offer another simple alternative (see Table 2). Though less detailed than that proposed by Norris, it may offer an initial organizing step in making sense of a particular case. For individuals that present with multiple ideologies, we propose the following questions as a starting point:

1. Is there evidence of *mixing* ideological content?
   - If so, are those ideologies (or elements thereof) similar (*convergent*) or different (*divergent*)?
2. Is there evidence of *migrating* from one type of ideology to another?
   - If so, are those ideologies similar (*convergent*) or different (*divergent*).

We acknowledge that even recommending such a schema be incorporated into any systematic risk assessment or threat assessment framework should not be taken lightly. A systematic argument for this is beyond the scope of our efforts here, and while our goal is not to trivialize or understate the difficulties and challenges associated with such work, we instead wish to offer some issues for consideration. At a minimum, being able to characterize an individual according to these four dimensions offers a starting point from which multiple additional considerations can be explored. We also recognize that the ability of a researcher or practitioner to make a judgement about what constitutes 'convergent' vs. 'divergent' is easier said than done. For such judgements to be valid and reliable, it requires at a minimum possessing subject-matter knowledge of particular ideologies (e.g. left-wing, right-wing, jihadist, etc.), knowledge about the qualities associated with ideologies (per Taylor's recommendation), as well as whether some 'master' ideologies (e.g.

Table 2
Beyond the 'Salad Bar': A Simple Classification Schema

	Mixing	**Migrating**
Convergent	Mixing-Convergent	Migrating-Convergent
Divergent	Mixing-Divergent	Migrating-Divergent

the Great Replacement Theory) can accommodate what might only appear superficially diverse interests to an uninformed observer. It should also go without saying that a judgement about whether an offender can meaningfully be categorized along any of these four dimensions can itself only be considered a temporal snapshot, anchored to a particular moment in time (whether early, or late, in their developmental trajectory to violence or some other outcome). A cursory consideration of these issues would inevitably generate even more questions, including whether one type of classification might be associated with a greater risk or threat of violence. We simply do not know, because we do not have a sufficient base of empirical research with which we can confidently test these assertions, let alone empirically strengthen their associations. This will, hopefully, change in due course.

In conclusion, there is clearly much to be done as the issues that have seemingly given rise to the current confusion are likely to remain. In addition to the empirical questions raised here, we would also do well to explicitly address the seeming incongruity between researchers on how to even characterize the current phenomena. Until these important issues receive further, much needed attention, we suggest in the meantime discontinuing and discouraging the use of 'salad bar'-related terminology in favor of language that incorporates, disentangles, and distinguishes respective processes and dynamics to not only encourage clearer conceptual thinking, but provide us a basis for empirical testing of the multitude of questions raised by these developments.

ENDNOTES

a. As of 2023, the MUU category has been replaced by the "Conflicted" category.

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