Trans-Atlantic Journeys of Far-Right Narratives Through Online-Media Ecosystems

ISD

Powering solutions
to extremism
and polarisation

Beirut l Berlin l London l Paris l Washington DC

www.isdglobal.org

Executive Summary

This research briefing explores if and how far-right[1] narratives from the United States (US), France and Germany gain traction in domestic mainstream media, or move across borders between the US on the one hand, and France and Germany on the other. It tests what will be referred to as the mainstreaming hypothesis (far-right ideas start out in far-right alternative media[2] but eventually move to the mainstream) and the transnationalisation hypothesis (far-right ideas spread between national media ecosystems).

The briefing uses the Topic Mapper function of Media Cloud[3] to study the hyperlink networks between three mainstream national and far-right online media ecosystems (USA, France, Germany) while focusing on ten different narratives pushed by far-right extremists in these countries, with five of them originating in the US and five from France and Germany. The research offers some evidence to support the hypothesis that ideas may be reaching the mainstream through such interactions, but limited support for the hypothesis that far-right media frequently hyperlink to international far-right outlets.

Key Findings

- **The volume and timing of stories about far-right narratives differ between mainstream national and far-right media.** The analysis showed that, of the narratives selected, many more stories were published in national media, but that in far-right media the relative proportion of such stories was greater. Additionally, the volume of coverage in far-right media appears to be more constant over time, while national media's coverage is more event-driven, often based around terrorist attacks or right-wing politicians using slogans associated with far-right movements, or not condemning those who have expressed far-right views.

- **The research found some support for the mainstreaming hypothesis within a national context.** US far-right and US national media cited each other relatively frequently, showing that within national contexts, or at least within the US national context, far-right media is regularly referenced by more mainstream press outlets. Interestingly, US national media referenced US far-right media less often when covering far-right narratives that originated in the US context than when covering European far-right narratives.

- **The research found limited support for the hypothesis that article hyperlinks in far-right media are an important vector for the transnationalisation of far-right ideas.** The volume of stories from far-right media outlets that linked to a far-right media outlet across the Atlantic (in either direction) was relatively small and differed between countries. In stories that covered any of the five US far-right narratives selected, 5 out of 21 links (23.8%) from German far-right media, 66 out of 272 links (24.3%) from French far-right media, and not a single link (647 overall) from US far-right media linked to another far-right media outlet from across the Atlantic.

- **French and German far-right media cite US far-right media more often than the other way around.** Even for stories about narratives that originated on the European far-right, US far-right media is more likely to be cited by German and French far-right media than to cite them. For these stories, 5 out of 95 links (5.2%) from German far-right media, 31 out of 574 links (5.4%) from French far-right media, and 10 out 647 links (1.5%) from US far-right media linked to another far-right media outlet from across the Atlantic.

Introduction

Following the Brexit referendum, and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, there have been major political, media and academic debates about the nature and impact of social-media-driven foreign interference in these polls, and democratic integrity more broadly. The focus of these debates has often been on state actors, the influence of automated accounts, and the role played by Russia in particular.[4] What was often ignored was the importance of both domestic and transnational non-state actors, from extremist groups to fringe media outlets and individual influencers, in weaponising social media to amplify distortive, deceptive, false, hateful and polarising content.[5] At the same time, research by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) has documented the tactical adoption of automated influence operations by non-state actors, from far-right online networks and media outlets to populist parties.[6] Given this background, it is crucial to further investigate the role played by non-state actors in mainstreaming extremist ideas.

Over the past few years, the far-right has been increasingly successful in mobilising support through the early adoption of new technologies. Using the opportunities provided by social media, and profiting from being amplified by influential politicians and political commentators, their extremist ideas have been able to reach significantly broader audiences than many would have thought possible.[7] Research shows that far-right communities on subreddits like The_Donald and 4chan's /pol/ board have been fairly successful in spreading memes[8] and alternative news[9] to wider audiences on social media and the internet at large. Qualitative research has also shown that far-right disinformation originating on fringe platforms such as 4chan can spread via Facebook and end up in mainstream media outlets, despite scepticism around the veracity of the content. Additionally, this transmission from the fringe into the mainstream may be driven by users actively and intentionally spreading disinformation rather than just passively consuming it.[10]

Rapidly transforming media ecosystems have fuelled these dynamics, enabling far-right activists and media outlets to spread disinformation systematically, attack political opponents and mainstream their previously fringe ideologies. A 2017 study found that the influence of far-right outlets like Breitbart had shifted established right-wing media outlets like Fox News to the (far-)right, leading to an 'asymmetrically polarised' media landscape: right-wing media had gravitated further from the centre than their established left-wing media counterparts. As centrist, liberal and left-wing media in the US feels compelled to respond to established right-wing media, Breitbart effectively achieved an intermediary agenda-setting function.[11] In a follow-up study on the French media ecosystem, it emerged that a 'core' of elite media in France had been successful in holding on to its gatekeeping function for the French media ecosystem and often ignored alternative online-only media, regional media, or conspiracy and far-right outlets.[12] This demonstrates the importance of studying the different structures of national media ecosystems, and the implications they may have for the ability of extremist actors to mainstream their positions.

At the same time, far-right ideas have increasingly spread across borders.[13] Ideas originating from the French far-right movement Nouvelle Droite, such as the 'the great replacement', 'metapolitics', 'Identitarianism' or 'ethnopluralism', have been adopted by the American 'alt-right' over the past decade, and inspired acts of terrorism across the globe, from New Zealand to the US, Germany and Norway.[14]

Conversely, the visual style, memes, humour, cultural references, conspiracy theories and online-platforms of the American alt-right have been seminal in shaping digital far-right movements in Europe. Beyond a convergence of tactics and platforms, this has also resulted in an ideological convergence through shared narratives based around mutual fears and perceived dangers such as migration, terrorism and a perceived 'cultural displacement'.[15]

But what role do social media and online media ecosystems play in the transnationalisation of far-right movements? A recently published study by researchers at the German Weizenbaum Institut analysed the hyperlink networks between 65 alternative right-wing online news sites in Austria, Germany, the US, the United Kingdom (UK), Denmark and Sweden over a period of three months in 2018. The study found that these outlets cross-link to each other across borders, even though there is some variation between countries and the share of international links is relatively low compared with in-country links (830 from 23,806 [3.4%] links between right-wing outlets overall). US alternative right-wing online news sites function as a hub for such outlets in the other countries investigated.[16]

Other research has cast doubt on the extent to which social media helps to facilitate a transnationalisation of far-right discourses. Authors of a 2018 study of retweets from audiences of far-right parties and movements in France, Germany, Italy and the UK argued that beyond issues such as immigration and a 'nativist interpretation the economy', transnational far-right activity on Twitter is limited.[17]

Research Questions

There is a gap in understanding the mechanisms by which far-right ideas are disseminated in a transnational context. ISD sought to fill this gap by tracking how such ideas move from the far-right's online media ecosystem to different geographical and political contexts. To do this, ISD analysed how different types of far-right and national mainstream media that reference far-right narratives cite each other in stories covering far-right narratives, both within and across countries. While hyperlinks may not directly spread ideas, they provide an indication of who is paying attention to whom, and how important specific outlets are within the coverage of a certain issue. One of the key objectives was to explore if and how extremist narratives get picked up by fringe and then mainstream media, and then move across borders.

We refer to the two hypotheses tested in this briefing as the mainstreaming hypothesis and the transnationalisation hypothesis:

- **Mainstreaming hypothesis**: far-right ideas spread between different parts of national media ecosystems, e.g. start out in far-right alternative media but eventually move to the mainstream

- **Transnationalisation hypothesis**: far-right ideas spread from different European (German and French) media ecosystems to the US media ecosystem, or vice versa.

In the following section we lay out the approach we took to test these hypotheses.

Research Methodology

This report uses the Topic Mapper function of Media Cloud to study the hyperlink networks between three national and far-right online media ecosystems (US, France, Germany) by focusing on ten different narratives promoted by far-right extremists in these countries. The construction of the hyperlink networks is based on the news sites' article content, whereby a media source is considered as the node of the network, and hyperlinks are analysed as directed edges of (or connections within) the network.

In a first step, the Topic Mapper function of Media Cloud allows users to search for articles on the basis of media collections, keywords and date ranges. The date range was set to 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020 for all narratives.

In a second step, the Topic Mapper function applies a process called 'spidering', which analyses the hyperlink structure in the seed articles retrieved through the search described above. Researchers used this function to obtain data about the hyperlink structure between the different far-right media ecosystems for the different narratives on a media level (looking at the narrative of interest, and which media source links to which other media sources) as well as on a more detailed article level (looking at the narrative of interest, which article links to which article). It should be noted that this function in principle offers the possibility of extending the article database by following the links and adding previously unknown articles and sources which match the applied queries. However, for this study ISD was primarily interested in the hyperlink structure in and between the far-right media ecosystems of interest.

Media Collections

In order to map the trajectory of far-right narratives from France and Germany to the US, and vice versa, ISD created national collections of far-right media for the US (216 sources), France (55 sources) and Germany (60 sources), and used Media Cloud's extensive pre-existing collections for national media outlets in each of the three countries. The size of the national media collections differs: the collections include 271, 359 and 63 media sources for the US, France and Germany respectively. ISD identified any sources that were part of multiple collections and excluded them from the subsequent link analysis. For example, while Breitbart may be relevant for certain research projects that look at national media ecosystems, it is mainly relevant as a far-right outlet for the purpose of this analysis and was therefore excluded from the national media collection.

Narratives

Using ISD's research into far-right narratives online, analysts who monitor the respective discourses in the US, France and Germany selected ten far-right narratives that have gained traction in recent years. While some of these narratives draw on long-standing ideological vocabulary, such as German fascist terms, the vocabulary developed by the European New Right or American white supremacists, others cover more specific and recent trends, such as the 'boogaloo' and QAnon movements originating in the US.

For context, here is a short description of each of far-right narratives we selected.

Far-right Narratives that Originated in the US

Alt-right[18]
The 'alt-right' has become a catchall phrase for a loose group of extreme-right individuals and organisations who promote white nationalism. Aspects of the movement have become increasingly transnational, but it took shape in the context of US-focused online communities in the run-up to the 2016 US presidential elections. The alt-right has developed a distinct vocabulary covering terms such as 'taking the red pill', which describes a process of attitudinal

change and the embracement of fringe ideologies, a reference to the Matrix film trilogy where individuals consume a 'red pill' to no longer live in the illusion provided by the 'blue pill'. Other alt-right phrases include 'cuck(servative)', a neologism combining 'conservative' and 'cuckold', which is used as a pejorative for mainstream conservatives.

Boogaloo[19]
The 'boogaloo' meme refers to the breakdancing film Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo, which has become a synonym for bad film sequels. 'Boogaloo' stands as a synonym for a second American civil war, which will be a bad sequel to the first one. The boogaloo movement thus also symbolises the absurdity of internet culture and current political conditions. The 'boogaloo' had been circulating as an online meme for several years,[20] but there has been a significant growth in its use online during the COVID-19-crisis. Additionally, supporters of the movement have engaged in acts of offline violence and taken part in anti-government and anti-police protests.[21] While not every supporter of the 'boogaloo' may be classified as far-right, research has demonstrated that there is an overlap between 'boogaloo' and white supremacist communities online.[22]

COVID-19-related Conspiracy Theories[23]
During the current coronavirus pandemic, strikingly similar patterns in anti-lockdown mobilisation, conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns have been emerging in Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, the UK and the US. Therefore, one narrative focused on conspiracy theories relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. While not every person who believes in COVID-19-related conspiracy theories may be classified as far-right, there has been a growing interplay between conspiracy theorists and far-right activists in a range of countries over the course of the pandemic.

QAnon[24]
QAnon is a wide-ranging conspiracy theory that claims that an elite group of child-trafficking paedophiles have been ruling the world for a number of decades and that President Trump has a secret plan in place to bring this group to justice. Supporters of the movement believe that an anonymous insider from the Trump administration publishes coded secret information about these events on the internet (so-called 'Q-drops').[25] Adherents of the conspiracy

theory have developed a range of slogans from 'wwg1wga' (where we go one, we go all) and 'the great awakening' to the 'the storm is coming', a prediction about the supposedly imminent actions to be taken against elite paedophiles.

White Supremacy[26]
White supremacy is a worldview that argues for the inherent superiority of white people over non-whites, arguing that whites should be the dominant group in a society. While elements of white supremacist ideology may be implicit within European far-right thought, the more explicit expressions of it can be found among the US far-right. But even though European far-right movements have traditionally emphasised national over racial identity, certain trends suggest that there might be a shift: Identitarian groups for example have mobilised on behalf of an (implicitly white) ethno-cultural European identity against (implicitly non-white) non-European immigration. Additionally, far-right terrorists in Christchurch and Halle have referenced white supremacist ideas. In the context of what some have called an increasing 'internationalization of white supremacy',[27] tracking the extent to which such ideas are picked up by European far-right outlets is of great importance.

Far-right Narratives that Originated in France and Germany

Counter-jihad[28]
The 'counter-jihad' movement is a loose network of far-right bloggers, activists and think tanks who reject Islam as a backward, homogeneous, static and unreformable threat to peaceful coexistence in Western societies.[29] In turn, they legitimise the discrimination of Muslims. Through the works of influential adherents of the movement, an ideological vocabulary has been created that often (mis-)uses religious concepts such as 'dhimmi', 'taqiya' or 'kuffar' (used as proud self-description), in order to unmask the 'true nature' of Islam.

Minority Crime[30]
Previous research by ISD has identified crime (allegedly) committed by minority groups as one of the key topics discussed among far-right communities online.[31] While the specific terminology used by

the far-right to describe this phenomenon varies between different geographic contexts, terms such as 'ensauvagement' (descent into savagery), 'rapefugees' and 'Messermigranten' (knife migrants) play on similar fears of majority populations.[32]

National Socialist[33]
The vocabulary of National Socialist Germany has been referenced by some on the extreme fringes of the American far-right. Terminology such as 'blood and soil' was chanted by the 2017 white supremacist march in Charlottesville,[34] and alt-right influencer Richard Spencer referred to the 'the mainstream media, or perhaps we should refer to them in the original German Lügenpresse [lying press]'.[35]

New Right[36]
The New Right is a European far-right movement inspired by the French Nouvelle Droite and a loose network of authoritarian and antiliberal inter-war German thinkers referred to as the 'Konservative Revolution'. Younger generations of the New Right have organised under the umbrella of Identitarianism. The core beliefs of the New Right revolve around ethnonationalism, opposition to egalitarianism and pluralism, adherence to tradition and authority as well as social conservatism. Strategically, adherents of the New Right believe that they need to regain cultural hegemony by influencing the public discourse through writing, art, film, music and other cultural outputs that shape the range of acceptable political options. Only then can an authoritarian transformation of society become conceivable.

Yellow Vests[37]
The Yellow Vests movement (gilet jaunes) is an economic protest movement that originated in France in the fall of 2018. While the movement covers a range of political positions, the far-right has attempted to hijack the popular anger that found expression in the protests and redirect it towards their political goals.[38]

Narrative Journeys of Interest

To make the amount of data that needed to be analysed manageable, ISD selected specific combinations of far-right narratives and media collections that represented potentially interesting trajectories for investigation. For example, given that the QAnon conspiracy theory originated in the US, but has since found a surprising number of followers in Germany, in particular, mapping the linking patterns between US far-right media and European far-right media was of particular interest.[39] The in-country links were gathered to test the mainstreaming hypothesis, and the between country links to test the transnationalisation hypothesis.

Far-right Narratives that Originated in the US

Alt-right: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right, US far-right AND US national

Boogaloo: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right, US far-right AND US national

COVID-19-related conspiracy theories: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right

QAnon: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right

White supremacy: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right

Far-right Narratives that Originated in France and Germany

Counter-jihad: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right, US far-right AND US national

Minority crime: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right, US far-right AND US national

National Socialist: US far-right AND German far-right

New Right: US far-right AND German far-right; US far-right AND French far-right, US far-right AND US national

Yellow Vests: US far-right AND French far-right

Keyword Selection and Validation

To surface material of interest, we created lists of keywords associated with the ten far-right narratives outlined above. These keyword lists were taken from ISD's previous research projects looking at the digital far-right space in recent years, expertise in far-right ideologies, and ongoing monitoring of developments and debates within different far-right movements. These lists were created by a team of researchers in which at least three individuals are native speakers of English, French and German, respectively, and who have been monitoring trends on the national far-right sphere in the three countries investigated. They used between 12 and 86 keywords for the different narratives.

Initially, a wide range of potentially relevant keywords were included to gather as many stories as possible about the narratives selected. Media Cloud's keyword function was then used for Boolean searches in the national and far-right media collections in the US, France and Germany. Next, a random sample of 50 articles was downloaded for each narrative. The articles in the sample were then coded into relevant (covers the narrative in question) and irrelevant (does not cover the narrative in question). If more than 10% of the articles were irrelevant, the keywords that had resulted in false positives were excluded. For example, the term 'crusaders' turned out to produce more stories relevant to rugby and American football than to counter-jihad narratives. Similarly, 'kike' was excluded as it was more often used as a nickname for the Spanish name Enrique than as an antisemitic slur, and the abbreviation 'NPC' (non-player character), which has become an alt-right meme, mostly resulted in articles about video games as opposed to the far-right.

Analysis

Volume of Stories Over Time

To develop an initial overview over the volume of stories in different media collections over time, ISD used Media Cloud's explorer function. The analysis showed that for all the narratives selected many more stories were published in national media, but the greater share in relative terms could be found in far-right media. In a few cases (see the example of QAnon in US national and far-right press below), a rise of mainstream interest in far-right narratives did not coincide with far-right media attention. While the relative peak of interest for the US far-right was in the latter half of 2019, national media coverage spiked when President Trump said in a press conference that QAnon supporters 'like me very much'.[40] Similar patterns were found for the other narratives (Figure 1).

The volume of coverage in far-right media appears to be more constant, while national media's coverage is more event-driven, often around President Trump or other right-wing politicians using specific slogans associated with different far-right movements, or not condemning those who have expressed far-right views. Unsurprisingly, coverage of New Right phrases spiked following the Christchurch attack, in which the attacker had named his manifesto 'The Great Replacement', a key concept of the New Right (Figure 2).

Cross-linking Patterns

The cross-linking patterns reveal three main trends:

- The research found some support for the mainstreaming hypothesis within a national context.

- The research found limited support for the hypothesis that article hyperlinks in far-right media are an important vector for the transnationalisation of far-right ideas.

- French and German far-right media cite US far-right media more often than the other way around.

The volume of stories from far-right media outlets that linked to a far-right media outlet across the Atlantic

Figure 1 Volume of stories about QAnon in US far-right and national media (top: total stories; bottom: normalised percentage of stories),
1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020
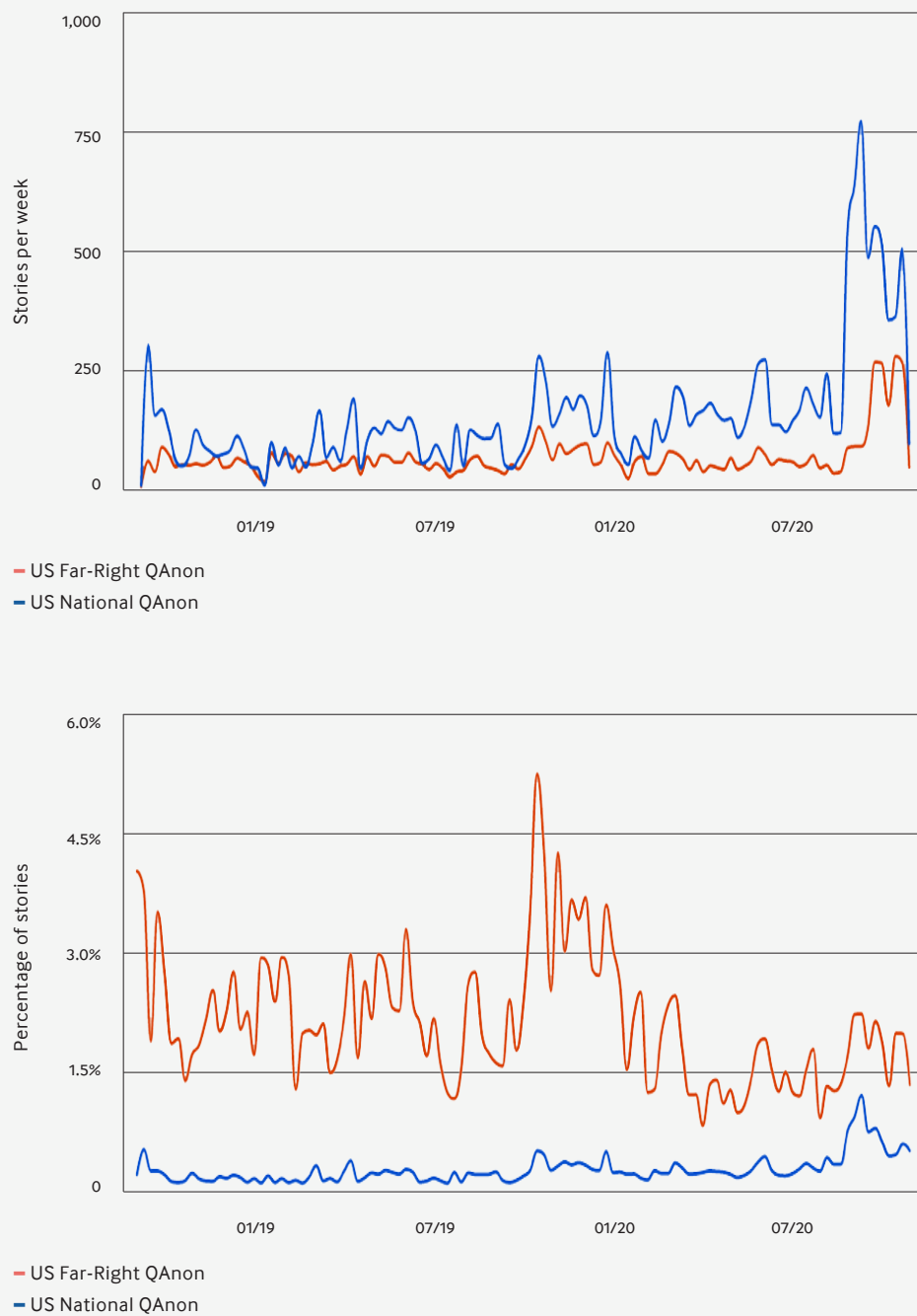
Figure 2   Normalised percentage of stories about the New Right in French far-right and national media (top)[41] and counter-jihad themes in the US far-right and national media (bottom), 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020

- FR Far-Right New Right
- FR National New Right

- US Far-Right Counter-Jihad
- US National Counter-Jihad
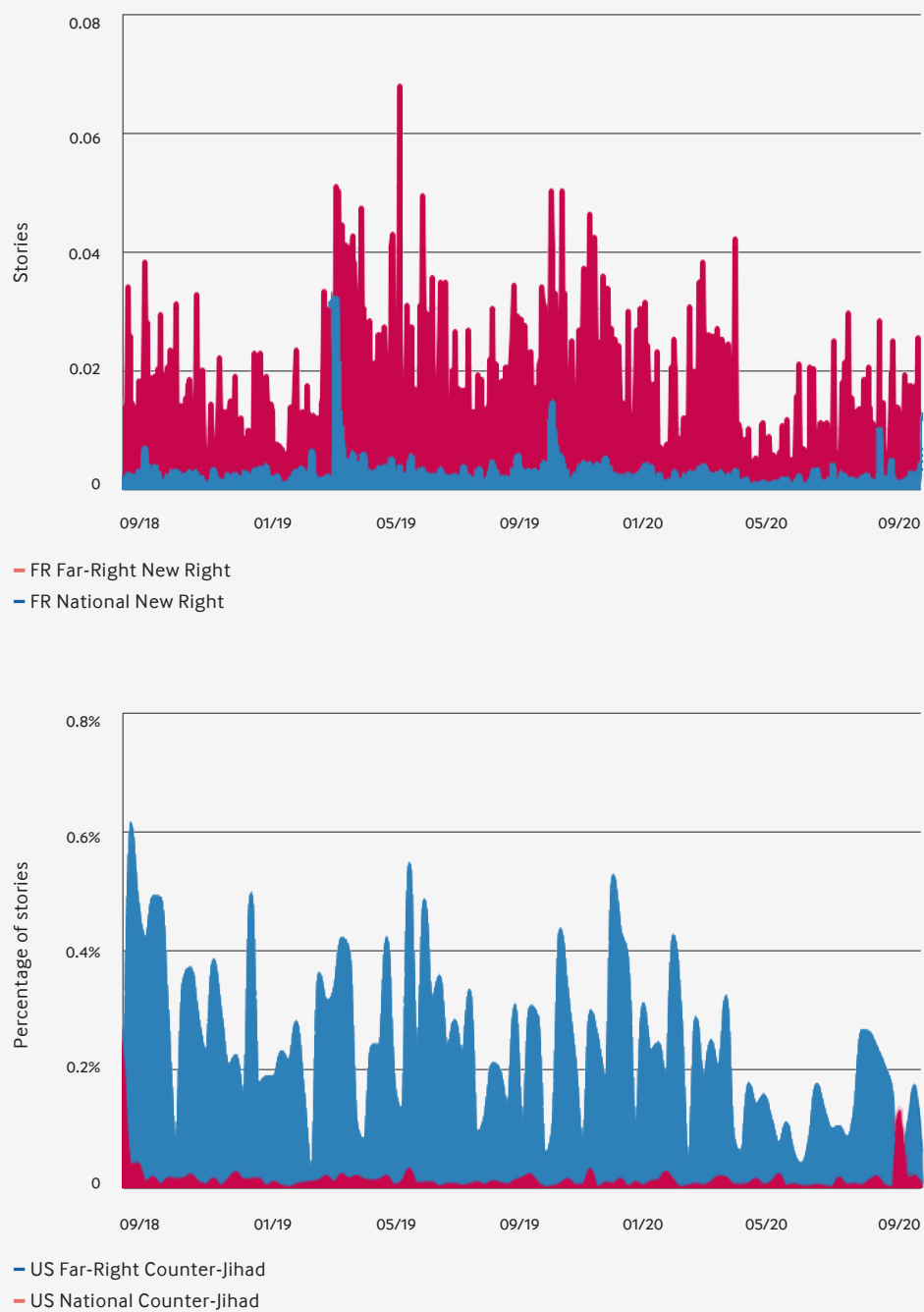
was relatively small. The share of all links by far-right media outlets that led to far-right media outlets across the Atlantic differed between the European outlets and the US:

- In stories that covered any of the US far-right narratives, 23.8% and 24.3% of links from German and French far-right media respectively led to another far-right media outlet from the US. In contrast, no links from US far-right media (from a total of 2,281 links to far-right media) led to German or French far-right media.

- In stories that covered any of the French or German far-right narratives, 5.2%, 5.4% and 1.5% of links led to another far-right media outlet from across the Atlantic from German, French and US far-right media respectively. This suggests that even for narratives originating on the European far-right, US far-right media is more like to be cited by German and French far-right media than to cite them.

- This suggests that for stories covering far-right narratives, transnational hyperlinks may be used

more frequently than in all stories published by far-right outlets: recent research by the Weizenbaum Institut showed that about 10.9% of the outlinks in German 'alternative right-wing online outlets' linked to similar outlets in the US.[42]

- By comparison, 13.1% and 3.1% of links from German and French national media respectively led to a US national outlet. In turn, 4.1% of US national media links led to German or French national media. This suggests that US national media pays more attention to German and French national media outlets than US far-right outlets pay to their European far-right counterparts.

- Unsurprisingly, far-right outlets in all three countries link much more often to other domestic far-right media.

These results suggest there is very limited support for the transnationalisation hypothesis, especially of the idea that European far-right ideas regularly gaining the attention of US far-right media — at least so far as is measurable through hyperlink analysis (Table 1). Even

Table 1 Hyperlinks in stories about all selected far-right narratives that originated in the US, 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020

All	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	2281	129	0	0
US National citing	10	822	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	66	NA	206	NA
DE Far-Right citing	5	NA	NA	16

Table 2 Hyperlinks in stories about all selected far-right narratives that originated in France and Germany, 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020

All	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	637	387	6	4
US National citing	120	813	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	31	NA	543	NA
DE Far-Right citing	5	NA	NA	90

Figure 3 Network maps showing the connections between far-right French (blue) and far-right US (red) media for stories about COVID-19-conspiracy theories (left) and counter-jihad narratives (right), 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020
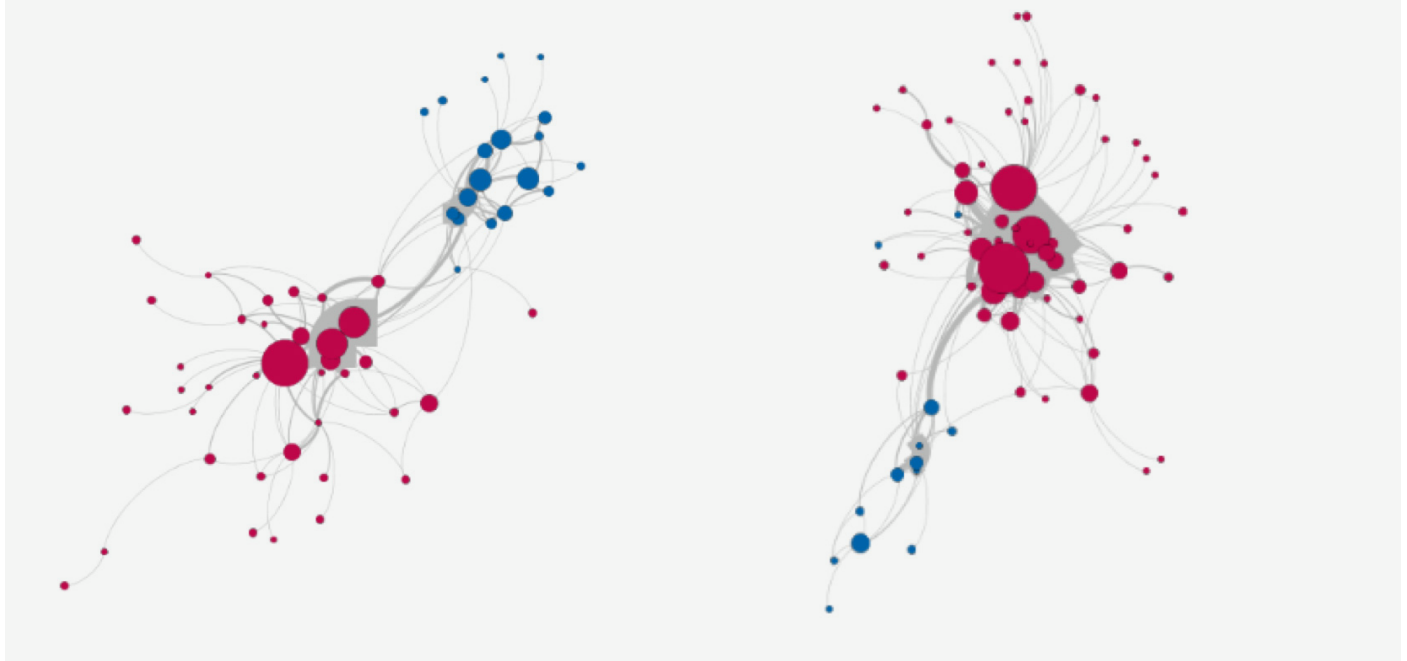
the adoption of the terminology of the Yellow Vests, a movement that originated in France only recently, in other geographic contexts has not led to a high number of hyperlinks by far-right media to French far-right articles covering the movement.

US far-right and US national media cited each other much more frequently, showing that within national contexts, or at least within the US national context, the more mainstream press regularly references far-right media. Interestingly, national media did not reference US far-right media very frequently when covering far-right narratives that originated in the US context, but did so more often when covering French or German far-right narratives (Table 2). Nevertheless, far-right media unsurprisingly cite national media more frequently than the other way around. These results provide some support for the mainstreaming hypothesis within a national context.

Using the network mapping software Gephi, ISD visualised the connectivity between media collections in articles about the far-right narratives under consideration. Figure 3 shows the hyperlinking

patterns between the French and US far-right media collections in articles about COVID-19-related conspiracy theories and counter-jihad narratives. Despite some level of hyperlinking between them, the collections form clusters that are relatively isolated from each other.

When comparing this to the hyperlinking patterns between the US national and US far-right media collections, a different picture emerges (Figure 4). First, there is a much greater level of cross-referencing across media collections. Second, certain far-right outlets such as Breitbart are situated much deeper in the national news cluster than any outlet in the more isolated French far-right media collection visualised above.

Figure 4 Network maps showing the connections between US national (blue) and US far-right (red) media on stories about the alt-right, 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020
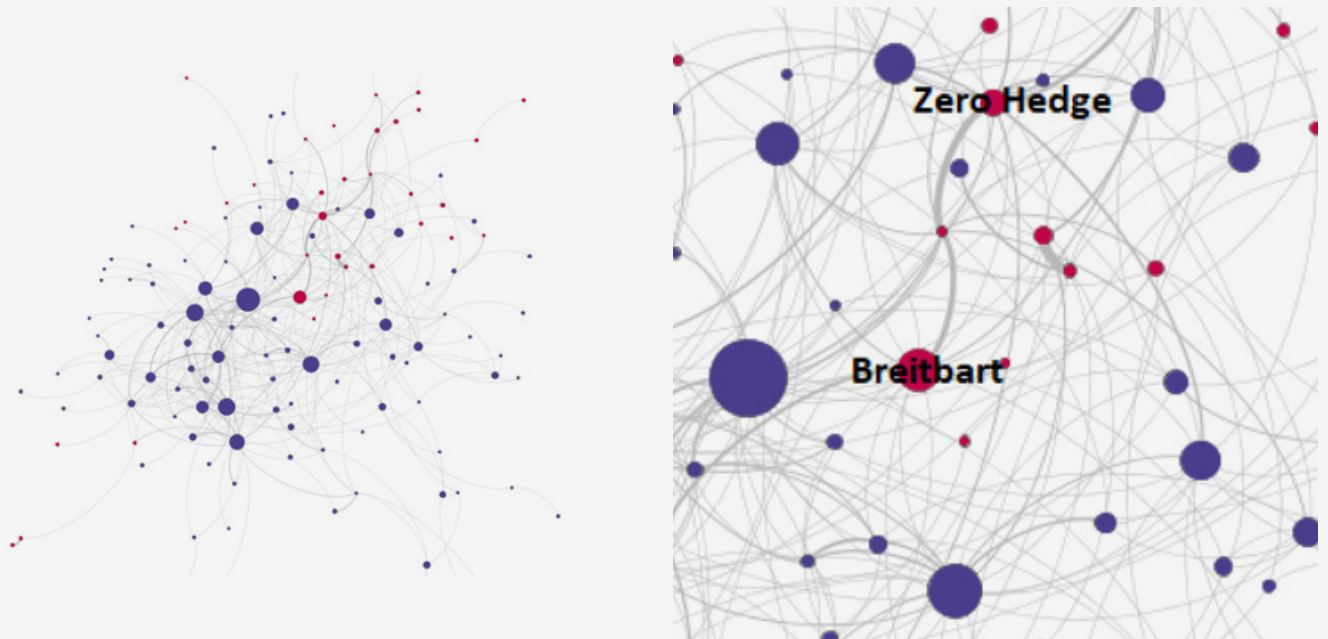
Articles in US far-right media about conspiracy theories concerning COVID-19 (39), the QAnon movement (18) and white supremacist narratives (12) were linked to most often by French and German far-right media. French far-right media (64) linked to US far-right media much more frequently than German far-right media (Table 3), even though the share of such transnational links is similar for far-right outlets in both countries (see above).

When analysing individual narratives that originated in France and Germany, we found that counter-jihad articles in US far-right media (20) were linked to most often by French and German far-right media, followed by articles about the Yellow Vests and minority crime (6 each) and New Right ideology (4). US far-right media only linked to French and German articles about counter-jihad themes (7) and New Right narratives (3) (Table 4).

Table 3 Hyperlinks in stories about individual far-right narratives that originated in the US, 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020

Alt-Right	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	87	101	0	0
US National citing	10	360	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	2	NA	1	NA
DE Far-Right citing	0	NA	NA	2

Boogaloo	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	5	28	0	0
US National citing	0	462	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	0	NA	0	NA
DE Far-Right citing	0	NA	NA	0

COVID-conspiracies	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	1124	NA	0	0
US National citing	NA	NA	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	35	NA	111	NA
DE Far-Right citing	4	NA	NA	1

QAnon	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	562	NA	0	0
US National citing	NA	NA	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	17	NA	71	NA
DE Far-Right citing	1	NA	NA	1

White Supremacist	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	503	NA	0	0
US National citing	NA	NA	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	12	NA	23	NA
DE Far-Right citing	0	NA	NA	12

Table 4 Hyperlinks in stories about individual far-right narratives that originated in France and Germany, 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020

Counter-Jihad	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	310	276	5	2
US National citing	114	590	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	18	NA	234	NA
DE Far-Right citing	2	NA	NA	26

Fascist	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	60	NA	NA	0
US National citing	NA	NA	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	NA	NA	NA	NA
DE Far-Right citing	0	NA	NA	32

New Right	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	55	53	1	2
US National citing	5	195	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	2	NA	143	NA
DE Far-Right citing	2	NA	NA	63

Minority Crime	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	64	58	0	0
US National citing	1	28	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	5	NA	146	NA
DE Far-Right citing	1	NA	NA	1

Yellow Vests	US Far-Right cited	US National cited	FR Far-Right cited	DE Far-Right cited
US Far-Right citing	148	NA	0	NA
US National citing	NA	NA	NA	NA
FR Far-Right citing	6	NA	20	NA
DE Far-Right citing	NA	NA	NA	NA

In articles featuring the selected far-right narratives that originated in the US, the outlets most frequently cited were the US far-right websites Breitbart and Zero Hedge. The outlets citing them were mostly French far-right sites, with only the German Journalistenwatch making the top five (Table 5).

The most frequently cited outlet was the American far-right website Breitbart, while the disinformation site Zero Hedge[43] was most frequently cited from other media in articles featuring the selected far-right narratives that originated in France and Germany, followed by the German blogs journalistenwatch.com and the ethnonationalist sezession.de (Table 6).

Table 5 Far-right media outlets most frequently cited from and most frequently citing from other far-right media outlets in articles about the selected far-right narratives that originated in the US, 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020

Cited		Citing	
Zero Hedge	9	stopmensonges.com	26
Breitbart	6	lesakerfrancophone.fr	16
qanon.pub	3	nouvelordremondial.cc	14
amren.com	2	lesmoutonsenrages.fr	4
GatewayPundit	2	journalistenwatch.com	2

Table 6 Far-right media outlets most frequently cited and most frequently citing from other far-right media outlets in articles about the selected far-right narratives that originated in France and Germany, 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2020

Cited		Citing	
Breitbart	7	Zero Hedge	6
bvoltaire.fr	2	journalistenwatch.com	3
polemia.com	2	sezession.de	2

Conclusions

This research sought to explore if and how far-right narratives gain traction in domestic mainstream media or move across borders. ISD therefore tested the mainstreaming hypothesis (far-right ideas start out in far-right alternative media but eventually move to the mainstream) and the transnationalisation hypothesis (far-right ideas spread from German and French media ecosystems to the US media ecosystem, or vice versa).

Our findings suggest there is some support for the hypothesis that ideas may be reaching the mainstream through such interactions, but limited support for the hypothesis that far-right media frequently hyperlink to international far-right outlets. Future research should build on these findings
to investigate:

- How far-right narratives are covered when being hyperlinked by other outlets, especially national media

- The role social media may play as an intermediary between different national media ecosystems

- The extent to which far-right narratives, views and conspiracy theories promoted online are adopted (via surveys or polling).

Citations do not necessarily accurately represent coverage. Mere reference of specific narratives does not mean these narratives are portrayed in a supportive manner. While there are ongoing debates in journalism and academia around the ethics of providing the 'oxygen of amplification'[44] to extremist, racist, authoritarian and anti-democratic actors who desire attention, not every story about the far-right will help to further spread their ideas. The consequences of covering extremist movements are difficult to predict in any case, and even negative coverage may inadvertently increase the reach of their ideas. Nevertheless, there remains a clear difference between providing factual information about extremism or critically analysing ideas and actors, and uncritically adopting and thereby normalising their language to a wider audience. Therefore, publications with a large reach in particular have a responsibility continuously to evaluate when and how to cover extremist groups, individuals, activities and ideas.

Future research should therefore try to assess whether far-right narratives are actually being normalised across different media ecosystems, or merely covered in a descriptive or even critical way.

Additionally, more research needs to be conducted on whether social media platforms serve as intermediaries for the mainstreaming and transnationalisation of far-right ideas across different geographical media ecosystems. It is conceivable that there is a symbiotic relationship between far-right media and online communities in each national context, and that online communities are more important in facilitating any transnational spread via social media. On these platforms, narratives may then be picked up by the respective far-right media outlets and far-right influencers who are active on specific platforms, and will likely be responsive to the content that is popular among their audiences. This type of research could also provide further insights on the extent to which the agenda-setting power of media outlets influences the interests of their audience, or the other way around (or some combination thereof).

Finally, conducting regular surveys on the adherence to far-right narratives, views and conspiracy theories promoted online, both in the wider population and among supporters of the far-right, will be of great importance. Recent ISD-supported polling[45] about the QAnon movement demonstrated that only a small number of Americans know a lot about the movement, and most view it negatively. Even among supporters of QAnon, not every specific claim of the conspiracy theory found wide-spread support. Only through such surveys can the impact these narratives are having beyond the online space really be assessed.

Endnotes

01   In line with academic and far-right expert Cas Mudde, we define the far-right as groups and individuals exhibiting at least three of the following five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy or strong state advocacy. Mudde, Cas (2000) 'The Ideology of the Extreme Right', Oxford University Press. Far-right is an umbrella term, which encapsulates both the 'radical right' and the 'extreme right'. According to Mudde, the radical right and the extreme right both 'believe that inequalities between people are natural and positive', but they hold different positions on democracy. While the radical right is opposed to certain aspects of liberal democracy (e.g. minority rights, independent institutions) it is not in principle against democracy, but favours a majoritarian democracy led by the in-group it identifies with. Extreme-right actors on the other hand are in principle opposed to democracy as a form of governance, instead favouring authoritarian rule. Mudde, Cas (2019) 'The Far Right Today', John Wiley & Sons, 5—7.

02   We define alternative media as outlets who self-identify as an "alternative" and "corrective to a perceived political and media mainstream". While the focus of this report is on far-right alternative media, alternative media outlets may express other political stances as well. Heft, Annett, Eva Mayerhöffer, Susanne Reinhardt, and Curd Knüpfer (2019) 'Beyond Breitbart: comparing right-wing digital news infrastructures in six western democracies', Policy & Internet, 25 August.

03   Media Cloud is an open source, open data platform that gathers content of online media. It is a consortium research project across multiple institutions, including the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Northeastern University. See https://mediacloud.org/.

04   R. DiResta et al., New Knowledge, The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency, New Knowledge, https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/533-read-report-internet-research-agency/7871ea6d5b7bedafbf19/optimized/full.pdf#page=1; P. N. Howard, B. Ganesh and D. Liotsiou, The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012—2018, Computational Propaganda Research Project, https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/534-oxford-russia-internet-research-agency/c6588b4a7b940c551c38/optimized/full.pdf#page=1.

05   ISD, The Battle for Bavaria: Online Information Campaigns in the 2018 Bavarian State Election, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Battle-for-Bavaria.pdf.

06   ISD, '2019 EU elections: information operations analysis, interim briefing paper', Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Disinfo-European-Elections-Interim-report-ISD-2-V2.pdf.

07   Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, 'The Great Replacement': The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf.

08   Savvas Zannettou et al., 'On the origins of memes by means of fringe web communities', 2018, https://arxiv.org/pdf/1805.12512.pdf.

09   Savvas Zannettou et al., 'The web centipede: understanding how web communities influence each other through the lens of mainstream and alternative news sources', 2017, https://arxiv.org/pdf/1705.06947.pdf.

10   P. M. Krafft and Joan Donovan. 'Disinformation by design: the use of evidence collages and platform filtering in a media manipulation campaign', Political Communication, 37(2): 194-214, 2020.

11   R. Faris et al., 'Partisanship, propaganda, and disinformation: online media and the 2016 US presidential election', Berkman Klein Center, 16 August 2017, https://cyber.harvard.edu/publications/2017/08/mediacloud.

12   Institut Montaigne, 'Media polarization "à la française"?: comparing the French and American ecosystems', May 2019, https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/publications/media-polarization-la-francaise.

13   ADL, Hate Beyond Borders: The Internationalization of White Supremacy, Anti-Defamation League, 2019, https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/hate-beyond-borders-the-internationalization-of-white-supremacy

14   Patrick Hermansson et al., The International Alt-Right. Fascism for the 21st Century?, Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right, 2020.

15   Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, The Fringe Insurgency: Connectivity, Convergence and Mainstreaming of the Extreme

Right, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2017, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Fringe-Insurgency-221017_2.pdf; Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston, Post-digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US, Transcript Verlag, 2018.

16   Annett Heft et al., 'Toward a transnational information ecology on the right? Hyperlink networking among right-wing digital news sites in Europe and the United States', International Journal of Press/Politics, 2020, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1940161220963670.

17   Caterina Froio and Bharath Ganesh, 'The transnationalisation of far right discourse on Twitter: issues and actors that cross borders in Western European democracies', European Societies, 21(4): 513–39, 2019.

18   Alt-right keywords used: /pol/, alpha-male, beta-male, bluepilled, cuck, cucked, cuckservative, edgelord, Electric Jew, Fashwave, fashy haircut, fashy, Free helicopter rides, Gorillion, Groyper, Happy Merchant, Kebab remover, Kek, Kekistan, kekistani, magapede, Moon man, Normie, normies, Oy vey, red pill, red pilled, red pills, redpill, red-pill, redpilled, red-pilled, redpilling, Remember the 6 trillion, Remove kebab, Rote pille, S.J.W., shitlord, social justice warrior, soy boy, soyboi, Top kek, Topkek, Tradwife, Trumpwave.

19   Boogaloo keywords used: Boog, Boogaloo Boi, boojahideen, bugaloo, I became unreasonable, Stop the duopoly, #BigIgloo, #Boogaloo2020, #boogaloobois, #boojahideen, #HisNameWasDuncan, become unreasonable, being boogaloo ready, Big igloo, big luau, boogaloo bois, boogaloo boy, boogaloo boys, boogaloo movement, Boogaloo, Boogaloo2020, Boogalooers, boogaloos, Boogie Bois, BoojieBastards, Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo, bring on the boogaloo, Duncan Lemp, His Name Was Duncan, spicy fiesta, Thicc Boog, when the boogaloo hits.

20   SPLC, 'The "boogaloo" started as a racist meme', Southern Poverty Law Center, 5 June 2020, https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/05/boogaloo-started-racist-meme.

21   Bellingcat, 'The boogaloo movement is not what you think', 27 May 2020, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/05/27/the-boogaloo-movement-is-not-what-you-think/.

22   Jakob Guhl, Julia Ebner and Jan Rau, 'The online ecosystem of the German far-right', Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020, https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/the-online-ecosystem-of-the-german-far-right/.

23   Covid conspiracy theories keywords used: (Coronavirus OR Corona OR Covid-19 OR Coronakrise OR Covid) AND (#FreiheitsVirus, #GibGatesKeineChance, #Masquesobligatoires, #Pizzagate, 5G, 5G virus, arme biologique, bevölkerungskontrolle, bezos, bill gates, Bill Gates coronavirus, Biowaffe, bioweapon, Buzyn chloroquine, chinois responsable, Chipimplementierung, corona faux virus, covid autoritaire, covid destabilisation, covid destabliser, deep state, Depopulation, dictature sanitaire, Entvölkerung, Entvölkerungswaffe, fake pandemic, force de la chine covid, gates foundation, human sacrifice, Hydroxychloroquin, Hydroxychloroquine, Impfzwang, importation virus, Laboratoire P4, mandatory vaccinations, melinda gates, mensonge covid, mensonge hopital vide, ment hopital vide, menti covid, Neue Weltordnung, New World Order, NOW, orchestred pandemic, Pizzagate, plandemic, population control, remede ethanol, remede javel, Rothschild, sacrifice children, soros, stop 5g, stop5g, tiefer staat, virus asiatique, virus chinois, virus complot juif, virus complot sioniste, virus Rotchild, virus Soros, Wuhan Laboratoire, wuhan virus, Zwangsimpfung).

24   QAnon keywords used: #13families, #befreitdiekinder, #jesuispatriote, #JeSuisQanon, #outofshadows, #rettetdiekinder, #SatanicElite, #savethechildren, #trusttheplan, #vertrauedemplan, #whereareallthechildren, adrenochrome, dark to light, das große Erwachen, deep state, Der tiefe Staat, élite pédopornographique, élite pédopornographique et satanique, fall of the cabal, follow the white rabbit, great awakening, großes Erwachen, patriote Q, patriots awakened, pedogate2020, pedowood, q sent me, QAnon, QAnon worldwide, qarmy, qarmy worldwide, Schlafschaf, sheep no more, storm is coming, storm is upon us, the great awakening, the storm is coming, the storm is upon us, trust the plan, Wachschaf, we are Q, where we go one we go all, wir sind q, wwg1wga, wwg1wga worldwide.

25   Aoife Gallagher, Jacob Davey and Mackenzie Hart, The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Key Trends in QAnon Activity Since 2017, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2020, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Genesis-of-a-Conspiracy-Theory.pdf.

26   White supremacist keywords used: 1488, (((, 14 88, 14 words, Anti-racist is a code word for anti-white, Christian identity, civilisation judéo-chrétienne, complot juif, Countersemite, Culpabilité blanche, cultural suicide, Dancing Israelis, dark enlightenment, Ecofascism, Es ist okay, weiß zu sein, ethnostate, fourteen words, francais de souche, genocide blanc, genozid an den weißen, Genozid an europäischen Völkern, globalism, hoananas, Holohoax, human biodiversity, It's Okay to Be White, Jew media, Jewish Media, Jewish Question, Jews will not replace us, JQ aware, Jwoke, Leaderless resistance, menace civilisation blanche, menace civilisationnelle, Open borders for Israel, pornographie mémorielle, propogande sioniste, race inférieure, race realism, Race realist, racial holy war, racismeantiblanc, RAHOWA, shoax, sous race juif, sous-race, The Siege, We must secure the existence of our people, We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children, white christian values, white dispossession, white genocide, White guilt, white lives matter, white power, white pride, white separatism, Zionist Occupation Government, Zionist Occupied Government, ZOG.

27   ADL, Hate Beyond Borders.

28   Counter-jihad keywords used: #IslamHorsDEurope, #Islamisation, #LislamismeTue, #LislamOseTout, Chariah, civilization jihad, Coronajiha, danger islam, danger musulman, Deus vult, dhimmi, envahisseur musulman, Eurabien, God wills it, immigration islamique, invasion islamique, invasion musulmane, islam radical, islam terrorisme, Islamic grooming gangs, Islamic invasion, Islamic takeover, Islamification, Islamisation, Islamisierung, islamisme, Islamization, Kopftuchmädchen, kuffar, menace islamiste, Muselmänner, Musels, Muslim grooming gangs, musulman terroriste, musulmans radicaux, offensive islamiste, probleme voile, Reconquista, stealth jihad, voile islamique.

29   Alexandeer Meleagrou-Hitchens and Hans Brun, A Neo-Nationalist Network: The English Defence League and Europe's Counter-Jihad Movement, 2013; Matthew Goodwin, The Roots of Extremism: The English Defence League and The Counter-Jihad Challenge, Chatham House, 2013.

30   Minority crime keywords used: #ensauvagement, #LaRacailleBlesse, #LaRacailleBrule, #LaRacailleEstRaciste, #LaRacailleRecedive, #LaRacailleTue, #LaRacailleViole, #LaRacailleVole, #refugeesnotwelcome, 93 pas France, Anti-Abschiebe-Industrie, arabe délinquant, arabe violeur, Asylbereicherer, Asylindustrie, criminalité banlieue, délinquant pas francais, ensauvagement, Fakefugees, faux migrant, faux réfugié, frankistan, Goldstücke, insécurité banlieue, Kulturbereicherer, Messermänner, Messermigranten, musulman délinquant, no go area, No go zone, No go zones, no-go area, no-go zone, nogozone, pseudo migrant, pseudo réfugié, racailles, Rapefugees, sauvage banlieue, voyous banlieue, voyous quartier.

31   Guhl, Ebner and Rau, 'The online ecosystem of the German far-right'.

32   John Lichfield, The racist myth of France's 'descent into savagery', Politico, 7 September 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/marine-le-pen-racist-myth-france-descent-into-savagery/.

33   National Socialist keywords used: A people without space, Art Bolshevism, Aryan race, Ausschwitzlüge, Blood and Honor, Blood and Soil, Blut und Boden, Blut und Ehre, Cultural Bolshevism, Cultural Marxism, Cyclon B, Daseinskampf, degenerate art, 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer', Endlösung, Endsieg, Entartete Kunst, Entjudung, Final Solution, Führer, Führerstaat, Gott mit uns, Hail Victory, Heil Hitler, Herrenrasse, Hitler Salute, Hitlergruß, Horst Wessel Song, Horst-Wessel-Lied, Jewish Bolshevism, Judäo-Bolschewismus, Judenfrei, Judenrat, Judenrein, Judeo—Bolshevism, Jüdischer Bolschewismus, Kapo, Konzentrationslager, Kraft durch Freude, Kulturbolschewismus, Kunstbolschewismus, Lebensraum, Lügenpresse, lying press, Meine Ehre heißt Treue, My honor is loyalty, 'One people, one nation, one leader', productive and greedy capital, Racial Hygiene, Rassenhygiene, Roman Salute, schaffendes und raffendes Kapital, Sieg Heil, strength through joy, Swastika, The Eternal Jew, Übermensch, Volk ohne Raum, Volkstod, Zyklon B.

34   Meg Wagner, '"Blood and soil": Protesters chant Nazi slogan in Charlottesville', CNN, 12 August 2017, https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-unite-the-right-rally/index.html.

35   in Chris Graham, 'Nazi salutes and white supremacism: who is Richard Spencer, the "racist academic" behind the "alt right" movement?', The Telegraph, 22 November 2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/richard-spencer-white-nationalist-leading-alt-right-movement/.

36   New right keywords used: #wirsindvielmehr, Bevölkerungsaustausch, Ersetzungsmigration, Ethnonationalism, Ethnopluralism, Ethnopluralismus, france aux francais, Generation Identity, grand remplacement, Great Replacement, großer Austausch, Heimatschützer, Identitäre, Identitarian, InvasionMigratoire, Kulturmasochismus, Kulturrevolution von rechts, menace migratoire, metapolitics, Metapolitik, Migrationswaffe, Nationalmasochismus, Patriot Peer, PatriotPeer, Remigration, Umvolkung, Umweltschutz ist Heimatschutz, Verteidigung des Eigenen, Volksaustausch.

37   Yellow Vests keywords used: Gelbwesten, Gilets Jaunes, Yellow Vests.

38   Kelly Weil, 'The far right is trying to co-opt the yellow vests', Daily Beast, 8 January 2019, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-far-right-is-trying-to-co-opt-the-yellow-vests.

39   Katrin Bennhold, 'QAnon Is thriving in Germany: the extreme right is delighted', New York Times, 11 October 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/11/world/europe/qanon-is-thriving-in-germany-the-extreme-right-is-delighted.html; Carol Schaeffer, 'How Covid-19 spread QAnon in Germany', Coda Story, 19 June 2020, https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/qanon-covid19-germany/.

40   Associated Press, 'Trump praises QAnon conspiracists, who "like me very much"', Los Angeles Times, 20 August 2020, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-08-20/trump-praises-qanon-conspiracists-appreciates-support.

41   As the French far-right collection is not publically accessible to its sensitive nature, the graphs displaying the normalised percentage were not created using the Media Cloud software.

42   Annett Heft et al., 'Toward a transnational information ecology on the right? Hyperlink networking among right-wing digital news sites in Europe and the United States', International Journal of Press/Politics, 2020, 11-13. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1940161220963670.

43   Cranley, Ellen. 'Finance blog Zero Hedge was banned from Twitter for Wuhan coronavirus misinformation. It's not the first time the publication has raised eyebrows.' Business Insider, 1 February 2020. https://www.businessinsider.com/who-is-zero-hedge-finance-blog-that-spread-coronavirus-misinformation-2020-2?r=US&IR=T

44   Whitney Phillips, 'The oxygen of amplification: better practices for reporting on extremists, antagonists, and manipulators online', Data & Society, 22, 2018.

45   Brian Schaffner, 'QAnon and conspiracy beliefs', Institute for Strategic Development, 2020, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/qanon-and-conspiracy-beliefs.pdf.

ISD | Powering solutions to extremism and polarisation

www.isdglobal.org