Conflict Amplified: Disinformation and Hate in the Israel-Hamas War

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Executive Summary

As the Israel-Hamas conflict has escalated into a broader Middle East crisis in 2024, the information environment surrounding these events has become even more complex. This report investigates the spread and impact of mis- and disinformation, hate speech, and extremist narratives related to the Israel-Hamas conflict in the UK, France and Germany. Employing innovative methodologies developed alongside CASM Technology, ISD analysed extensive multilingual datasets from mainstream and fringe platforms. These datasets comprise of social media posts from actors based in (or focused on) the UK, France or Germany, who are known to routinely spread extremist and hateful content, disinformation and/or conspiracy theories. As such, this study identifies the key themes and moments of online escalation around the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The findings of these investigations reveal the centrality of hateful narratives targeting Jewish and Muslim communities in online conversation about the conflict, as well as opportunistic use of its developments by extremist groups, and the amplification of disinformation by hostile state-affiliated actors. This research emphasises the hybridised and evolving nature of online misinformation, hateful and extremist narratives, and the importance of adaptive countermeasures to address these threats. To mitigate these online threats and their impact on communities effectively, platforms must ensure the comprehensive enforcement of existing policies, as well as the development of specific crisis-response mechanisms that account for the sensitivities of escalating conflict.

Key Findings

- **The volume of online disinformation and hate speech peaked during critical events** such as the October 7 Hamas attack, the Iranian missile strike in April 2024, the UK summer riots in August 2024, and the Lebanese pager attack in September 2024.

- **Dominant themes in online conversation about the Israel-Hamas conflict included news and updates from the ground, antisemitism, anti-Muslim hate, and narratives around international and domestic responses to the conflict.** Anti-Muslim hate was particularly prevalent in the UK dataset driven by local events animating anti-migrant sentiment.

- **Far-right networks exhibited internal divisions.** Some aligned with Israel while others with Palestinian causes, driven by antisemitic or anti-Muslim biases. Meanwhile, far-left and Islamist groups used the conflict to amplify narratives of victimisation and calls for activism.

- **Pro-Kremlin actors used the conflict to propagate disinformation,** such as alleging Western-supplied weapons were used by Hamas. Narratives spread and amplified by these actors were tailored to target prevalent domestic issues including immigration and economic concerns in France and Germany.

- **Telegram emerged as a key hub for extremist content.** It significantly outpaced X, Facebook and Instagram in terms of the volume and coordination of disinformation and hate narratives.

- **The closure of Meta's CrowdTangle API significantly hindered data collection,** reinforcing the need for reliable and consistent access to social media platform data for longitudinal research.

- **Online conversations about the conflict transcended national boundaries.** Significant influence from both American and Russian narratives shaped online discourse for the three European countries in focus.

Glossary

Disinformation
Disinformation is false, misleading or manipulated content intended to deceive or harm.

Misinformation
Misinformation is false, misleading or manipulated content shared irrespective of an intent to deceive or harm.

Far right
There is no agreed definition of what constitutes the 'far right'. A widely accepted definitional minimum of 'far right' created by Cas Mudde identifies five core elements common to the majority of definitions: strong-state values, nationalism, xenophobia, racism and anti-democracy.

Far left
Far-left groups, actions or networks are typically rooted in Marxist, socialist or anarchist ideologies. They pursue an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and radically egalitarian, anti-fascist agenda, typically with an internationalist outlook. For further information, see ISD'S Explainer on far-left antisemitism.

Islamism
Islamist extremism uses violence, politics or social activism to advocate for the creation of an exclusionary and totalitarian Islamic state. Within this state, religious outgroups are subjected to implicit, explicit or violent means of subjugation and prejudice.

Antisemitism
Antisemitism is understood using the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition as "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." ISD is informed by the IHRA's 11 context-dependent examples of antisemitic manifestations.

Anti-Muslim hate
Thresholds for anti-Muslim hate were measured against ISD's definition as 'activity which seeks to dehumanise, demonise, harass, threaten, or incite violence against an individual or community based on religion, ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, national origin or migrant status'. This was understood in the context of the existing tropes and conspiracies which constitute Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred.

Pro-Kremlin, Iran or CCP
Official, state-affiliated, state-directed or pro-state accounts. Content published by these accounts serve to increase the resonance of pro-state messaging. This category is based on analytical judgement about content published.

Inclusion in this category does not necessarily mean that sources are directed or operated by state actors, that they have any direct relationship with such actors, or that their operation is necessarily malign.

Introduction

The October 7 attacks by Hamas on Israel and the ensuing conflict have sparked widespread and damaging repercussions beyond the Middle East, sending shockwaves through communities worldwide. Online activity has played a particularly important role in amplifying these effects.

Communities around the world have been targeted by online hate speech, with significant surges in both antisemitic and anti-Muslim activity documented across social media channels. Extremist movements have seized upon the conflict to stoke division and incite violence, whilst hostile states have used the conflict as a lever to exacerbate wedges around social cohesion.

The Israel-Hamas conflict has caused fractures within online communities responding to its developments; at times, it has sparked calls for violent mobilisation. Islamist movements framed the events of October 7 as a legitimate response to Israeli government action, calling for similar attacks against Jewish communities in the West. Islamist influencers described the attack as a victory and have shown support for the ongoing Palestinian struggle.

At the same time, far-right online accounts diverged in their interpretation of the attacks. Many on the extreme right, such as accelerationist movements, celebrated the attack and called for copycat activity by extreme-right groups. Antisemitism remains such a central pillar to these movements that they often express solidarity with Palestinians despite prevailing anti-Muslim hate. However, other highly active radical-right Telegram channels expressed support for Israel and Jewish communities, given the importance of anti-Muslim beliefs to their ideology. Far-left movements typically showed support for Palestinian liberation, often to the point of celebrating or condoning violence against Jews or Israelis.

Until now, studies have largely focused on specific ideologies, areas of harmful online content, or geographic contexts. However, in the hybridised online ecosystem, information manipulation occurs across multiple languages and platforms. This demands large-scale analysis to identify key trends.

To better understand the scale and nature of these disinformation and hate speech, and the way they impact upon communities, this analysis draws upon data collected from domestic extremist and hate actors, and those who routinely spread conspiracy theories and disinformation. These actors are based in, or have a large audience in, either the UK, Germany or France.

To interpret these large datasets, ISD and CASM built live dashboards of posts from these actors on Telegram, Facebook, Instagram and X. The content of those dashboards was used to identify peaks in online conversation and the prevailing narratives contained within them. This overarching analysis is complemented by six smaller investigations published throughout the project lifecycle, the leads for which were generated by these dashboards.

Over the project timeline, the use of bespoke and innovative research methods was required to keep up with the pace of change and scale of the online mis- and disinformation environment. Understanding the breadth of activity across mainstream platforms has become increasingly complicated by the shuttering of tools that previously allowed consistent data access. This research, for example, was hampered by the gap in time between the closure of Meta's API access via CrowdTangle and the rollout of the Meta Content Library. This therefore involved the constant identification of new tools for gaining access to data that was comprehensive and capable of providing comparative insights.

This report first presents the volume of conversation about the conflict over time in online ecosystems where mis- and disinformation, and hateful or extremist narratives, typically circulate. Next, a topic modelling analysis identifies the key themes in the data over the studied period. Finally, this paper presents the methodological innovations developed throughout the project to study mis- and disinformation and hate around the Israel-Hamas conflict at scale.

Methodology

To analyse the nature of online information threats and hate speech about the Israel-Hamas conflict in the year following the October 7 2023 attack, this research adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating digital ethnography and Beam. Co-developed by ISD and CASM Technology, Beam uses Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to produce account-level measures and network analytics to identify the users, spaces and points of coordination in emerging disinformation, hateful and extremist narratives. These sophisticated bespoke methods were combined with subject matter expertise and ethnographic monitoring to prioritise key networks for further investigation.

Seed list generation and account expansion
As a first step, analysts put together seed lists of users potentially relevant to online mis- and disinformation and extremist rhetoric related to the conflict. The inclusion criteria for seed listing were accounts belonging to conspiracy theorist communities, domestic and international extremist and hate actors, or those affiliated with state actors with a vested interest in shaping opinion about the conflict. Thresholds for meeting these inclusion criteria were measured against ISD's definitions of far-right extremism, Islamism, conspiracy theories, far-left extremism, and state-actor affiliation or support, as presented in the glossary above.

In the initial phase, seeds were identified based on existing lists from relevant past collaborations between ISD and CASM, and additional ethnographic research carried out by analysts with extensive subject matter expertise. Seeds were collected from accounts based in, or focused on, the UK, France, and Germany, measured either based on self-identification of location or relevance of the majority of posts to the country context.

Four platforms were prioritised for collection based on previous knowledge of relevant online venues for mis/disinformation, hate and extremism, as well as broadly comparative data access: Instagram, Facebook, X, and Telegram. Based on analysts' identification of Telegram as a central hub of extremist activity in the context of October 7, ISD and CASM Technology ran an iteration of account expansion to discover the most frequently shared actors being amplified across the original seed channels. The candidates derived from this process were subsequently filtered for inclusion as per the above criteria.

Data from X, Instagram and Facebook seeds was collected using Brandwatch. While all X posts were available for collection, access only permitted collection of posts for public Facebook and Instagram accounts, omitting posts on private groups or comments. Analysts aimed to spend similar lengths of time identifying relevant seeds on different platforms and in different languages. Differences in the volume of accounts and posts collected across languages and platforms relates to the popularity of specific platforms in different geographical contexts, the findability of relevant accounts and the typical volume of posts on different platforms.

Collection from Meta platforms (Facebook and Instagram) was severely hampered by the closing down of the CrowdTangle tool which previously used to collect data from them. This was further compounded by lack of access to the Meta Content Library, the tool intended to replace it. This severely restricted ISD's capacity to analyse data from Meta platforms. For example, collection on Instagram was limited to business pages; only 34 accounts and 660 posts could be collected, rendering the usability of this data highly limited. Instagram data has been included in this report to exemplify this, but little meaningful analysis has been possible.

Platform	Germany	France	UK	Total
X	196	136	252	584
Facebook	425	109	63	597
Instagram	83	23	51	157
Telegram	240	219	154	613
Total	**944**	**487**	**520**	**1,951**

Table 1: Number of final seed accounts (including channels, groups and pages) across geography and platform.

Data collection from seeds

All posts from included seeds from 6 October 2023 to 7 October 2024 were collected. Data from seed accounts on Telegram were collected via the official API using CASM Technology's in-house Method52 environment. Data from Telegram contained top-level posts made into the seed channels, either by the channel owner, or by members of the channel. Seed account data from Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) was collected via Brandwatch.

- X: included all posts (both replies and reposts) made by seed accounts

- Facebook: included all top-level posts made by seed accounts.

- Instagram: included the top-level posts made by seed accounts.

To capture conversation relevant to the conflict, seeds were filtered against a wide-ranging list of conflict-related keywords in English, French and German (Appendix 1); this resulted in a total dataset of 133,744 posts. Although this potentially limited relevant conversations which did not include keywords, our keyword list permitted the analysis of the most pertinent and overtly conflict-related posts. Filtered posts were subsequently uploaded to Beam for analysis.

Platform	Germany	France	UK	Total
X	57	63	131	251
Facebook	183	2	24	209
Instagram	22	4	8	34
Telegram	141	139	58	338
TOTAL	**403**	**208**	**221**	**832**

Table 2: Number of seed accounts present across the collected (keyword-filtered) datasets.

Platform	Germany	France	UK	Total
X	4,828	18,930	40,047	63,805
Facebook	1,954	13	3,217	5,184
Instagram	398	6	256	660
Telegram	25,435	29,920	8,740	64,095
Total	**32,615**	**48,869**	**52,260**	**133,744**

Table 3: Number of posts present across the collected (keyword-filtered) datasets.

Thematic analysis

A topic modelling approach was used to identify and analyse themes in online conversation about the conflict. Separate topic models were built for Germany, France and the UK to organise the large dataset into clusters of semantically similar messaging (those discussing similar subjects or using comparable language). These clusters were then manually reviewed to assign thematic labels. Each cluster was given a sub-theme to describe its specific topic, which were then grouped into overarching themes.

The process of semantic mapping involves computing numeric representations of messages that capture semantics of the text, clustering message representations to identify groups of semantically similar messages, and manual coding clusters to create a thematic taxonomy of themes and sub-themes.

We applied standard preprocessing techniques, first removing all hashtags, user mentions, emojis and URLs from the messages; we subsequently removed empty messages. Topic modelling does not guarantee that all messages are assigned a cluster.[1] Messages that did not fit well (i.e. lack sufficient homogeneity) within other clusters are left un-clustered. The number of un-clustered messages varies but often encompasses around half of the data. These messages typically reflect the general distribution of the entire semantic map. Consequently, un-clustered messages were included when analysing and presenting overall data volumes but were excluded from thematic analyses, as they cannot be categorised into themes. By their nature, un-clustered messages span all themes, rather than representing any distinct thematic group.

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1 For textual embedding, we utilised "BAAI/bge-m3", a popular general-purpose multilingual pre-trained model. For clustering, we employed a widely adopted process of first applying UMAP to the embeddings, simplifying the numerical representations into a lower-dimensional space (more suited to HDBSCAN clustering) which identifies dense areas in this reduced space as clusters. We used the BERTopic package to encapsulate this process and facilitate the generation of cluster keyword summaries.

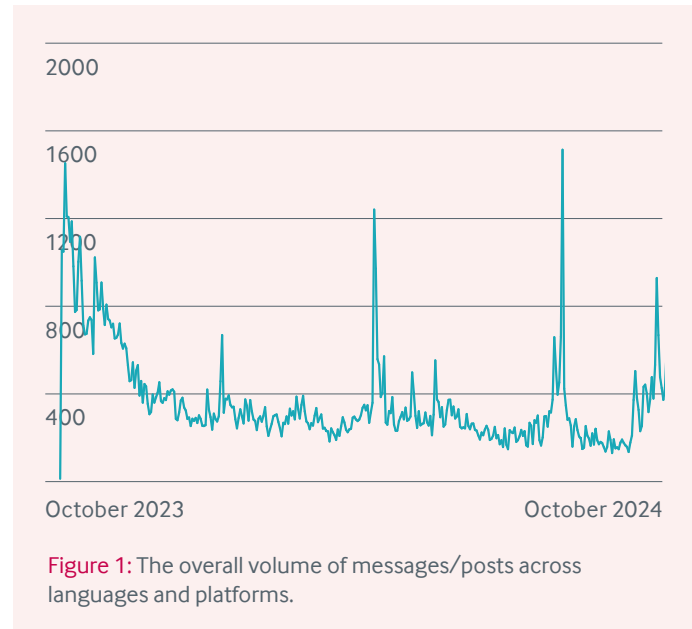# Analysing the Volume of Conflict-Related Conversation Over Time

This section shows peaks in conversation about the Israel-Hamas conflict as a topic across platforms and languages to illustrate the key areas of interest of extremist and disinformation actors over the year following the October 7 attacks. Qualitative analysis of a random sample of posts from each peak captures key events and narratives in conversations, which in turn allowed for further investigation of the hateful and extremist posting behaviours encapsulated within these peaks.

Figure 1 shows the volume of messages about the conflict posted between October 2023 and October 2024 across multiple platforms and languages. It evidences a steady stream of information and interest by extremist and hate actor networks across this period. Four key spikes in the volume of conversation can be observed:

- The period immediately following the initial October 7 attacks,

- The April 2024 Iranian missile strike on Israel,

- The August 2024 UK riots,

- The pager attack and subsequent escalation in Lebanon from mid-September 2024 onwards.

In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attacks, the volume of conversation about the conflict reached a peak. Across mainstream and fringe platforms, ISD research found antisemitism, anti-Muslim hate, hostile state actor-linked information operations and misinformation related to the conflict. This peaked on 9 October, when ISD found 1,473 messages containing at least one conflict-related keyword posted across platforms and languages. Following this immediate spike, the volume of messages maintained an elevated level for the following three months.

In France during this period, posts by the Telegram channel associated with a French media outlet known to frequently spread disinformation and conspiracy theories received the highest engagement in terms of likes. These were followed by posts from French Eurosceptic and right-wing politicians such as François Asselineau, Eric Zemmour and Marion Maréchal, as well as pro-Kremlin alternative media outlets.

Figure 1: The overall volume of messages/posts across languages and platforms.

Iran's first ballistic missile strike on Israeli territory on 13 April 2024 sparked a significant uptick in conversation across the extremist networks studied. Across all three languages analysed, the volume of messages rose by an average of 132 percent comparing the five days following the attacks to the five days before.
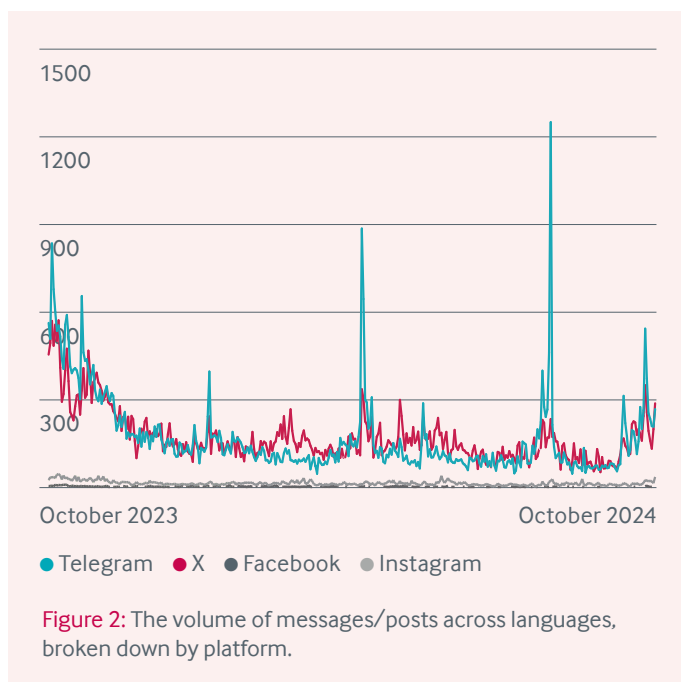
In August, the most significant spike in the volume of messages relates to the far-right riots in the UK sparked by a fatal attack on a children's dance party in Southport. At this time, ISD conducted a series of investigations into how this event impacted the landscape of hate and extremism in the UK. Misinformation spread immediately following the attack by pay-for-clicks accounts and far-right influencers alleged that the perpetrator was a Muslim who had recently arrived in the UK by boat. Across 55 British far-right Telegram accounts, ISD and CASM Technology evidenced a 246 percent rise in anti-migrant hate and a 276 percent increase in anti-Muslim hate. Far-right activity rose dramatically, both in overall volume of posts and in the number of posts specifically relating to the Israel-Hamas conflict as shown in Figure 1.

The Southport attack and subsequent riots had very little relation to the overseas conflict. However, the existing proliferation of anti-Muslim hate related to the conflict mixed with disinformation to perpetuate an all-encompassing narrative among far-right extremists

that links Muslims with violence. Some on the radical right considers Israel as another frontier in a global fight against Islam and linked the conflict to the alleged events in Southport on that basis. This spike is somewhat biased by one user posting "/FREE_PALESTINE" 814 times on one single day on a far-right Telegram chat forum, but there was still a significant spike in posting behaviour around this period even excluding this activity.

The final spike in volume began when Hezbollah pagers were simultaneously detonated on 17 and 18 September 2024. The volume continued rising over the subsequent weeks as Israel's air attacks and ground incursion into Lebanon ramped up. This trend had continued through the close of the data collection period (the end of October 2024). Messages discussing Israel's alleged involvement in the pager attacks — which often drew upon antisemitic conspiracy theories and tropes — were common at this time, as were posts theorising about Iran and Hezbollah's potential response.

Overall volume over time by platform

Figure 2: The volume of messages/posts across languages, broken down by platform.

Extremist and hateful online actors often engage in processes of 'tech stacking': they use different platforms for different purposes, from recruiting mainstream audiences to violent extremist organising. A breakdown of the volume of conflict-related posts over time across English, French and German shows the dominance of Telegram as a central hub for extremist online ecosystems. Telegram has long provided a permissive environment for extremist activity including the spread of misleading claims and hateful mobilisations. The discrepancy in volume in the chart above can be partially

attributed to a higher volume of seeds from Telegram (338 accounts, compared to 251 on X and 209 on Facebook); however it is not proportionate to the significantly elevated volume of posts on Telegram.

The day-to-day volume of conversation about the conflict by extremist actors on X is roughly commensurate with that on Telegram, despite a higher volume of Telegram seeds. However, at key events such as Iran's attack on Israel and the UK summer riots, the increase in activity is far more apparent on Telegram than X. While there were five clear peaks in volume of activity on Telegram, the picture on X was more nuanced. The most significant increase in activity on X was on 7 October 2023 and following the Lebanese pager attacks. While there were increases on X after Iran's attack on Israel and the Southport attack, these were not as pronounced as on Telegram.

Therefore, whereas X roughly follows the expected ebb and flow of conflict-related conversation, Telegram overall shows more drastic changes over time, signifying particularly strong inflection points for extremist groups to recruit or organise. Conversation on Facebook remained minimal over the course of the year, indicating that extremists find the platform less useful than X and Telegram. This low volume may also be indicative of more proactive content moderation efforts, or simply reflective of our inability to collect data from Facebook on a consistent basis throughout the data collection period.

Notable Trends

Whereas most posts in French and German were on Telegram, the majority of relevant English-language posts were found on X. Online conversation on X closely tracks with developments in international news, particularly in the Israel-Hamas war. By contrast, Telegram content appeared more concerned with localised and intra-community issues. The focus of Telegram content on more local issues can be attributed to the presence of one group chat which was particularly prolific compared to other broadcast lists. For example, a Telegram peak on 6 April 2024 corresponds with a controversy within a right-wing channel over far-right UK activist Tommy Robinson's support for Israel.

There was consistently less data from Telegram channels. However, a visible peak on 4 August 2024 saw Telegram post volume overtake that of X. This date corresponds to the summer riots, with particular focus on UK PM Keir Starmer's speech to the public in which he condemned "far-right thuggery". A smaller peak appeared on Telegram on 19 July 2024, following the Southport attack which later triggered the riots.

Also prominent in the UK data is a second peak on 1 March 2024, corresponding with the election of George Galloway as an independent MP for Rochdale. Galloway made the conflict in Gaza a central issue of his campaign. His election was therefore seen as evidence of anti-Israel electoral power in the UK and was commented on by far-left, far-right and Islamist accounts in the dataset. The conversation around Galloway's election was dominated by accounts affiliated with the fringe Muslim media outlet 5 Pillars, who hailed his election a victory for the Muslim vote. Simultaneously, anti-Muslim accounts pointed to the Rochdale child sex abuse ring scandal, a far-right rallying message about the perceived inherent criminality of migrants due to the Pakistani heritage of the child sex abuse perpetrators. Far-right channels also discussed the defacement of a World War One memorial with 'Free Palestine'.

In France, a significant spike occurred on 13 April 2024 when Iran launched a drone and missile attack on Israel. The posts receiving the most engagement were from a news headline from CGTN Français - a Chinese state-media channel aimed at a French speaking audience - followed by pro-Kremlin and far-left alternative news outlets. The most active channel on French-language Telegram was an alternative media channel which discusses geopolitics, wars, immigration and conspiracy theories.

As with French Telegram channels, German accounts shared significantly more posts (24,759 total) on the platform than they did on X (4,872 total). While there was a higher number of Telegram channels included in the data collection overall, these channels were also proportionately more active than those on other platforms. Over the monitoring period, researchers gathered 29,631 posts from 250 accounts across both platforms. On average, German Telegram users posted 162.8 messages about the conflict, far exceeding the 49.7 messages per account recorded on X.

Figure 3: The volume of conflict-related posts per country.

Case study
Pro-Kremlin Telegram Channels in Germany

In German, while the most active accounts on Telegram were associated with the German-language versions of Kremlin-controlled state media, X data was dominated by far-right influencers. The most active Telegram account, linked to the German-language RT outlet, posted 4,500 times—almost the total combined output of all X accounts in the dataset. The second and third most active accounts were also linked to Kremlin-controlled media. The Telegram account for TASS News (German edition) posted 2,974 times, while the German-language version of RIA Novosti published 2,051 posts. These figures underscore Telegram's critical role in disseminating content from Kremlin-backed outlets across the EU. It also demonstrates the persistence of these actors in circumventing the EU-wide ban imposed after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

German-language Telegram activity peaked on 9 October 2023, with 379 posts; on X, the highest volume was 98 posts on 11 October. On Telegram, the TASS News channel alone contributed nearly 100 of these posts (26.3 percent of the total for October 9). This was followed by RIA Novosti with 50 posts, again indicating the prominence of state-affiliated media in shaping narratives about the Israel-Hamas war. While Telegram activity was dominated by Kremlin-controlled media outlets, X's most active contributors were influencers from the right-wing milieu.

Case study
Hebrew-Speaking Online Communities in the UK

The leak of false military information from the Israeli cabinet to a British Jewish newspaper is a notable example of the transnational nature of online mis- and disinformation about the Israel-Hamas conflict.

A joint investigation by the Israeli army, police, and Shin Bet (Israeli security services) around the leak of documents to the British Jewish Chronicle and German outlet Bild resulted in the arrest of a senior aide to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. The material, some of which was fabricated, was used to advocate for Netanyahu's policies in the context of the Israel-Hamas war. The Jewish Chronicle has since cut ties with the author of multiple articles based on the fabricated material.

While the leak of such information via an English-language newspaper facilitated its reach to wide audiences, Hebrew-language social media users based in the UK remain overwhelmingly critical of Netanyahu and the war. In the period between 6 October 2023 and 7 October 2024, eight of the ten most reshared Hebrew language UK posts on X were critical of Netanyahu, one was neutral and only one (posted by Netanyahu himself) was positive.

Two of the critical posts appeared to come from accounts belonging to non-Israelis or Jews, who were attempting to insert their posts into Hebrew-language discourse on X by using the language. Of the remaining critical posts, five mentioned the mishandling of the hostage situation, while another focused on the ICC charges brought against Netanyahu and former Minister of Defence Yoav Gallant over alleged war crimes in Gaza. These findings suggest that despite the Jewish Chronicle controversy outlined above, online conversation among UK-based Hebrew-language accounts was overwhelmingly negative toward Netanyahu and his policies related to Gaza.

Understanding the Nature of Online Conversation

Using the topic modelling approach outlined in the methodology section, posts from across all platforms were analysed at scale to identify themes. Over the year following the October 7 attack, the conflict has become increasingly complex, with new actors and numerous escalations. These ongoing developments remained central to overall online conversation in the three countries of focus. Also central to discussion was the impact of ongoing conflict in the region, its relation to domestic politics and debate over international reactions and responses.
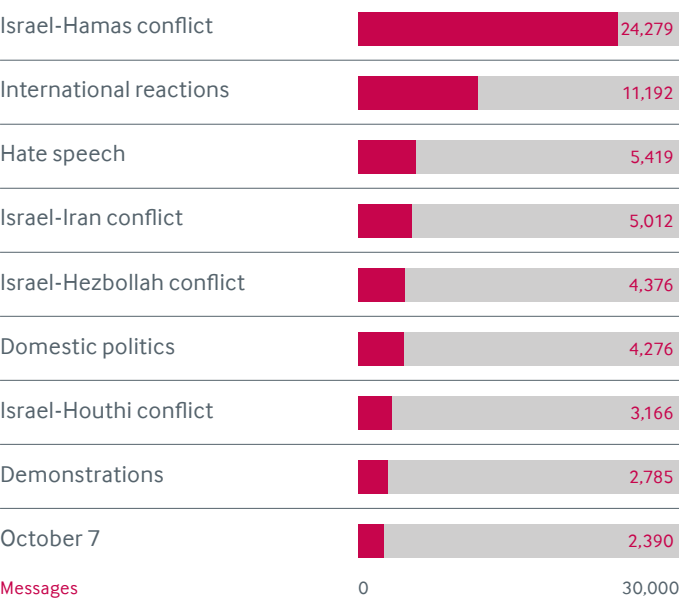
Theme	Messages
Israel-Hamas conflict	24,279
International reactions	11,192
Hate speech	5,419
Israel-Iran conflict	5,012
Israel-Hezbollah conflict	4,376
Domestic politics	4,276
Israel-Houthi conflict	3,166
Demonstrations	2,785
October 7	2,390

Messages   0   30,000

Figure 4: The most common themes across the overall dataset (i.e. including all English, French, and German language posts).

Figure 4 shows the most common themes across all social media posts on Telegram, X, Facebook and Instagram in English, French, and German. The largest category of posts was those related to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. This included updates on conflict developments, IDF and Hamas activities, and content which was either supportive or opposed to Israel's ongoing military campaign.

Escalating conflict between Israel and Iran was one of the most discussed topics. This was influenced by a large volume of French-language conversation about Iranian missile attacks on Israel and the helicopter crash of former Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in May 2024. The ongoing conflict with Hezbollah was also a key topic of conversation, concentrated around the pager attack

in Lebanon and subsequent escalations in conflict from September 2024 onwards. Discussion of the Houthi attacks on Western ships in the Red Sea was also present, though less commonly discussed than actions taken by other actors in the Middle East conflict.

Users posted about international reactions to the conflict almost three times as often as their own domestic politics. This emphasises the transnational nature of conflict-related news and opinion, which is highly influenced by global events and often imported from the US and other European countries. Despite English-language seeds being limited to those based in the UK, the volume of discussion about the US evidences the prevailing influence of American political discourse across Western Europe. Conversation about international relations also strongly focused on the Russia-Ukraine war, including drawing parallels between the two conflicts to promote pro-Kremlin viewpoints.
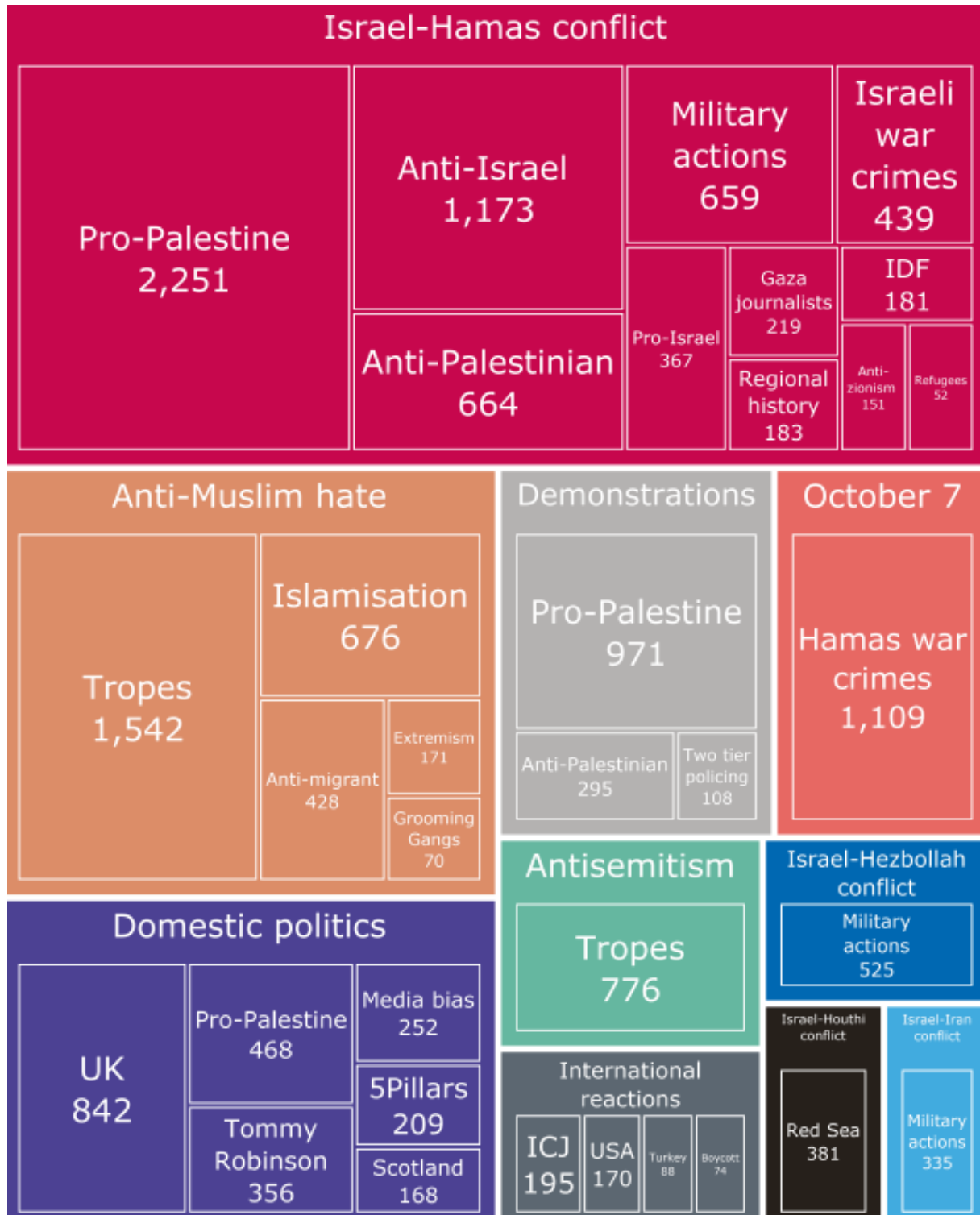
Demonstrations were a key topic of conversation. This included both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine protests, which were both celebrated and condemned. Within these discussions, the university campus protests that ramped up in spring 2024 were highlighted, with users referencing pro-Palestine encampments at both European and American educational institutions.

A high volume of posts included hateful content, mainly comprising antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate. Such hate speech included harmful tropes, antisemitic conspiracy theories and discussions of the perceived 'invasion' of Muslim communities in European countries. The large volume of anti-Muslim hate in the UK dataset compared with the other two countries appears driven by online discourse which mobilised violence following the Southport attack in July 2024, which often blended anti-Muslim and anti-migrant narratives.

While each country context and type of actor generated unique conversation topics and local references, the overall themes across the UK, France and Germany are broadly consistent. This analysis demonstrates, above all, high levels of interest in the Israel-Hamas conflict by a broad range of actors vested in spreading disinformation and hate. This interest has been sustained in the year since the October 7 attacks; it has also expanded to adjacent conflicts in Iran, Lebanon, and Yemen when escalations have occurred.

United Kingdom

Figure 5: Treemap[2] of themes and sub-themes in English-language posts about the conflict on Telegram, X, Facebook, and Instagram from 6 October 2023 to 7 October 2024.

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2   A treemap is a data visualization method that uses nested rectangles to display hierarchical data.

United Kingdom

General conflict related conversation was the most prominent theme in the dataset, as shown in the treemap above (Israel-Hamas conflict, figure 5). This was closely followed by the themes of anti-Muslim hate, domestic politics and demonstrations. These more localised topics were nonetheless most often linked to the Israel-Hamas conflict and often shared overlapping sub-themes or tropes.

The Israel-Hamas conflict was exploited by accounts with diverse ideologies to reinforce pre-existing beliefs and narratives. The October 7 attack in particular was used to evidence negative tropes about Muslims being violent and/or terrorists, and to stoke fears about Muslim migrants in Europe and the UK. Among the Islamist and far-left accounts monitored, the conflict was used to evidence narratives of victimisation, Zionist influence in the UK, and the need for activism and solidarity with Palestinians.

Anti-Muslim hate emerged as a particularly prominent theme among UK accounts. As mentioned, this reflects a period of social unrest during the summer riots, when anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK was particularly visible. Much of this content also references a perceived anti-Palestinian bias and claims of hypocrisy by both UK media and authorities in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict. The prevalence of the latter is illustrated in the top-right quadrant of the tree-map above.

Qualitative analysis of posts within anti-Muslim clusters shows unusual alliances. For example, a post by Nick Griffin, former leader of the far-right British National Party, hailed George Galloway's win in the Rochdale election as a "great result" and said that it signalled the move from a two party class divide to "a society where tribal lines count." Despite previously self-describing as "anti-Islam", Griffin appeared on a podcast associated with fringe Muslim outlet 5 Pillars. Host Dilly Hussain and he found common ground on shared conservative values and anti-interventionist foreign policy; both used antisemitic tropes such as alleging Jewish or Zionist control of media, financial and political institutions.

As mentioned earlier, Tommy Robinson's pro-Israel positions reflect wider divisions within the UK right-wing during the data collection period, while some more extreme-right individuals and groups showed solidarity with the Palestinian cause and promoted antisemitic conspiracy theories. While this trend has long existed, the data shows internal fissures among the UK right-wing have become particularly pronounced since the October 7 attacks.

Analysis of the dataset reveals Robinson's view to be the most popular among the audiences studied, with far-right conversation centring on pro-Palestinian protests and the perception of Muslims as a threat. Nonetheless, discussion of Robinson and his pro-Israel advocacy formed the basis for considerable conversation among the accounts studied. Conspiracy theorist and influencer Paul Joseph Watson offered a different position, advocating for "hating both Palestine and Israel". Watson posted: "Retweet if you don't care about Israel or Palestine, and only care about white British people." Watson, Griffin and Robinson all emerged as key voices among far-right UK-based accounts discussing the conflict.
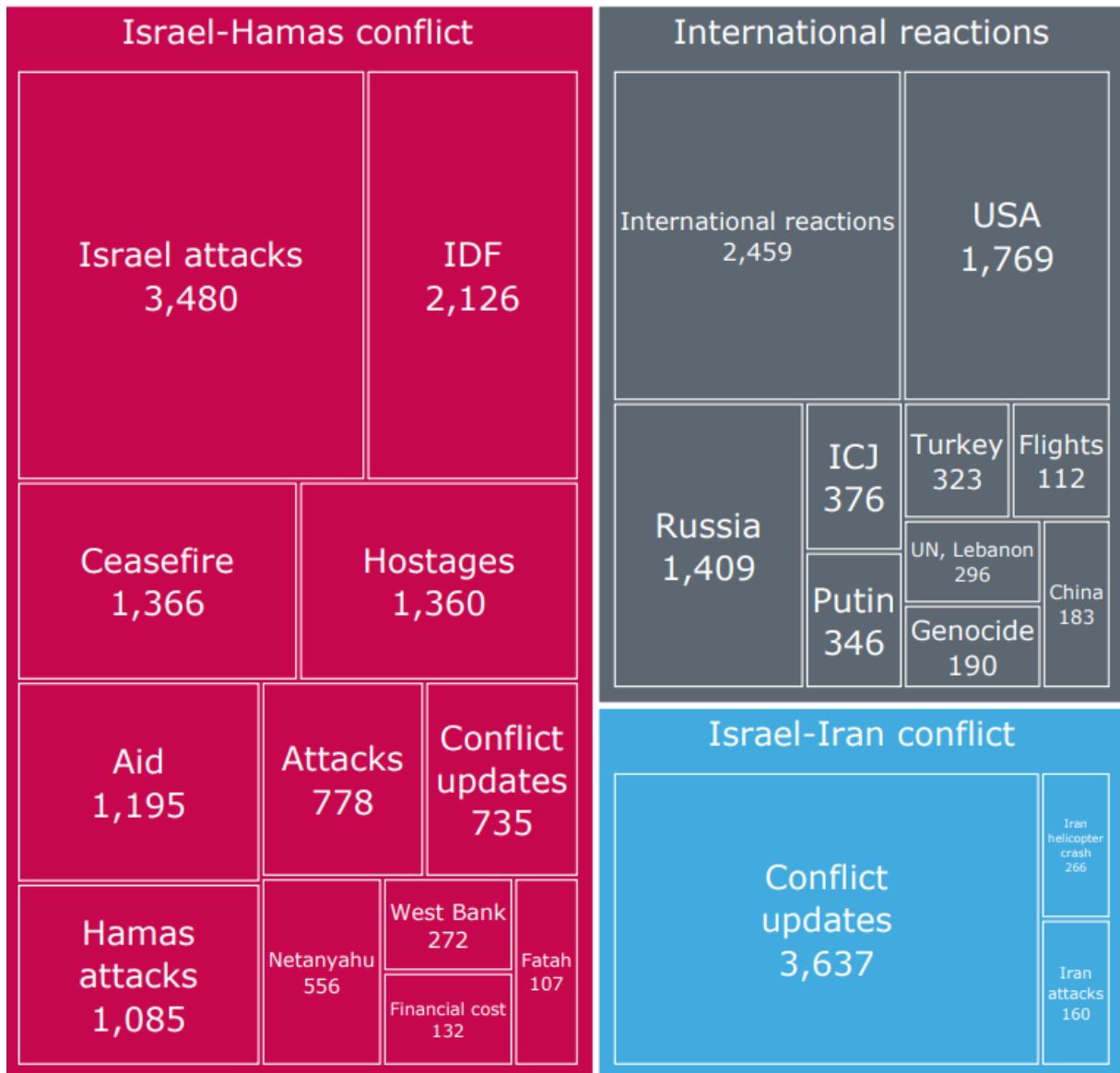
A subset of conversation relating the Middle East conflict to the war in Ukraine revolved around Western hypocrisy and compared the Russia-Ukraine conflict to the Israel-Hamas conflict. Some far-right accounts questioned support for Ukraine and advocated for prioritising the UK domestic population instead. While making few comments on Russian activity in Ukraine, both far-right and Islamist accounts criticised Western funding for military and humanitarian causes.

Overall, far-right and Islamist accounts leveraged events related to the Israel-Hamas war to further their own narratives and reach. Both groups used protests supporting or opposing Israeli actions in Gaza to evidence claims of victimisation and police bias against them. Far-right anti-Muslim accounts used the conflict to reinforce negative tropes about Muslims and migrants including claims that Muslims support terrorist groups and have proclivities for violence and rape. Meanwhile, pro-Palestinian protests and Galloway's election in Rochdale were used to inflate fears of an 'Islamist takeover of the UK'. Among far-right accounts, there was substantial pushback against far-right posts which came out strongly in favour of either Israel or the Palestinians, with some antisemitic slurs and accusations of users being 'traitors' for aligning with either side.

France

Figures 6 and 7 are treemaps[3] representing the themes and sub-themes in French-language posts about the conflict on Telegram, X, Facebook, and Instagram from between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2024. The topic modelling process revealed eight major clusters of conversation.
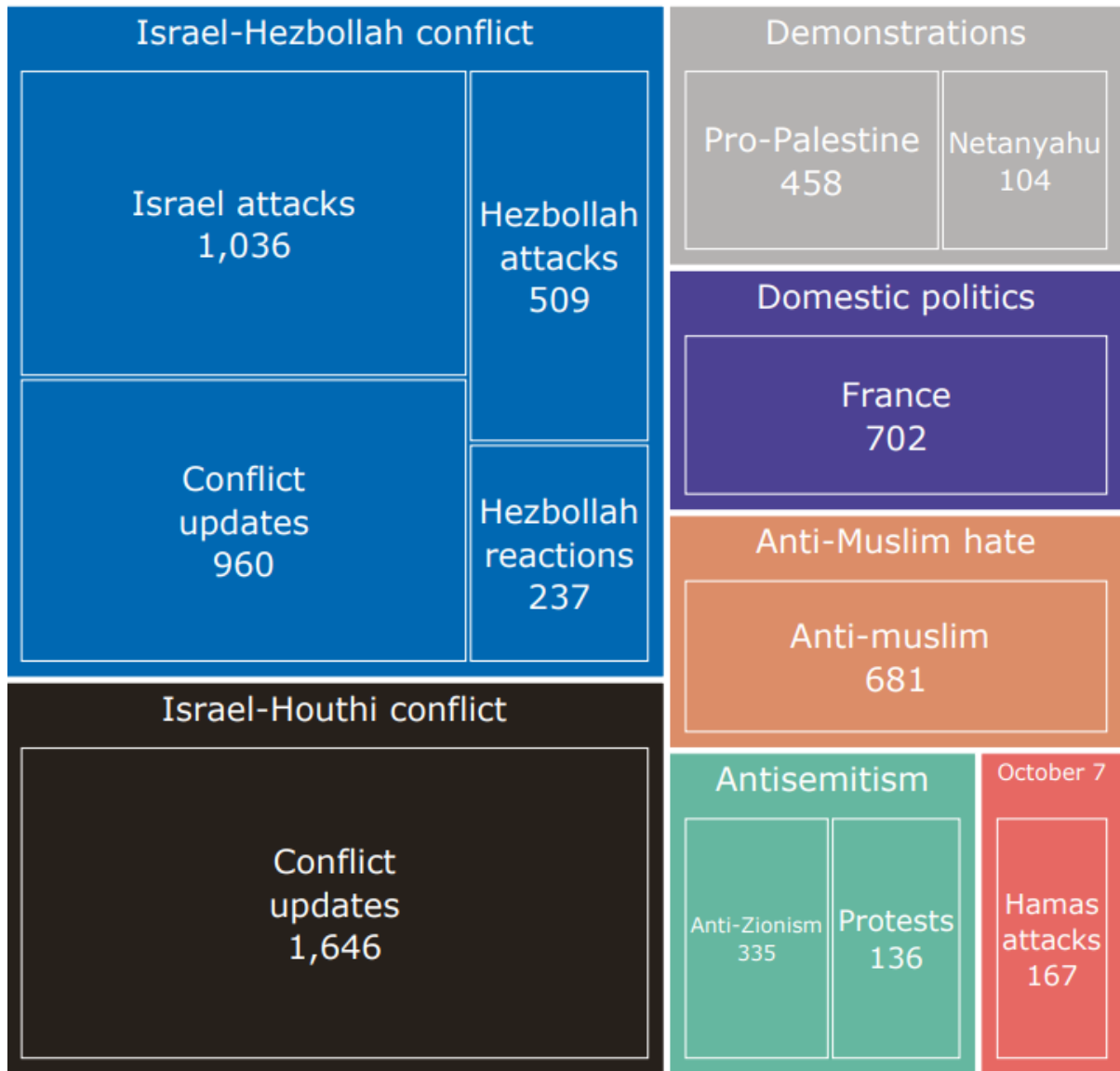
Figure 6: Treemap of themes and sub-themes in French-language posts about the conflict on Telegram, X, Facebook and Instagram from 6 October 2023 to 7 October 2024.

France

Figure 7: Treemap of themes and sub-themes in French-language posts about the conflict on Telegram, X, Facebook and Instagram 6 October 2023 – 7 October 2024.

France

Updates and information about the Israel-Hamas war was the most common type of post being shared (41 percent of all posts clustered). These posts contained information about the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, updates given by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Israeli government, news about ceasefire negotiations, the situation of the Israeli hostages held by Hamas, the humanitarian situation, and access to aid.

The second biggest theme was international reactions and responses to the conflict (23 percent). The largest sub-theme within this category contained international reactions from governments of several countries; the second largest was concerned with US government response, demonstrating the relevance of US policy in French online discussion.

Several additional sub-themes contained pro-Kremlin commentary on the conflict. They included statements on Putin's position and policies, and reporting and analysis by pro-Kremlin media outlets such as RT Français and Sputnik Afrique. These media outlets shared updates about the Israel-Hamas war from a pro-Kremlin perspective that align with the Kremlin's overall geopolitical strategy of presenting itself as a global peacemaker and attacking the Western response to date as 'warmongering'.

The posts shared as part of this sub-theme were generally pro-Palestinian. They showed support for a ceasefire, reporting on ongoing ceasefire negotiations, and pro-Palestinian protests in major US and European cities. Some of the posts also claimed that arms that were delivered to Ukraine by Western countries were being used by Hamas, a known pro-Kremlin disinformation narrative that initially circulated in October 2023, shortly after the outbreak of the conflict.

The third most common theme was updates about the Israel-Iran conflict (14 percent). The majority of these posts were news headlines and updates, including posts about the May 2024 helicopter crash and posts about Iranian attacks on Israel from April 2024 onwards.
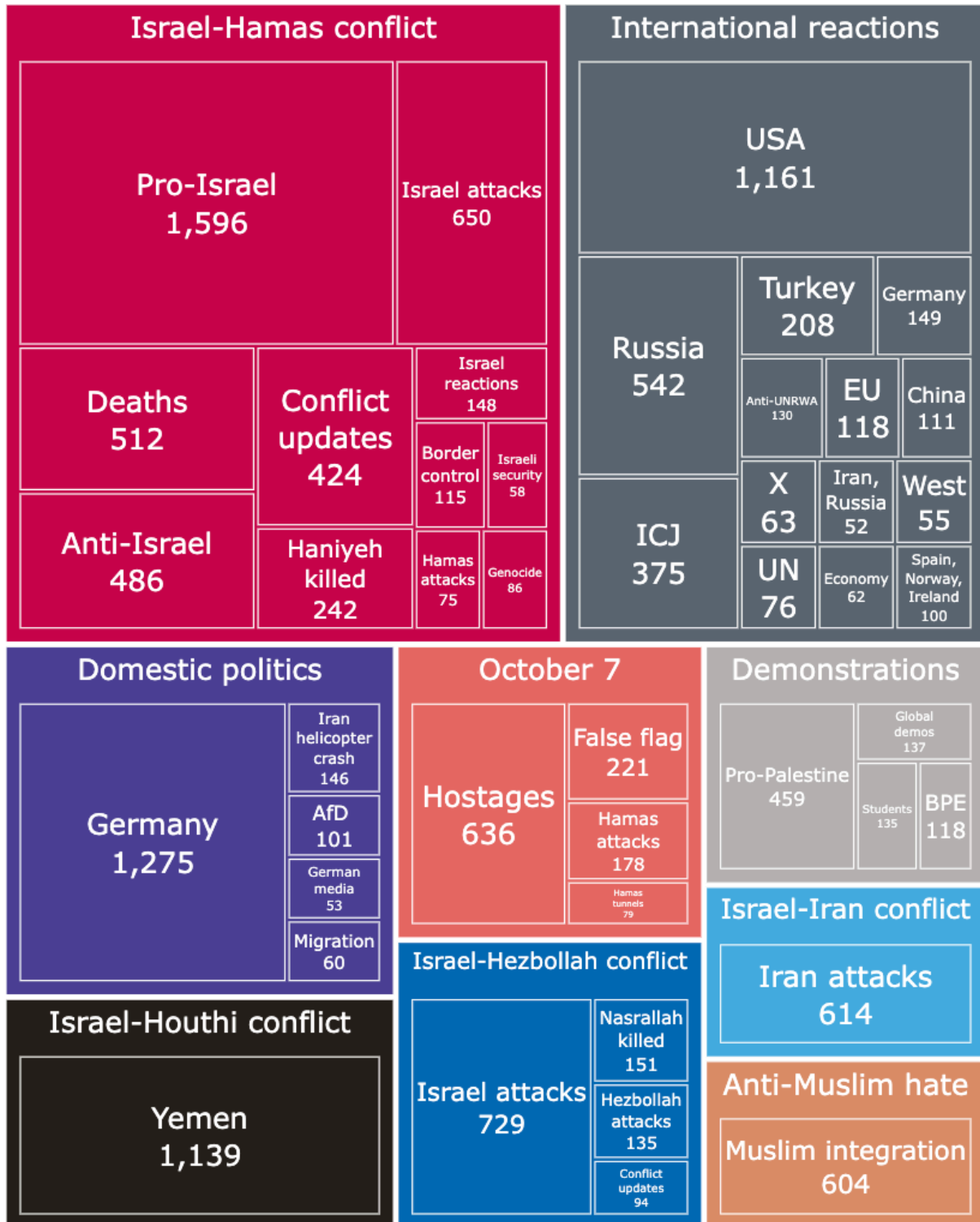
Conflict between Israel and Hezbollah was the fourth most discussed theme, again mainly consisting of updates about the conflict and reports about attacks both on Israel and Lebanon. The theme of protests contained reports about pro-Palestinian protests in major Western cities, at US and European universities, and across Middle Eastern countries from a pro-Palestinian perspective. A smaller sub-theme contained reports about anti-government protests in Israel.

Only 3 percent of the posts framed the conflict in relation to domestic issues in France. The majority of these were discussed reactions by far-right actors to the Israel-Hamas war, such as the Rassemblement National expressing its support for Israel and the 'need to combat radical Islam in France'.

The volume of overt anti-Muslim hate was relatively small, at 2 percent. Common narratives shared by far-right actors included conspiracy theories about a planned Muslim invasion and 'Islamification of France'; some content presented Islam and Muslim migrants as a threat to French society. Islam was described as a 'sect' and a 'mental illness', while Muslims were referred to as paedophiles. Of the posts, 0.5 percent referenced antisemitic hate crimes in France as a reaction to the conflict, but no clusters containing antisemitic hate speech were identified in the French-language data.

Germany

Figure 8: Treemap of themes and sub-themes in German-language posts about the conflict on Telegram, X, Facebook and Instagram 6 October 2023 — 7 October 2024.

Germany

The topic modelling shows German-language posts primarily focused on the Israel-Hamas conflict, followed by reactions from international actors and organisations. There were also posts covering domestic political issues in Germany, including criticism of German public officials. Posts in the Israel-Hamas theme consisted mostly of pro-Israel narratives and updates about the conflict on the ground. Posts addressing the involvement of other actors, such as Iran, Hezbollah or the Houthis, received comparatively less attention.

Smaller sub-themes were identified containing anti-Muslim and anti-Israel narratives, often featuring hateful comments. The anti-Muslim theme predominantly included far-right German accounts targeting Muslims living in Germany or migrants, while the anti-Israel sub-theme was centred on accusations of Israel committing genocide against Palestinians and conspiracy theories about false flag operations.

Within the Israel-Hamas conflict theme, a notable tendency emerged among monitored German accounts to express support for Israel, with pro-Israel sub-themes significantly outnumbering anti-Israel narratives and critiques of Israeli airstrikes. Most posts in this category provided updates on the conflict, including casualty figures and battlefield news. The second most prominent theme focused on relationship between the US and Russia: pro-Kremlin accounts portrayed Russia in a neutral or positive light while the US was framed negatively, often through commentary on its strategic interests in the region. The third-largest sub-theme involved mentions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in connection with Israel and Netanyahu.

Much like in the UK and France, demonstrations in Germany and abroad emerged as another significant them of conversation. Posts overwhelmingly focused on pro-Palestine demonstrations, with sentiments ranging from criticism of the protests and its participants to statements of support for the demonstrations and their cause.

Innovative Methods to Investigate Conflict-Related Misinformation

To gain a wide range of robust insights into the scale, nature and structures of the conflict-related hate and misinformation landscape on social media, ISD and CASM Technology sought to develop innovative tools and methods as part of the wider scope of this project. Combined with subject matter expertise, ISD and CASM Technology jointly identified and developed approaches to analyse the online environment around the Israel-Hamas conflict that complement those presented above. This section presents three methods developed for short investigations conducted as part of this project, the tools and techniques utilised, and the unique insights they were able to uncover.

Mapping propaganda and conspiracy networks distorting the October 7 attack

ISD researchers employed a network mapping approach to identify key nodes of influence within the nature of online conversation about October 7. This approach leveraged data collected using a keyword query related to known conspiracy theories about the events of October 7 and attempts to justify terrorist violence against civilians.

The investigation highlighted the misrepresentation of media coverage from credible news outlets as a manipulation tactic used by actors with an interest in perpetuating false and misleading content. This misrepresented coverage was most often used to support existing conspiracy theories, which often included antisemitic tropes and anti-establishment narratives. Notably, decontextualised conflict footage and misrepresented findings from Israeli media were used to infer that the Israeli military killed its own civilians on October 7 in numbers surpassing the deaths caused by Hamas, thereby downplaying well-documented violent attacks by the terrorist organisation.

To generate a snapshot of efforts to distort information surrounding the October 7 attack and in some cases even to justify it, analysts created a network map based on X posts from between 31 May to 31 July 2024. This period was chosen to incorporate the most recent peak in relevant discussion on the topic.

In the network map (Figure 9), each node represents a user, and links are drawn between nodes when users interact (i.e. share posts from, mention, or reply to each other). Accounts whose posts were popular among the
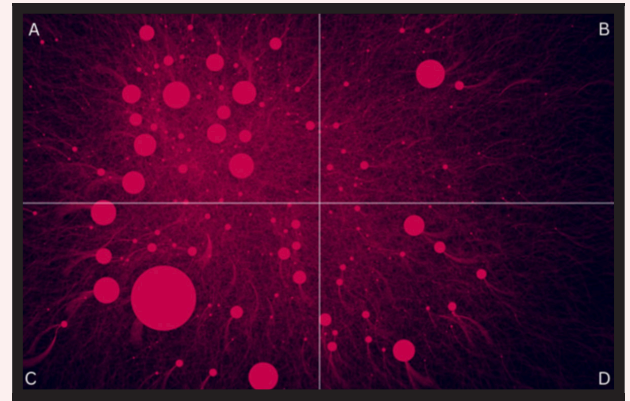

Figure 9: Network graph illustrating user interactions on X based on a keyword search of English-language October 7 distortion-related discourse between 31 May and 31 July 2024.

network (determined by the total number of outbound links) appear larger in the graph, indicating influence within the network and therefore influence in the online conversation between these actors. As such, the structure of the map reveals the network's central and fringe actors, highlighting the flow of engagement around key narratives and clusters of users interacting more frequently with one another.

While social network maps about contentious issues often display as a 'polarised crowd' (with tightly focused clusters of users engaging primarily with like-minded individuals) this network graph indicates a more complex dynamic. This network map shows that in this case, X users promoting opposing narratives are tightly interconnected, often engaging with each other through replies or mentions.

Discourse about the October 7 attack, and the ensuing actions taken by both Israel and Hamas, has been deeply polarised. Users have often presented contradictory information and interpretations of the same events. The map above highlights that influencers (represented by the larger nodes) across the political spectrum are key drivers of this conversation, frequently directing their posts and replies towards official Israeli government accounts, media outlets or journalists, and those with differing views. These interactions have produced a network that spans diverse ideologies and types of accounts.

One notable trend is the connection between those sharing mis- and disinformation content and media outlets; it is within these spaces we observed information from traditional news sources being distorted to promote misleading narratives. Similarly, there is significant overlap in interactions between highly followed accounts with starkly opposing viewpoints who are often engaged in disputes over basic facts related to the October 7 attack and its aftermath. For example, while quadrant A includes several large pro-Israel X accounts, it also includes smaller nodes that represent the accounts of international bodies such as United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and that of US President Biden, with regular tagging of their accounts. Additionally, two large nodes representing the Israeli government and the IDF are intermingled with pro-Israel influencers, demonstrating the central role of government sources in discussion about the conflict on X.

Meanwhile, users positioned on the fringes of the network (quadrants C and D), particularly those justifying the attack, tended to function more as broadcasters than engagers. These accounts disseminated messaging to their followers without participating as much in debates, in contrast to the more interactive behaviour observed within the core of the network of users.

Investigating use of conflict-related narratives in pro-Kremlin information operations

ISD conducted an investigation into how a pro-Kremlin ad network associated with the Doppelganger campaign used the Israel-Hamas conflict to spread propaganda in France and Germany. The use of ads is a well-known strategy employed by pro-Kremlin actors, most recently uncovered in the US Department of Justice affidavit published on 4 September 2024. According to the affidavit, the Social Design Agency (SDA), a Russian entity closely linked to the Kremlin, uses tactics including ads. This is part of the 'International Conflict Incitement' project, which aims to escalate domestic tensions in countries that are allies of the US.

ISD used the Meta Ad Library to identify and retrieve 192 pro-Kremlin Facebook ads targeting audiences in France and Germany. The ads were selected if they mentioned both the Israel-Hamas war and the war in Ukraine — indicated by containing the keywords 'Ukraine' + 'Gaza' or 'Ukraine' + 'Palestine' — and displayed characteristics similar to those of ads previously identified by ISD, DFRLab and EU DisinfoLab as part of the Doppelganger campaign. These characteristics include:

- Single-use Facebook pages with page names that followed generic patterns,
- Identical text and visuals used by pages with the same naming patterns,
- Cartoon-style visuals that follow the same style as visuals previously used by Doppelganger,
- Sharing of known pro-Kremlin disinformation narratives about Ukraine,
- Use of known pro-Kremlin information manipulation tactics, such as impersonation.

The ads were then coded qualitatively to allow for thematic and discourse analysis of the main narratives. The following five broad narratives emerging from the analysis:

1. Allegations that weapons supplied to Ukraine by the West are being used by Hamas,
2. Promotion of anti-American sentiment,
3. Polarising commentary about domestic issues in France and Germany,
4. Criticism of aid and military support for Ukraine,
5. Claims that the war in Ukraine is benefiting arms traders.

The ads were then coded further according to the sub-narratives they contained. Both the main narratives and sub-narratives were placed on a mind map to visualise how they relate to each other and to be able to identify contradicting narratives. Quantitative analysis was also used to ascertain their potential reach and volume over time.

Across the two countries, the narrative that weapons supplied to Ukraine by NATO countries were used by Hamas was the most prominent, featuring in 37 percent of the ads analysed. The second most prominent narrative found in the ads was the promotion of anti-American sentiment, which appeared in 31 percent of ads.

While there was consistency in pro-Kremlin narratives used across France and Germany about Gaza and Ukraine, ISD also found that the content of the ads was localised to suit domestic debates about crime, the economy and immigration. Localised content often leveraged narratives typically utilised by anti-immigration actors in each country. These included the portrayal of refugees from Ukraine and Gaza as a threat to public security, and claims that the two conflicts had caused domestic economic decline.

Despite a clear stance on support for Ukraine, anti-American sentiment, and immigration and economic matters in France and Germany, there was not a fixed position on the Israel-Hamas war; multiple narratives contradicted each other. Rather than following specific objectives in their depiction of the Israel-Hamas war, the authors of the pro-Kremlin ads seemed to be opportunistic, using narratives that fit their other foreign influence operation goals.

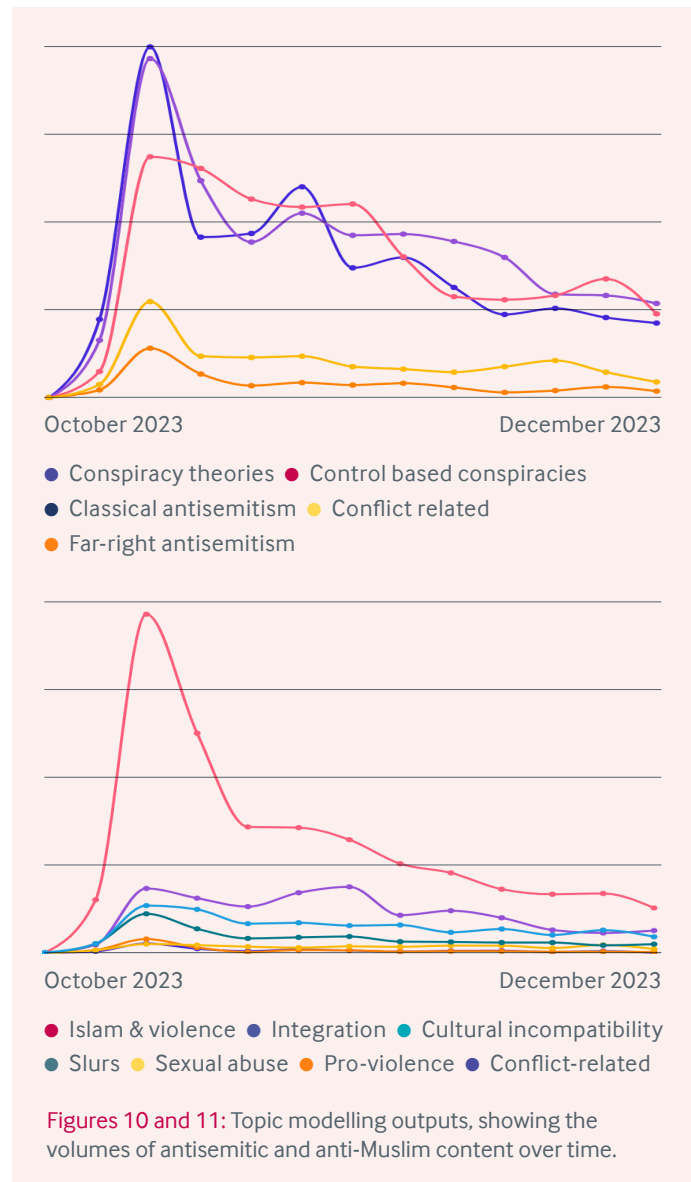### Narrative analysis of antisemitism & anti-Muslim hate speech

Seeking to understand the relative prominence of diverse antisemitic and anti-Muslim narratives after 7 October 2023, ISD worked with CASM Technology to conduct a large-scale topic modelling analysis.

In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attacks, ISD sought to evidence changes in online antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate over time. To do, ISD worked with CASM Technology to train bespoke hate speech classifiers, using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to capture the nuanced and often covert nature of online hate, particularly when related to the Israel-Hamas conflict. Such language is often missed by simple keyword approaches, necessitating the building and training of automated classifiers.

Analysts chose to conduct analysis on YouTube (specifically comments) as a vector for understanding potentially hateful responses to a range of media regarding the conflict. Analysts conducted a manual thematic analysis of a random sample of 1,000 antisemitism posts to gain an initial understanding of the broad themes driving online hate. To understand these key narratives at scale, ISD and CASM Technology undertook a large-scale topic modelling analysis, combining innovative AI tools with subject matter expertise to evidence changes in themes and sub-themes over time.

Using existing analysis as a basis for identifying channels which have previously received antisemitic comments, all comments on videos posted by relevant channels between 1 October and 24 December 2023 were collected. Comments were filtered using a conflict-related keyword list; a random sample of 200,000 comments potentially relevant to anti-Muslim hate and antisemitism was used for the topic model.

Semantically similar comments were grouped together and a random sample of posts in each group was reviewed by subject matter experts for relevance to a hateful sub-theme. Sub-themes were subsequently grouped into themes, evaluated for accuracy and improved where

October 2023   December 2023

- Conspiracy theories   ● Control based conspiracies
- Classical antisemitism ● Conflict related
- Far-right antisemitism

October 2023   December 2023

- Islam & violence ● Integration ● Cultural incompatibility
- Slurs ● Sexual abuse ● Pro-violence ● Conflict-related

Figures 10 and 11: Topic modelling outputs, showing the volumes of antisemitic and anti-Muslim content over time.

needed. This achieved over 80 percent precision and recall scores for detecting hate speech; relatively high compared with other available models. The resulting dataset was able to understand, at scale, changes in narratives of online antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate over the first three months of the Israel-Hamas war.

This innovative method, combined with nuanced and detailed understanding of the syntax and manifestations of online hate speech, allowed ISD to evidence the exact ideas driving online hate. For example, it showed the prevalence of antisemitic conspiracy theories compared to more 'grey area Israel-related antisemitism', although the latter has dominated counter-narrative discourse. Such research has already been used to inform law enforcement, government and civil society understandings of the key ideas driving online hate. It is intended to further be used as a robust basis for developing targeted and relevant counter-narrative campaigns.

Conclusion

Across multiple languages and geographies, this research has identified the key inflection points and narrative developments in online conversation about the Israel-Hamas conflict so far. The study highlights the dynamics that have been leveraged by hate and extremist actors, purveyors of disinformation, and conspiracy theorists in the UK, France and Germany.

In addition to the wave of heightened activity immediately following the October 7 attack, we also identified the first Iranian missile launches, the UK summer riots, the Lebanon pager attacks as key areas of tension in social media discourse. A topic modelling approach employed across the three languages confirmed the sustained relevance of the Israel-Hamas war over the year after the initial attacks, as well as an active overlap with hateful language towards both Jewish and Muslim communities.

This research has also sought to further develop transferable tools for large-scale analysis of online mis- and disinformation and hate about the Israel-Hamas conflict. ISD has sought to improve the reliability of detecting nuanced online hate at scale by training bespoke classifiers and refining automated methods on conflict-related datasets has sought.

The knowledge of key areas of interest among these actors should help to inform the building of platform crisis response mechanisms as the conflict continues. This should include anticipating surges in harmful online behaviour at high-volume crisis moments and increasing moderation capacity accordingly, as well as introducing additional user features to ensure the accessibility of verified and reliable information. Additionally, discovery of the sustained centrality of hateful language towards Jewish and Muslim communities should maintain pressure on social media platforms to improve their detection and decision-making processes around violative content.

The hybridised nature of online discourse about the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict encompasses known extremist actors, mainstream hateful language, hostile state actor information manipulation, and widespread mis- and disinformation. As the conflict deepens and expands, drawing in additional actors and regions, the complexity of the information environment demands the constant evolution of tools and resources to counter these information threats.

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