HOW EXTREME IS THE EUROPEAN FAR RIGHT?

INVESTIGATING OVERLAPS IN THE GERMAN FAR-RIGHT SCENE ON TWITTER

Reem Ahmed and Daniela Pisoiu

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ABBREVIATIONS

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
AN	Autonome Nationalisten (Autonomous Nationalists)
BfV	Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (the domestic intelligence service of the Federal Republic of Germany)
BNP	British National Party
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Union in Bavaria)
DDW	Der Dritte Weg (The Third Way)
EDL	English Defence League
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FN	Front National (National Front)
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party Austria)
GRECE	Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne (Research and Study Group for European Civilization)
IBD	Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland (Identitarian Movement Germany)
JA	Junge Alternative (Youth Alternative)
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
NetzDG	Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Rechtsdurchsetzung in sozialen Netzwerken (Network Enforcement Act)
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany)
Pegida	Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident)
REP	Die Republikaner (The Republicans)
RN	Rassemblement National (National Rally)
RT	Russia Today

SNA	Social Network Analysis
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (Social Democratic Party of Austria)
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Violent right-wing extremism is a growing threat to Western liberal democracies. At the same time, radical right-wing populist parties and figures across Europe are succeeding electorally by way of increased representation in national parliaments. These gains have been achieved against a backdrop of anti-refugee sentiment, austerity, and disillusionment with the European project, with populists on the left and right promising to deliver an alternative and using effective slogans and 'people' politics.

Ordinarily, we differentiate between the *extreme* right and *radical* right: the former posing a threat to the democratic system with their fascist links and overt racism; the latter respecting the democratic system whilst offering a 'sanitised' version of far-right politics – namely, adopting a 'new master frame' that emphasises culture rather than race. Recent analyses of the far right, however, have indicated social and discursive overlaps between the 'extreme' and 'radical' right-wing parties and groups. The findings reported herein challenge this traditional separation within the far-right spectrum, and potentially have deeper theoretical and methodological implications for how we study the far right. The Internet adds another dimension to this threat, as far-right discourse becomes more visible on social media and messaging applications, potentially attracting more people to the cause as well as mainstreaming and legitimising particular narratives prominent in the scene.

Existing literature has specifically examined the online sphere, and social media in particular, and these scholars have communicated interesting findings on how the social networks and discourses overlap, for example identifying the co-occurrences of certain hashtags or analysing retweets and transnational cooperation.

The aim of this report is to determine the overlaps apparent in the far-right scene on Twitter, and specifically, to ascertain the extent to which different groups on the scene are indeed talking about the

same issues in the same way, in spite of apparent differences in tone and underlying ideologies. We utilise a mixed-methods approach: first, gaining a cursory insight into the *extreme* right-wing scene on Twitter across Europe; and then applying a detailed frame analysis to three selected groups in Germany to determine the implicit and explicit overlaps between them, thus complementing the quantitative findings to offer an in-depth analysis of meaning.

KEY FINDINGS

THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY

- A total of 381,912 tweets were collected through the Twitter application programming interface (API) from 175 EU-wide accounts that were identified as right-wing *extremist* (specifically, accounts with overt neo-Nazi and white supremacist themes). The tweets were collected at the end of September 2016, and the sample includes tweets from 1 September 2015 to 30 September 2016.

- To examine potential overlaps, we examined the top hashtags, hashtag co-occurrences, and URLs. We also investigated account suspension.

- #whitegenocide was the most frequently used hashtag (5,300), followed by #afd (2561) and #merkel (1781). #islam and #isis were also used widely, as well as #eu – predominantly in negative terms. Moreover, #trump, #maga (Make America Great Again), and the US election in general were popular topics in the dataset.

- #whitegenocide not only co-occurred with other white identity-themed hashtags but was also used with more populist themes such as #trump, #ukip and #brexit.

- The hashtag counts and co-occurrences demonstrate tactics of trolling and hashtag pairing, as well as the fact that those within the sample supported radical right-wing populist parties, issues, and figures. There was also evidence pointing to transnational cooperation, especially with the US, highlighting the influence of the US-based far right in driving the narratives in Europe.

- The majority of URLs within the dataset linked to other Twitter pages and tweets. There was also a high number of out-links to YouTube and Facebook pages. Mainstream right-leaning and far-right news sites, such as *Mail Online, Die Welt, Daily Express,*

Breitbart, *Russia Today (RT),* and *Sputnik News* were also regularly linked to 'substantiate' evidence presented in tweets – mostly in connection with refugees and immigrants.

- Regarding suspensions, 37.7% of the accounts have either been suspended or no longer exist since the data was collected in September 2016. Also, the frequency of English-language account suspensions was more prevalent, suggesting a greater focus on the moderation of English-language content.

THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

- Here we carried out a more detailed examination of the overlaps that exist within the textual and visual discourses produced on Twitter by three far-right actors in Germany: the Autonome Nationalisten (Autonomous Nationalists – AN), the Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland (Identitarian Movement Germany – IBD), and the Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany – AfD). Commonly labelled as extremist, New Right and radical right-wing populist, respectively. The data covered the period 1 August to 30 October 2018 (394 tweets in total).

- Our findings demonstrate that the three discourses converge, as the groups essentially articulate the same problem (diagnostic frame), similar solutions (prognostic frame), and visuals, slogans, and captivating images to motivate potential supporters to action (motivational frame). In this sense, all three groups create an apparently logical and consistent (conspiratorial) story of how the left and global 'elite' are set to 'destroy' Germany through migration. The issues are framed in apocalyptic terms and they generally use stories and tropes rather than narratives or complex frames.

- To give the impression of *credibility*, these groups use (distorted) statistics, reference academics and news media internal to their scene, and constantly post stories relating to migrant crime in an attempt to create a sense that such crime is an ongoing, everyday occurrence. The latter tactic is particularly exploited by the AfD.

- To ensure the *salience* of their messages, these groups manipulate the migrant 'crisis' and connect this issue to other perceived social, political, and economic grievances, such as crime and the distribution of public funds. All three groups also promote nostalgic conceptualisations of 'traditional' family and gender roles, championing the role of housewives and encouraging high birth rates among German families – highlighting ideas and concepts linked to National Socialism. The AN and IBD commemorate the Second World War and the Battle of Vienna, respectively.

- The themes are virtually the same across the three groups, but in terms of design and marketing the AfD is clearly ahead. The IBD skilfully plays a middle role, by 'daring' to say more, yet phrasing most of their statements in a sarcastic and/or interrogatory manner, thus successfully skirting the line of illegality.

- The AfD and IBD have similar levels of influence on Twitter, with the AfD scoring slightly higher. Unsurprisingly, as a fringe group, the AN's influence on Twitter is more marginal. In terms of content, the IBD and AN appear to target a younger audience, whereas the AfD tries to appeal to a wider cross-section of society, in particular, disaffected centre-right voters.

The quantitative and qualitative samples revealed similar themes; however, explicit references to white supremacy and anti-Semitism were evident in the former, but not the latter. Both samples were similar in terms of their prognostic framing: specifically, claiming that Europeans faced an imminent threat from migration. The quantitative Twitter sample framed this through the concept of 'white genocide', whilst the AN, AfD, and IBD viewed this as the death of the German people, the demise of Germany, and a 'great replacement', respectively.

The 'culprits' were also the same: foreigners, refugees, mass migration, the left, Islam, Chancellor Merkel, and the 'elite', among others. The accounts within the quantitative sample went further than this, however, as there, Jewish people and non-whites were also to blame.

Contemporary analyses of the New Right and radical populist right place much emphasis on the replacement of *race* with *culture* and how this has made the discourse compatible with the mainstream. We do not contest this; however, the findings from both samples demonstrate that this misses an important piece of the puzzle, which is the aforementioned formulation of the 'problem' and the 'perpetrators' thereof, which are anything but new. The radical populist right and the New Right deliver these messages in a manner that is more palatable and credible, thus adding perceived legitimacy to the same myths and narratives utilised by the extreme right. This exploration additionally gives ample grounds for rethinking the very topic of an 'overlap' between the radical populist right, the New Right, and the extreme right.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- This report focuses on Twitter; however, the growth of the far right online suggests that there is much potential to explore alternative forms of social media, message boards, and image-based sites such as Gab, 4Chan, 8Chan, and Reddit. There is a wider ecology of far-right activity online, and Twitter is just one entry point towards other platforms and more underground content.

- Our cursory insight into account suspensions suggests that the extreme right have been relatively successful in evading takedowns on Twitter. Moreover, as English-language content had proportionally the highest suspension rate compared to other languages, it would be interesting to investigate this further.

INTRODUCTION

THE FAR RIGHT is not a homogeneous group; the scene is best understood as a spectrum or continuum which spans varying degrees of extremism and activism, ranging from racial supremacy to cultural exclusion. That being said, in Europe, anecdotal evidence suggests that from the more extreme neo-Nazis and white supremacists to the anti-immigration, anti-Islam populists, and the New Right, there are many overlaps at various levels: people, institutions, and discourse. Many terrorist groups display either membership overlaps or some other types of connections to the far-right scene. For example, some members of the Bamberg Group in Germany, who have allegedly planned attacks against refugee centres and politicians, were also members of the 'Die Rechte' (The Right) party (Bundesministerium des Innern 2016: 48). Another overlap can be detected in the context of the 'extremism of the middle' debate. As with other forms of extremism, violent actors on the right-wing scene do not necessarily come from deprived or marginalised parts of society – as some might assume that neo-Nazis do – and many of the leaders tend to be well educated. Those who carry out violent acts are often convinced that they are doing so on behalf of the people. Finally, in terms of discourse, there is an apparent overlap between the ideas propagated by organisations deemed 'terrorist' and groups or movements deemed 'extremist' or 'populist'. For example, they both exploit the topic of migration and demonise foreigners and asylum seekers in particular.

Whilst the populist radical right-wing parties have successfully worked on their image and message to distance themselves – at least officially – from any form of neo-Nazism or fascism, every now and then a party member stirs controversy. In 2017, for example, Björn Höcke, head of the Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany – AfD) in Thuringia, argued that Germany should stop atoning for Nazi crimes and labelled the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a 'monument of shame' (Oltermann 2017). Those within the AfD were faced with the dilemma of whether to condemn Höcke publicly or downplay his comments and accuse the left of over-reacting. For the most part, such parties have managed to maintain an air of legitimacy. Distancing themselves from anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism, some radical right-wing populist parties even claim to be protecting a 'Judeo-Christian' alliance which

is under threat from Muslim immigrants (Polakow-Suransky 2016). Radical right-wing populists, moreover, have attempted to draw the dividing lines in terms of culture rather than race, claiming that Western culture is under threat from the increasing so-called 'Islamisation' that is happening all over Europe (Pisoiu and Ahmed 2016).

This evolution needs to be looked at in more detail. What does it mean? Is this a completely different way of thinking, or is it still the same racist logic, carefully repackaged? What is also telling is that the radical right-wing populist parties have managed to overshadow more extreme parties such as the British National Party (BNP) and the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany – NPD). The BNP is largely defunct in the UK, with the UK Independence Party (UKIP) most likely to have subsumed its former voters. That said, UKIP's recent shift further towards the far right became even more pronounced under the leadership of Gerard Batten – UKIP's leader from April 2018 until July 2019 – and since then has arguably moved beyond the realm of 'radical' to 'extreme'. Batten is well known for his Islamophobic comments[1] and he appointed the founder and former leader of the English Defence League (EDL), Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson), as an advisor. Three other social media activists linked to the 'alt lite'[2] – Paul Joseph Watson, Mark Meechan, and Carl Benjamin – were also welcomed into membership of UKIP in 2018 (HOPE not hate 2019: 56–7). In the German context, in January 2017 the German Federal Constitutional Court rejected appeals filed by the Federal Assembly for the NPD to be

1   See for example: www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/feb/18/ukip-gerard-batten-islam-muslims-quran.
2   According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), 'alt-lite' is a term "created by the alt right [see note 3] to differentiate itself from right-wing activists who refused to publicly embrace white supremacist ideology ... sometimes referred to as the New Right, [the alt-lite] is [a] loosely connected movement whose adherents generally shun white supremacist thinking, but who are in step with the alt right in their hatred of feminists and immigrants, among others. Many within the alt lite sphere are virulently anti-Muslim; the group abhors everyone on 'the left' and traffics in conspiracy theories". For more information, see: www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/from-alt-right-to-alt-lite-naming-the-hate.

banned, arguing that whilst the party does disrespect the democratic order it does not pose a significant threat to democracy, as it is unlikely that the NPD will ever succeed in achieving its aim beyond the parliamentary level (Bundesverfassungsgericht 2017, 2 BvB 1/13, § 844, 845, 910). Implicit in this decision is the fact that the NPD has lost a lot of support in recent years – largely to the AfD (*The Guardian* 2017).

The burgeoning terrorism literature has, in recent years, also included the role of the Internet and its impact on communications, propaganda and individual radicalisation processes (see, for example, Alarid 2016; Gill et al. 2015; Morris 2016; Torok 2013; von Behr et al. 2013). The extreme right has grown online, and there is potential for extensive research. Since 2010 in particular we have seen an increase in the presence and activity of far-right groups on Twitter and Facebook, as opposed to 'mere' websites and password-protected forums. The extreme right and alt-right[3] are also embracing alternative forms of social media, message boards, and image-based sites such as Gab,[4] 4Chan, 8Chan, and Reddit. In a study by Berger (2016:3) comparing white nationalists and the Islamic State (IS) on Twitter, it found that since 2012 the followers of US-based white nationalists had grown by more than 600%. In the VOX-Pol *Year in Review* for 2018, Conway (2019: 11) observes that "the European extreme right

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3   The term 'alt-right' was coined by white supremacist Richard Spencer in 2008. The Southern Policy Law Centre (SPLC) defines the alt-right as: "a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness' and 'social justice' to undermine white people and 'their' civilization. Characterized by heavy use of social media and online memes, Alt-Righters eschew 'establishment' conservatism, skew young, and embrace white ethno-nationalism as a fundamental value". Available at: www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alternative-right.

4   The social networking site was founded by Andrew Torba in 2016 as a 'free speech' alternative to Twitter and Facebook. Gab came under strong criticism after the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting on 27 October 2018 and was taken offline as it was dropped by its former web host, GoDaddy. At the time of writing, Gab found a new host and went back online. It has been described as a "haven for white nationalists, neo-Nazis and other extremists". For more information see: www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/us/gab-robert-bowers-pittsburgh-synagogue-shootings.html; www.bbc.com/news/technology-46097048.

online scene is diverse and fast changing, but was very much strong and growing in 2018". However, it is difficult to measure the volume and frequency of content accurately, as different groups overlap and it is often quite difficult to differentiate between the more extreme neo-Nazi/white supremacist material and anti-Islam/anti-immigration content (ibid.: 11–12). It is thus challenging to measure the online activity of the far right, as the extreme right is far from homogeneous and there are different levels of (extremist) discourse. What we do know, however, is that the Internet has played a particularly important role in the far right's efforts to mobilise younger people. Social media offers a range of options for optimising propaganda: individuals can interact directly with the speakers (through comments, messages, etc.); audio-visuals can be used more effectively; and dissemination increases exponentially. In the 15 March 2019 attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, for example, the perpetrator posted his so-called 'manifesto' on his social media account and livestreamed the attack, whilst Facebook and YouTube struggled to take down the video before it was shared and viewed numerous times. Furthermore, social media is used by far-right groups and individuals to disseminate memes and (sub-)cultural references that resonate with younger audiences in a bid to move away from the stereotypical 'older' neo-Nazi image (Forchtner and Kølvraa 2017; Simpson 2016).

As will be detailed below, there has been some research into the discursive overlaps across the far-right scene, and the idea of capturing interlinkages within the far-right scene is not new. This report, however, seeks to enrich and add to this literature by utilising a mixed-methods approach: first, by gaining a cursory insight into the extreme right-wing scene on Twitter across Europe; and then by applying a detailed frame analysis to three selected groups in Germany to determine the implicit and explicit overlaps between them. Recent elections in Europe have seen the rise of extreme-right parties and a general shift to the right in various governments as extreme and radical populist right-wing parties have increasingly gained a foothold through coalitions with conservative parties. Against a backdrop of anti-refugee sentiment, austerity, and disillusionment with the European project, people are turning towards populists on the left and right who promise to ease their troubles with

effective slogans and 'people' politics. Poland and Hungary, for example, are attempting to lead the way in central Europe with strong right-wing governments. Following indecisive elections, Italy was being held together by an anti-establishment far-right coalition, and in Austria the populist right-wing Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party Austria – FPÖ) was propping up the centre-left Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (Social Democratic Party of Austria – SPÖ) as a junior partner until 30 May 2019. The far right in Finland, Denmark and France came very close to seizing power in recent elections, and a number of radical right-wing populist parties form the main opposition in many European countries.

Germany is an exception in central Europe, as the ruling government has thus far resisted such influences owing to the 'grand coalition' format with the centre-right Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany – CDU)/Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Union in Bavaria – CSU)[5] and centre-left Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany – SPD) parties sharing power. Moreover the better-known extreme right-wing party, the NPD, has fallen into disarray while the radical right-wing populist AfD has managed some electoral success, although not to the point of aspiring to join the governing coalition, despite various outcries capitalising on pseudo-terrorist incidents involving refugees. It would appear that Germany is the wrong place in which to explore the reasons for this shift to the right, since Germany seems to be resisting it somewhat. At the same time, a series of other developments in the non-party political spectrum warrants a closer examination of this case, one that can also shed light on the broader dynamics in the European far-right arena. Here we discover a lively far-right scene with numerous groups and activities that have grown in number and impact; in particular, the Autonome Nationalisten (Autonomous Nationalists – AN) and the Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland (Identitarian Movement Germany – IBD). The former

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5 The CSU is the sister party of the CDU and is based in the German state of Bavaria. The CSU exists only in Bavaria, whilst the CDU exists in all remaining 15 federal states and does not operate in Bavaria.

emerged through an attempt to modernise the extreme right, primarily by using left-wing symbols and repertoires of action. After some initial sensationalist appearances, their fate seemed sealed, not least owing to some prominent defections to the left. However, a revival is taking place thanks to the opportune cross-pollination of an increasing use of social media and the refugee crisis. The Identitarian Movement – a manifestation of the New Right wave, is equally profiting from this conjuncture and is making itself known through various more or less grotesque protest actions at home and abroad.[6]

These trends are significant as there has been a documented rise in right-wing violence in both Europe and the United States in recent years (Jones 2018). Whilst there are a variety of reasons for a rise in right-wing violence, there is growing concern amongst academics that far-right ideology and discourse are increasingly seeping into the mainstream (see, for example, Miller-Idriss 2017, Marcks 2016). Such overlaps in the scene, and the discourses that inspire those within, should therefore not be overlooked. This is important in itself, as the radical populist right and those (loosely) affiliated with the New Right usually deny vehemently any associations with the extreme right and white supremacist violence. One of the most noticeable features of radical right-wing populism is its discourse. More than political 'actions' or other forms of political activity, it is issues and slogans that capture people's attention and, arguably, these have a greater influence on their popularity and electoral impact. They 'dare to say what everybody thinks' and are not afraid of 'giving' the political elite 'the low-down' – a tactic that resonates widely. As Koehler notes: "Bold and rhetorically violent anti-immigration and Euro-skeptic platforms of right-wing parties arguably might also increase support for more violent actions by small clandestine groups." (2016: 85).

6   For example, the Identitarian Movement led the 'Defend Europe' campaign in summer 2017. The aim was to obstruct NGOs and organisations helping migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, see: www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/HnH-Defend-Europe-Briefing.pdf.

While it is currently difficult to estimate the effect of these non-parliamentarian movements on daily politics and a possible right-wing shift, looking comparatively at different actors and their discourses across the far-right spectrum is not. In the quantitative study, we selected accounts that overtly referenced white supremacist and neo-Nazi themes. For the qualitative sample, we selected three key groups that represent the contemporary far-right spectrum in Germany: a right-wing extremist group that shuns democracy and adopts left-wing tactics to appeal to younger audiences – the AN; a group that denies having neo-Nazi features and grounds its intellectual foundations in the New Right movement – the IBD; and a radical right-wing populist party – the AfD. These types of groups – or individual actors – are present in various combinations in most European countries, and the more contemporary far-right movements and parties tend to make a considerable effort to claim that they are not neo-Nazis. Determining whether or not they are in fact neo-Nazi is not the task of an academic inquiry; it would, however, constitute an interesting insight if these groups were similar in their discourse – that is, if they talked about the same things in the same way. This report first examines the contemporary far right and its current manifestations, followed by an overview of the AN, AfD, and IBD – locating them in the wider context of the contemporary far-right movement. We then outline the state of research on the far right online and the methodology of frame analysis, with a particular focus on the concept of new master frames. The second part of the report presents the findings of the quantitative and qualitative Twitter analyses, respectively.

THE CONTEMPORARY FAR RIGHT AND ITS CURRENT MANIFESTATIONS

THE FAR-RIGHT SCENE is highly complex, and definitions and classifications continue to be disputed. The term 'far-right' is quite broad and has been applied to both extreme right movements, such as white supremacists and neo-Nazis, as well as mainstream conservatives (see Anti-Defamation League 2018). Somewhere in the middle, however, there lies a contingent of post-war movements and parties which argue that they are neither neo-Nazi nor mainstream conservative. Most of these groups and parties even deny the fact that they are 'right-wing', rejecting the right-left dichotomy altogether (Mudde 2017: 3–4). For the purpose of this report, in examining the contemporary far right we have split the scene into three distinct, but overlapping, categories: the extreme right; the populist radical right;[7] and the New Right. As Fielitz and Laloire (2016: 14) point out, however, "the clear-cut boundaries between parties, movements and subcultural actors are increasingly becoming obsolete". Nonetheless, there are certain features that distinguish these groups – at least cosmetically – and they are worth looking at.

To add some nuance to the concept of right-wing extremism, Carter (2005: 17–18) argues that there are two features that define the extreme right. First, the *extremist* element, which rejects "the fundamental values, procedures and institutions of the democratic constitutional state", followed by the *right-wing* element, which rejects "the principle of fundamental human equality". In 2000, Griffin argued that whilst there was an abundance of extreme right-wing 'groupuscules' and organisations, they were unlikely to pose a challenge to democracy because they had an 'absent centre' and lacked a coherent discourse or movement (Griffin 2000: 172). Nearly two decades on, the Internet has arguably altered this dynamic by connecting these 'groupuscules' and facilitating the spread of different ideologies (Allen 2019). As part of that process, the extreme right has been transformed from street-based 'hooliganism' (its previous stereotypical image) into a thriving Internet

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7   'Populist radical right' and 'right-wing populist/ism' are used interchangeably in this report.

community in which far-right and alt-right 'influencers' spread their ideas and ideology, and racist and white nationalist memes circulate virally on 4chan and 8chan (ibid.).

Whilst Griffin posited that extreme right groups were not to be feared, he did warn that "another type of radical right has crept up on European society" (Griffin 2000: 173). He was referring to the populist radical right, and stressed that such groups posed a particular threat as they had the potential to 'contaminate' the liberal order from within, unlike the extreme right, which openly rejected the democratic state. In the introduction to *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*, Mudde (2017: 4) explains: "The populist radical right shares a core ideology that combines (at least) three features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism". Whilst parties and movements may display additional features such as anti-Semitism, these three features are the ideological glue that binds the populist radical right together. Nativism relates to the idea of preserving the homogeneity of a society by rejecting individuals who have a different religion, race, and/or ethnicity from the 'native population' and thus may threaten the social and cultural fabric of such societies. Mudde (2007: 19) argues that 'nativism' is a suitable concept to apply to the radical right for three reasons. First, in contrast to the rather broad 'nationalism', the term 'nativism' eliminates the possibility of including liberal forms of nationalism. Secondly, the term incorporates both racist and non-racist reasoning, as the 'other' can be excluded on the basis of culture or religion, rather than race. Finally, nativism incorporates other elements besides single-issue terms such as 'anti-immigrant' or 'xenophobic', and can thus be applied across the board to different radical right-wing parties and movements in Europe and beyond, including those who emphasise different aspects of nativism and target various 'outgroups'. Mudde emphasises that in order to construct the native identity, boundaries must be drawn to elucidate who is part of the ingroup and outgroup; the concepts of the 'other' and 'ingroup/outgroup' are thus socially constructed by the populist radical right. Whilst the target groups are often existing ones, such as Muslims or Roma, their characteristics are portrayed through stereotypical constructs (ibid.: 63–5). Authoritarianism in this context

relates to a belief that strong forms of law and order are necessary in order to protect society. This would mean harsher punishments for criminals and a greater emphasis on discipline in the home and at school. The final feature, populism, pits the 'pure people' against the 'corrupt elite', where these types of parties, in particular, claim to be the true voice of the people (Mudde 2017: 4).

As noted above, the populist radical right – unlike the extreme right – tends to form parties and participate in the democratic system in order to exert its power. Mudde notes that this has changed in recent years, however, as the refugee crisis has emboldened a surge in extreme right and radical right street politics, despite the fact that street-based politics tended to be associated more with the former (ibid.: 5). This is where we enter the so-called grey zone, in which parties and movements do not self-identify as right-wing extremists but their views, policies, and actions overlap considerably with a number of extremist positions (Salzborn 2016: 45). Specifically, as we shall see below, typically populist issues are taken up by the 'extreme right', which also supports political parties. Conversely, the populists every now and then show clear overlaps with the neo-Nazi movements, in terms of both membership and discourse.

The most 'sophisticated' manifestation of the contemporary far right is arguably the European New Right,[8] whose roots can be traced back to the French *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right), a school of political thought that developed in France in the late 1960s (Griffin 2000: 170). This 'sophistication' is largely reflected in calls to modernise the scene through producing high quality, intellectual content that would resonate with the rest of society (ibid.: 170). Whilst Griffin accepts that the New Right is not a homogeneous movement, a number of themes do recur, and have inspired contemporary far-right groups. Primarily,

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8   Hereafter, 'New Right'. In this report, the 'New Right' encompasses all aspects of the New Right movement across Europe, including the French *Nouvelle Droite* and the German *Neue Rechte*.

the idea of 'right-wing Gramscianism'[9] underpins much of the New Right's strategies to emphasise both the importance of 'cultural hegemony' and the need, first, to shape public debate through cultural institutions and the media, rather than through political hegemony. The New Right also looked towards intellectuals associated with the 'Conservative Revolution' during the Weimar era, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt, and Martin Heidegger (ibid.: 170). The emergence of the New Right was in response to what was seen as the failure of 'traditional' right-wing extremists to mediatise themselves successfully or to justify their positions with references to theory or intellectual thought. For them to achieve cultural hegemony, therefore, their ideas needed to be accepted by the mainstream (Salzborn 2016: 38–9). In particular, the New Right looked increasingly towards *culture* – specifically, European culture as a unique homeland with 'pre-Christian mythic roots', which needed to be defended against migrants and the growing threat of multiculturalism. This also relates to the anti-globalisation stance of the New Right, which criticises the decadence of modern society (Griffin 2000: 171). The rebranding has mainly involved the replacement of the term 'race' by 'culture' and the co-option and rephrasing of leftist ideas (Steiger 2013). Interestingly, results from recent elections have also demonstrated how some of the 'working class', who traditionally voted for the left, have migrated to right-wing extremist and populist parties.

One of the leading intellectuals of the New Right movement, Alain de Benoist, was largely responsible for spreading the message across Europe through publications and the Nouvelle Droite's flagship 'think-tank', the Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne (Research and Study Group for European Civilization – GRECE). As Bar-On (2012: 335) notes: "De Benoist has also been responsible for restoring an aura of credibility to the extreme

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9   In reference to the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci and his idea of 'cultural hegemony'. Gramsci reasoned that the key to gaining power was to win over the hearts and minds of both ordinary people and elites through the creation of cultural institutions. He felt that ideas were more likely to resonate with the masses if the narratives wielded through cultural, rather than political institutions were controlled (see Bar-On 2011: 204).

right-wing milieu and turning French ultra-nationalists into avid pan-Europeanists and radical ethnopluralists". This is another feature of the New Right, which looks beyond the traditional idea of nationalism, constricted by borders, towards a more 'Europeanised' coalition of forces (Bar-On 2012; Griffin 2000). This links to the idea of ethno-nationalism, which is sustained by myths surrounding shared European history and cultural homogeneity (Elgenius and Rydgren 2018: 2).

The emergence of the New Right in Germany can be situated in the period following the failure of the NPD to reach the 5% threshold required for parliamentary representation in the West German federal elections of 1969. Consequently, the far right broke up into two main factions: one was born out of disillusionment with participating in the democratic system in the first place, and consisted of extra-parliamentary, extremist and terrorist organisations; the other acknowledged the failures of the NPD's intellectual shortcomings, seeing promise in the ideas of right-wing Gramscianism and the notion that success could only be achieved through cultural hegemony. Whether they resorted to street politics or engaged in purely intellectual endeavours, the contemporary far right in Germany discovered that they had to detach themselves from the 'old' National Socialist elements of the far right (Woods 2007: 10). They utilised the tactic of political mimicry, adopting their opponents' discourse and strategies and modifying them to suit their own goals and messages (Salzborn 2016: 39).

Analysts of the contemporary far right ordinarily illustrate this point using the following citation, here taken from Jentsch (2009):

> The following is a legendary quote from Thora Ruth in 1973, which has served as a basis for the modernisation efforts of right-wing extremism in recent decades: "We must construct our statements in such a way that they no longer fit the cliché of 'die-hards'. This is similar to how an advertising agency aligns its message to appeal to popular taste rather than its own taste. (...) Take for example the foreign worker issue and the statement 'They should go home': this is often met with a sneer. However, it would be hard for the Left to disagree if one claimed: 'It should be forbidden for big business to move people across Europe for the sake of profit. People should

not be brought to work; the work should be brought to the people.'
The meaning remains the same: 'Foreign workers out!' The listen-
ers' reaction, however, will be fundamentally different."[10]

In addition to mimicking the discourse of the New Left, the New Right
in Germany adopted its tactics, setting up loose circles and groups
and publishing magazines all promoting common goals and themes
of the New Right ideology. This created a 'New Right umbrella', which
meant that the ideas would keep flowing through the loose network of
individuals and groups, and various publications such as *Junge Freiheit*
(Young Freedom), *Criticón* (Hypercritical), and *Mut* (Courage) (Salzborn
2016:39, 43). Whilst it was the parliamentary failure of the NPD in 1969
that triggered this shift, the widely regarded 'father' of the New Right
in Germany, Armin Mohler, played a pivotal role in disseminating the
ideas of de Benoist and the Nouvelle Droite to a German audience
(Woods 2007: 19, 25–7). As a movement, the New Right has largely been
regarded as a loose coalition of intellectuals who aspire to 'provide'
ideas, rather than engage directly in party politics. That said, in the
German context, Die Republikaner[11] (The Republicans – REP) were
endorsed by various New Right journals as a potential party-political
wing of the New Right (ibid.: 14). In addition to this, there were often
direct links and collaboration between individuals within the REP
and New Right circles. For example, Mohler was an adviser to Franz
Schönhuber when the latter was leader of the REP, and the former
deputy leader of the REP, Johanna Grund, has contributed to New
Right publications such as *Junge Freiheit* (ibid.: 19).

   Within the aim of gaining cultural hegemony, the New Right has
continually tried to influence the mainstream debate and has articulated
its messages within the boundaries of what is considered acceptable.
The New Right did achieve successes in West Germany in the 1980s,
when some of the themes discussed in *Junge Freiheit* appeared in
mainstream conservative newspapers such as *Die Welt* and *Frankfurter*

10   Translated from German by the authors.
11   Die Republikaner was founded as a 'right-wing breakaway' party in 1983 by
     former CSU members Franz Handlos and Ekkehard Voigt (see Mudde 2000: 31).

Allgemeine Zeitung (Woods 2007: 30). These themes revolved around the idea that Germany was being infiltrated by millions of foreigners and their families, and that this could lead to disintegration of the German language, culture, and people ('Volk') (Gessenharter 2017: 6). In 1983, the CDU Minister of the Interior, Friedrich Zimmerman, claimed that the growing number of foreigners – especially from Turkey – heightened the risk of conflict amongst the German people (Woods 2007: 30). The REP also played a role by contributing to reforms such as the 'Asylkompromiss' ('asylum compromise') in 1992/93. The law limited the right to asylum and ensured that refugees would be categorised on the basis of 'urgency' (Marcks 2016: 69; Mudde 2000: 46–7; Poutrus 2014: 121). This early success in influencing asylum policy arguably paved the way for the strong anti-immigration discourse that dominates the contemporary far right. Whilst the New Right discourse began to seep into the mainstream, the nativist nature of such themes did not go unnoticed, and this opened up a debate on where to situate the New Right: were they in the far-right strand of conservatism, or were they right-wing extremists? Or did they form a 'bridge' between mainstream conservatism and the extreme right? (For an overview of these debates, see: Gessenharter and Fröchling 1998; Gessenharter and Pfeiffer 2004; Minkenberg 1992; Salzborn 2016: 44–5;Woods 2007: 30).

The influence of the New Right began to diminish in Germany around the 1990s and 2000s; in recent years, however, there has been something of a resurgence of New Right ideas and tactics across Europe (Salzborn 2016: 45–6). As has been seen with the emergence of the alt-right across the Atlantic, the European right-wing scene – as a whole – is undergoing a transformation, with the movement's different groups attracting young, educated, middle-class individuals (ibid.: 37). That said, the alt-right sets itself apart from the European New Right and the radical populist right by being primarily a white nationalist movement that more overtly espouses biological racism and anti-Semitism (see Zúquete 2018: 312–15). The Internet has had a considerable impact on the contemporary far right's ability to disseminate its ideas more widely in the quest for cultural hegemony (Griffin 2000: 171; Woods 2007: 1). Its messages online are more complex and intellectual, and resort to scientific and pseudoscientific evidence or

authoritative statements to substantiate their claims. In the context of Germany, three examples serve as a useful basis for the analysis of the contemporary far right on social media: the AN, AfD, and IBD. The three groups represent the extreme right, the radical populist right, and a manifestation of the New Right, respectively. The common thread that links them – apart from their far-right ideologies – is their relative success in rebranding the far right in their respective representations. Thus, whilst the IBD is more closely linked to the New Right in terms of intellectual foundations, all three groups use the Internet to re-frame and modernise the right-wing discourse – in a manner comparable to that in which the New Right of the 1970s used magazines and journals to achieve cultural hegemony.
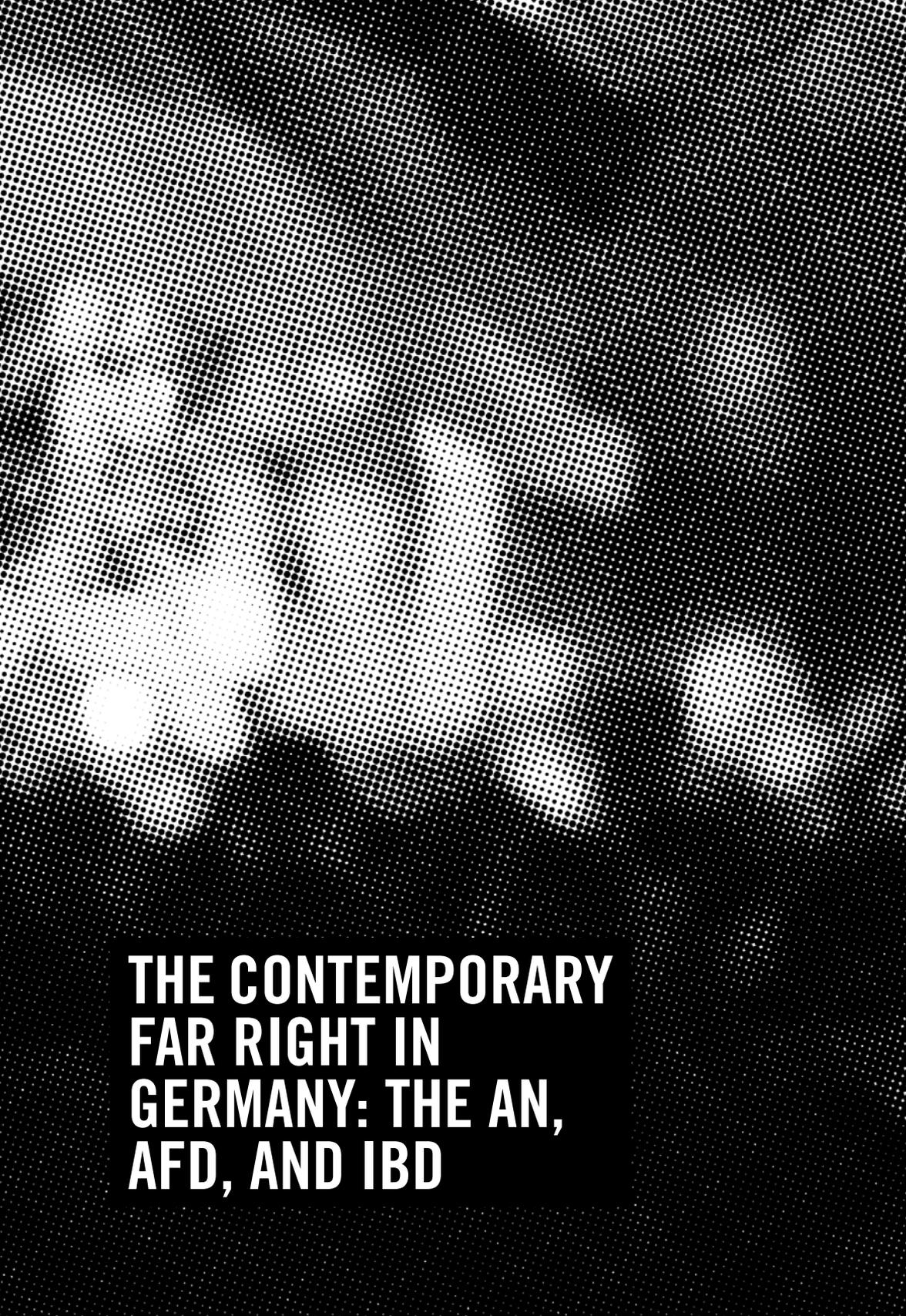
THE CONTEMPORARY FAR RIGHT IN GERMANY: THE AN, AFD, AND IBD

IN GERMANY, THE emergence of the AN is largely attributed to the breakdown of the more 'traditional' extreme-right parties and organisations. Amid a surge of racist violence in the 1990s, many right-wing extremist parties were banned and replaced by local, loose-knit groups known as the Freie Kameradschaften (free fellowships) and Freie Nationalisten (free nationalists). When the Kameradschaften allied with the NPD in the early 2000s, the AN was formed in protest (Schedler 2014: 242–3). While these groups did not necessarily disagree about their basic ideological ideas, the AN argued that the historical heritage of and resemblance to the National Socialist era was detrimental, especially when it came to acquiring new recruits.

From their name to their demonstration style and anti-capitalist beliefs, the AN adopt many of the traits of the far left. In name, the AN reference the leftist Autonomous Movement, and in demonstration style they use tactics such as the 'black bloc'[12] (see, for example: Pisoiu and Lang 2014; Schedler 2014; Schlembach 2013). The aim here is to appeal to younger people through a collective identity in style and cultural references. This is highlighted in an interview Schedler had with a former AN member, who said: "'You were seen as not so dangerous by younger people who joined the movement because you did not match the image of a typical neo-Nazi'" (Schedler 2014: 250). Miller-Idriss (2017: 51–2) also argues that, by diverging from the skinhead aesthetic, the AN "set a new precedent that opened the door to a broader adoption of a variety of mainstream styles". This is significant as it rendered the movement more accessible to younger audiences. The AN's initial resistance to the NPD is significant for understanding the early ideology of the AN: namely, that they were against the parliamentary system and believed that revolution would only come about through demonstrations on the streets (Schedler 2014: 244). Recently this has changed somewhat as the AN are now promoting the NPD and other parties online, and in 2017 encouraged their supporters to vote for the NPD in the German federal elections.

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12 The 'black bloc' strategy is "a social movement tactic directly lifted from leftist activists in which groups of identically dressed, disguised protesters move as a 'block' against counterprotesters or police" (Miller-Idriss 2017: 51).

The AfD is a prime example of a populist radical-right party in Germany, as it proposes a nativist agenda that emphasises culture rather than race, and champions an 'alternative' to the mainstream establishment parties. The party has developed and changed direction, however, since it was established in 2013. In September 2012 a group of economists, conservative journalists, entrepreneurs, and managers formed a group called the 'Wahlalternative 2013' (an alternative choice for Germany's 2013 federal elections). The Wahlalternative's main platform was the reintroduction of national currencies – a direct reaction to the bailouts during the Eurozone crisis. Following a joint attempt with the 'Federation of Independent Voters' during the state elections in Lower Saxony in January 2013, which was unsuccessful, in February the AfD was founded as a political party. Konrad Adam, Bernd Lucke, and Frauke Petry were elected as its leaders. Despite falling 0.3% short of the required 5% threshold during the 2013 federal elections, the AfD garnered a good deal of support and attention for this relative electoral success, despite being such a new party. Its previous focus had been predominantly on monetary and fiscal policies, but now the AfD wanted to extend its reach to a broader range of potential voters. This was the beginning of much internal conflict within the party (Arzheimer 2015: 540–1). It found itself caught between the market-liberal Eurosceptics, led by Lucke, and the nationalist anti-immigration wing led by Petry and her ally Alexander Gauland. This ultimately culminated in a split, with Petry taking over the lead in July 2015 (Lochocki 2016: 44). The AfD has since taken an increasingly nativist turn, retaining its Eurosceptic roots and anti-establishment populism. In the 2017 federal elections it was the third largest party, with 12.6% of the vote. The AfD's position in German politics and its representation in the German parliament have brought the party's issues closer to the mainstream debate.

The IBD is the German 'chapter' of the wider Identitarian Movement, which locates its intellectual and theoretical founda-tions within the New Right (Zúquete 2018: 11–12). The Identitarian Movement in general started in France in 2002 with Le Bloc Identitaire, Le Mouvement Social Européen (the Identity Block, the European Social Movement), which followed on directly from the now-banned

organisation, Unité Radicale (Radical Unity).[13] In 2012 a Facebook group called Identitäre Bewegung Deutschlands was established, followed at around the same time by one in Austria (Steiger 2013: 28). The IBD was initially led by Nils Altmieks, a civil engineer, and although it is officially separate from its Austrian counterpart, the two groups are closely connected and have worked together on producing and disseminating German-language content online through social media, blogs, podcasts, and vlogs, with the leader of the Austrian Identitarian Movement, Martin Sellner, becoming a YouTube personality (Zúquete 2018: 74–5, 79). The movement is most prominent in Austria, Germany, Italy, and France; however, its influence is spreading across Europe with different 'chapters' opening in the UK and Ireland (HOPE Not Hate 2018).

Defending (European) identity is at the very core of the Identitarian movement. This concept can be traced back to the New Right with de Benoist and Charles Champetier's *Manifeste pour une renaissance européenne* (Manifesto for a European Renaissance), in which the authors are highly critical of what they see as the West's 'neoliberal imperialism' and its ambition to homogenise the world according to the Western worldview. As a consequence, identities are at risk of being erased (Zúquete 2018: 10–11). Here it is important to note that de Benoist is highly critical of the concept of 'biological identities' and does not necessarily view some identities as being superior to others – rather, he believes that each identity group should stay within its own borders to ensure cultural 'purity' (ibid.: 10–11). Guillaume Faye, on the other hand, had differing views regarding identity. Faye, who used to be an intellectual in the New Right movement, championed the idea of 'ethnocentrism', which has now become a central theme amongst the Identitarians (ibid.: 13). His book *Pourquoi nous combattons: manifeste de la résistance européenne* (Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance) was translated into English in 2011 and published by Arktos, a Budapest-based British publishing house that has translated and

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13 Unité Radicale was disbanded by the French government after one of its affiliates, Maxime Brunerie, attempted to assassinate President Jacques Chirac as he was driven down the Champs-Élysées on Bastille Day in 2002.

promoted New Right publications over the last decade (ibid.: 98–9). Faye (2011: 134) defines 'ethnocentrism' as: "the mobilising conviction, distinct to all long-living peoples, that they belong to something superior and that they must conserve their ethnic identity, if they are to endure in history". According to Faye, "**identity's basis is biological; without it the realms of culture and civilisation are unsustainable**" (ibid.: 171, emphasis in original). Faye thus takes the idea of defending identity further, by referring explicitly to biological and cultural identity. De Benoist, in particular, has distanced himself from such rhetoric, emphasising that Faye left the New Right decades ago. Furthermore, whilst Faye is also a controversial figure amongst the Identitarians, and emphasis on ethnicity varies throughout the movement, he developed terminology and concepts that constitute a fundamental part of Identitarian language and discourse on defending Europe (Zúquete 2018: 12–15). In this context, Zúquete argues that the views of the New Right are present within the Identitarian 'defence' narrative and that they "pick and choose á la carte what serves them the best in the ND [New Right] cultural production in order to carry on their combat for Europe" (ibid.: 11). As mentioned above, this 'cherry-picking' approach to ideology is quite common within the contemporary far right (Allen 2019).

Defence of the European identity is driven by the conspiratorial narrative of a perceived imminent 'Great Replacement'. Renaud Camus, a French writer, posited the idea that Europe's cultural and ethnic make-up was at risk of being 'replaced' by non-Europeans in his 2011 book, *Le Grand Remplacement* (The Great Replacement). He argues that this 'replacement' is taking place not only as a result of demographic trends, but also because non-Europeans are committing violent acts against the indigenous population, who are the victims of a 'conquest' (Zúquete 2018: 147). Thus, according to Camus, there is a struggle between 'replacists' (the pro-immigration, neo-liberal elite) and 'anti-replacists' who are prepared to go to great lengths to defend Europe (ibid.: 148). In the German-speaking Identitarian context, the 'Great Replacement' is referred to as 'Der Große Austausch' and presented as the reality of modern life. The concept is rejected as a 'theory': rather, it is seen "as a reality caused by processes set in motion by misguided elites" (ibid.: 153).

In addition to its ideological foundations, aesthetics are a crucial part of Identitarian activism (ibid.: 50). Identitarians illustrate their ideas using visual material from pop culture, including such well-known Hollywood characters as the indigenous population in *Avatar* and its fight for survival against an exploitative race. At the same time, Identitarians are particularly careful in this regard. They reject references to National Socialist textual and visual material, for example where it glorifies the Wehrmacht (Bruns, Glösel and Strobl 2015: 31–3). Disseminating imagery is part of their wider metapolitical plan to appeal to younger audiences, and "[t]hey attempt to create a 'New Cool' that, however, is not based on self-gratification and consumerism but rather expresses the ethics and values that mirror an Identitarian worldview" (Zúquete 2018: 52).

To influence the public debate, the Identitarians have often used strategies designed to prompt the authorities to overreact to their activities (*The Economist* 2018). In March 2018, for example, Martin Sellner was denied entry to the UK when he wanted to make a speech at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park and attend a conference organised by the Identitarian Movement's UK and Ireland chapter, 'Generation Identity' (Townsend 2018). In response, Sellner declared he was living in 'a new totalitarianism' and warned that Europeans "are being replaced, conquered by radical Islam, and ... are not allowed to talk about it!" This reinforced the idea of 'the people' being silenced by the 'politically correct' and 'corrupt elite'. The story gained a lot of traction amongst the Identitarian, populist radical right and alt-right online networks, and was extensively reported on in the mainstream media, bringing the debate on free speech and hate speech to the fore (*The Economist* 2018). The official Facebook and Instagram pages of the Identitarian Movement were also systematically taken down in June 2018. Whilst this was not widely reported on in the mainstream media, the Identitarians reacted strongly on their various chapter websites, declaring that they would move to Gab and Twitter and that the ban was a politically motivated attempt to silence the group. They went on to claim that they always remained within the limits of Facebook's Community Standards, and that they 'simply' wanted "to raise awareness ... [of the fact] that mass immigration and the multicultural

experiment have been unmitigated disasters" (Generation Identity 2018). The Facebook ban carries some significance as the Identitarians rely heavily on different social media platforms to get their messages across; however, their 'guerrilla-style' media tactics go beyond Facebook and Instagram, and they have a well-developed system of cross-media posting, which enables them to evade censorship (Zúquete 2018, 48). In a study by Hentges, Kökgiran, and Nottbohm (2014), for example, the authors found that the viral nature of content uploaded by the IBD ensured its maximum outreach. The IBD uploaded different stunts and protests relating to their activities on their official social media channels, and these professionally edited videos would go viral amongst their networks. As well as serving propaganda purposes, such content takes the traditional far-right street protest beyond the limits of one city as it is shared across the country and beyond borders. The stunts serve as a way to set the media agenda and provoke political debate (Zúquete 2018: 48–9) – thereby achieving their metapolitical aims.

The IBD and AN are monitored by the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (the domestic intelligence service of the Federal Republic of Germany – BfV). This security agency classifies the AN as a neo-Nazi group and says it is most concerned with the threat of violence the group poses when protesting on the streets. The BfV has monitored the IBD since August 2016, citing a concern that some IBD members have close links to extreme right-wing organisations and groups. In addition, it explicitly raises concerns regarding the IBD's use of the Internet to promote its cause. The BfV's assessment of the AfD is rather more complicated, however. This is reflective of the wider issue of radical right-wing populist parties skirting the line of inflammatory speech and – in Germany's case – posing a threat to the constitutional order. On 15 January 2019 the BfV announced that it was treating the AfD as a 'test case', whilst comprehensively monitoring the Junge Alternative (Youth Alternative – JA) and 'Der Flügel'[14] ('The Wing') – the youth organisation and a sub-organisation

14   'Der Flügel' was launched by the head of the AfD in Thuringia, Björn Höcke. Höcke has been a controversial figure within the party (see Introduction).

of the AfD, respectively – as classified 'suspect' cases (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2019b). For a test case, the BfV do not fully monitor the group or organisation, but instead use open-source material to help classify it in advance of possible further surveillance. The AfD challenged both its classification as a test case and the fact that the BfV had made this information public. On 26 February 2019 the Administrative Court in Cologne ruled in favour of the AfD, citing that the decision to classify the party as a test case had been based on "fragments of suspicion" and that the classification had had a negative impact on the public's opinion of it (Verwaltungsgericht Köln 2019). On 8 March 2019 the BfV announced in a press release that it would not lodge an appeal against the ruling, but that the JA and 'Der Flügel' would remain classified as suspect cases. It argued, on the basis of extensive material and detailed expert opinion, that there were sufficient indications that the two sub-organisations posed a threat to the constitutional order (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2019b).

The debate over the BfV's surveillance of the AfD has been going on for several years. In August 2016, for example, when the BfV announced that it was monitoring the IBD, the press release mentioned that there had been reports from several federal states raising concerns regarding contact between the AfD and the IBD. The then President of the BfV, Hans-Georg Maaßen, claimed that he had no knowledge of the alleged connections and that there was not enough evidence to ascertain whether or not individuals from the IBD had a controlling influence on the AfD (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2016). This statement is interesting as Maaßen has been a controversial figure in German politics and was forced into early retirement following a number of scandals. One such scandal followed his reaction to violent far-right protests in Chemnitz in August 2018, which broke out after two asylum seekers were arrested following the fatal stabbing of a German man. Maaßen claimed, that contrary to media reports, the BfV had no 'reliable evidence' to suggest that foreigners were being 'hunted' in the city of Chemnitz, and insinuated that the video footage depicting these allegations might have been fabricated (Meaney and Schäfer 2018). After receiving a sideways promotion following this controversy, Maaßen sealed his fate at a speech in Warsaw in November 2018 when

he claimed that his departure as president of the BfV was thanks to 'radical left-wing forces' in the SPD who had specifically targeted him owing to his criticism of the German government's refugee policy (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 2018). Whilst Maaßen maintains that he is a member of the CSU, he has been accused of having close links to the AfD, with one AfD defector claiming that Maaßen advised the party on how to avoid being placed under surveillance by the BfV (Meaney and Schäfer 2018). The statement above therefore raises further questions regarding the alleged cooperation between the IBD and the AfD, and indeed the links between the JA and 'Der Flüge' and extremist groups in general, as suspected by the BfV (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2019b). As we shall see below, both the IBD and the AfD argued for Maaßen's reinstatement in elaborate textual and visual campaigns.

Whilst the IBD is more explicitly linked to the New Right, the latter's elements and strategies are also displayed to varying degrees by the AfD and AN. First, all three groups have overtly distanced themselves from neo-Nazism. In doing so, they emphasise the threat of a non-native culture, rather than race. The AfD and IBD – and, to a lesser extent, the AN – have attempted to influence mainstream debates with themes relating to Islam, refugees, and free speech. Also evident is political mimicry of traditional far-left issues, which have been adopted by all three groups: namely, anti-globalisation and disdain for the 'corrupt' elite. The AN in particular has, in addition, adopted left-wing tactics and sub-cultural styles, with the aim of attracting younger recruits.

THE FAR
RIGHT ONLINE —
PREVIOUS STUDIES

SOCIAL MEDIA IS attractive to the far right in the same way as it is to other extremist groups. It offers a more direct, personal communication channel with potential audiences (Ernst et al. 2017: 1357). Moreover, in the absence of traditional media 'gatekeepers', the far right are able to get their message across in a way that was not previously possible in the context of mass media (Stier et al. 2017: 1368). As mentioned above, literature on the Internet and its role in radicalisation, terrorism and extremism has been growing exponentially in recent years. In terms of the far right, there have been a number of studies focusing on the networks and interlinkages online, as well as discourse and content analyses regarding what such groups, individuals, and parties post, and the strategies they employ.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is one common method which has been used to capture social networks and interlinkages, and to understand better the potential mobilisation structures of the extreme right. Caiani and Wagemann (2009: 69) explain that network analysis is used as a way to investigate the 'meso' level of social analysis, 'filling the gap' between structure and agency and looking at the connections between the micro- and macro-levels. In a study by Burris et al. (2000), the researchers collected a sample of 80 white supremacist websites based in North America and Europe and measured each website's centrality score based on the number of incoming links. The most central websites within the network, at the time of the study, were Stormfront, Zundelsite, Resistance Records, and the National Alliance. Writing in 2000, Burris et al. found that the white supremacist online network was largely decentralised, with different centres of influence. There were few, if any, 'bridges' to mainstream political groups, and the online white supremacist world was very isolated from the mainstream Christian right and the Republican Party. There were likewise very few links to other extremist movements or organisations. Finally, the researchers found that whilst there was not enough evidence to confirm the emergence of a transnational white supremacist 'cyber-community', the online networks certainly attracted those who lacked such a community in their local towns (Burris et al. 2000: 231–2). This idea that the Internet serves as an 'echo chamber' and a sanctuary for those who do not have access to like-minded people

in their own 'real world' setting has been investigated – and to some extent verified – on the qualitative level (see, for example, Koehler 2014; von Behr et al. 2013; Wojcieszak 2010).

Focusing on the online far-right scene in Italy and Germany, Caiani and Wagemann (2009) examined approximately 80 right-wing extremist organisations in each country and looked at the structure and shape of the networks using SNA. The authors found that the Italian network was more fragmented, while the German network appeared to be more concentrated on a few central actors, with the NPD in particular playing a key role. Caiani and Wagemann also argue that to some extent the results on the virtual level reflect some of the real-world characteristics in each country. The fragmentation of the far-right scene in Italy, for example, has thwarted attempts to create a united extreme-right force, and whilst the structure of the German network demonstrated more efficient communication channels, the authors argue that it is unlikely that the few central actors will be able to exercise great influence over the whole network (ibid.: 93–4). When reflecting on these early studies from both Burris et al. and Caiani and Wagemann, it is important to put them in the context of their time; in particular, the online far-right scene has certainly flourished since 2000 when Burris et al. conducted their study, and the radical populist right have made electoral gains across Europe since Caiani and Wagemann's 2009 study. That is not to negate their worth, but rather to probe the question of such connections anew. The fact that Caiani and Wagemann found that the NPD played a central role within the German far-right scene suggests that a closer investigation into the possible discursive overlaps across the scene itself is warranted; especially given that the NPD has lost much of its influence in the past decade.

Froio and Ganesh (2018) also used SNA to map the transnational far-right Twitter network across France, Germany, Italy, and the UK. Based on an analysis of retweets from followers, they found that while the Internet was a good source for exchange, far-right transnationalism was in fact quite moderate on Twitter as cross-border retweets were limited. The retweets were then qualitatively coded and compared with the content that was retweeted amongst national communities. The two issues that were most likely to be shared transnationally were

immigration and 'anti-native' economic strategies; in particular, how immigration from predominantly Muslim countries is framed as a perceived 'threat' to European culture, security, and the economy. This led the authors to determine that Islamophobia was the "transnational glue of the far right" (Froio and Ganesh 2018: 19).

In another study on the transnational reach of the far-right scene, Davey and Ebner (2017) did find a high level of cooperation between right-wing activists around the world, especially when it came to exerting influence on a number of national elections in Europe in 2017. In the case of the German elections, the aim was to bolster support for the AfD. Information was shared across the American alt-right and European far-right online landscape, including strategies to infiltrate mainstream debates and flood social media with memes and hashtags in support of the AfD, and against the establishment parties. The authors found that the communication had a sequence, which started with coordination and grassroots efforts on 4Chan, 8Chan, and Reddit channels, but then moved onto closed forums. 'Reconquista Germania' and 'Infokrieg' (info war) on the gamer forum Discord were found to be central in terms of providing instructions for coordinated social media campaigns. Reconquista Germania, for example, released a video on YouTube proclaiming that the campaign to get the AfD into the German Parliament – attacking the 'old' established parties and championing the AfD – would start on 1 September and end with the General Election on 24 September 2017. The instructions included 'raids' on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, whereby scheduled tweet storms and hashtags were agreed upon in advance. Members were instructed to troll and spam comment sections on Facebook and YouTube. There was also advice on how to automate Twitter accounts, and members were encouraged to post about other topics too, in order to avoid suspicion and evade take-downs. Davey and Ebner observe that in the two weeks leading up to the election, the top five trending hashtags were pro-AfD, indicating a successful campaign on the part of the 'coordinators'. Using geo-tagging, the authors also analysed the #Merkelmussweg (Merkel has to go) hashtag and discovered that whilst over 60% of the tweets containing this hashtag originated in Germany, it was also posted from other European countries and the US, as well as Indonesia.

The extreme right flooded Twitter with #MGGA (Make Germany Great Again) and a barrage of Pepe the Frog[15] memes, in a direct nod to the alt-right tactics during the 2016 US election. This finding is interesting. It indicates that there have been transnational efforts at critical junctures in national politics – such as elections – and that the Internet is facilitating the communication and coordination of such tactics.

Davey and Ebner's study refers to the influence of the US-based far-right online scene, in terms of both the adoption of tactics and transnational cooperation. This is significant, as the US-based far right – particularly the alt-right – are quite influential in terms of driving such narratives online. For example, in his study on the alt-right on Twitter, Berger (2018: 5) observes that whilst the alt-right's "centre of gravity is found in the United States ... its reach extends internationally". Berger analysed 27,895 accounts (collected between April and June 2018) which were identified as an 'audience' for alt-right content, and detected six key categories of content relating to the following: pro-Trump; white nationalism; general far-right ideas;[16] anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim; trolling/shitposting;[17] conspiracy theories and disinformation (ibid.: 14–16). Pro-Trump content was by far the most prevalent theme, and it provided "a crucial, in-group definition that united a fractious group of far-right ideologues" (ibid.: 53). The use of conspiracy theories in political discourse has a long history and they were even considered a "legitimate form of knowledge", especially in the US, where they were communicated through prominent political figures (Butter 2014: 28). For example, Butter argues that presidents from George Washington to Dwight D. Eisenhower

15 Relating to Pepe the Frog – a meme that was re-appropriated by the alt-right and has been used in racist and anti-Semitic contexts. It was added to the ADL's hate database in 2016. See: www.adl.org/combating-hate/hate-on-display/c/pepe-the-frog.html.

16 Berger (2018:14) identifies such content as "hard-right attitudes just outside the realm of mainstream conservatism and fringe-right nationalism lacking an overt racial element".

17 Shitposting: "Posting of worthless or irrelevant online content intended to derail a conversation or to provoke others." See: qz.com/1173819/shitpost-is-the-2017-digital-word-of-the-year.

brought the American nation together through imaginations of 'plots' being carried out against the state by internal and external forces. Importantly, from the 1960s conspiracy theories lost their status of 'official knowledge' (in the West) becoming less mainstream and more of a fringe phenomenon. With this shift, the 'establishment' began to be included in the group of conspirators, rather than being its victim (ibid.)

As well as investigating transnational linkages, there have been attempts to examine the discursive overlaps that exist within both the broader far-right scene and mainstream politics. For example, in a study on 'inter-ideological mingling' on Twitter, Graham (2016) utilised a mixed-method approach which examined both the hierarchical clusters at the meso-level and a textual analysis on individual tweets at the micro-level. For the hierarchical cluster analysis, data was collected through purposive and snowball sampling based on a hashtag search – a total of 4,800 tweets from 12 hashtags were collected. Graham used four hashtags from the following categories: extremist; mainstream conservative; and mainstream progressive. One month later, a second set of tweets (1,600) was collected using the same hashtag terms as the first search. Graham analysed the texts of the second set of 1,600 tweets with the aim of ascertaining whether the extremist hashtags were being used alongside other mainstream conservative and progressive hashtags in the same tweet, in order to infiltrate the mainstream debate. The results of the micro-level analysis showed that extremists were using hashtags as a tactic to reach out to a wider, more mainstream audience, and that a number of strategies were being employed to do so. The first tactic is 'piggybacking',[18] whereby a user would use trending hashtags and add an extremist hashtag, as a means to infiltrate a trending topic. 'Backstaging' is used to blend and join a series of hashtags, which ultimately links to an external website. Finally, 'narrating' uses a sophisticated blend of hashtags, which flips the debate to fit around the extremist's idea of

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18   This tactic has also been referred to as 'hashtag pairing' and 'hashtag hijacking', see: wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/AltRightOpenIntelligenceInitiative.

current debates (Graham 2016: 33–5). For example, this particular tactic may include taking the hashtag #refugeeswelcome and re-writing the narrative to reflect why refugees should not be welcomed.

Klein and Muis (2018) examined the Facebook pages of far-right parties and groups in the UK, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The aim of their research was to compare the types of online mobilisation techniques used by parties and non-institutionalised groups (movements and communities) according to the political opportunity structures in their respective countries, as well as to ascertain the differences in online discourses between these groups. Klein and Muis found that far-right parties tended to focus more on the struggle against establishment politics, rather than exclusionary discourse against non-natives. The BNP was an exception, which the authors attributed to the fact that there are limited political opportunities for far-right parties in Britain. Debate amongst the non-institutionalised groups tended to be more extreme, and there were more activist forms of online mobilisation. For example, the authors noted that the most extreme discussions were found on the pages of Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident – Pegida) and the IBD (Klein and Muis 2018: 15–17). This was not as evident in the Dutch case however, as the non-institutionalised groups placed more emphasis on anti-elitism. The AfD focused more on criticising the EU and the elitist political establishment than Islam and immigration (ibid.: 15–17). It is important to note that the data in this study was collected in 2014–15; as elaborated above, the AfD has changed its direction and party goals significantly since Klein and Muis collected their data, and it is likely that different results would emerge if this study was repeated. In France there were no notable differences between the discourses of the Front National (National Front – FN)[19] and the French Identitarian Movement. The authors also noted that at times it was difficult to distinguish between party, movement, and community pages because some groups supported a particular party or leader, whereas other groups were called 'party-movements'

19 The FN changed their name to 'Rassemblement National'
    (National Rally – RN) in June 2018.

(ibid.: 19). This research is interesting as it highlights some relevant differences between parties and non-institutionalised groups. On the surface, it would appear acceptable to assume that parties tend to place less emphasis on nativism in a bid to appear more attractive and legitimate. However, that does not mean that they do not intersect on an ideological level with movements and communities; thus, it is important to examine the subtext and metanarratives.

In another study, Stier et al. (2017) examined the overlaps between Pegida and the German political parties by looking at two areas of potential crossover on Facebook; in particular, audience and topics. The authors also sought to ascertain whether German political parties were increasingly adopting topics traditionally emphasised by radical right-wing populists. To test for audience overlaps, the authors compared likes and comments on the Facebook pages of Pegida and established German political parties (AfD, CDU, CSU, Freie Demokratische Partei [Free Democratic Party – FDP], Grüne [Greens], Linke [the Left], and the SPD). Pegida and the AfD appealed to similar audiences and focused on similar topics which were different from those of the other parties. The topics included media bias, EU referenda and Chancellor Merkel's refugee policy, and were linked to the wider narrative of criticising elites. The out-group narrative also played a central role for Pegida and the AfD whilst criticising policies relating to asylum, border control, Islam, mass migration and refugee housing. Other topics, such as fear of social decline and poverty amongst the elderly, were also emphasised by the left (Stier et al. 2017: 1378). Based on this finding, Stier et al. argued: "While party leaders repeatedly distanced the AfD from more radical right-wing groups and Pegida in particular, our findings challenge the self-presentation of the AfD as a party of the political centre" (ibid.: 1381). The researchers also found that the CSU increasingly subsumed topics emphasised by the radical right-wing groups, although not to the same extent as the AfD and Pegida. Other than this, Stier et al. found that the CDU were more inclined to de-emphasise right-wing populist topics, which probably helped the populist groups, especially given the febrile climate in the country on the issue of the grand coalition's liberal refugee policy (ibid.: 1382).

FRAME ANALYSIS AND NEW MASTER FRAMES

AS THE LITERATURE on social movements has shown, it is neither grievances per se, nor the ideology being propagated, that motivate, but the so-called 'frames'. Frame analysis is a method that has been developed and used in social movements scholarship as a way to demonstrate how discourse can impact behaviour. Here, frame analysis is not just a method, but also an approach whereby discourse plays a key role in mobilisation. Based on the observation that grievance is ubiquitous whereas mobilisation is not, framing theory argues that problems only become relevant as motivations for mobilisation when they are *formulated* as such, and in such a way as to resonate with the audience. Framing theory argues that in order to understand mobilisation it is not sufficient to know and understand ideology; in fact, ideological content as such does not help much at all for these purposes. Framing theory claims to understand how ideological messages are constructed in order to attract supporters and to motivate them for action. Messages follow a certain structure with two broad components: the actual frame or message (core framing tasks), and a series of resonance criteria which ensure that these messages are liked and accepted by the audience.

The core framing tasks consist of *diagnostic*, *prognostic*, and *motivational* frames. As such, movements articulate a perceived social 'problem' and identify the source of the problem, or the perceived enemy who they believe to be responsible (diagnostic framing). They then offer solutions to the problem (prognostic faming) and urge activists and supporters to join them in enacting change (motivational framing) (Benford and Snow 2000: 615–8). Such frames only 'work' however, if they *resonate* with the target audience. Successful resonance is dependent on *credibility* and *salience*. In order for frames to be credible, they should be consistent and not contradictory (frame consistency), be accompanied by evidence (empirical credibility), and be delivered by a credible source or individual (credibility of frame articulators). The salience of the message is contingent upon the extent to which the target audience places importance on the issues, beliefs, and values articulated by the movement (frame centrality), as well as the extent to which the

frames resonate with their personal everyday experiences (experiential commensurability) and with commonly known stories about the past (narrative fidelity) (ibid.: 619–22).

Looking towards Snow and Benford's (1992) work on *Master Frames and Cycles of Protest*, the idea that new cycles of mobilisation occur through novel master frames has been applied to the case of the contemporary far right (see Rydgren 2005; Elgenius and Rydgren 2018). According to this idea, the old master frame of biological racism has been replaced with ethno-nationalism, identitarianism, and anti-establishment populism to adapt to the new political environment (Elgenius and Rydgren 2018: 4–5). Rydgren (2005) explains that, after the electoral success of the French FN in 1984, it became clear that this new master frame was indeed powerful and had led to a "process of cross-national diffusion" across Western Europe, through the likes of de Benoist and GRECE (Rydgren 2005: 416). This is important, as it demonstrates that going beyond a set of ideologies and looking towards frames is a more valuable strategy for understanding mobilisation. Thus, it is this master frame of protecting cultural and national identity that shapes the resonance criteria outlined above.

Frame analysis has been used to explore the links between the more 'classic' neo-Nazi scene and the contemporary extreme right. For example, Schedler (2014: 251) identified the key frames that both the NPD and AN share: claiming that immigrants, Jews, and the far left are to blame for the problems they face (diagnostic framing); calling for an ethnically 'pure' state (prognostic framing); and constructing the image that both groups are a strong and necessary resistance movement (motivational framing). However, to update and modernise their image, Schedler argues that the AN have adopted strong positions – often occupied by the left – on capitalism, globalisation, the environment, and even animal rights. This in turn can be interpreted as a 'frame extension'. Thus, whilst the traditional far right frames lie at the core of the AN, the latter has modernised its image by adopting more contemporary frames that shun the overtly fascist image (ibid.: 251). For example, Schedler argues that whilst the 'Jewish world conspiracy' is a great source of 'agitation' for the AN, the movement attempts to disguise its anti-Semitism by avoiding overt references to Jewish people and re-framing its diagnostic frame

in terms of a 'Zionist occupation' of governments (ibid.: 251). It also specifically criticises Israel's actions against terrorist groups at 'National Anti-War Day' rallies – the type of event usually attended by and associated with the left (Schedler 2016: 314).

In another study, Caiani and della Porta (2012) utilised a frame analysis approach when investigating populist discourses within the extreme right-wing scene in Germany and Italy. Rather than viewing populism as an ideology, the authors conceptualise populism as a frame in itself, which can be 'bridged' with more 'traditional' right-wing extremist frames. Thus, in terms of overlaps in the German and Italian cases, the authors found that the populist frame was evident in the extreme right discourse, as references to 'the people' were often bridged with traditional extreme right frames such as nativism and anti-establishment discourse. Additionally, cases of bridging between populism and nationalism were found to be more frequent in Germany than in Italy. Caiani and della Porta attribute this to two key factors: historically, nationalism is more deeply rooted within the German discourse; and traditional conceptualisations of citizenship in Germany are primarily based on ethnicity (*jus sanguinis*) (ibid.: 197–8).

A recent study by Froio (2018) sought to determine the anti-Islam frames utilised by the French far-right scene online. Using a mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative methods, Froio analysed 77 far-right French websites from both parties and non-parties. The websites featured five different dimensions: ultra-secularism; ultra-republicanism, ultra-conservative Catholicism; anti-republicanism; and biological differences (race frame). Three main frames were used: religious, cultural, and race frames. The religious frames were the ones most commonly used throughout the network, with the race frames seldom utilised. In the French context, this made sense, as Froio suspects that it resonated more successfully with the republican values of separating church/religion and state, highlighting the perceived strain in the relations between Islam and France (Froio 2018: 702–3). The lack of a race frame was also explained by the fact that racist discourses are widely seen as unacceptable, so, by focusing more on culture and religion, the radical right-wing populists were able to maintain an air of legitimacy. Froio went on to argue: "It is this desire to enter the political

system that induces the far right to adapt its nativist discourse to the available political and discursive opportunities defining the belonging to the national community" (ibid.: 705). This relates back to the idea that the contemporary far right are trying to sanitise their discourse in order to resonate with wider audiences. This raises two issues that Froio also alludes to. The first is the 'chicken and egg' question: is this discourse becoming more mainstream because the contemporary far right has successfully repackaged its message against the backdrop of an opportune climate created by the refugee crisis? Or has mainstream discourse 'naturally' moved to the right, allowing such groups to initiate debates that were previously considered taboo? The second issue relates to what Froio terms a 'dilemma' for the contemporary far right: whilst they have been able to appear more legitimate through such discourses by edging closer to the mainstream, far-right groups may end up alienating their more radical base, who could argue that they have become replicas of the very 'establishment' they so heavily criticise (ibid.: 705).

In their study, Elgenius and Rydgren (2018) identified five anti-immigration frames that are used by far-right parties, namely: portraying immigrants as undeserving competitors in the job and housing markets; claiming that immigration costs are using up public funds that could (and 'should') be spent on the native population; portraying immigrants as a threat to the ethno-national identity of the country; claiming that immigrants are linked to higher rates of crime; and framing Muslim immigrants as a threat to liberal Western values (Elgenius and Rydgren 2018: 2). Using the right-wing populist party Sweden Democrats as a case study, Elgenius and Rydgren attributed its electoral success to its ability to tap into perceived grievances and its effective use of frames to supply solutions to such grievances by blaming the outgroup, namely Muslim immigrants. The rebranding of the master frame away from biological racism and open anti-Semitism has made such a party more accessible and acceptable to wider audiences (ibid.: 15–16). The researchers also emphasise that, in order for a frame to be effective, it has to adapt to and resonate with the local context – in this case Sweden. Therefore, whilst there are obvious common trends and overlaps throughout the European far right in terms of discourse,

different parties and movements in different countries would probably exhibit modified frames. In the Swedish case, for example, the diagnostic frames were designed to tap into a sense of nostalgia, suggesting that life before immigration was better and that traditional values and culture were now under 'threat' owing to the political correctness and multiculturalism long promoted in Sweden by the Liberals and Social Democrats (ibid.: 16).

Finally, while not specifically focused on the far right, the work of Wehling (2016) provides some significant evidence on framing mechanisms from the perspective of the cognitive neurosciences. It shows in particular how important frames are in political decision making, and gives some examples from the political discourse of far-right parties. Here, Wehling demonstrates how frames influence the kinds of information we receive and how we perceive it, and how frames can even influence individual actions. In the area of political framing, she argues that political decisions are taken based on frames, rather than facts, and that the ways in which issues are framed influence the ways in which solutions are perceived and accepted, whilst the actual framing as such remains elusive. In other words, most of the time the public does not even realise the presence of frames. Frames present 'reality' in a selective way, hence the importance of plurality in democratic political discourse. Importantly, once a frame has been put in place, it is difficult to counter it, and repetition only causes it to be cemented. Here we can already gauge the reasons why framing and repeating the association between 'foreigner' and 'criminal' is so effective. Telling examples from the area of far-right political discourse include the metaphorical depiction of the nation as a 'body' and migrants as a 'foreign body' or a 'virus', migration depicted as a 'natural disaster': tsunami, flood or tide.
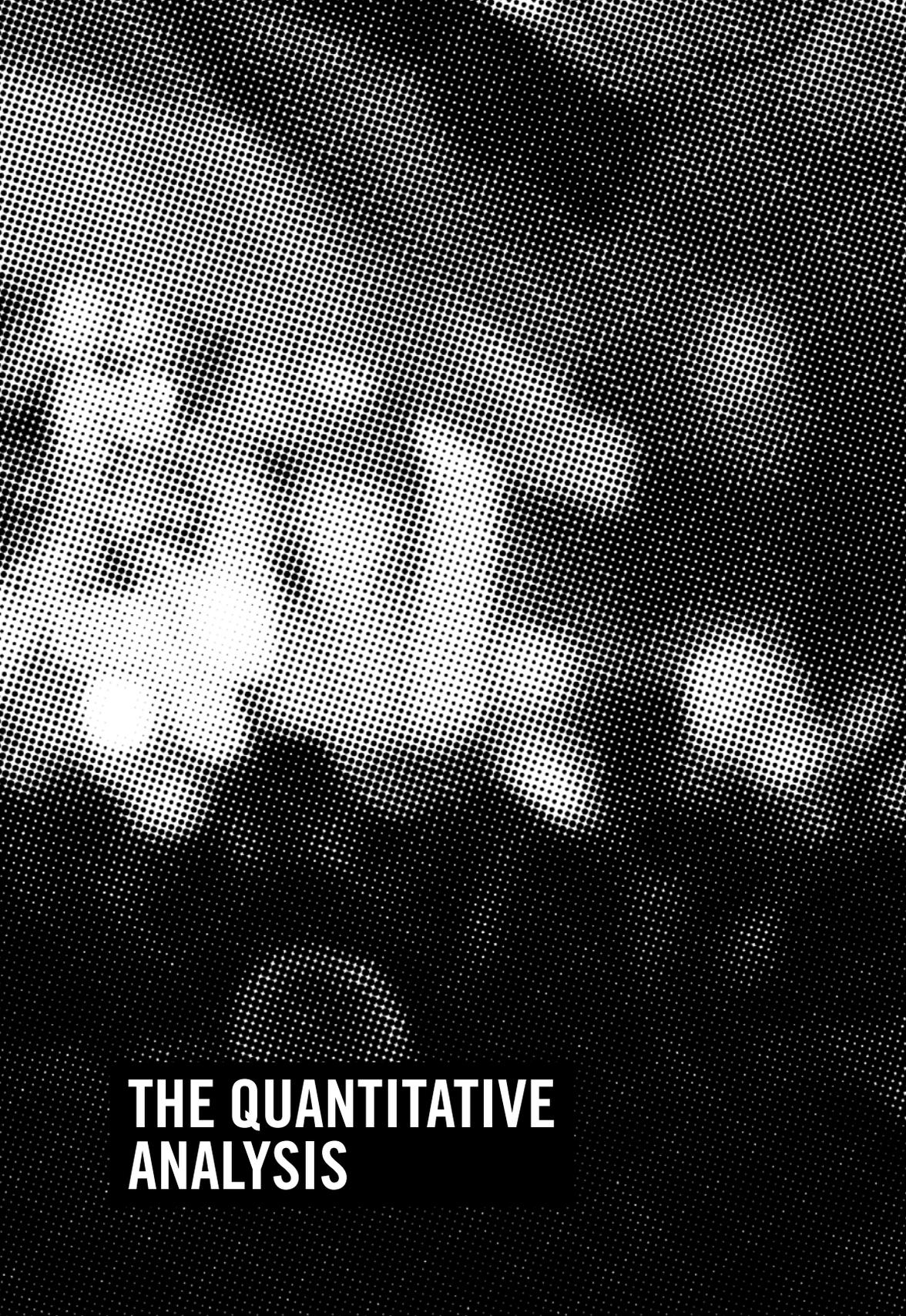
THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

THE DATASET FOR the quantitative study was compiled by computer and social scientists working within the VOX-Pol Network. Initially, relevant seed accounts were identified based on right-wing extremist and populist groups in Europe. The follower relationships were then extracted and accounts with more than 100,000 followers were excluded. SNA was then used to determine the central accounts. The dataset was checked manually, and all accounts that were irrelevant, linked to parties, and/or US-based were excluded. The content of each account was assessed by three different researchers to ensure that these accounts could be classified as right-wing *extremist*: specifically, that the content was explicitly *racist*, with neo-Nazi, white supremacist, and anti-Semitic themes. That said – and a finding in itself – it was already difficult at this stage to distinguish between the 'extremist' accounts and the radical right-wing populist/anti-immigration accounts.

Some EU-based accounts that were not as central in the SNA were purposely sampled and added to the final list in order to ensure broad coverage of EU-based extreme right-wing accounts. A total of 381,912 tweets were collected through the Twitter API from the 175 accounts identified. The tweets were collected at the end of September 2016 and the sample includes tweets from 1 September 2015 to 30 September 2016. At the time of collection, the Twitter API limit for each user was 3,200 recent tweets; it is therefore important to note that the time span does vary considerably, and the majority of tweets in the sample cover the latter months of the time period. The year 2016 is a particularly interesting time frame to study as the populist radical right made two significant gains on both sides of the Atlantic: the vote in favour of a British exit from the EU – or 'Brexit' – and Donald Trump's electoral victory. Moreover, across Europe, radical right-wing populist parties made a certain amount of 'progress' towards gaining political power and seats in parliaments, pointing towards a more sustainable grip on mainstream politics.

The aim of this exploratory part of the study was to gain a cursory insight into some of the overlaps evident in the online extreme right Twitter community in Europe. To analyse these overlaps, we looked to the different hashtags and URLs collected from the 175 accounts. Hashtags are useful as they direct users to a particular topic and draw

in a supposed "virtual community of interested listeners" (Zappavigna 2011: 791). Hashtags are a way of communicating with different users and engaging in particular debates surrounding that hashtag, but they have also been used by extremists to infiltrate moderate debates (Berger 2016; Graham 2016). One method of looking at overlap is to map out hashtag co-occurrence – which is when two hashtags are used within the same tweet. URLs are also helpful as they show which platforms and news websites such communities link to.

Of the tweets, 23.64% contained hashtags, and of the tweets with hashtags, 44.4% contained more than one hashtag and 35.9% linked to URLs. English was the most prominent language (32.2%), followed by Spanish (16.9%) and German (15%). This reflects the countries represented in the sample, as the largest number of accounts originated in Spain (18.3%), followed by the UK and Germany (both 12.6%). It is important to note that it was not possible to determine exactly where 8.6% of the sample originated from as those users did not disclose their location. These accounts tended to tweet in English but were ambiguous about their location and tweeted about more general themes, such as anti-Semitism (holocaust denial, 'Jewish world conspiracy'), defending Europe and the European race, and 'white genocide'. The high proportion of Spanish accounts is a particularly interesting finding as far-right activism in Spain has – until recently – been viewed as a 'fringe' phenomenon, as compared to other European states (Encarnación 2019). The recent electoral success of the far-right Vox (Voice) party, however, has dampened Spanish feelings of being 'immune' to right-wing populism, as the party managed to secure 24 representatives in the Spanish parliament with 10% of the vote in the national elections on 28 April 2019. This is significant as, since the end of the Franco era in 1975, far-right groups had never gained more than a single seat in the Spanish parliament. Vox's swift rise has also been linked to a sophisticated and coordinated online campaign to spread conspiracy theories and disinformation about candidates from the mainstream parties, as well as polarised narratives to send the message 'Make Spain Great Again' (see Applebaum 2019).

Table 1 displays the top ten hashtags in the dataset. The most frequently used was #whitegenocide, followed by #afd and #merkel. This is unsurprising, given that the refugee crisis – and Chancellor Merkel's involvement in it – was at its height during this time. In addition to Merkel and the AfD, there are other hashtags which relate to national politics, such as #alvde[20] and #brexit, again unsurprising as Spain and the UK, respectively, featured prominently in the sample. The hashtags #islam and #isis were also used widely, as well as #eu – predominantly in negative terms. Moreover, #trump, #maga (Make America Great Again), and the US election in general were popular topics in the dataset as Trump was viewed as a champion against the 'crooked' elite, which Hillary Clinton was perceived to represent during the 2016 US election. There were also many references to alt-right tropes, such as Pepe the Frog, and a good deal of trolling around the #debatenight hashtag. This relates back to Ebner and Davey's (2017) findings as there appeared to be some level of cooperation amongst

Table 1. Top 10 hashtags

HASHTAG	COUNT
#whitegenocide	5,300
#afd	2,561
#merkel	1,781
#brexit	1,625
#alvde	1,371
#islam	1,217
#trump	1,074
#antiwhite	1,065
#isis	905
#maga	852
#eu	850

20   'Aqui la voz de Europa' (Here is the voice of Europe) – a nationalist
     movement in Spain.

the transnational right-wing scene in a foreign election. There are also similarities with Berger's (2018) findings as 'MAGA' and words relating to 'Trump' scored very highly in terms of hashtag, profile word, and word pair frequency. The #whitegenocide hashtag also featured in Berger's top 25 hashtags, 2,983 in total (2018:33). These connections and similarities are significant and highlight how the US context and actors seem to be driving international far-right narratives.

Table 2 shows the top 20 hashtag co-occurrences that emerged from the dataset. Aside from the more 'likely' co-occurrences with 'white' identity-themed hashtags, such as #antiwhite, #diversity, #altright, and #whitepeople, #whitegenocide was also used with more populist themes such as #trump, #ukip and #brexit. In addition, these accounts not only appeared to have been supporting Donald Trump, but also encouraged their followers to vote for the AfD in Germany. As such, discussions surrounding refugees were clearly prominent and #merkel and the ruling coalition of the #cdu and #spd were seen as central to this debate, with the #afd serving as an appropriate alternative to the mainstream parties. Using mainstream party hashtags was likely used to infiltrate any discussions relating to these parties on Twitter (cf. Graham 2016). The #afd was also tweeted alongside #pegida by way of mutual support.

Related to the refugee issue was the general denouncement from the extreme right regarding the EU-Turkey refugee agreement, which was signed on 18 March 2016. This agreement stipulated that any migrants arriving into Europe via the Aegean Sea would be sent back to Turkey. In return, Turkey would receive money for this and talks regarding Turkey's accession to the EU and visa liberalisation in the Schengen area would be accelerated (Council of the European Union 2016). Turkey's accession to the EU has always been a contentious issue for the far right, as Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country. Moreover, what were perceived as big concessions that the EU, and particularly Chancellor Merkel, were granting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan fired up the far right. We see this play out in the tweets containing the hashtags #erdogan and #merkel. Finally, #oberhausen and #refugeesnotwelcome reference the large numbers of refugees that were taken in by Oberhausen in comparison to other German cities.

Table 2. Top 20 hashtag co-occurrences

HASHTAG 1	HASHTAG 2	COUNT
#antiwhite	#whitegenocide	565
#afd	#agh16[21]	354
#diversity	#whitegenocide	312
#altright	#whitegenocide	275
#trump	#whitegenocide	260
#afd	#cdu	235
#erdogan	#merkel	225
#cdu	#spd	224
#erdogan	#türkei	220
#afd	#spd	213
#whitegenocide	#whitepeople	191
#flüchtlinge (refugees)	#merkel	181
#brexit	#eu	174
#deutschland	#merkel	171
#cdu	#merkel	166
#brexit	#whitegenocide	165
#oberhausen	#refugeesnotwelcome	158
#afd	#pegida	147
#brexit	#voteleave	137
#ukip	#whitegenocide	136

The majority of URLs within the dataset linked to other Twitter pages and tweets. There were also a high number of out-links to YouTube and Facebook pages. Mainstream right-leaning and explicitly far-right news sites, such as *Mail Online, Die Welt, Daily Express, Breitbart,*

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21   Reference to the Abgeordnetenhaus (House of Representatives) election in Berlin in 2016.

Russia Today (RT), and *Sputnik News* were also regularly linked to 'substantiate' the evidence presented in the tweets – mostly concerning refugees and immigrants. Similar findings were also reflected in Berger's (2018) study. In addition to news portals and social media pages, a number of tweets linked to pages and blogs associated with prominent far-right activists such as David Duke

Table 3. Updates to accounts since 2016

COUNTRY	ACCOUNT SUSPENDED	ACCOUNT NO LONGER AVAILABLE	TWITTER HANDLE CHANGED
Austria	1/8	1/8	
Belgium	2/8		
Denmark	1/2		
Finland	3/5	1/5	
France	1/9	1/9	
Germany	7/22	2/22	1/22
Hungary	1/3		
Ireland	3/4		
Italy	1/10		
The Netherlands	1/4		
Poland	1/8	1/8	
Portugal			1/3
Slovenia	1/1		
Spain	9/32	4/32	6/32
Sweden	2/4		
Switzerland			1/1
UK	10/22	3/22	1/22
Unknown	6/14	3/14	1/14
Total % of complete dataset	**27.43%**	**9.14%**	**6.29%**

of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and with the extreme right website the 'Daily Stormer'. Links to the New Right online publication *Junge Freiheit* were also apparent. In general, it appears that the tweets from these accounts were used as a means of disseminating information rather than calling explicitly for violence. In this sense, mobilisation was used mostly to promote right-wing populist parties, figures, and themes, such as the AfD, Trump, and Brexit, respectively. Moreover, there was a general sense of *defending* European culture, identity, and race through creating a narrative of white Nordic roots – a common trope within the white supremacist movement. Furthermore, some of the posts were explicitly anti-Semitic, with some also using the platform to deny the Holocaust.

The hashtags, hashtag co-occurrences, and URLs are relevant as they give an insight into the topics that the European extreme right are tweeting about. The co-occurrences, in particular, also demonstrate tactics of inter-ideological mingling, as well as potential trolling. Beyond this, the extreme right is openly supporting radical right-wing populist parties, issues, and figures. This is important as it shows that radical parties and issues are resonating with the more extreme right, even though the former constantly deny any ideological affinity with the latter.

Since this data was collected in 2016, Twitter and other social media companies have been under increased pressure to take down racist hate speech, especially from Germany,[22] and from the EU in

22 The Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Rechtsdurchsetzung in sozialen Netzwerken (NetzDG – Network Enforcement Act) came into force in January 2018. This law penalises social media companies financially for failing to remove reported content that violates one of 22 statutes in the German criminal code. In relation to hate speech the statutes cover the following: incitement to hatred; defamation of religions, religious and ideological associations; insult; and defamation. See: www.gesetze-im-internet.de/netzdg/BJNR335210017.html.

general.[23] Two years after the identification and collection of these accounts, we revisited the user dataset to determine whether they still existed. Using the Twitter User ID number, each individual account was checked to see if it was still active. Searching with the User ID ensured that any users that had changed their handles since September 2016 would still be found. We found that 37.7% of the accounts had either been suspended or no longer existed – these figures are broken down by country in Table 3. It is important to differentiate between those accounts that were suspended by Twitter and those that are no longer available, as in the latter category it is unclear whether the accounts were deleted by the user or whether Twitter suspended them some time ago. Judging by their previous Twitter handles, in most cases there is no reason to believe that some users changed their handles in order to evade takedowns. One user, however, did remove the rather conspicuous '1488'[24] in their handle. As the number of accounts per country varies considerably, it would not be useful to read too much into country figures. That said, the fact that the frequency of English-language account suspensions was more prevalent does suggest a greater focus on the moderation of English-language content. This raises interesting questions for further research on content moderation. In general, the overall numbers provide a useful insight into takedown activity, which was less than expected given the quite explicit material that exists on the accounts that are still active.

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23   In May 2016, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, and YouTube agreed with the European Commission's proposal to implement a "Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online". See: ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/countering-illegal-hate-speech-online_en.

24   The figure 1488 is a combination of two White Supremacist numeric symbols. '14' refers to the '14 Words' slogan: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." '88' refers to the eighth letter of the alphabet, 'H', and stands for 'Heil Hitler'. For more information see: www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/1488.

THE QUALITATIVE
ANALYSIS

METHOD

The quantitative analysis revealed a high level of interest in German domestic politics across the European extreme right-wing scene. This, in addition to reasons outlined above, renders Germany a relevant case study for the qualitative analysis. The AN, IBD, and AfD were selected as they represent the extreme right, a manifestation of the New Right, and a radical right-wing populist party, respectively. These groups also reflect the features of the contemporary far right and new master frames, insofar as they reject openly neo-Nazi themes, thus seeking to depart from the elements that were more conspicuous in the 175 accounts identified in the quantitative sample. Comparing these seemingly disparate strands of the far right with one another thus gives us further insight into potential overlaps.

The AN, IBD and AfD Twitter accounts tell stories. These stories appear in the form of frames and tropes, and in order to understand the effect of these stories we need to go beyond the cognitive level of frame analysis and include emotions and visuals. We therefore supplemented framing theory with the analysis of visuals, a hermeneutic, intertextual reading of posts and the consideration of narratives uttered in a minimalistic form. The criminological concept of trope captures this latter form as fragmentary (word, phrases) references to 'agreed-upon stories', or allusions to 'pre-existing systems of interpretation', pointers to hegemonic stories in a particular discursive space (Sandberg 2016: 3, 13). The essence of tropes is that it is enough to utter a word, or a combination of words, without having to tell the entire story behind them. In order for tropes to be successful, however, the viewer needs to be 'in the know' and thus able to understand the story behind them.

In this study, we sampled the Twitter accounts of the AN (Groß-Gerau, Hesse: 140 tweets),[25] IBD (Hesse and Central: 148 tweets), and AfD (Hesse and Central: 106 tweets) for the period 1 August to 30 October 2018. In the case of the IBD and AfD we also included their national accounts in order to reach a number of tweets comparable to that propagated by the AN account. Tweets were predominantly posted in German and translated into English by the authors. It is worth noting the level of *influence* that these particular Twitter accounts have in a comparative context. To examine this, we used the online tool *SparkScore*, which measures account influence based on the average number of retweets and likes, as well as the number of followers, number of lists that the user appears on, and whether the account has been verified by Twitter. SparkScore also measures an account's level of engagement (average number of retweets and likes, tweets per week, and following-to-followers ratio), and it compares these statistics against other accounts with a similar number of followers.[26] The AfD Central account had the highest SparkScore (88) and engagement score (94), followed by the IBD's SparkScore (70) and engagement score (82). The AN had a very low SparkScore (4), although engagement was high (87). These results are unsurprising, however, as the AN are a fringe group. To put these figures into context, the SparkScores of the official Twitter accounts of the ruling coalition parties were lower than those of the AfD and IBD, and their engagement scores were lower than those of all three groups. For example, the SparkScores of the CDU, CSU and SPD were 60, 54, and 59, respectively; whilst their engagement scores were 29, 43, and 25, respectively.[27]

25 The AN Groß Gerau Twitter account is the only 'official' Twitter account associated with the AN. Even though the handle suggests that the account is based in Hesse, the tweets from this account focus predominantly on issues relevant to Germany and Germans, as well as the AN movement as a whole.

26 SparkScore was developed by SparkToro. Full details on the methodology for measuring influence can be found here: sparktoro.com/blog/a-new-free-tool-to-determine-the-true-influence-of-a-twitter-account.

27 All scores are out of 100.

In the following, we deconstruct and construct the narratives from the textual, audio, and visual material posted on Twitter. This time period is interesting as the context is the local elections in Bavaria and Hesse – the last in the round of local elections, in which the AfD obtained seats in all local parliaments. It was also in this period that Angela Merkel announced her withdrawal as head of the CDU party and her intention not to stand again for the position of Chancellor. Chancellor Merkel has been a major target of criticism for the far-right scene in Germany and Europe, and the AfD celebrated her withdrawal as their own accomplishment. During this period, moreover, the far right was particularly active over the debates surrounding the signing of the migration pact, which was adopted by 164 member states of the United Nations on 10 December 2018. Using the classical structure of framing, we discuss the core framing tasks (*diagnostic*, *prognostic,* and *motivational frames*), describing the additional *emotional* and *visual mechanisms* used, followed by the resonance criteria (*credibility* and *salience*).

CORE FRAMING TASKS

DIAGNOSTIC FRAMES

The main *diagnostic* frame is quite simple and is utilised by all three groups identified: the German people are at risk of dying out. This frame is unusual, as it is not about something that already exists, but about something that might happen in the future, if nothing is done about it. The three groups articulate this in diverse ways and use different language, but the message is the same. The AN, for example, uses the concept of 'Volkstod' ('death of the people'), the AfD and IBD refer to the concept of the upcoming 'Abschaffung' (elimination/demise) of Germany, and the IBD use 'der große Austausch' ('the great replacement'). The BfV (2019c) describes the extreme right's conceptualisation of 'Volkstod' as the alleged imminent extinction of a people as a social and cultural unit, that is, a 'people's community' ('Volksgemeinschaft'). 'Volksgemeinschaft' is a National Socialist term that relates to "a community based on shared racial characteristics", whereby – in line with extreme right notion of an authoritarian state – the state is expected to instinctively "act in accordance with the alleged unanimous will of the people" (ibid.). This was a fundamental concept and objective of National Socialism. The origin of 'Abschaffung' is by all accounts a reference to the well-known book *Deutschland schafft sich ab (Germany Abolishes Itself)* by former politician Thilo Sarazzin. While problematic and inaccurate in some respects, the book was certainly not meant to feed right-wing propaganda. Nevertheless, it did provide an extremely useful term for the New Right and facilitated the return of concepts such as 'elimination' and 'demise' to mainstream discourse, this time without the stamp of National Socialism. As outlined above, the idea of 'the great replacement' is central to the Identitarian worldview. The German variant of this slogan is used consistently by the IBD to frame the imminent and 'urgent' nature of the perceived 'threat'. 'Volkstod' and 'der große Austausch' are closely related to the concept of 'white

genocide'. In a post retweeted by the IBD, there was even an explicit reference to a 'white genocide' that was allegedly occurring in South Africa, together with accusations that the German government would rather help economic migrants with a tendency towards crime than white South African farmers who wished to emigrate.[28] This was also an attempt to imply that a similar 'white genocide' was happening in Germany itself. The 'replacement', 'death', and 'demise' of the German people allegedly occurs through 'Umvolkung' ('forced' change in the population's ethnic composition) and 'Überfremdung' (foreign 'domination'). Other formulations of this frame include the loss of culture through 'mass migration' and the destruction of the country.

The AN Twitter account used both 'Volkstod' and 'Überfremdung' quite prominently, mostly in the form of hashtags. The AfD did not use these terms across its Twitter accounts, although the words were obviously used elsewhere. For example, in a press article it was revealed that an internal evaluation advised AfD politicians to stop using the words 'Umvolkung', 'Überfremdung', and 'Volkstod', along with other expressions denoting xenophobia, racist discrimination and Islamophobia, in order to avoid being monitored by the BfV (Pittelkow and Riedel 2018). Interestingly enough, in a statement responding to this issue, the AfD politician Roland Hartwig claimed that only 'individual cases' within the AfD might be problematic. As we shall see below, 'individual cases' is the very trope used to generalise the perceived criminal behaviour of migrants and asylum seekers, in particular. Indeed, the AfD was careful not to use these terms explicitly on Twitter, referring rather to migration and asylum in all of its inflections, as well as using more explosive terms such as 'invaders'. As a tweet by AfD politician Gottfried Curio illustrated, the essence of 'Umvolkung', 'Überfremdung' and 'Volkstod' were very much present: "When a long-grown forest is deforested, the leftist greens chain themselves to every tree. When a cultural nation, which has grown over hundreds of years is replaced demographically, they themselves are the axe in the forest. Does that mean: it's ok if

28 For an overview on 'white genocide' in South Africa, a white supremacist conspiracy theory, see: www.adl.org/blog/the-racist-obsession-with-south-african-white-genocide.

the Germans die out, as long as your trees don't?" Furthermore, on closer investigation, and through an advanced word search on the AfD's official Facebook page, we found all three words – 'Umvolkung', 'Überfremdung', and 'Volkstod' – in the user comments as reactions to postings from the AfD. These terms were also found in the IBD sample: for example, in a video by Martin Sellner, the words 'Austausch' and 'Umvolkung' were used interchangeably. Furthermore, IBD Hesse retweeted an article outlining the 'Volksaustausch' ('replacement of the people') and mentioned the concept of 'Überfremdung' in the context of a worldwide conspiracy.

A subsection of the story featured very prominently was the depiction of the *criminal, violent and 'kulturfremd' (alien to our culture) asylum seekers and foreigners*, who physically attack and even murder German people. The various incidents of 'regular' crime, violence, sexual violence, and terrorism were instrumentalised to construct and 'demonstrate' the imminent threat to the German people. There are, roughly speaking, three types of violence that were present and described repeatedly by the AN, IBD and the AfD Twitter accounts: sexualised violence against women and children; general violence against the German people; and violence among asylum seekers/foreigners. On the AN Twitter account, sexualised violence against women in the form of rape and harassment is attributed to 'Südländer' (people from the south/the Mediterranean), foreigners, Eastern Europeans, asylum 'cheaters', Africans, refugees, Afghans, and Syrians. The case of a group rape in Freiburg was tweeted once on the AN account and emphasised on the AfD account with an image. One case of sexualised violence against children perpetrated by Afghans was also reported by both the AfD and AN. Interestingly, in the reporting of some of the cases regarding violence against women, the hashtag #120db was used: this referred to a women's movement associated with the Identitarian Movement. The IBD lists numerous small-scale actions by the 120db group and, through images posted on their Twitter account, they also create the impression that these incidents are a regular occurrence requiring protective action for German women. The IBD also tweeted about concrete incidents of sexualised violence, followed by calls to action.

The 'general' violence is attributed again to 'Südländer', refugees, migrants, dark-skinned people, and asylum seekers. Here we also found the hashtag #keinEinzelfall (not an isolated incident); this framing was reinforced through the incident in Chemnitz and statistics apparently showing high levels of #Ausländerkriminalität (crimes perpetrated by foreigners). In this part of the violence frame, the AN retweeted posts from the NPD and the far-right party Die Rechte (The Right). Within this violence frame we observed more sophisticated diagnostic frames, criticising mainstream politics of diversity for generally augmenting the existential threat by 'inviting' foreigners (of other 'cultures') into the country: #Multikultitötet (multiculturalism 'kills'), #Chemnitz, #keinEinzelfall, #Chemnitzüberall (Chemnitz everywhere), Ausländerterror (terror by foreigners), #Überfremdung, #Messerattacke (knife attack), bloodshed. The perpetrators identified are more specific in this context: Afghans, Moroccans, Somalians, Syrians, Turks, but also refugees in general, and 'fake' refugees. The #Messerattacke hashtag was very present and particularly useful, as it combined the frightening picture of terrorists using an easily accessible weapon with the implication that this type of violence was rife amongst refugees and gangs. Here the perpetrators were refugees, Turkish people, people with foreign accents, and 'Kulturfremde' (culturally alien); however, besides the obvious construction of the 'other', there were poignant references to National Socialism and expressions such as 'ungepflegte südländische Diebe' ('scruffy Mediterranean thieves').

In addition to foreigners and migrants, those held *responsible* for this state of affairs are all the mainstream parties, with the exception of the AfD, and of course the NPD (as well as other smaller right-wing extremist parties, such as Der Dritte Weg [The Third Way – DDW]). Specific people, such as Chancellor Merkel, minister of the interior Horst Seehofer together with targeted SPD and Greens politicians and the German representative at the UN, were also identified as being directly responsible. This technique of attacking individuals online in an attempt to ruin their reputation was practised by the AfD and the IBD in particular, and ranged from critiquing their arguments, to

revealing information about their personal lives, and producing posts that harassed these individuals directly. Above all, the government was accused of not working in the best interests of the 'people'.

On the AN Twitter account, it was claimed that the mainstream parties were responsible for the 'Volkstod' and the 'Überfremdung'. Pictures of vandalised election posters were shared, with 'responsible for Volkstod' stickers, in an attempt to demonstrate that AN supporters were promoting this message on the streets. In one tweet linking to the DDW website, the AN showed support for the view that the 'Volksverräter' ('traitors of the people') in Berlin (the government, the 'elite') were responsible for the fact that in some parts of Germany there were almost no Germans anymore – this apparently being evidence of 'Überfremdung'. We also found that, within the IBD sample, there was purported evidence suggesting that the 'elite' was set on 'destroying' German culture and values. These tweets claimed that the government was lying to the German people, as they continued to pursue the course of illegal migration, and there were even accusations that the Chancellor was flying migrants in. The AfD also blamed all mainstream parties, in particular the SPD, for the 'invasion' of migrants. In general, the AfD portray themselves as the middle-class conservative alternative to the CDU/CSU, so their attacks against the latter are not ideological, but pragmatic; for example, the AfD argues that the CDU/CSU have failed to deliver on what they promised – further highlighting the 'treason' trope. In another example of hyperbole with the intent to stoke up widespread fear, in the middle of discussions of whether to classify three states in North Africa as safe countries of origin, the SPD were accused by the AfD of 'inviting invaders' into Germany. However, the SPD's official party line was shared with their coalition partners: namely that Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria were in fact safe, or had just become safe, so that there was no reason for migrants from these countries to come to Europe, nor for those who were already in Germany to remain there. Whilst this issue was debated within the SPD, the AfD suggested that the centre-left parties were fraternising with members of the extreme left, or even had them within their ranks, and that they were attempting to obstruct the classification process.

The AfD also posted a tweet denouncing 'left-wing' social workers for helping 'violent' asylum seekers who were allegedly 'rioting'. This is an example of the oppositional frame, which differentiates between migrants and the left on the one hand, and 'citizens' on the other, portraying the two groups as mutually exclusive and painting the image of an overall left-wing conspiracy. For the IBD, the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) saving migrants on the high seas are the enemy. There are numerous examples of attempts to construct a discrediting story about these actors, using 'twisting' mechanisms, for example by claiming that saving migrants is 'human trafficking' and, like the AfD, accusing these NGOs of being part of the wider leftist conspiracy. More broadly, all three groups (the AN, AfD, and IBD) see the left as their natural enemy and warn of the danger of left-wing extremism. At the same time, however, the IBD positions itself outside the political spectrum, declaring that all who are pro-globalisation and 'Multikulti' are their enemies, whilst depicting President Trump in a positive light. Finally, in another twisting exercise, the IBD claimed that the left was in fact imperialist, capitalist, and responsible for propping up the 'elitist system'. The fight against the left was also evident in other contexts and frames within the AfD sample, as in the statement that 'liberalism makes one ill' – 'Liberalismus macht krank'. The conspiracy theory was further extended to include the idea of servitude to President Erdoğan, through the fact that a CDU politician attended the opening of a mosque in Germany with the Turkish president. Incidentally, this also qualified as an example of growing 'Islamisation'. The IBD also targeted President Erdoğan and his influence on the Turkish population in Germany.

PROGNOSTIC FRAMES

The proposed *solution* is primarily to stop migration and, more generally, put an end to the circumstances leading towards the perceived 'demise' of the German people. The sample demonstrated support for radical right-wing parties such as the AfD, and – in the case of the AN – extremist parties, such as the NPD, and DDW. In our AN Twitter sample there was rarely any direct support for the AfD, but they did retweet a few AfD posts and they publicly rejoiced when the AfD obtained 13%

The text above states: "Defend your #home – stop #over-foreignisation" followed by hashtags belonging to the mainstream parties and from local elections in Hesse and Bavaria. On the image, they state: "We believe in our children! DU/SPD/LINKE/ GRÜNE in immigration", followed by the slogan "For the People and Homeland".

of the vote in the local elections in Hesse. The other solutions presented by all three were: 'resistance' ('Widerstand'), fighting for the 'homeland' ('Heimat'), and (German) families, and culture. The AN sample also revealed more explicit National Socialist references: #Volk, #Rasse ('race/breed'), #Nation, #NSjetzt (National Socialism now), #NSAREA (National Socialist area). In one tweet, the AN blamed the mainstream parties for mass migration and pleaded with their audience to 'defend' Europe and think about future generations (see Figure 1). Both here and across the three groups there was an appeal to German people to

have more children to 'mitigate' the perceived high birth rates amongst migrants. For the IBD, stopping the migration pact and 'defending' Europe was also presented as a key solution for putting an end to the 'dreaded replacement'.

All three groups presented *deportation* (which the IBD also referred to as 'remigration') as a central *solution* to crime committed by foreigners. They also claimed that the government was in fact lying about deporting people, and that many of the countries of origin that were declared unsafe were in fact peaceful. For example, the AN Twitter account shared a link to the Facebook page of the NPD in Hesse, which showed a flyer campaign by the Young Nationalists (a youth wing of the NPD) along with the comment: "Our people must finally feel secure. Criminal foreigners and bogus asylum seekers must be deported immediately." The IBD also proposed deportation by twisting the left-wing slogan 'no person is illegal' to 'no *deportation* is illegal'. The AfD used the #Abschieben (deportation) hashtag alongside more graphic and concrete acts of violence committed by asylum seekers – themselves appearing with a hashtag alongside the German #Bürger (citizens), who have 'lost patience' with the repeated acts of violence. They went on to claim that 'such people' could not be reached by the left-wing, 'aimlessly wondering' social workers. 'Festung Europa' (Fortress Europe) was another related solution. Within the AfD and IBD samples, the combination of hashtags and terms relating to #Islamisierung ('Islamisation'), #FestungEuropa, uncontrolled #Massenmigration, and 'Islamist' kindergartens tellingly summarised the story of the problem and put forward the solution they favoured.

MOTIVATIONAL FRAMES

All three groups framed the social and political situation in Germany in apocalyptic terms in order to *motivate* their followers to support and act upon their cause. Motivational frames are generally aided through visuals, slogans, and captivating images. One common tactic is to use current events to spur people into action. For example, the incident and resulting right-wing rallies in Chemnitz in August 2018 (see above) were highly relevant topics during the period of data

collection. The Chemnitz incident was used by all three groups to hyperbolise the violence frame. The solutions proposed became increasingly militant and explicit: take back the streets and 'resist'. The #Chemnitz hashtag became the symbol for the murders, rapes, and 'oppression' of the German people at the hands of the 'foreigners'. The authorities were blamed for failing to deport the perpetrator, and overall the case was used to illustrate, and in a sense provide 'evidence' for the 'demise' story, which in this case culminated in someone being killed. We observed how several major frames are linked – including some originating on the extreme right as well as from among the Identitarians and right-wing populists: #Widerstand, #WirsinddieWende (we are the revolution), #refugeesNOTwelcome, #Merkelmussweg (Merkel must go), #Kandelistüberall (Kandel [city in Germany] is everywhere), #GrenzenDicht (tight borders), #DefendEurope, #ChemnitzErwache (Chemnitz awakening), #c2608 (the date of the Chemnitz stabbing), #Multikultitötet. The AfD framing on the one hand contested the claim that foreigners had been 'hounded' and the presence (at least in great numbers) of far-right elements during the demonstration; on the other hand, they used the same argument for vigilantism by the 'people', given the perceived failure of the police to protect them against an alleged, hyperbolised threat. This appeared on Twitter in the form of apparent witness statements and an overall twisting of the demonstration by comparing it to the protests that had occurred just before the fall of communism, and declarations of an apparent lack of order. In another instance of frame twisting, the AfD attempted to re-appropriate the hashtag #wirsindmehr (we are more), which was used by the left in response to the Chemnitz demonstrations. The aim of this was to position the AfD behind the 'citizens' wrongly accused of being a right-wing extremist mob, and to polarise opinion against the left. In another instance the meaning was reversed, as the crime was attributed to the victims; for example, according to one tweet by the AfD, the 'foreigners' were in fact 'hounding' the Germans. The IBD also propagated this image of Germans being 'hounded', and accused the state of protecting the perpetrators instead of the victims. This is an example of another classic theme across the board: namely, that the state does not fulfil its most basic duty, which is to protect its citizens.

Focusing on the topic of crime perpetrated by migrants, the AfD made extensive use of images and crude language to conjure up familiar and frightening experiences of these crimes, such as the last words of a dying victim. In the same way that other crimes were framed, knife attacks were portrayed as something that occurred regularly; for example, following a murder in Köthen, the AfD posted an emotive image with the caption: "How many more?" In the case of the IBD, the binary comparisons went further than those based on violent crime to argue that Germans were hard-working while the 'foreigners' were lazy and 'fed off' the state. Nonetheless, most of the emphasis was placed on violence; for example, a tweet by the IBD declared all migrants to be 'stabbers' and 'rapists'. Moreover, incidents of violence were reframed to portray masses of armed migrants roaming around, wanting to take away 'our land and our identity'. An image posted by the IBD contained a similar message to the previously mentioned AfD one: "How many more times does it have to happen before people get active?"

The AN took this a step further and argued that it was necessary for them to take matters into their own hands because the police were not capable of protecting the people – in particular women – from crime. They argued for the need to establish #Schutzzone (protection zones) and #Schutzstreife (protection patrols), a suggestion that correlates with the idea of National Socialist zones propagated also outside this issue area. Again, in one retweet from the far-right news site *Unzensurierte Nachrichten* (Uncensored News) they claimed: "The police are practically invisible: women are getting harassed more often by asylum seekers and knife attacks are an almost daily occurrence! It is understandable that citizens need to patrol the streets in order to ensure more security." In other retweets originating from the NPD, we found elaborations on how Hesse will not be 'lost' and 'when the state does not protect us citizens, we have to protect ourselves'. The IBD also invoked the argument of state impotence in terms of protecting its citizens, particularly with reference to women, but also in the context of the Chemnitz story. Similarly, the IBD referred to the concept of 'zones' here – specifically, IBD zones – as areas of information and contestation of the mainstream discourse.

The AfD did not openly argue for vigilantism; they were however on the same page concerning the first part of the story, namely, claiming that the police were not capable of protecting the people whilst making insinuating comments regarding protection zones. For example, an image was posted with the caption: "The police have a monopoly on the use of force? Wonderful, but please do not hesitate to use this force even when the delinquents are non-Germans." They also commended the establishment of a militia/vigilante group with the comment: "The state pulls back, and citizens take matters into their own hands." In another image posted by the AfD in the aftermath of Chemnitz, the party declared the failure of the state to protect its people, claiming that the consequence was death, and that deportations 'save lives'. With the aim of creating an image of total chaos and fear, a series of tweets by the AfD declared Chancellor Merkel a security risk, followed by the suggestion that Germany had been transformed into a 'slum' as a consequence of migration, and the claim that 'criminal' asylum seekers were everywhere. In addition to this, the AfD propagated for general protection of 'our wives and daughters'. Pupils and teachers were also deemed in need of 'protection' from violence as they were particularly at risk as a result of 'diversity'.

The concept of defence extends beyond vigilantism in the sense that the IBD, in particular, perceive themselves as the 'defenders' of Europe through protest actions, but also through actual attempts to stop migrants at the border. For example, IBD activists were involved in actions intended to stop migration at sea, and commended initiatives to return migrants to their countries of origin or in-between countries, such as Libya. The IBD are furthermore – and typical for their self-identification as a 'movement' – intensively preoccupied with low-scale 'stunts'; these include recording footage of activists planting protest banners on buildings, such as mosques that are under construction. These actions are not particularly impressive in themselves, as they usually involve only very few activists. However, the videos are usually professionally edited and accompanied by dramatic music, slow motion, and a playful interplay of light and darkness, which may have

Identitäre Bewegung
@IBDeutschland

Follow

Während #Syrien seine Landsleute zur Rückkehr aufruft, tritt in #Deutschland heute (1.8.) die Neuregelung des #Familiennachzug|s in Kraft: Auch „Flüchtlinge mit eingeschränktem Schutzstatus" sollen ihre Angehörigen nach Deutschland holen dürfen.

Der heimliche Einmarsch: Neuregelung des Familiennachzugs tritt heute in K…
Der VOLKSAUSTAUSCH galoppiert! Im vergangenen Jahr stieg die Zahl der Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland um unglaubliche 4,4 Prozent…
compact-online.de

The text above the link and picture reads: "While #Syria calls on its compatriots to return, in #Germany today (1.8.) the new regulation of #familyreunification comes into force: 'Refugees with limited protection status' will also be allowed to bring their relatives to Germany."

a compelling impact on the viewer. This is the ultimate aim of these stunts – to produce 'impressive' videos that can be posted online and that will appeal to (potential) supporters.

The need to defend borders is justified through the use of the *invasion* frame. This frame was elaborately exploited by the AfD: the party asserted that migrants were 'invaders' who invaded like 'locusts' if not stopped in time. A video posted by the AfD framed a situation of

imminent 'danger', depicting Africans beginning to 'invade' Europe by first declaring 'war' in Spain. Here, time is important, as they claimed that Germany was facing an actual impending 'invasion', and urged that individuals should act quickly by voting for the AfD. The invasion hyperbole was also used abundantly by the IBD, through stories of the imminent arrival of masses of individuals, the use of terms such as 'mass migration', and visuals of hordes of dark-skinned men (see Figure 2 above). This was to give the impression that the 'stream' does not stop: they keep on coming. This is an example where meaning is twisted as a reverse contestation to confirm their own theories; for example, by quoting a recent BfV report, which referred to 'alleged uncontrolled mass migration', the IBD sarcastically asked whether the

Figure 3

AfD Image.

BfV was suggesting that mass migration was actually controlled by the state. This feeds into the wider conspiracy that the left is actively facilitating the 'replacement' of the German people.

The motivational frames employed by these groups linked immigration issues to other grievances relating to the economy and societal issues, in order to stir up support from their potential bases. For example, the AN often retweeted content from the DDW and NPD accounts on topics relating to: #Islamisierung (Islamisation) and #Islamismus (Islamism); children abroad receiving benefits; genital mutilation; terrorism; child molesters; and 'wasting' money on refugees. A post from the IBD also alluded to taxes being 'wasted' on migrants, and referred similarly to the issue of children receiving benefits abroad. Another theme which the AN mentioned to a lesser extent than the AfD and the IBD was that of German poverty. The AfD built the link in an overt way by arguing that 'illegal migrants' received money that 'should' go to German pensioners instead. This is an example of the poverty migration trope, which emphasises the nativist economic element. The IBD also disseminated a story of an elderly person whose pension was not enough to pay for his apartment anymore, claiming that such money was spent on migrants instead. In an emotional selfie-video, the leader of the AfD, Alice Weidel, used a similar incident to declare that Germany had forgotten its own people in an apparent zero-sum game between foreigners and locals. The AfD also exploited the topic of children abroad receiving benefits; using an image, they give the impression of immediacy by claiming there has been a 10% increase in child benefit sent to other EU states in only six months (see Figure 3).

Furthermore, the three groups depict themselves as victims of censorship for being 'critical' of 'Islamisation', whilst claiming that they are the true 'defenders' of freedom of speech. This was particularly evident in the case of the IBD, which often twisted meaning and reality by using 'Islamisation' as if it were already an established fact and reframing Islamophobia as 'critique'. Underlying the whole argument is a favourite twist of the New Right, which is to say that democracy in its pure form guarantees an unlimited right to free speech.

CREDIBILITY

Visuals and emojis, as well as powerful rhetorical devices accompanied by (usually shocking) images, were used to engage the audience; one of the most powerful tools in terms of resonance, however, is repetition – the simple tactic of re-posting content on an almost daily basis. Even when there was no event or news story on a particular day, these groups posted previous incidents committed by refugees repeatedly, in order to give the impression that they were happening every day at an unprecedented level. Here, the repetition, irony, and eventual twisting of the word 'Einzelfall' (isolated case) – designed to suggest that in fact incidents of migrant crime were not isolated at all, but regular occurrences – were also evident. For example, the IBD used hashtags for places such as Chemnitz and Cottbus alongside #Einzelfall to create the picture of a continuously developing and imminent threat of violence across different cities and to emphasise the claim that the situation in Europe was becoming more dangerous every day. The AfD, in particular, used this tactic of reposting press articles on migrant crime. For example, it consistently capitalised upon an Afghan man's murder of his German girlfriend, using the hashtags #Einzelfall, #Messermigrant ('knife-migrant'), #Afghanistan and an image criticising the sentence that the perpetrator received. In addition to its use of repetition, this example demonstrates twisting by linkage, such as when 'Multikulti' was placed in the same context as particular ethnicities and murder, so that it would take on a negative connotation.

Whilst ensuring that their own messages remain consistent, these tactics simultaneously highlight the perceived *inconsistencies* in the mainstream discourse. 'Einzelfall' is a case in point, as repetition and reposting serve as a means of discrediting political actors and challenging the conception of 'one-off' incidents. Another tactic has involved drawing on messages from mainstream conservatives and

claiming ownership of their issues: for example, the AfD highlighted that whilst Horst Seehofer of the CSU heavily criticised the migration issue in Germany, the CSU merely talked about these problems, while the AfD offered 'real' solutions – emphasising the discrepancy between discourse and action.

All three groups resorted to techniques of *empirical credibility* (reports from the press and from far-right outlets) to reinforce their arguments. In doing so, they used official and distorted statistics to demonstrate the apparent increase in the numbers of foreigners and Germans with a migration background ('Migrationshintergrund'). For example, in one post the AN suggested that, according to the Federal Statistics Office, almost every fourth citizen in Germany has foreign origins; thus, the size of the population with a migration background was 19.3 million, or 23.6% of the whole. In a tweet that followed, the AN stated that every second one of these people would become a German citizen – followed by the hashtags #Migrationshintergrund #Überfremdung and #Volkstod.

The IBD also used statistics to highlight the number of school-children with a migration background. A significant argumentative effort was furthermore invested in setting up the 'great replacement' as a matter of reality against the backdrop of such statistics. An elaborate story was constructed around its emergence and relating how the entire world had in fact been working tirelessly ever since the end of the Second World War to replace – and basically wipe out – the 'European' population in an apparently historically unique 'experiment'. To this end, issues and other stories were adapted to fit the logic of the conspiracy theory; for example, it was claimed that asylum seekers were in fact only economic migrants in disguise. This is incidentally also an illustration of a hierarchy of 'wrongs' typical of all three discourses. The IBD took its hyperbole to the next level, declaring the current state of affairs to be a case of an unconditional surrender. It also invoked statistics on high birth rates in Africa and suggested that future generations would undoubtedly migrate to Europe. This was portrayed by showing images of African migrants at the gates, along with the suggestion that they would travel through Spain to get to Germany. This mirrored many elements of the video posted by the AfD as described above.

The AfD also used statistics to link terrorism with the idea of a 'mass invasion' of Muslims. In a tweet linking to an image on their Facebook account, the AfD claimed that the authorities were "failing to control and protect" the population from terrorism, followed by a picture displaying statistics on the increase in criminal investigations of 'Islamist extremists' in Hesse, with the title "Allahu Akbar! Europe belongs to us!" and a stamp that reads "Islam does not belong to Germany" (see Figure 4). To highlight levels of crime, the AfD used official statistics from the Federal Crime Office to show that in 2017, whilst 13 Germans were killed at the hands of asylum seekers, no asylum seekers were murdered by Germans. What is missing here, of course, is the percentage of those 13 convictions in the wider context of all murders in Germany that year. In another scaremongering

Figure 4

Image from the AfD.

tweet, the AfD claimed that a study on debt by the International Monetary Fund showed that the financial situation in Germany was worryingly unstable – the AfD suggested that the results implied that even Kenya and Uganda had better economies than Germany.

Utilising official statistics from the Federal Statistics Office and the International Monetary Fund, as well as mainstream press reports, strengthens the credibility of frame articulators. Moreover the AfD has often promoted itself as a 'party of academics', claiming that it has a high number of members with the title of doctor or professor. In the current Bundestag (German Parliament), the AfD comes second in this category (after the CSU), with a proportion of 20.7% of members holding a doctorate or professorship.[29] The intellectual and academic identity of the AfD has thus been exploited to lend more credibility to their statements and views. The IBD have also used such tactics; for example, they often draw on the book *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* by the British author Douglas Murray, which outlines the apparent 'suicide' of Europe that is occurring through declining birth-rates and mass migration. When referring to the book, the Identitarians were keen to point out that Murray was educated at Eton and Oxford and could not therefore be accused by the 'liberal elite' of being a neo-Nazi. The use of (mainstream) intellectuals – or frame articulators – to support their arguments is a tactic commonly used by the IBD and the New Right in general.

SALIENCE

In terms of frame *centrality*, all three groups exploited the migrant 'crisis' in order to connect this issue to other perceived social, political, and economic grievances. Immigration was thus used as a central frame to exploit fears surrounding 'mass migration' and to apportion blame to the current political system and mainstream politicians.

29   21.7% of CSU members in the current Bundestag hold the title of doctor or professor. For more information, see: www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ neuer-bundestag-das-sind-deutschlands-volksvertreter-1.3720219.

This is linked to the *narrative fidelity* frame, whereby the salience of frames is additionally dependent on cultural resonance within the target audience. By tapping into perceived grievances, these groups claim to offer an alternative vision of how society should be structured – one that often reflects a 'nostalgic' return to conservative family values.

Such principles reject perceived 'political correctness' around topics of gender and sexuality. For example, the AN sample revealed the hashtags #NoHomo and #Genderwahn ('delusions' about gender issues). We also found formulae such as 'man+woman+children=family', or slogans such as "Protect children from delusions about gender issues – support families with many children." In addition to this, the AN promoted a healthy lifestyle, whilst claiming that homosexuality and childless families were a 'danger' to the health and existence of the 'people'. The AN also tweeted a picture of a flyer-posting campaign with the caption 'healthy and natural family', against 'Homopropaganda' and the 'destruction of the family'. In the AfD sample there was no evidence that the hashtag #Genderwahn was used; however, different formulations of 'gender madness' were evident through the use of 'Gendergaga'. For example, the AfD tweeted an eclectic manifestation of 'Multikulti-Diversitäts-Integrations-Gendergaga-Vielfalts-Ideologie' ('Multicultural-diversity-integration-gender-madness-variety-ideology'), which of course was viewed as 'troubling'. Another tweet argued against gender research because this would apparently prevent children from qualifying in 'decent' professions.

The IBD equally attached importance to health and bodily resilience. For example, they encouraged 'patriots' and members to remain sporty, even in hot weather conditions. In another image, the IBD claimed that healthy lifestyles were not invented by the hippies (leftists). An individual's healthy lifestyle as a precondition for the health of the people (Volk) was a classical National Socialist theme. This also fits in with the more general features of youth subcultures that emphasise militancy about physical fitness. Reaffirming gender identity roles, IBD women posed as 'Mädels' (girls) and wore traditional dresses and hair styles. Linked to this, and to the topics of family and gender, was the idea of rewarding housewives, which the AN showed full support for by retweeting an

NPD post on the issue. The AfD also referred to paying housewives to raise children, so that their decision to return to work would not be influenced by financial hardship or social pressure.

In addition to promoting archaic family values and traditional gender roles, narrative fidelity frames touch upon historical events and commemorations of the past. In this sense, the AN made explicit references to National Socialism: #NTNLSZLST (National Social) and #NSjetzt. It also commemorated individuals associated with (neo-) Nazism and the Second World War. For them, the call to action involved commemoration marches, demonstrations and other kinds of remembrances. The IBD usually take other historical references from before the Second World War and individuals who have contributed in one way or another to the creation of the German people; an action was dedicated for example to Bismarck. Moreover, every year the Identitarians stage a commemoration of the 1683 battle against the Turks in Vienna. The victims of the Second World War are however also mentioned, in a bid to draw parallels with the victims of crime today. In the time period studied, there were no similar historical references within the AfD sample.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The online stories of the AN, IBD, and AfD portray an alternative worldview centred around the narrative of a national and worldwide conspiracy against the German people, whereby Germans and their culture are in danger of being replaced. These stories are not just narratives which explain what is happening, why, and what one should do about it. They are pop-cultural products, and have an effect on viewers in the same way as films, for example – in this case, horror films. These groups are primarily frame manipulators and frame twisters; they craft an apparently logical and consistent (conspiratorial) story of how the left is set to 'destroy' Germany through migration – a story that in essence shares similarities with the National Socialist story of how the Jews were set to 'destroy' Germany. They attempt to delegitimise the government by showing its apparent inability or unwillingness to solve issues, and they highlight its perceived political and financial corruption. They use (distorted) statistics, and reverse the meaning of 'Einzelfall', and they generally use stories and tropes rather than narratives or complex frames. These groups want to motivate, but even more importantly they want to amaze and frighten, and they work with emotions to draw the viewer into this fantasy, which in turn becomes a reality for them. As a central part of this, all three groups utilise symbols and a great many visuals. For all important messages there is a short sentence and an image featuring a slogan, a frightening caption or picture, and – in the case of the AfD in particular – a picture of a notable party member endorsing the message. It is not the facts as such that mobilise, but the way in which they are interpreted and combined with the fantasies and stereotypes that create the story. In addition, they use emotions such as outrage, fear or disgust, and mechanisms such as hyperbole and generalisation, framing issues as more serious and more threatening than they really are. The themes are virtually the same, but in terms of design and marketing the AfD is clearly ahead. The IBD skilfully plays a middle role, by 'daring' to say more – ideas and concepts

more intimately linked to the original National Socialist vocabulary, for example – yet they phrase most of their statements in a sarcastic and/or interrogatory manner, so that neither accusations of a National Socialist resurgence, nor libel, can be invoked.

Table 4. Summary of frames

CORE FRAMING TASKS		
DIAGNOSTIC FRAME	**PROGNOSTIC FRAME**	**MOTIVATIONAL FRAME**
• 'Problem': Germans/ Europeans are in danger of dying out • Source of the 'problem': foreigners, refugees, 'mass migration', mainstream parties, the left, Chancellor Merkel, the 'elite', political correctness, homosexuals, NGOs, Islam	• End migration • Deportation ('remigration' – IBD) • Vote for right-wing parties • Increase German birth rates	• Issues framed in apocalyptic terms • 'Defend' Europe/ German citizens and encourage vigilantism • Visuals, slogans, and captivating images utilising victims of (migrant) crime and images portraying German children and pensioners in poverty • IBD perform stunts and upload professionally edited accounts of them

RESONANCE CRITERIA	
CREDIBILITY	**SALIENCE**
• Consistent re-posting of (mainstream) press reports relating to migrant crime • Use of (distorted) statistics from official bodies • Constant references to academics and right-wing intellectuals (AfD & IBD)	• Nostalgically looking back on traditional family values and gender roles • Commemorating WWII and Battle of Vienna (AN & IBD) • Exploitation of the migrant 'crisis' and linking the issue to other perceived social, political, and economic grievances

CONCLUSION

THE AIM OF this report was to determine the overlaps apparent within the far-right scene on Twitter. This is important as the far right have made electoral gains all across Europe, and the populist radical right are claiming to be part of a 'new' form of right-wing conservativism which has no association with the more extreme elements of the right-wing spectrum. However, we cannot deny that such parties attract an extremist base. The question is, therefore, whether these parties are in fact more extreme than they want us to believe, or whether the extremists are simply an inconvenient minority that have joined these parties in the hope that the more 'sanitised' versions of their concerns will actually have a chance to be heard on a mainstream platform. Central to this analysis is understanding the New Right, and radical right-wing populism, and how their adherents have successfully adopted a 'new master frame' by reformulating previous dividing lines relating to race and applying them instead to culture. This in itself poses an essential question: how should we deal with this shift? In particular, are race and culture fundamentally the same in this context, or are they actually different concepts with distinct ideological messages and assumptions?

We utilised a mixed-methods approach, which entailed first exploring the European *extreme* right-wing scene on Twitter, and then analysing the particular frames used by the AfD, AN, and IBD in Germany and evident on their official Twitter accounts. On a cursory level, our findings from the quantitative study did suggest a level of transnational cooperation and an overlap of national issues, such as Trump, the AfD (cf. Berger 2018; Ebner and Davey 2017), and Brexit, with the refugee crisis and the perceived 'threat' to the white race forming the backdrop to these debates. The accounts in the quantitative sample were identified as right-wing extremist, and as such the tweets were openly racist with rampant neo-Nazi and white supremacist themes. These accounts unambiguously supported right-wing populist parties, figures, and issues, both in Europe and across the Atlantic. This is significant as it confirms that elements of the New Right and radical right-wing populism do indeed resonate with the extreme right. The hashtag analysis, moreover, confirmed findings by Graham (2016): namely, that hashtags were used to infiltrate and twist mainstream topics and debates. Additionally, the extreme right-wing accounts

linked to mainstream right-leaning online newspapers, such as *Mail Online*, the *Express, RT,* and *Die Welt,* to substantiate their arguments and legitimise their conclusions: the empirical credibility mechanism, which we also found in the qualitative sample. The accounts in the quantitative sample linked not just to the mainstream press but also to blogs centring around conspiracy theories, as well as to more underground far-right websites and forums.

The qualitative study revealed similar themes; as expected, however, there were no explicit references to anti-Semitism, as the groups and movements studied are keen to distance themselves from neo-Nazism. The quantitative sample, on the other hand, contained explicit anti-Semitic tweets and references to the 'superiority' of the white race. Aside from this, both samples were similar in terms of their prognostic framing; specifically, in warning that Europeans faced an imminent threat from migration. The quantitative Twitter sample framed this through the concept of 'white genocide', whilst the AN, AfD, and IBD viewed it as the death of the German people, the demise of Germany, and a 'great replacement', respectively. Essentially these concepts are the same – that the German/European culture/race is under threat from 'over-foreignisation'. The 'culprits' are likewise the same: foreigners, refugees, mass migration, the left, Islam, Chancellor Merkel, and the 'elite', among others. The accounts within the quantitative sample went further than this, however, as Jewish people and non-whites were also to blame. Nevertheless, all the groups and individuals within the quantitative and qualitative samples attributed issues to some kind of conspiracy, be it the left, foreigners, or Jewish people. The solution, for the majority of these groups, is to support right-wing populist parties and figures. However, whilst the AN has traditionally kept its politics on the streets and outside the democratic system, recently it has openly supported the NPD and expressed joy at the AfD's electoral successes. As a movement, the IBD also has a rather ambiguous relationship with political parties, and in particular the AfD. Aside from the odd retweet, the IBD did not expressly ask its supporters to vote for the AfD. As mentioned, however, there have been reports of much closer cooperation between the two groups than they imply publicly.

In terms of tactics and motivational frames, the AfD is the most sophisticated, followed by the IBD. Whilst the IBD performs protest stunts and uploads them to social media, the AfD produces simple, eye-catching slogans alongside visuals. The IBD targets a younger audience, incorporating elements of traditional street protest politics with digitalisation and professionally editing its content, which eventually goes viral. In a similar way, the simple yet memorable AfD images are easily shared and retweeted amongst their supporters and followers. These groups reproduce a large portion of their content by way of frame consistency to make it appear that refugees are constantly arriving in Europe and that migrant crime is continuously on the rise. These claims are corroborated with distorted statistics from (credible) sources, as well as news articles.

The AfD, IBD and – to a lesser extent – the AN are successfully skirting the line in terms of their discourse. Like the more extreme elements of the far right, their rhetoric is highly exclusionary, yet they remain within the limits of legal speech. The AN's more overt references to National Socialist discourse were surprising as, when the AN was formed, its members made a conscious effort to detach themselves from neo-Nazism; however, it appears that the AN has now become rhetorically bolder. That said, the group continues to steer clear of explicit anti-Semitism. The AN's Twitter account predictably lies on the periphery of influence, compared with those of the AfD and IBD. Whilst some may take comfort in the fact that an extremist group has marginal influence, our findings demonstrate that the AfD and IBD are in effect delivering the same messages in a manner that is more palatable and credible. They thus contribute perceived legitimacy to the same myths and narratives utilised by the extreme right, but their outreach and influence are more far-reaching.

Our findings confirm most of the scholarship on far-right framing, but we go into more detail regarding how these frames are constructed, and in addition we identify new mechanisms of persuasion. For example, we observed how these actors not only use empirical credibility, they create their own kind of empirical credibility – such as when they refer to media sources internal to their own scene. They do not merely bridge frames (cf. Caiani and della Porta 2011), they twist frames,

they exaggerate and make ample use of hyperbole, they take individual incidents and project mass phenomena, and they make extensive use of modern audio-visual repertoires. This exploration additionally provides ample grounds to rethink the very topic of an 'overlap' between the populist, New Right and extreme right. What we see is a convergence in topics with some differences in formulation, but not even on a consistent basis. All three groups in our qualitative analysis were worried about the same issue: the death/replacement of the German people – i.e. the natives – through migration/foreigners/refugees. Furthermore, and even more worryingly, this kind of problem is not at all new, but is in essence the same core concern that existed in National Socialist ideology.

Contemporary analyses of the New Right emphasise the replacement of race through culture and how this has made the discourse compatible with the mainstream. We do not contest this; we do argue, however, that this misses an important piece of the puzzle, which is the aforementioned *formulation of the problem*, which is emphatically not new. We might argue in fact that the combination of contemporary discursive innovations and contemporary populist repertoires – such as personal attacks, crude, simple and bold language, use of social media, dramatic videos and visuals in general – has in fact resurrected and rebranded an existing ideational potential, and has in effect united the far right. Neo-Nazi groups have also adopted these elements to a great extent. Meanwhile, radical right-wing populist parties such as the AfD adopt 'outing' tactics typically used by extremist groups. Together they create and feed a story of an existential threat that is imminent and which the state is neither willing nor able to handle – an utterly subversive and, historically, hardly novel statement of fact. The emphasis on traditional gender roles is but an indication of this return to history. Importantly, this return is not necessarily and not always a return to actual National Socialism, but rather to its core ideas, including family structures, and also to ideas relating to the equality and dignity of people. Most importantly, the underlying cultural revolution propagated by the New Right is the reverse of the 1968 revolution and its liberalism. This broader picture should be a priority for future research.

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