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‘THE GREAT REPLACEMENT’:

THE VIOLENT CONSEQUENCES OF MAINSTREAMED EXTREMISM

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About this paper

This report presents the findings of a project that investigated the prevalence, scale and nature of the ideologies and narratives that motivated the attack which left 51 dead and injured a further 50 more during Friday prayers at the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand. The report explores the origins of the 'Great Replacement' and 'white genocide' theories and the dynamics and platforms which have allowed the ideas to spread. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis across mainstream and alternative social media channels, this report reveals significant mainstreaming of extreme-right narratives across social media platforms and in language and policies promoted by mainstream politicians in Europe and North America. This report provides some recommendations for steps to be taken by technology companies, government and civil society to counter the spread of extremist ideologies.

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Executive Summary

On 15 March 2019 a shooter killed 51 individuals and injured 50 more in an alleged terrorist attack during Friday prayers at the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand. It is alleged that the attacker left behind documentation outlining his motivation for the attack. This so-called manifesto referenced two interlinked conspiracy theories which have come to dominate the ideology of the international extreme-right – the Great Replacement theory and the White Genocide theory.

These theories focus on the premise that white people are at risk of being wiped out through migration, miscegenation or violence. This sort of thinking is not new, and concepts which amplify ethnic and cultural differences between whites and non-whites have long been leveraged to justify conflict in supremacist circles. However, recently these concepts have come to dominate the ideology of extreme-right groups, providing the ideological glue which ties together an increasingly cohesive, networked and transnational extreme-right.

This paper explores the dynamics which enable the growth of this toxic ideology. It outlines the origins, internationalisation and mainstreaming of these concepts. In particular, it focuses on the role of the Identitarian Movement, whose supporters are important proponents of the Great Replacement theory, and have increasingly advocated for remigration – the forced deportations of migrant communities to create an ethnically and culturally homogenous society.

Our findings draw on analysis using social listening tools to examine online behaviour, as well as over four years of digital ethnographic work observing extreme-right communities online.¹ Following the attack in Christchurch, we investigated the prevalence, scale and nature of the ideologies and narratives that motivated the perpetrator, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis

across mainstream and alternative social media channels. In our quantitative analysis we assessed over two million social media and media mentions of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, which was at the heart of the attacker's manifesto, and related terms such as 'remigration' and 'white genocide'. We complemented this approach by creating case studies drawn from analysis of conversations on forums and encrypted chat rooms frequented by the extreme-right.

Key Findings

The so-called 'Great Replacement' theory originated in France and its main proponents include the Identitarian group Generation Identity, an organisation that wants to preserve 'ethnocultural identity' globally.² Our 2019 Generation Identity Europe Census identified 70,000 followers of official GI accounts on Twitter, 11,000 members of Facebook groups, 30,000 members of Telegram groups and 140,000 subscribers on YouTube. Although these numbers will inevitably contain researchers and journalists, our assessment suggests that a majority of these individuals are supporters of the Identitarian Movement.

We identified around 1.5 million tweets referencing the Great Replacement theory between April 2012 and April 2019 in English, French and German language. The volume of tweets steadily increased in the seven years leading up to the Christchurch attack, with the number of tweets mentioning the theory nearly tripling in four years from just over 120,000 in 2014 to just over 330,000 in 2018.

French accounts dominate online conversation around the Great Replacement theory, perhaps unsurprisingly as the concept originated in France. However, the theory is becoming more prevalent internationally with English speaking countries accounting for 32.76% of online discussion around it.

Extreme-right communities use a range of methods to broadcast the Great Replacement theory, including dehumanising racist memes, distorting and misrepresenting demographic data, and using debunked science. Great Replacement propagandists have found ways to co-opt the grievances of different fringe communities on the internet by connecting anti-migration, anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), anti-abortion and anti-establishment narratives.

The Great Replacement theory is able to inspire calls for extreme action from its adherents, ranging from non-violent ethnic cleansing through 'remigration' to genocide. This is in part because the theory is able to inspire a sense of urgency by calling on crisis narratives.

We found over 540,000 tweets using the term 'remigration' between April 2012 and April 2019. This concept calls for forced deportations of minority communities and essentially represents a soft form of ethnic cleansing. Since 2014, the volume of tweets about remigration has surged and reached broader audiences, rising from 66,000 tweets in 2014 to 150,000 tweets in 2018. The first stark increase in conversation around the theory occurred in November 2014, coinciding with the first Assises de la Remigration (Annual Meeting on Remigration) organised by Generation Identity in Paris.

Politicians and political commentators have been key in mainstreaming the Great Replacement narrative by making explicit and implicit references to the conspiracy theory in their speeches, social media posts and policies. We identified four leading politicians from across Europe explicitly advocating the Great Replacement concept, and five others using related language and conspiracy theories in their campaigns.

Alternative far-right media outlets have played an important role in spreading the idea of remigration on a global level in the last year: 10 out of the top 15 sources are responsible for roughly 50% of total coverage of the term remigration between April 2018 and April 2019, and can be classified as sources of far-right alternative news.

Glossary

Accelerationism: a theory that argues that technological and social advance should be sped up to increase instability and result in revolutionary change.

Alt-right: a loose collection of extreme-right and white nationalist groups originating in America. The movement is known for its online mobilization and use of internet culture in its communications.

Conspiracy Theory: a theory which seeks to explain a phenomenon by invoking a sinister plot orchestrated by powerful actors. These conspiracies are painted as secret or esoteric, with adherents to a theory seeing themselves as the initiated few who have access to hidden knowledge. Adherents to conspiracy theories usually see themselves as in direct opposition to the powers who are orchestrating the ploy.

Dark Social: a term used in marketing to describe material shared in ways that are difficult to track, such as emails, short message service (SMS) systems and encrypted chat. In this report, we use the term to describe channels employed by extremists for communications which are not easily analysable through traditional social listening tools, such as closed chat groups.

Eurabia: a conspiracy theory coined in the early 2000s by Bat Ye'or (aka. Gisèle Littman), who argued that Western countries are slowly being brought under Islamic rule.³

Extreme-right: groups and individuals that exhibit at least three of the following five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and strong state advocacy (in accordance with the definition provided by far-right expert Cas Mudde).⁴

Far-right: the political manifestation of the extreme-right.

Identitarianism: a pan-European ethno-nationalist movement, which focuses on the preservation of European ethno-cultural identity and is inspired by the French intellectual right movement the Nouvelle Droite (New Right).

Red pill: a piece of information that facilitates an individual's awakening to the 'truth' of extreme-right-wing ideology, enabling radicalisation. The term is commonly used by the extreme-right, twisting its original meaning in the movie *The Matrix*.

Remigration: the call for forced deportation of migrant communities, with the intent of creating an ethnically or culturally homogenous society, essentially a non-violent form of ethnic cleansing.

White Genocide: a conspiracy theory popularised by white supremacist David Lane, who argued that white populations are being replaced through immigration, integration, abortion and violence against white people.

The Great Replacement Theory

On 15 March 2019 a terrorist attack occurred in Christchurch, New Zealand. The attack was livestreamed over Facebook, and has subsequently been shared with millions of people worldwide.⁵ In total, 51 civilians were killed and 50 more injured in the shootings. It is alleged that the perpetrator outlined his motivations in a so-called manifesto, which was leaked to the extreme-right-wing board 'Politically Incorrect' on the fringe imageboard 8chan and Twitter. This document specifically mentions what the author calls 'the Great Replacement' as the motivation behind the attack.

The core ideas behind this conspiracy theory have been present in far-right circles for years,⁶ however research by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) into extreme-right milieus reveals the extent to which this theory has come to dominate not only violent extreme-right groups on 'dark social' platforms, but also the language and ideologies of far-right, xenophobic and nativist groups and political parties across Europe and beyond. In particular, the centrality of the so-called Great Replacement theory to the Christchurch attack requires policymakers to reassess the threat posed by groups who continue to espouse and spread this theory online.

This paper outlines the origins and main arguments of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, its proponents, the tactics used to disseminate this concept, and the extent to which it is being politically mainstreamed, to illustrate how this concept has come to dominate the transnational extreme-right.

What is the so-called 'Great Replacement'?

Proponents of the so-called 'Great Replacement' theory argue that white European populations are being deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through migration and the growth of minority communities. This propagation often relies on demographic projections to point to population changes in the West and the possibility that ethnically white populations are becoming minority groups. Certain ethnic and religious groups – primarily Muslims – are typically singled out as being culturally incompatible with the lives of majority groups in Western countries and thus a particular threat.

The Great Replacement theory is closely linked to other theories which are popular in white supremacist, ethno-nationalist and nativist circles, including the ideas of white genocide and Eurabia – with these concepts often used interchangeably.

The term 'white genocide' was first popularised by white supremacist David Lane, who argued that white populations are being replaced through immigration, integration, abortion and violence against white people.⁷ It differs from the Great Replacement theory in that it is often tied explicitly to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories – suggesting that Jewish people deliberately orchestrate population change. The Great Replacement theory originated and gained prominence in European extreme-right circles, which often prioritise cultural narratives, but the concept of white genocide was coined in the US, where it gained prominence among groups with a more explicit racist ideology.⁸ Similarly, 'Eurabia' was promoted in the early 2000s by Bat Ye'or (aka. Gisèle Littman), who argued that Western countries are slowly being brought under Islamic rule. The Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik heavily referenced the Eurabia Islamisation concept.⁹

Fears of racial mixing and miscegenation have been central to white supremacist groups for decades. Beyond these circles, there has been a rise over recent years in theories that emphasise 'cultural' compatibility, led by counter-jihadists like Pamela Geller and Daniel Pipes; far-right and populist politicians such as Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen; as well as leaders of street-based groups like the English Defence League.¹⁰ These individuals have highlighted the supposed incompatibility of Muslims or Islam with democracy or the West, raised fears about the 'Islamisation' of Europe, and criticised 'left wing' and 'establishment' politicians for being pro-immigration. Since 2011, the term 'Great Replacement' has started to represent an evolution of these ideas to a more worrying and potentially dangerous realm, emphasising the complete replacement of white people and conspiratorial machinations of the elite.

What Is the Origin of the Great Replacement Theory?

The French philosopher and writer Renaud Camus coined the term 'Great Replacement' in his 2011 book entitled *Le Grand Remplacement* (The Great Replacement). He subsequently presented his ideas at a meeting entitled *Assises de la Remigration* (annual meeting on remigration) in Paris in 2014.¹¹ Since then, he has become one of the most influential ideologues of the European *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right) and its youth wing, the Identitarian Movement.

The Identitarian Movement was founded in 2003 in the South of France as *Bloc Identitaire*, which later changed its name to *Les Identitaires*, or *Generation Identity* in the English context. It is a pan-European, white nationalist group that advocates an ethnically and culturally homogenous Europe.¹² Today, the Great Replacement theory is central to the ideology and campaigns of *Generation Identity*.¹³

Camus participated in the 2014 European elections, running for the *Liste Antiremplaciste* (Anti-Replacement List).¹⁴ He also ran to be a member of the European Parliament (MEP) in the 2019 European elections, on *La Ligne Claire*, which he co-led with Karim Ouchikh, a French Identitarian politician.¹⁵ After a supporter of *La Ligne Claire* was photographed posing with a swastika, Camus withdrew his list days before the election.¹⁶

Generation Identity is one of Europe's fastest growing far-right movements: since the group was founded in southern France in 2003, it has set up offshoots in countries across Europe, including Austria, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Norway, the UK and Ireland.¹⁷ This report estimates its membership numbers across all countries and platforms.

We discuss below how our social media analysis found that the first mentions of 'Great Replacement' occurred in 2012 and have steadily increased

Today, the Great Replacement theory is central to the ideology and campaigns of *Generation Identity*.



since. This term now features prominently in the promotional materials used by Identitarian movements like Generation Identity.

Similarly, the word 'remigration' has emerged in discussions among networks. Recently, Generation Identity groups have launched a large-scale campaign against the UN Global Migration Pact, which they co-ordinated in the encrypted chatrooms of Telegram and Discord.¹⁸ Austrian Generation Identity leader Martin Sellner has released more than 20 videos on YouTube about the pact and created a Telegram channel dedicated to undermining the Migration Pact. Their actions have significantly shaped the online discourse and increased the political pressure to reject the pact, with the Austrian government eventually backing out of the agreement.¹⁹

In March 2019, Sellner renamed a channel on the chat app Telegram (previously used to stage campaigns against the UN Global Migration Pact) as European Compact for Remigration (Figure 1), and created an email list for supporters to sign up to for joining the planned campaign for a remigration pact (Figure 2). In a video, he announced that the goal of this campaign will be to try to influence right-populist parties and support 'de-Islamisation' and 'remigration'.

Figure 1 Logo of the European Compact for Remigration



Figure 2 Martin Sellner's appeal on Telegram to join the pact for remigration²⁰



While Generation Identity groups and members do not openly call for or support violence, the Great Replacement theory clearly underpins their messaging and their call is for remigration – a euphemism for what is the forced repatriation of migrant communities, or a form of non-violent ethnic cleansing of Europe. Just a week after the Christchurch attack, on 21 March 2019, the Austrian offshoot of Generation Identity staged a protest against 'the Great Replacement' and for 'remigration' and 'de-Islamisation'.²¹

The ideological links between the Christchurch attacker and Generation Identity were further underscored by the fact that the Austrian Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism raided Sellner's apartment to investigate his connections to the Christchurch shooter. It is alleged that the perpetrator of the Christchurch attack had donated an 'unusually high' amount of €1,500 to Sellner in 2018. In autumn 2017, the attacker gave Génération Identitaire (Generation Identity) in France four donations, which amounted to €2,200.²²

The Great Replacement Theory and Its Potential to Inspire Violent Action

Contemporary frameworks for analysing violent extremist narratives can help to assess an ideology's potential for mobilising audiences and inspiring violent action.²³ Narratives function at the core of extremism; they fuel the process of self-identification with an in-group and link problems and grievances experienced by the in-group to the existence and actions of out-group(s).²⁴ In particular, extremists use crisis narratives that imply that all crises experienced by the in-group can only be solved 'through hostile action against the out-group'.

According to extremism expert J. M. Berger, violent extremists employ five prevalent crisis narratives: conspiracy, dystopia, impurity, existential threat and apocalypse.²⁵ The first four of these are particularly prevalent in the Great Replacement theory, but apocalyptic thinking – which can be understood as the end of history – is less so. This is because proponents of the Great Replacement theory believe that mass migration and demographic shifts will not necessarily end all life on the planet, but rather the meaningful civilisation which has been created by white Europeans. In other words, for this world view to be effective it needs to be compared to an imagined future where society continues but in a weak and degraded form. This helps exaggerate the perceived existential threat whipped up by those advocating the Great Replacement theory, and facilitates a sense of urgency, which can inspire extreme actions.²⁶

To examine how the Great Replacement theory draws on crisis narratives we watched 20 YouTube videos which promoted it. Researchers coded these pieces of content to examine the extent to which narrators called on the crisis narratives outlined above in their propaganda.²⁷ We found that two videos (10%) touched on all five crisis narratives; 10 (50%) touched on four of them, four (20%)

touched on only three of them, two (10%) on only two of them, and two (10%) on only one of them. The most common crisis narrative addressed was 'existential threat', which 19 videos referred to; after 'apocalypse' the least commonly referred to was 'impurity' (Table 1).



Narratives function at the core of extremism...



Table 1 The crisis narratives supported by 20 YouTube videos that promoted the Great Replacement theory.

Video #	Conspiracy	Dystopia	Impurity	Existential threat	Apocalypse
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
2	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
9	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	No	No	No	Yes	No
12	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
14	No	Yes	No	No	No
15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
16	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
17	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
19	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
20	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

We outline below the ways this content triggered crisis narratives of conspiracy, dystopia, impurity and existential threat.

Conspiracy

Proponents of the Great Replacement theory often draw on conspiracy theories to amplify their messaging, suggesting that progressive politicians, the media and globalists are working concertedly, actively and purposively to destroy native Europeans and their culture(s). They often paint Muslim communities as implicit in these plans because of the perception that they innately desire to destroy Western civilisation. Proponents of the Great Replacement theory frequently overlay it with anti-Semitic theories, blaming 'globalist Jewish elites' for mass migration. In the US, various extreme-right networks have tied the idea of the Great Replacement to the so-called Kalergi Plan, which suggests that Jewish academics and politicians are deliberately conspiring to change the ethnic makeup of Europe and America as part of a wider anti-white agenda.²⁸ Recent terrorist shootings at synagogues in Pittsburgh, San Diego and Poway were inspired by similar ideas.²⁹

Dystopia

The Great Replacement theory is inherently dystopian, emphasising migration as the cause of downfall and degradation in society, with governments, tech giants and the media painted as complicit. This dystopian narrative is conjured in three key ways by proponents of the Great Replacement theory:

1. They paint areas with large migrant populations as degraded, and focus on perceived increases in crime and violence, urban decay and economic deprivation in diverse communities. For example, one vlogger commenting on ethnic replacement directly referenced a community cohesion strategy document produced by Birmingham Council in the UK

to suggest that ethnic minorities actively hurt the economy of a society: 'One of the main issues is that areas where there is a "high concentration" of ethnic minority groups, particularly black and Asian communities, have become more disadvantaged.'³⁰ They often highlight the culture nurtured by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as an exemplar of the inevitable destiny of societies with large Muslim populations.

2. They focus on censorship of extreme-right voices by the government and social media companies to suggest an Orwellian system is being created to permanently silence proponents of the Great Replacement theory. This concept has previously proved highly successful in mobilising far-right actors and demonstrates how proponents of the Great Replacement theory are able to tap effectively into other grievances which are held in extremist communities.³¹
3. They use the cognitive dissonance which arises around the concept that white people are actively and willingly involved in their own destruction to evoke the sense of a mentally ill society. The recently deceased French journalist and New Right theorist Guillaume Faye claimed in a 2015 speech at the white nationalist National Policy Institute³² that Western countries are plagued by a 'mental illness', which he labelled 'ethno-masochism'. According to him, a combination of pro-abortion, pro-LGBT and pro-migration policies have led to the gradual replacement of white people.³³

Impurity

Proponents of the Great Replacement theory stress the impurity of migrants – in particular from Islamic countries – as the source of supposed decay of Europe. They focus on perceived social, cultural and racial deficiencies of Muslim migrants when compared with white Europeans. In many instances they use the perceived degradation of society in

areas with a diverse population – demonstrated through the misrepresentation of crime statistics and economic disparity – to suggest that migrant communities are directly responsible for this destruction because of some innate and immutable difference. Subsequently they use this argument to suggest explicitly or implicitly that migrant communities are impure and have a polluting effect on the host society.

Existential threat

Proponents point towards migration being an existential threat to the continued existence of society at an ethnic and cultural level. At its core, the Great Replacement theory is effective because it is able to create a sense of urgency by pointing to the imminent extinction of white people and the demise of European culture. This is often emphasised through video footage of urban areas with large populations of people from minority ethnic backgrounds designed to demonstrate the lack of white people. Advocates of the Great Replacement theory emphasise the supposed threat migration poses to the cultural homogeneity of a society in ideologues focusing on the perceived un-European nature of Islam.

Supporters of the Great Replacement theory evoke existential threats by suggesting that migration threatens the physical wellbeing of native citizens. They use statistics referencing violent crime levels, economic deprivation and levels of sexual assault and rape in areas with high levels of ethnic diversity to highlight how continued migration will supposedly result in the downfall of society. They emphasise the threat they believe migration poses to the cultural homogeneity of a society, for example in the discrepancies between Sharia and common law. In the UK they use cases of child sexual abuse committed in migrant communities to suggest that these communities pose a threat, and mobilise propaganda campaigns that focus on the perceived extinction of white people.³⁴

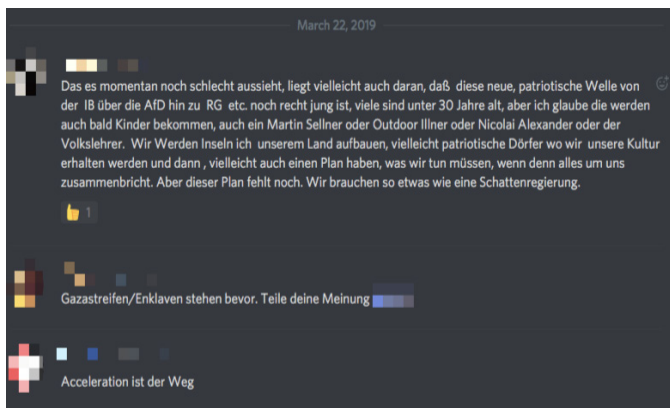
Often proponents of the Great Replacement theory use this existential threat to demonstrate that assimilation and cohabitation are impossible and only resolvable through extreme action such as forced segregation, deportation or even genocide. This has been observed several times in recent years, such as in Bulgaria where activists have formed into paramilitary structures to personally securitise their borders, or where Identitarian activists of Defend Europe chartered a vessel to prevent refugees from reaching European soil.³⁵ Such calls for action are relatively widespread – in an analysis of 214,602 British tweets containing anti-Muslim hatred, we found over 12,000 posts (5% of messages) containing a call to ban Islam or to deport Muslims.³⁶

The Great Replacement theory contains the seeds to inspire extreme and violent action by drawing on a range of these crisis narratives, and proponents also encourage accelerationist views. Accelerationism is a theory that technological and social advance should be sped up to increase instability and result in revolutionary political change. The theory, originally coined by philosopher Nick Land although not for this purpose has been co-opted by extreme-right circles in recent years.³⁷ Groups endorse the view that there should be faster polarisation to bring about a race war, which they deem to be both inevitable and desirable.³⁸ These beliefs are apparent in the manifesto of the Christchurch attacker. He wrote that 'stability and comfort are the enemies of revolutionary change' and concluded that it was necessary to 'destabilise and discomfort society wherever possible'.³⁹

ISD researchers conducting ethnographic research in dozens of far-right channels have observed that accelerationist views are widespread in Identitarian circles. In chat channels linked with Identitarian groups, members shared plans about the breakdown of the political system or society as a whole, suggesting that accelerationist action is required for the rebirth of society in their vision.

For example, a member of an Identitarian Discord group highlighted the need to 'build islands in our lands, maybe patriotic villages where we can conserve our culture', suggesting that a plan on 'what to do when everything around us collapses' was needed, as well as a shadow government. Another member in the group concluded that 'accelerationism is the way' (Figure 3).

Figure 3 German language Identitarian chat on Discord⁴⁰

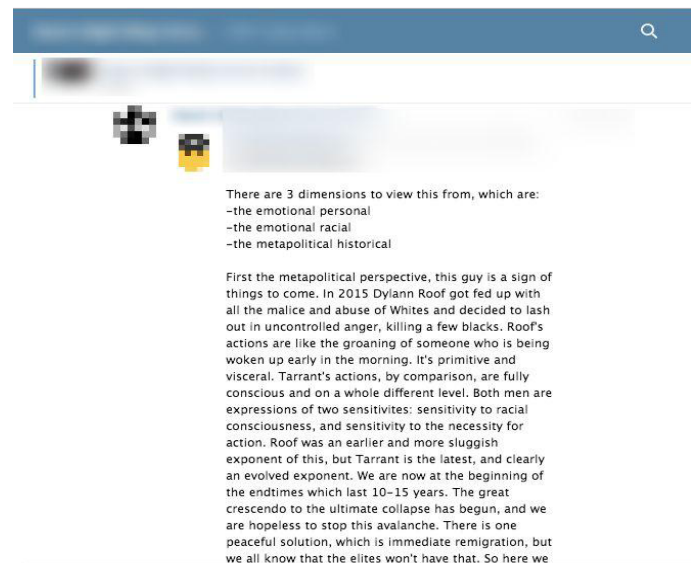


Studies show that the aim of terrorism is usually to achieve radical political and societal change. When the power ratio of government to challenger is high, a resort to terrorism can be perceived as a logical choice.⁴¹ The act of terrorism then serves two functions: to create sympathy among ideologically aligned audiences and to instil fear and hostility into the enemy audiences.⁴²

It is alleged that the Christchurch attacker directly referenced the defeat of Front National leader Marine Le Pen in the 2017 French elections as a turning point that prompted him to commit the attack. While we should be cautious about taking the so-called manifesto at face value, we have seen similar rhetoric surface repeatedly in closed chat channels frequented by the extreme-right, with adherents to the Great Replacement theory advocating for violent action when they have given up on political solutions. Figure 4 shows an example on Telegram of an extreme-right group

endorsing violence as the only solution to the 'Great Replacement', reinforcing how this theory is able to necessitate extreme violence as a solution to impending catastrophe.

Figure 4 Extreme-right chatroom on Telegram



the aim of terrorism is usually to achieve radical political and societal change.

Proponents of the Great Replacement Theory

The next section of this report outlines the categories of groups and individuals who have explicitly expressed support for or used the language of the Great Replacement theory, as well as implicit and/or tacit support of the concept:

Identitarian Groups

As shown in the previous chapter, Generation Identity has been among the most active proponents of the Great Replacement theory. It has launched campaigns across the entire social media ecosystem, with Facebook, Twitter and Telegram being particularly important platforms for spreading propaganda to sympathisers and new audiences.

To get an idea of the scope and reach of online Identitarian networks, we conducted a census covering its official channels on Twitter, Facebook, Telegram and YouTube as of May 2019.⁴³

Twitter

Table 2 shows the number of people who follow Generation Identity accounts on Twitter as of May 2019.

Table 2 Census of the official GI channels on Twitter in May 2019

Country	Account name	Followers
Austria	Identitäre Bewegung Österreich	16,500
France	Les Identitaires	13,200
Germany	Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland	23,300
Italy	Generazione Identitaria	3,225
UK and Ireland ⁴⁴	Generation Identity	10,747
Others ⁴⁵	multiple	Approx. 3,000
Total		69,972

Facebook

Table 3 shows the number of people who follow Generation Identity pages on Facebook as of May 2019.

Table 3 Census of the official GI channels on Facebook in May 2019

Country	Account name	Followers
Austria	deleted	Group banned
France	Les Identitaires	Group banned
Germany	Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland	Group banned
Italy	Generazione Identitaria	10,629
UK and Ireland	Generation Identity	Group banned
Others	multiple	Approx. 300
Total		11,000

Telegram

Table 4 shows the number of people who are members of Generation Identity channels on Telegram as of May 2019.

Table 4 Census of the official GI channels on Telegram in May 2019

Country	Account name	Followers
Austria ⁴⁶	Martin Sellner	21,587
France	Les Identitaires	1,069
Germany	Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland	3,347
Italy	Generazione Identitaria	623
UK and Ireland	Generation Identity	2,233
Others	multiple	Approx. 300
Total		29,157

YouTube

Table 5 shows number of people who subscribe to Generation Identity channels on YouTube as of May 2019.

Table 5 Census of the official GI channels on YouTube in May 2019

Country	Channel name	Subscribers
Austria	Martin Sellner	101,389
France	Les Identitaires	10,963
Germany	Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland	19,927
Italy	Generazione Identitaria	1,284
UK and Ireland	Generation Identity	5,464
Others	multiple	Approx. 2,000
Total		141,027

Academics, Writers and Research Institutes

Recently, ISD identified internationally coordinated campaigns that boosted white genocide narratives in the 2018 Swedish elections.⁴⁷ A coalition of think tanks, alternative media outlets and social media influencers has amplified the reach of these campaigns beyond traditional far-right audiences. For example, the Gefira Foundation, which frames itself as a European think tank 'focused on current demographic changes and the consequence on geopolitical and financial development', publishes articles on the Great Replacement concept in English, German, Polish and Italian. One of its reports and campaigns about demographic change and migration is called 'Sweden will remain Sweden, but just in name'. In the report, Gefira suggests that the Swedish government deliberately distorts demographic change data and argues that it is 'pursuing a systematic re-population policy... to compensate for the low birth rate'.⁴⁸

Political Parties and Actors

The Great Replacement theory has also penetrated the circles of far-right politicians and political commentators, who have made explicit and implicit references to the idea of an orchestrated 'invasion of the Occident' (tables 6 and 7).

Table 6 Explicit mentions of the Great Replacement by four far-right politicians

Politician	Party	Country	Year	Medium
H. C. Strache	Freedom Party of Austria	Austria	2016, 2017, 2019	Twitter and Interview with Kronen Zeitung
Marion Maréchal-Le Pen	Front National	France	2016	Twitter
Björn Höcke	Alternative für Deutschland	Germany	2018	Interview with artist Sebastian Henning
Dries Van Langenhove	Vlaams Belang	Belgium	2019	Social media

The former Austrian Vice Chancellor H. C. Strache of the far-right Freedom Party posted in 2016 and 2017 on Facebook that 'the Great Replacement had already taken place under the governments of the SPÖ/ÖVP/Greens'. In an interview with Kronen Zeitung in April 2019 he vowed to 'continue the battle against the Great Replacement'.⁴⁹

Leading Alternative for Germany (AfD) politician Björn Höcke also mentioned the conspiracy theory, warning of the 'impeding death of the people through Great Replacement' in his interview with Sebastian Henning, an artist from Dresden, which was published in 2018.⁵⁰

Dries Van Langenhove, frontrunner of the Belgian far-right populist party Vlaams Belang in the 2019 European Parliament elections, regularly posts about 'the replacement' on social media.⁵¹ For example, in March and April 2019 he wrote on Twitter and Facebook that 'we are being replaced'.⁵²

In 2016, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, niece of National Rally leader Marine Le Pen and former National Assembly member in southern France, tweeted '#GreatReplacement: it's a truth in a number of territories in France'.⁵³

In addition to explicit references to the Great Replacement theory, a number of mainstream politicians globally have used language which closely mirrors language employed by the theory's proponents, or have referenced related conspiracy theories. This includes making direct references to migrants as 'invaders', as well as the use of visual material which evokes the theory.

It should be noted here that these references are not in and of themselves indicators that politicians directly support the theory, and should in no way be taken to suggest that these actors endorse the violent actions of some of the theory's advocates. But they do suggest a conscious 'dog-whistle' politics aimed at courting voters sympathetic to more extreme viewpoints, and underscore the extent to which fringe groups are able to influence mainstream political and public discourse around key wedge issues like migration

Figure 5 Tweet from H. C. Strache⁵⁴



..they do suggest a conscious 'dog-whistle' politics aimed at courting voters sympathetic to more extreme viewpoints

We observed and documented numerous examples of politicians across North America and Europe using language which mirrors that of proponents of the Great Replacement theory and related concepts. A few selected case studies from 2018 and 2019 are presented below:

- Hungary's far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has described refugees as 'Muslim invaders'.⁵⁵ Orbán's campaigns in Hungary, which blame the migration crisis on the Jewish philanthropic investor George Soros, have also prompted waves of anti-Semitism.⁵⁶
- Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini claimed that he 'halted the migrant invasion'⁵⁷ and the president of the Spanish far-right Vox party in Andalucía, Francisco Serrano, tweeted that 'along with the refugees are Islamic radicals who have been planning the invasion of Europe for years'.⁵⁸
- In Germany, a party-internal reviewer warned AfD politicians in 2018 to stop using extremist trigger words such as Umvolkung (ethnic replacement), Überfremdung (foreign infiltration) and Volkstod (death of the people).⁵⁹ However, one of AfD Berlin's campaigns in the run-up to the 2019 European Parliament elections focused on the Eurabia conspiracy theory, with posters that said: 'Learning from Europe's history... so that Europe will not become Eurabia' (Figure 6).⁶⁰
- In Spain, the president of Vox Sevilla, Maria José Piñero, retweeted a video featuring conspiracy theories about George Soros and the Bilderberg group, which mirror the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories prevalent among Great Replacement theory and white genocide proponents, including concepts of invasion and forced ethnic displacement. Francisco Serrano, the president of Vox in Andalucía, tweeted about 'the Islamic radicals who have been planning the invasion of Europe for years' (Figure 7).

- US President Trump has also referred to migrants as 'invaders' on several occasions.⁶² Furthermore, he has implicitly humoured the narrative that South Africa is undergoing a white genocide,⁶³ and has also previously retweeted Twitter accounts which promote the White Genocide theory.⁶⁴

Figure 6 Tweet from AfD Landesverband⁶¹



Figure 7 Tweet from Roberto Centeno and reply from Francisco Serrano⁶⁵



Mainstream Social Media Analysis of The Great Replacement

Using the social media listening tool Crimson Hexagon, we assessed the evolution of the Great Replacement theory on mainstream social media in the seven years preceding the attack in Christchurch.

Between 1 April 2012 and 1 April 2019, we identified a total of 1.48 million posts that contained at least one keyword and hashtag mentioning 'Great Replacement' in the English, French and German languages. This included all variations and alternative spellings of:

'great replacement' '#greatreplacement'
'grand remplacement' '#grandremplacement'
'#grandRemplacement' 'großer Austausch'
'#dergrosseAustausch' '#dergroßeAustausch'.

Volume Evolution of "Great Replacement" Discussions (2012-2019)

As Figure 8 shows, the volume of tweets about the Great Replacement has steadily increased since 2012. Although this is not a definitive measure that more individuals are engaging with the conspiracy,

it nevertheless suggests the concept has become more widespread in recent years.

It can be observed that debate reached its peak after the Christchurch attack, which propelled the term 'Great Replacement' to mainstream attention. However, when the volume of discussion following the attack is observed in Figure 9, we can see that use of these keywords is slightly higher than that before the attack. This might in part be driven by continued commentary around the attack and its motivations, however when the key influencers involved in this conversation are examined, it is clear that four are linked into far-right circles, suggesting that the Christchurch attack did not affect the willingness of individuals to align themselves publicly with this discourse (Figure 10).⁶⁶

Figure 8 Discussion of the "Great Replacement" on Twitter between April 2012 and April 2019

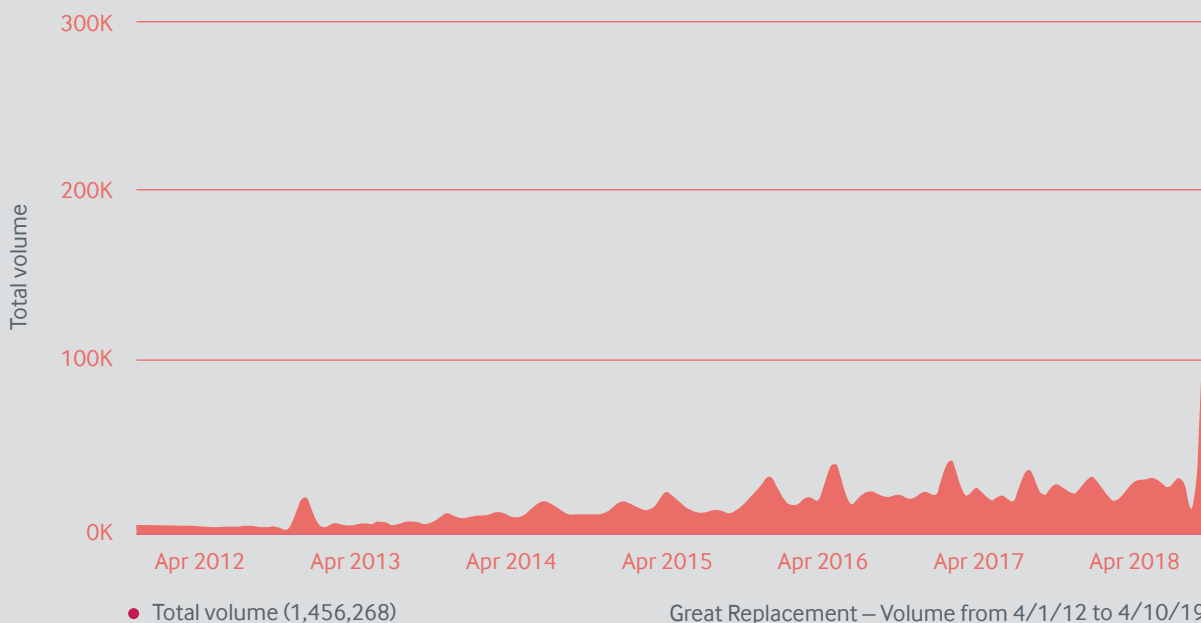
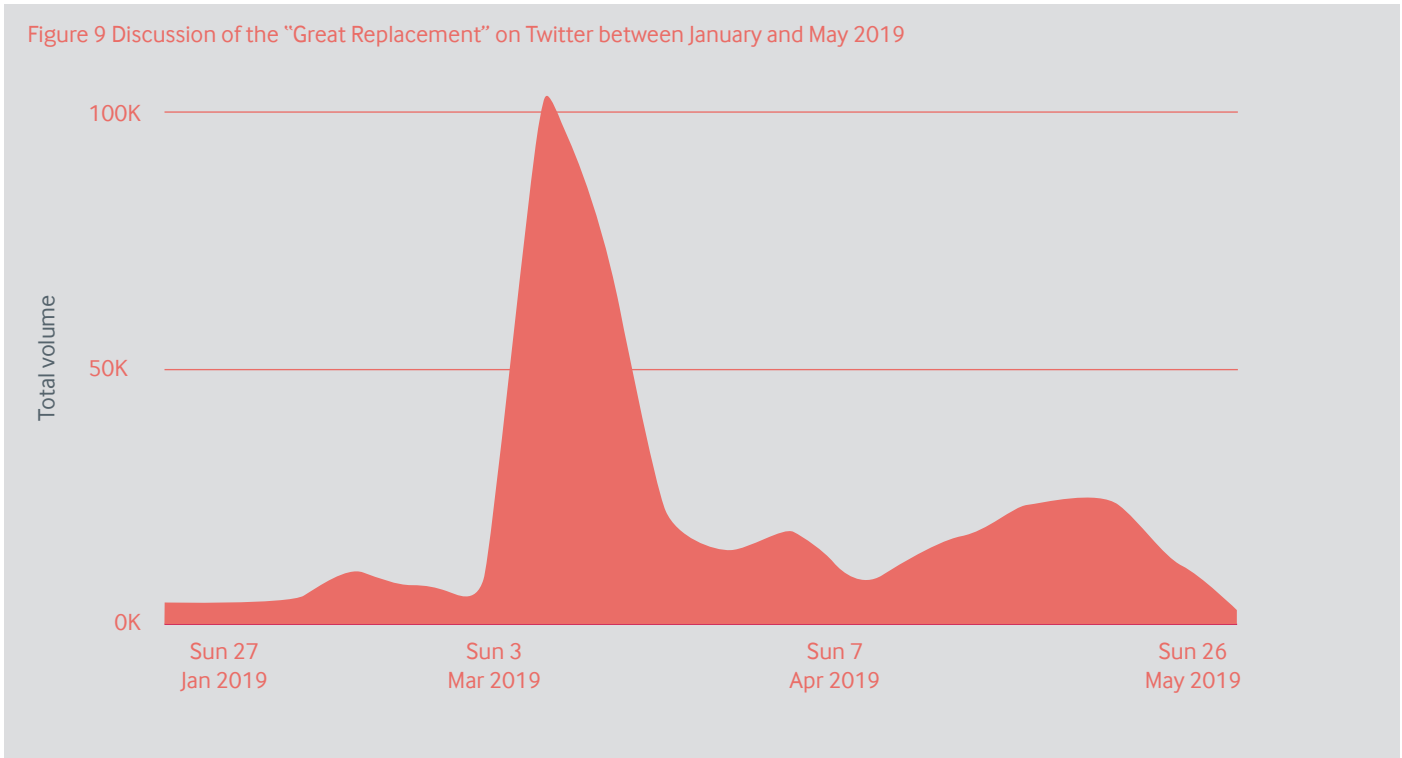


Figure 9 Discussion of the "Great Replacement" on Twitter between January and May 2019



Countries and Influencers driving "Great Replacement" Discussions











When discussion between 2012 and 2019 is examined, of the 750,000 tweets with an identifiable location, over 50% came from France, 23% from the US, 7% from the UK, and the rest from countries like Canada, Germany and Australia.

To get an idea of the social media influencers around the Great Replacement theory over the examined time period, we analysed the top ten most influential Twitter accounts whose holders engaged with the conspiracy theory and its support networks.⁶⁷

We found that eight out of the ten of these accounts appear to be associated with French individuals or organisations. Three are far-right politicians: the Mayor of Béziers Robert Ménard Jean-Yves Le Gallou MEP and president of Souveraineté, indépendance et libertés (SIEL) Karim Ouchikh.⁶⁸ Two accounts are linked with the far-right magazine Fdesouche; two are no longer on Twitter; and one is held by Renaud Camus, who coined the theory. The only two non-French most influential Twitter accounts are the official one for the President of the USA and one for the extreme-

right site Defend Evropa (Figure 10).

Figure 10 The ten Twitter accounts who engaged the most with the Great Replacement theory and its support networks between 2012 and 2019

	97,356 tweets	543 following	26,428 followers	4.9 influence score
	98,634 tweets	1 following	47,628 followers	1.4 influence score
	37,454 tweets	2,348 following	43,900 followers	1.2 influence score
	30,080 tweets	3,460 following	33,008 followers	1.0 influence score
	30,475 tweets	595 following	20,039 followers	0.9 influence score
	20,296 tweets	24 following	36,092 followers	0.9 influence score
	24,367 tweets	1,418 following	22,015 followers	0.8 influence score
	67,507 tweets	185 following	2,428 followers	0.7 influence score
	5,560 tweets	39 following	25,590,936 followers	0.6 influence score
	1,812 tweets	111 following	28,044 followers	0.6 influence score

Volume Evolution of “Remigration” Discussions (2012-2019)

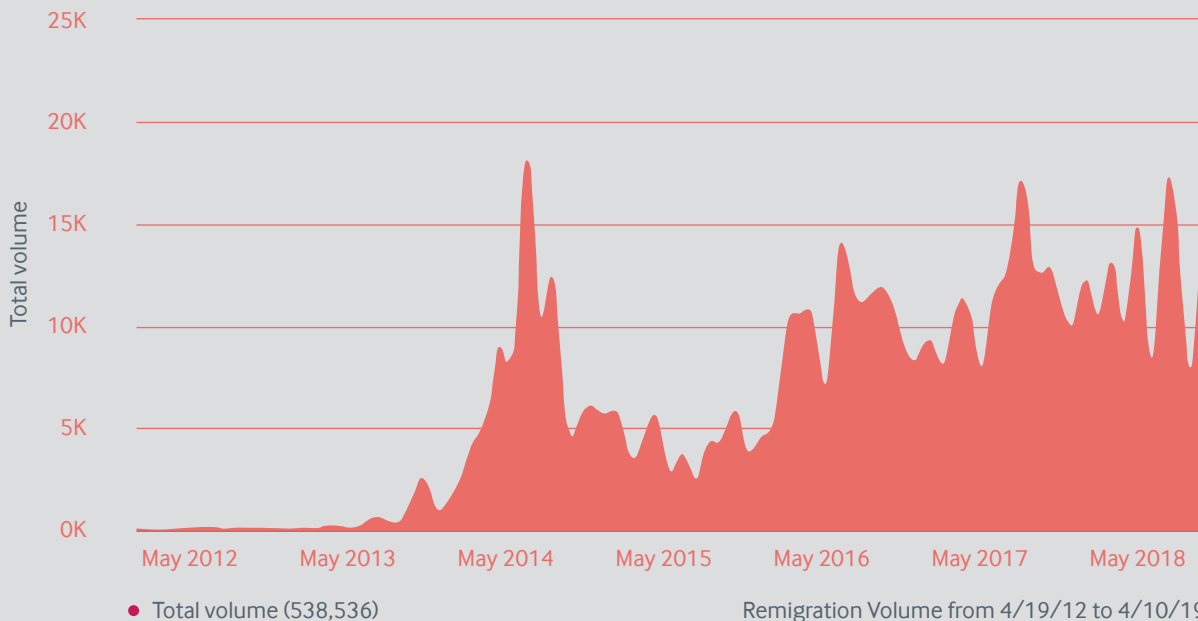
Our Twitter analysis shows that the volume of tweets using the term ‘remigration’ has strongly increased since mid-2014. Overall, it was used over 540,000 times between April 2012 and April 2019.

The initial surge shown in Figure 11 coincides with the first Assises de la Remigration (Annual Meeting on Remigration) in Paris in 2014 organised by Generation Identity⁶⁹ and the launch of the Twitter account @Remigration. The account @Remigration alone was responsible for over 10,000 tweets mentioning ‘remigration’ in the second half of 2015, over 20 times more than the second most active account (Figure 12). The hashtag #remigration was frequently paired with #legrandremplacement (the Great Replacement).

Figure 12 The ten Twitter accounts who used the term “remigration” most often between 19 April 2012 and 10 April 2019.

Account	Volume
@Remigration	15,911
@52Fabienne	1,467
@art_phl	1,443
@darktweep	1,427
@SpaceFromGreece	1,346
@bbidoill	1,313
@RenaudCamus	1,201
@FrontSocial	1,080
@languillem	1,066
@ZoursBielski	1,016

Figure 11 Discussion of “Remigration” on Twitter between April 2012 and April 2019













Countries and Influencers Driving “Remigration” Discussions

Of the over 240,000 tweets produced from an identifiable location that use the word 'remigration', over 50% came from France, almost 20% from Germany, over 6% from the US, and the rest from countries like Switzerland, the UK, Canada and Austria.

A range of figures are driving and amplifying the conversations on Twitter on remigration but Renaud Camus's account ranks among the most prolific and influential. Generation Identity Germany (Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland) is another of the top ten most influential accounts (Figure 13).

Figure 13 The ten Twitter accounts who engaged the most on the topic of remigration and its support networks between 2012 and 2019

	98,005 tweets	544 following	26,712 followers	5.2 influence score
	30,526 tweets	587 following	20,207 followers	3.2 influence score
	4,196 tweets	468 following	9,943 followers	1.5 influence score
	21,072 tweets	2,270 following	9,069 followers	1.5 influence score
	66,669 tweets	2,697 following	8,485 followers	1.5 influence score
	3,982 tweets	186 following	22,715 followers	1.4 influence score
	30,134 tweets	3,485 following	33,140 followers	1.3 influence score
	13,028 tweets	3,307 following	17,154 followers	1.2 influence score
	42,361 tweets	5,349 following	8,917 followers	1.1 influence score
	1,696 tweets	3,560 following	4,946 followers	1.0 influence score

Political parties have also picked up on the idea of remigration as a solution to the 'great replacement', demonstrating the influence of extremist groups on the policy of populist and far-right. In Austria, the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ; Freedom Party of Austria) featured a call for nationwide remigration on one

of its regional websites.⁷⁰ In Spring 2019, the AfD called for 'remigration' in its official European elections manifesto.⁷¹ Before that, in January 2019, the neo-Nazi party Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany) had demanded a remigration pact,⁷² as had the blogger and anti-Islam activist Michael Stürzenberger, who is the former chair of Die Freiheit who turned author for PI-News in late 2018.⁷³

The increasingly common use of the concepts and language of migration-related conspiracy theories by far-right politicians and political activists suggests that the Great Replacement theory and similar ideas are becoming mainstream.

In the UK, a survey conducted by the YouGov-Cambridge Centre for Public Opinion Research found that 30% of people who voted to leave the European Union in the referendum in 2016 believed in the Great Replacement theory (as opposed to 6% of remain voters).⁷⁴ Furthermore, both Brexit and Trump voters had a much higher tendency to believe in conspiracy theories about immigration than those who voted for Remain or Hilary Clinton. This is important as it demonstrates how populist and mainstream causes are able to build support for dangerous extremist talking points.

Dissemination tactics and technologies used to amplify the Great Replacement theory

We found that proponents of the Great Replacement theory use a range of tactics to substantiate and broadcast the concept, drawing on broader trends which can be observed in extreme-right-wing communications, including:

- **Mobilising 'dark social' platforms:** As major social media platforms have increased efforts to moderate egregious content, extreme-right-wing communities have used a range of fringe social media platforms to communicate and build ideological consensus around key issues including the Great Replacement theory. These platforms are important as they enable the growth of a more cohesive extremist subculture, and cross-border collaboration and coordination.
- **Using memes:** Memes are an effective way for quickly conveying extremist talking points relating to the Great Replacement theory. These often contain opaque references to internet culture, helping to reinforce the subculture of the international extreme-right.
- **Disseminating messaging over mainstream social platforms:** Although extreme-right-wing communities use fringe social media platforms to share material, mainstream social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook remain important avenues for disseminating material on the Great Replacement theory. These platforms are also beneficial as they provide the opportunity to reach and radicalise new audiences.
- **Using alternative media:** In recent years an alternative media ecosystem has sprung up, which explicitly caters to extreme-right communities. Not bound to the same editorial guidelines as 'traditional' print media, these sources use a combination of misinformation, conspiracy theories, hyper-partisan commentary and the collation of sensationalist stories to reinforce the extremist world view.
- **Using offline events, rallies and stunts:** Extremist groups also use a range of offline activity stunts to draw attention to their cause. Generation Identity has become particularly adept at using a range of tactics, including distributing fliers, hanging banners at key locations and waging publicity stunts, such as placing Islamic dress on statues.⁷⁵

Enabling Technology: 'Dark Social' Platform Analysis

Over the past few years, the Great Replacement theory has spread to a range of subcultures of the internet.

Our research reveals that alternative social media platforms, image boards, fringe forums and encrypted chat channels are instrumental in diffusing the conspiracy theory across different online communities. We have identified four kinds of these alt-tech platforms, which we characterise as the 'dark social ecosystem':

- **Extremist in-house creations:** Platforms created for the purpose of offering a safe haven for extremists. These include the Identitarian social networking app Patriot Peer.
- **Ultra-libertarian platforms:** Platforms created by libertarians or commercially driven developers, which tend to operate in the name of free speech, and which tolerate violent and extremist content, do not proactively take down any content, and are not willing to cooperate in any efforts to counter extremism. These include the Twitter substitute Gab.
- **Hijacked platforms:** Platforms created for an entirely different purpose, which have been hijacked by extremists who are proactively engaging in counter-extremism efforts. These include the gaming chat channel Discord.
- **Fringe platforms:** Popular platforms which serve as the engine-rooms for internet culture, and often as a home for loosely organised communities of internet trolls. These include the imageboard 8chan.

The Christchurch attack was intimately linked to extreme-right-wing culture which has grown around fringe platforms, and the strategy adopted by the perpetrator in the lead-up, execution and aftermath of the attack was designed with these audiences in mind. The choice of dumping the so-called

manifesto and leaks to the Facebook livestream on 8chan prior to the attack ensured that the material made its way into the hands of the most ardent ideologues before being disseminated more broadly across the internet.

Far-right propagandists have used the entire new media ecosystem to promote the idea of a white genocide: they have been particularly active across unregulated imageboard threads on 8chan and 4chan, censorship-free discussion platforms like Voat and ultra-libertarian social media sites like Gab and Minds, and use closed chat channels to share egregious activity and coordinate online campaigns. ISD researchers are currently embedded in 50 extreme-right chat channels on applications such as Discord, Telegram and WhatsApp, as well as monitoring groups, communities and discussion boards on 4chan, 8chan, Gab, Minds, Voat and Reddit. In May 2019 alone we identified discussions of the Great Replacement and white genocide theories on all of these channels – providing some indication of how widespread these concepts are.

On the encrypted messaging apps Discord and Telegram, radical groups that spread white genocide ideologies include Generation Identity channels as well as international alt-right groups. Some of these channels are connected to each other. A few provide a gateway to more violence-endorsing conversations, however it should be noted that these are a minority of this set, making up approximately 10% of all channels monitored.

The so-called manifesto and livestream of the terrorist attack in Christchurch contained numerous references to broader internet culture, and in particular the alt-right subculture, to the extent that they can be characterised as one long insider 'joke'. Even the choice of background music for the livestream was meme-linked, in this case a reference to the Bosnian genocide, which is regularly praised in these corners of the internet.

By ensuring that audiences on 'dark social' platforms received this material first, and were pandered to throughout the attack, the perpetrator was investing in the continued propagation of material that promoted his activity. He forged a link between digital subcultures and new terrorist propaganda, urging his readers and watchers on 8chan: 'Do your part by spreading my message, making memes and shitposting as you usually do.'

The reference to the popular video-game vlogger PewDiePie at the beginning of the attack represents a concerted effort to ensure the attacker's propaganda resonated culturally with as broad an audience as possible. Alluding to accusations that PewDiePie is sympathetic to extremist ideology⁷⁶ forced PewDiePie to react to these accusations,⁷⁷ fuelling the media storm that followed the attack and ensuring additional media channels (in this case the video-game vlogging sphere) were brought into discussion around the event. Furthermore, the very fact that the video was filmed in the first person, aping a popular gaming format in visual style, has added to its notoriety. Indeed, some individuals have created modified maps which look like the Al Noor Mosque on the popular first-person shooter game Counter-Strike so that they can re-enact the shooting online, and a number of supporters have created video-game-style remixes of the attack footage and distributed it online.

This intensely self-referential, gamified nature of the attack suggests it was designed explicitly for an audience heavily engaged with internet subcultures.

This strategy falls into a pattern that ISD researchers observed in numerous other contexts, including the Charlottesville rally, which resulted in a terrorist attack. Extreme-right commentators have explicitly referenced the need to weaponise internet culture so that younger generations can be radicalised more effectively. Similarly, non-violent extreme-right movements such as Generation Identity have

stressed the value of gamification of propaganda campaigns, as outlined step-by-step in their Media Guerilla Warfare Manual.⁷⁸

The use of livestream can be characterised as a pragmatic way of ensuring that as much of an attack would be broadcast as possible. However, it also mirrors a pattern of interplay between fringe and mainstream platforms, whereby extreme-right communities rapidly produce large amounts of propagandist material which can then be widely spread throughout broader digital ecosystems. They primarily use larger platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as avenues through which to disseminate propaganda material to broader audiences, while fringe platforms remain safe havens for the initiated to radicalise further. ISD observed and documented this trend in a variety of settings, including in the German, Italian, French and Swedish elections, and this behaviour is also common with ISIS and other Islamist terror groups.⁷⁹

As the Great Replacement theory co-opts the grievances of different fringe communities on the internet by connecting anti-migration, anti-LGBT, anti-abortion and anti-establishment narratives, it has gained traction among a range of loose online networks: the gaming community, the loose anti-feminist communities known as the 'Manosphere', conspiracy theorists, counter-jihadist bubbles and anti-Semitic echo chambers have found their lowest common denominator in the victimhood of the white European people. In addition to this, the Great Replacement theory is often intimately bound up with misogynistic discussions – with women often being blamed as the drivers of falling birth rates as they step away from traditional gender roles.

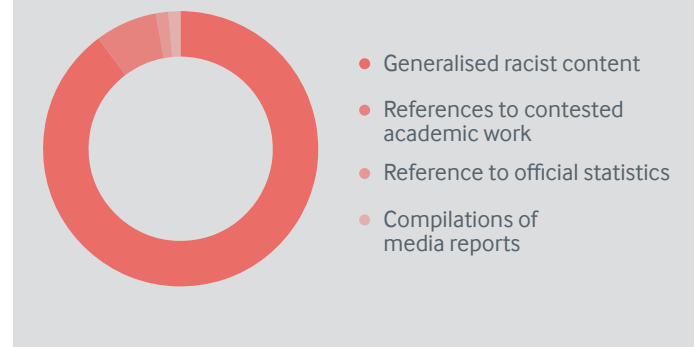
The Use of Memes to Spread White Genocide Theories

To examine the differing ways this material is constructed we analysed an extreme-right 'red-pill dump', containing 480 memes designed to promote the Great Replacement and white genocide theories as a tool for radicalisation. We have subsequently found examples of the memes identified in this dump circulating on fringe social media and major platforms. In particular, we were keen to understand the content of these memes better to see which tactics extreme-right communities use to communicate their ideology.⁸⁰

We found that 90% (431) of these pieces of content contained generalised dehumanising and racist discussion playing on racial stereotypes, themes of racial impurity, the threat of cultural differences between Europeans and people from Africa and the Middle East, and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. The remaining 10% (49) contained references to external sources or made statistical claims to justify the Great Replacement theory. Of these, 35 referenced sources that came from academic demographic studies and official bodies including the United Nations, the European Commission, and other government and law enforcement bodies. Of the remaining 14 references, 7 cited contested academic work, sources associated with far and extreme-right ideology, or unverified statistical claims, while 7 included compilations of media headlines which reinforced extreme-right conspiracy theories (Figure 14).

The general memes in this set presented unsubstantiated, emotive and hyperbolic claims to ethnic and cultural displacement, as well as references to broader conspiracy theories focusing on racist, racialist and anti-Semitic tropes. This is important as it demonstrates how material shared around this topic rarely engages with the theory behind the Great Replacement theory, but instead appeals to emotion and pre-existing prejudices.

Figure 14 ISD breakdown of red-pill content of 480 memes



References to media reporting were also used to reinforce the idea that there is a conspiracy in the liberal press to drive an anti-white agenda. Here compilations are made of headlines for articles promoting immigration and minority rights. Often these are juxtaposed with headlines discussing why people are having fewer children, for example because of career incentives and environmental concerns around population growth. These collections also highlight stories articles which have been written by Jewish authors, further fuelling anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. In this way extremist groups are taking advantage of the 'clickbaitification' of journalism, where authors are incentivised to arrive at sensationalised and emotive headlines.⁸¹

Writers of extremist content around the Great Replacement theory quote contested academic works to reinforce notions of racial superiority. Works cited focused on racial differences in IQ, and include the controversial books *The Bell Curve* by Charles A. Murray and *Race, Evolution and Behavior* by J Philippe Rushton, as well as allusions to phrenology.⁸² Although racialism is heavily contested and has largely been debunked in contemporary scientific study⁸³, the resurgence of these ideas is important as it provides the veneer of legitimacy to white nativist messaging. Furthermore, these arguments are powerful at appealing to impurity narratives, explicitly and

irrevocably drawing divisions between different ethnic groups.

White nationalist sources also reference a range of statistics created by international and national bodies including the United Nations, the European Commission, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the US State Department, as well as work from academic demographers. These include projections for population growth in Africa, discussion around population shifts in Europe as well as crime and incarceration statistics.⁸⁴ These statistics were cherry-picked, used out of context, and misinterpreted. In a number of instances statistics were falsely accredited to official bodies and instead linked to extremist websites. This demonstrates how extreme-right communities deliberately concoct disinformation, which they then 'brand cleanse' by associating them with credible sources even when they seek to distance themselves from these groups, itself a potentially valuable tactic for engaging a range of different audiences.

Amplification Through Alt-Media

Using the MIT tool MediaCloud, we retraced media mentions of 'remigration' across a broad international media landscape between April 2018 and April 2019. The data collection was based on a large list of global media sites provided by the European Media Monitor project,⁸⁵ and a list of right-wing populist news sites provided by the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society. For the purpose of comparison, we also collected datasets including mentions of 'Great Replacement' (keywords: 'great replacement', 'grand remplacement' and 'großer Austausch') and 'white genocide' (keywords: 'white genocide' and 'génocide blanc'). We conducted some data cleaning to exclude corrupted data. In total, the term 'remigration' was mentioned in 317 stories by 119 news sources over between April 2018 and April 2019, rather less than the number of times 'great replacement' (~2000 stories) or 'white genocide' (~500 stories) was mentioned.⁸⁶

To gain a more detailed understanding of the media attention towards 'remigration', we focused our analysis on the top 15 sources, which are responsible for roughly 50% of total coverage (158 stories) (Figure 16). Of these top 15 sources, 10 are listed as right-wing populist sites in corresponding media collections provided by the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society on Mediacloud. The top two sources – Riposte Laïque and Résistance Républicaine – produced approximately 20% of the total coverage. Both are French alternative news sites that host anti-immigration and anti-Muslim material.

With over 3,200 views, one of the most-widely shared articles is an interview in Riposte Laïque with Karim Ouchikh from January 2019, in which the French politician speaks about 'the Great Replacement, Islamisation, remigration'.⁸⁷ The interview was shared by Résistance Républicaine, suggesting there is a high degree of alignment and interconnectedness between the two platforms.⁸⁸ Another prominently shared article was a piece in Résistance Républicaine entitled 'Macron accelerates the Great Replacement, he wants to accommodate 86% of migrants (as opposed to 50% currently)'.⁸⁹ Among the top sites that shared this article are the French Identitarian online magazine Novopress, Breizh-Info (a Breton far-right website led by an Identitarian), and the Austrian Identitarian magazine Info-Direkt.

In addition, traditional media sites are found within the top 15 sources and are responsible for roughly 7% of total coverage of the term 'remigration'. An explorative qualitative assessment indicates that news outlets such as Die Zeit, Le Monde and Der Spiegel used 'remigration' mainly to evaluate the term critically or in the context of coverage about populist-right parties like the German AfD.

Figure 15 The media sources that mentioned 'remigration' the most frequently between April 2018 and April 2019

Source	Count	Country
ripostelaique.com	43	France
resistancerepublicaine.eu	22	France
medias-presse.info	13	France
baltic-course.com	11	UK
breizh-info.com	11	France
pi-news.net	8	Germany
fdesouche.com	7	France
bvoltaire.fr	6	France
fr.novopress.info	6	France
zeit.de	6	Germany
info-direkt.eu	5	Germany
Lemonde.fr	5	France
nouvelobs.com	5	France
polemia.com	5	France
spiegel.de	5	Germany

Conclusions

Recent attacks demonstrate the potential for the Great Replacement theory to drive extreme-right mobilisation and terrorist acts. By examining the narratives that its proponents employ, it is clear that the theory lends itself to calls for radical action against minority communities – including ethnic cleansing, violence and terrorism.

These narratives are increasingly influential in the promotion of violent extremism, but there are also concerted efforts to normalise the underlying ideology through a range of communications tactics that have enabled groups on the fringes to impact mainstream political and public discourse. Populist and far-right parties including the AfD in Germany, the Austrian Freedom Party, Lega in Italy and UKIP are championing virulent anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies, in part shaped by a desire to pander to voters who are sympathetic to these narratives. Several more traditional conservative and centre-right parties have also nodded to these narratives, such as Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz who has been criticized by far-right leader Heinz-Christian Strache of the Austrian Freedom Party for copying his agenda on immigration.⁹⁰ But such rhetoric can also be identified on the political left, as evidenced for instance by the Social Democrats in Denmark who have been noted for their tough anti-immigration policies.⁹¹

Further research is required to understand the interplay between extreme fringe movements and the political mainstream in relation to the instigation and dissemination of extremist ideologies and conspiracy theories. Such research could include an examination of the points of convergence between mainstream and fringe discourse. Perhaps most importantly, there needs to be a facility that provides real-time, ongoing analysis of extremist information operations targeting specific groups such as minorities, LGBT communities and political opponents, and

leveraging key wedge-issues like migration or integration. Such a facility could help inform rapid response to this growing challenge, providing up-to-date data to civil society organisations, policy makers and front line services working to prevent community polarisation as well as incidences of hate crime, violence and terrorism.

More generally, however, we need to explore and trial innovative mechanisms that allow for a frank airing and authentic engagement with legitimate grievances and policy concerns around migration. This is often best done at a local level, where municipal authorities, if properly informed, can play an instrumental role in engaging with local grievances and divisive local dynamics. Innovative approaches need to be explored and tested, both offline and online, that enable 'people to people' contact across dividing lines, and engagement with marginalised or fringe voices and with extremists themselves. Some of the most promising examples of such work have failed to be invested in at scale, leaving extremists a wide open and fruitful terrain to successfully exploit grievances and poison the public debate.

From a policy response perspective, the fact that extremist messaging and content often skirts the boundaries of both acceptability and legality represents a serious challenge. These groups often operate within a 'grey area' that tests the limits of freedom of speech, illegal hate speech and speech that contravenes the community standards of different social media platforms.

Where content and messaging online neither transgresses national laws or the policies of the tech companies, one has to look beyond the content moderation and removal approaches which have dominated government and company digital policy discussions to date. Indeed, perhaps the greater challenge faced is not in individual pieces of hateful content, but rather the flourishing, noxious communities that propagate and normalise their hateful ideas among wider and wider constituencies of users. It has become increasingly apparent that the technological architecture of the major platforms inorganically amplifies extreme messaging. Algorithms designed to maximise time spent on platforms to enhance advertising revenue inadvertently aid extremist communications strategies, channelling sympathetic users to ever more sensationalist or borderline content. Individuals may be unaware of the extent to which algorithms shape what they see online and the distortive effect this can have on their digital experience.

The potential impact of online architecture on radicalisation requires further research and attention from policymakers as well as greater public awareness. Improved transparency around the development and outcomes of these algorithms has the potential to shed light on the impact of malicious co-option of platform architecture, better inform policy responses, and encourage more responsible platform design on behalf of the technology sector.

In addition to third party review or regulation of the outcomes of platform architecture, there are a number of crucial policy gaps related specifically to far and extreme-right movements. In recent years, governments have been pushing social media companies to restrict the exploitation of their platforms by extremist and terrorist groups. For example, following pressure from governments, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism

(GIFCT) was launched by Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube. The GIFCT website outlines its record in relation to the removal of terrorist content.⁹² However, the main focus of these efforts to date has been on the removal of Islamist extremist content. Far-right extremist propaganda has only very recently started to come into focus as a priority concern, with new policies being launched by both Facebook and YouTube in relation to limiting access to white supremacist and white nationalist content.⁹³ But it should be noted that the tech companies currently rely on national or international lists of proscribed terrorist groups, such as the UN Designated Terror Groups list, to direct their GIFCT enforcement efforts and these tend to prioritise identification of Islamist groups. As a result, far and extreme-right violent extremist and terrorist material is still readily accessible online.

Overall, policymakers have been slow to recognise the threat posed by the extreme-right and have only very recently begun to make efforts to address this issue in response to the recent surge in far-right inspired acts of violence. It is crucial that this gap is closed and that more is done by governments, tech platforms and practitioners to understand the dynamics of these movements. This however requires an increase in expertise. Whilst the UK, Canadian and German Governments have made steps to proscribe extreme-right groups, other countries are currently lagging behind. Crucially, the United States is currently limited in its domestic response to extreme-right terror; a policy failure with far-reaching consequences, including shaping the agenda of predominantly US-based social media platforms. Although major platforms have introduced some voluntary measures to counter white nationalist and white supremacist content, many of the fringe platforms frequented by the extreme-right use free speech and libertarian arguments as the baseline for their policies. This wider technological ecosystem must be addressed by policy makers if the challenges faced are to be

addressed successfully. Raising greater awareness about the nature, scale and tactics of online extremist networks is an essential first step in helping practitioners and governments to more effectively respond to the threat in an informed, proportional and consistent fashion.

Endnotes

- 1 As there are sensitivities around providing direct links to extremist channels, including the risk of providing oxygen to extreme-right wing ideologues, we have withheld references to these channels but can supply them on request.
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