Toxic Narratives

MONITORING
ALTERNATIVE-RIGHT ACTORS

AMADEU ANTONIO STIFTUNG

INITIATIVEN FÜR ZIVILGESELLSCHAFT UND DEMOKRATISCHE KULTUR

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Dear Readers,

With our Monitoring Report, we want to draw attention to certain trends and dangers facing democratic culture within the digital sphere and ask how we can protect this culture together. We want to focus here on the arguments, content, images and above all the associated narratives that right-wing populist and far-right extremist actors circulate within social networks. As attitude research has shown, these narratives are easily assimilated within society's democratic center, particularly in the case of racist attributions or the use of antisemitic conspiracy narratives to explain world events.

In seeking to depict the complexity of the developments and the interaction of the various actors, we have utilized a concept that gained currency in Germany during the course of the Trump election campaign. As an analogue to the self-description of a portion of the U.S. right wing as the "alt-right," we refer here to an "alternative right." This concept has been criticized – with some justice – as being euphemistic. However, it seemed more appropriate to us, and better able to render the current changes visible, than speaking only of the "new right." The alt-right is a term for a variety of ideologies that seek to convince others that the "identity of the white people" is threatened due to policies promoting an open, multicultural society based on human rights and equality. Former U.S. presidential adviser Steve Bannon, who strongly sympathizes with the alt-right movement, has been a strong advocate of this ideology through the Breitbart news portal, using what he calls "rolling narratives." In the course of this strategy, he has published thousands of articles linking current themes with an underlying racist narrative, seeking to provide his worldview with a viral interpretive influence. Various factions of the German alternative-right scene are now trying to emulate Breitbart's success.

For the analysis of specific narratives, we have selected 10 right-wing populist, far-right and conspiracy-ideology actors that are representative of larger phenomena, quantitatively classifying and qualitatively assessing their most far-reaching posts within the largest social network. We have deemed these narratives to be toxic insofar as they poison the social climate, use othering to construct in- and out-groups, and thus seek to polarize the environment into nothing more than friends and enemies. This construction of "the enemy" then makes it possible to open up the digital environment to mobbing, hate, hate speech and even criminally prosecutable incitement to hatred and violence (German "Volksverhetzung").

Today's updated narratives often have roots in familiar right-wing extremist accounts of the world. Particularly alarming is the image of the so-called race war – ostensibly imminent due to the influx of asylum seekers, immigration and an alleged Islamization – that underlies many of the narratives. Overall, 27 such narratives can be observed, which can be further clustered into 10 broader framing narratives (for example: internal/external threats, the downfall of the German people, etc.). Here, it is evident that the newer narratives draw on already widely disseminated sub-narratives targeting the "manipulative establishment" or representatives of the constitutional democratic state. This largely open and viral condemnation of the democratic system is for us previously unprecedented in the digital sphere. Moreover, narratives are very durable. Already many young people are growing up surrounded by these accounts of the world, with their influence shaping the youths' developing attitudes toward life.

This brutal mobilization of hate and contempt through the means of toxic narratives has to date been met with little opposition. Anyone who confronts them within social networks, trying to discuss the issues raised, will be abused, insulted and threatened within hours. Counter-speech has often proved to be ineffective. Arguments, statistics and references to research findings often simply lead to insistence on original positions or even to further radicalization and a consolidation of worldviews. In contrast to these forces, there are comparatively few democratic counter-narratives that make positive reference to equality, human rights and the rule of law. It is thus all the more critical to develop, disseminate and recount such narratives. It is equally important that those pursuing this task are credible in their own attitudes and avoid employing communications techniques similar to those used by the alternative right.

To date, the public debate has focused largely on the issues of filter bubbles, fake news and criminally prosecutable hate speech. The discussions around Germany's

new online hate-speech law (Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz, NetzDG) have made clear how superficial the awareness of the problem is. While the steep financial penalties have justifiably centered the public debate around aspects of freedom-of-expression, there has as yet been little examination of the consequences of hate speech and questions of democratic culture in the digital sphere.

As a part of its own digital work, the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, a German non-profit foundation, engages with hate and other forms of group-focused enmity online while promoting the development of a democratic digital civil society. Unlike some other actors, we seek to work with platform operators to achieve changes, for instance in the context of the Online Civil Courage Initiative we are implementing jointly with Facebook, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and others.

In its other projects, the foundation supports online deradicalization, promotes the development of a digital culture of debate, is developing a pool of trainers able to address the issue of online hate, and works to address hate speech from the perspective of those affected, thus empowering them. It also publishes Belltower.news, a digital civil society portal offering up-to-date information on relevant issues. The foundation connects all these activities with a research-driven foundation through the work of the Institute for Democracy and Civil Society.

We hope the present study will help illuminate the thoughts and ideas lying behind the examined phenomena, while further advancing efforts to shape successful counter-strategies. I would like to extend my warm thanks to the Freudenberg Stiftung, whose assistance enabled us to produce this Monitoring Report.

Timo Reinfrank
Executive Director, Amadeu Antonio Stiftung

Viral Hate. Right-wing extremist
communication strategies in Web 2.0
Amadeu Antonio Stiftung 2013

Introduction: Narratives and their impact

Many fairy tales begin with the phrase, "Once upon a time…." When talking about narratives, we often have this in mind. Others think of school literature or mythology, or about stories and narratives that not only describe a set of actions or series of events, but also convey a deeper meaning or lesson.

But other narratives exist too, which may not be written down, but are nevertheless potent forces within our lives and the society at large. These are the narratives that we use to order, explain and describe the world, and which define the perspective from which we contemplate society. Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard justifiably calls such explanations of the world "grand narratives." These accounts function like any other stories, evoking emotions and providing us with motivations. But what if this form of narrative primarily evokes fear, rejection or even hate?

Narratives have long-term potency, create apparent connections between disparate events, and provide legitimacy for personal worldviews.

Stories of this kind have served as the basis for the violence directed against refugees and their supporters. As the number of asylum seekers rose, more than 300 Facebook sites were created across Germany with the title "Nein zum Heim" ("No shelter here") or something similar, protesting against local refugee housing and seeking to inflame the public mood against the new arrivals. With their strongly local references and unprofessional appearance, they gave every impression of being organizational platforms for ordinary "worried citizens"; as a consequence, some of the sites reached tens of thousands of people with their racist propaganda. No direct relationship between violent attacks and these groups can generally be proven; however, their contribution to an overall increasingly tense and aggressive anti-refugee sentiment is obvious.

For good reason, online hate and agitation have been the focus of much discussion since that time. However, considerably less attention has been paid to the narratives underlying these forms of hate speech.

In most cases, the condemnation of a certain group of people is not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it is accompanied by stories that "explain" and reinforce the negative valuation. These accounts are crafted to sound true and correct to the specific target audience, and thus provide additional motivation and legitimation. Narratives have long-term potency, create apparent connections between disparate events, and – as in the cases to be examined here – can be classified as toxic for the social environment. Such toxic narratives can be found in far-right, right-wing-populist and conspiracy-theory contexts. This does not mean that all such narratives are automatically of right-wing extremist or right-wing populist origin; however, they complement each other well. Toxic narratives are very adaptable and can be found in other parts of society.

Should a person deem one such toxic narrative to be true, he or she doesn't necessarily have to believe all other linked narratives. However, there is a strong probability that this will happen sooner or later.

For this reason, it is necessary to process such narratives – decoding them, examining their core content and classifying them – in order to respond to them cogently and successfully. The present report is intended to make a contribution to this effort.

Why do we use the term "toxic narrative"?
The concept of "toxic communication" has been established in the English-speaking world since the 1960s. The term has also been borrowed in Germany to refer to linguistic behavior that has a negative influence on its environment. When we speak of toxic narratives, we are referring to accounts of the world that supply the pertinent "events" and interpretations for such communication.

The challenge of alternative-right media strategies in the digital public sphere

"Together against online hate." ("Gemeinsam gegen Hass im Netz") With this prominent problematization of the issue of hate speech, the German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (BMJV), along with a task force composed of other political, business-sector and civil society actors, introduced the danger of right-wing populist and right-wing extremist social-network content to a broader public. The problem and possible countermeasures were also widely discussed in the press.

In the course of 2016, the British referendum on the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (EU), as well as Donald Trump's election as president of the United States (US), drew media attention to additional digital phenomena that can be prominently used to promote group-focused enmity – especially fake news and social bots.

The various phenomena are frequently conflated in public discussions. However, the relationships between them, as well as with the specific strategies pursued by right-wing extremist and right-wing populist actors, often remain unclear. U.S. media reports during and following the presidential election helped kindle a vigorous discussion about the future of the German public sphere. However, the lack of empirical foundation has made it difficult to develop suitably targeted responses.

For this reason, the current overview will provide an initial introductory illustration of the connections between the phenomena. In the process, it will also highlight significant differences between the German and American developments.

1. Hate speech as a digital form of group-focused enmity

Public debate in Germany in 2016/2017 focused initially on communications designated by the Council of Europe as hate speech – thus, those that attacked people on the grounds of national origin, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability or religion, or otherwise promoted, justified or incited the production of such content.[1] To be sure, the disparagement and vilification of specific population groups, an expression of group-focused enmity, is nothing new. However, the incidence of such behavior has increased significantly online since the number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany surged in 2015.

In Germany, content that is clearly subject to criminal prosecution, such as incitements to hatred or violent action, threats or libel, can be distinguished from forms of hate speech that are not as yet punishable by law. This latter category includes cyberbullying, defamation, harassment and coercion – or more simply, toxic communication. More generally, it encompasses communication styles and content that contribute to the destruction of online communities or induce certain participants to leave such communities through methods such as the persistent disparagement of individuals or groups, lies, insults and other destructive expressions.[2]

Focusing on the phenomena of fake news and social bots detracts from addressing the ideological content and strategic dimension of hate speech.

All of these various forms have serious psychological and physical consequences for those affected. This can begin with headaches and increased blood pressure, and range through aggressiveness, anxiety and even suicide. In some cases, the acts also have an effect on the victim's surroundings.

We have observed an alarming diffusion of discrimination and numerous calls for violent acts in connection with hate speech. Thus, the strategic dimension of such speech must be emphasized. In many cases, the speech act is not only intended to wound, but is also deliberately used as a verbal weapon to recruit sympathizers, intimidate activists, focus attention on particular issues and gain interpretive sovereignty within societal discourses.[3]

2. Fake news as a cornerstone of the new alternative-right media landscape

Since the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president in November 2016, an additional phenomenon has drawn significant media attention: the viral propagation of false information, rumors and lies – in short, fake news. This refers to false reporting that is distributed over the internet and particularly through social networks with the aim of influencing public opinion.

This phenomenon too is not strictly new. In Germany, as carefully documented by projects such as HOAXmap. org, a massive rise has been evident particularly since the surge in the number of asylum seekers in the fall of 2015. Following the U.S. election, numerous press outlets addressed the issue of the degree to which fake news determined the outcome of the election, as the majority of such false reports had supported Donald Trump's campaign. For example, the most prominent instance was the so-called "Pizzagate" accusation, in which Hillary Clinton was alleged to have operated a pedophile network from a pizzeria in Washington, D.C.

However, recent studies have indicated that fake news did not in and of itself determine the election's outcome. Rather, the election results reflected the depth of division within U.S. society,[4] which also manifested in the context of the travel ban for Muslims from certain countries to the United States, which was supported by about one-half of the population. Furthermore, some researchers argue that fake news is only a symptom of the systematic consolidation of the alternative-right media landscape by outlets such as Breitbart, Fox News and the conspiracy-theory site Infowars, all of which strategically and skillfully use social networks to disseminate misleading information and even disinformation.[5] The goal here has been to establish alternative counter-publics skeptical of the supposed media mainstream, to influence the selection of issues addressed by the mainstream media, and above all, to stoke emotions such as anxiety and hate – the foundations of hate speech – and spread conspiracy narratives.

3. Alternative-right media figures and their mutual reinforcement

The situation in Germany is for the moment more differentiated. As Facebook research conducted by the Süddeutsche Zeitung shows, the broad democratic middle remains confronted by a rather isolated right-wing-populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).[6] In this regard, Germany appears to be far less polarized than the

United States, with a significantly smaller right-wing-populist and extreme-right party and media spectrum. However, the strategies used to establish the alternative-right media landscape in the United States have been evident here too. As one sign of this fact, the issues and the content shared by political parties and followers, as well the sites "liked," differ significantly between the mainstream parties (which rely on sites such as Tagesschau, ZDF-heute-Nachrichten, Spiegel Online, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Huffington Post Deutschland) and the AfD (which relies on Junge Freiheit, Epoch Times, Russia Today Deutschland and Compact Magazine).

Twitter analyses by the newspaper Tagesspiegel and netzpolitik.org have illustrated the AfD's creative use of social networks. For example, the party benefits from an apparently large online support network. The account with the broadest reach, which primarily disseminates AfD party material under the name @Balleryna, is an anonymous, unofficial supporter account. But how has it collected its 287,000 followers? "The analysis of hundreds of thousands of accounts confirmed the samples," write the netzpolitik.org authors. "Only 3 percent of Balleryna's followers, or barely 10,000 users, are German-language accounts, although tweets are exclusively in German. The remainder of the followers speak English, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese and numerous other languages. Particularly amusing: We find that there are nearly twice as many Arab speakers subscribed to the unofficial communications channel of the right-wing populist party as there are German followers."[7] This is a clear indication that this media presence in fact reaches only a small number of real supporters.[8]

The alarmist narratives of the alternative-right media are like ambient noise that's hard to filter out.

However, the agreements between the AfD and the operators of such supporter accounts are informal; thus, these accounts, tightly networked with each other, can behave more radically than the official party accounts. They create a continuous "background noise"[9] of information slanted toward the party's interests, and reinforce the positions of official accounts, for instance those of party officials such as Frauke Petry, Marcus Pretzell, Alice Weidel or AfDKompakt.

4. Social bots' amplification of discursive conflicts

The fact that the @Balleryna account has so many followers is in all probability due to automated procedures and so-called bots or social bots – and points to

additional factors that contribute to the viral propagation of group-based enmity online. Bots are computer programs that largely automatically process repetitive tasks without being dependent on human interaction. Social bots are in turn computer programs that masquerade as persons within social networks, produce or share content and interact with people. Their use in the U.S. elections showed that operators can draw on the analysis of large and complex data sources ("big data") to help control or manage them, enabling individualized communication strategies ("microtargeting"). Because these bots imitate real users, they can be particularly challenging to identify.

Social bots are increasingly employed for political purposes, for example to increase a politician's number of followers, distribute negative information about an opposing candidate or promote certain issues within the political discourse. Their manner of functioning and impact was also made clear during the U.S. election: 20% of the content distributed online during the campaign was ostensibly generated by social bots, although social bots comprised just 0.5% of all users. In addition, a significantly higher share of the content created and distributed by social bots showed support for Donald Trump as opposed to Hillary Clinton.[10]

However, one of the few analyses of the use of social bots in Germany, conducted during the 2017 presidential elections, indicates that the share of content automatically generated and distributed on Twitter in this country remained comparatively small for all parties.[11]

Mobilization and the interaction of media phenomena

This overview of the phenomena featured most prominently in media reports shows that they are all closely related. However, the concepts of hate speech and fake news, as well as efforts to consider them in isolation, often obscure the view of the deeper causative problems. At the root of the discursive challenges observed within democratic public sphere are deliberate strategies by right-wing populist and far-right actors who utilize the latest media and technological methods in pursuit of their goals.

This trend is exacerbated by so-called echo chambers. This refers to the individual informational and discursive spaces within social networks – created through users' own activities (posts, likes, friendships, etc.) – in which users come into contact only with content that generally accords with and thus reinforces their own

opinions, despite the platforms' overall large sizes. Made possible by the personalization of content, this development risks giving users a false impression of the general climate of societal opinion. For example, minorities can more quickly imagine themselves to be in the majority, while individuals often feel themselves to be better informed – and better able to participate in the political discourse – after consuming one-sided information. This is also true of Germany's right-wing populist and right-wing extremist actors, who currently remain a minority, but who are mobilized using the support of echo chambers.[12]

The following chapters provide a detailed examination of strategies and narratives used by prominent right-wing populist and right-wing extremist actors to disseminate hate and discord in Germany. In this regard, it should be noted that while the issues associated with right-wing populist and far-right positions are becoming more diverse, extreme right-wing ideologies and conspiracy theories are also in some cases simply reappearing in a new guise.

Why do we use the concept of **echo chambers**? The "echo chamber" concept describes a phenomenon created by many people's tendency to surround themselves in social networks with other like-minded people, thus mutually reinforcing each other's opinions. This produces the impression that one's own position is a majority opinion. This effect is often equated with the concept of the "filter bubble"; however, this latter term simply describes a situation in which algorithms primarily show social-network users content that is likely to be of interest or relevant to them on the basis of their previous usage behavior.

Toxic narratives

Narratives – accounts of the world – are representations of events. As such, they convey a dual meaning. At the content level, they provide information about an event in and of itself, and thus address the "what" of an occurrence. At the discursive level, they communicate information about the "how"; this can involve the event's temporal dimension as well as details such as a description of the setting or causal explanation.

In this way, a narrative sets events into a meaningful context. In the process, details are selectively chosen or omitted. Thus resulting in an interpretation of the event from a specific perspective, requiring the narrative to rely on potential recipients' preexisting knowledge and experience to be understood.

Analysis of alternative-right worldviews: Basic assumptions

Because of this, a narrative enables conclusions to be drawn regarding the values, norms and ideas collectively shared by its authors and the people sharing and promoting it. Narratives illustrate their proponents' fundamental schemata for classifying and analyzing the world around them, as well as their manner of thinking and experiencing. They offer a structure of meaning that – like a parable – integrates events into an overall

Photo: Demonstration of Pegida NRW, January 9, 2016 in Cologne

Source: Felix Huesmann

context, and thus bolsters or supports certain worldviews. This applies to stories depicting philosophical, religious, economic or historical relationships, as well as to narratives intertwined with assumptions about other people or groups. Selective narration generalizes individual events and elevates them in importance. Through repeated repetition and diffusion into the individual and collective memory, narratives can make long-lasting contributions to the construction and stabilization of individual and collective identities.

Analyzing narratives thus presents an outstanding opportunity to make worldviews and their long-term changes visible. Given the increasing prominence of conspiracy theories of all kinds, as well as the widespread difficulty in distinguishing virally disseminated assertions from facts, true from manipulated photos, and genuine quotes from out-of-context sentence fragments and pure inventions, this even appears necessary. Certainly, it seems clear that new right-wing populist and far-right actors will continue to mount a digital challenge to pluralistic, liberal and democratic societies through their use of novel media and technologies.

Research into manifestations of right-wing extremism has shown that even if extreme-right worldviews and extreme-right action are not the same thing, they do go hand in hand. Attitudes and behaviors depend on each other. Thus, the ideology of inequality and the acceptance of physical violence as a legitimate means to achieve political goals are core defining elements of right-wing extremism.[13]

Does this mean we should assume that individual Facebook posts expressing support for ethnic inequality in fact motivate right-wing-extremist actions? Not necessarily; far-right attitudes are one thing and closed far-right worldviews and actions another. However, those who promote narratives consistent with far-right ideologies – even if they begin with a tangle of contradictory and tentative attitudes – may find that repeated articulation contributes to a hardening of their far-right worldview. Consequently, it must be assumed that about one-fifth of the German population holds at least a partially far-right pattern of attitudes, for instance in the area of racism.[14] These opinions too can be reinforced and broadened through repeated articulation. Far-right positions could in this way become socially acceptable again, simply due to their pervasiveness.

However, right-wing narratives often appear today in a new guise. As the literature on the "new" right and its intellectuals has noted, the political strategies and ideological content espoused by far-right actors has changed since the 1990s. This has been reflected, for example, in the emergence of an intellectual meta-politics (the justification of political positions), as well as in the focus on a right-wing cultural hegemony in the place of party politics. Political strategies have ranged from a partial, functionally justified lack of organization – as in the case of the fellowships that, as informal structures, dispense with associational or party-political regulations – to the adaptation of left-wing cultural tactics (far-right actors can today be found in all societal strata and subcultures, from punks and skinheads to organic farmers and art students). The groups furthermore adapt their terminology to fit their social, political and media environments, employing a kind of political mimicry to conceal their real objectives and make inroads into the societal mainstream.

The change in the fundamental ideological framework can in turn be characterized with the concept of "ethnopluralism." Here, the new right has replaced the elimination of minorities, as pursued under the Nazi ideology, with concepts of segmentation that call for the "consistent spatial separation and geopolitical segregation of people on the basis of ethno-cultural criteria."[15] Overall, numerous new actors and strategies have thus emerged since the turn of the millennium.[16]

However, with the increase in the number of asylum seekers in Germany, we have seen a new wave of media mobilization. Analysis is thus vitally necessary. The following sections will present and classify dominant narratives, with the aim of clarifying prominent actors' strategies and highlighting their power to transform worldviews.

Analysis of alternative-right worldviews: Methodology

To begin the analysis, we selected 10 relevant and dominant social-media actors from within the spectrum of conspiracy theorists, right-wing extremists and right-wing populists. The selection was based on several factors. In some cases, the choices represent opinion leaders within the online-media environment. However, other pages were also included in the selection in order to create a representative depiction of the broad spectrum of far-right and populist-right currents and actors.

The sites evaluated include the AfD's, "Lügenpresse" (The Lying Press) and PI-News ("Politically Incorrect")

pages, along with the Identitären Bewegung and Pegida sites, to name some of the more internationally well-known examples. These actors are broadly representative of the alternative-right online sphere, employing and disseminating similar and connected narratives. However, these narratives are not limited to the right-wing online sphere. Conspiracy narratives in particular know no political affiliation and can indeed be found in all parts of society. In order to illustrate this, we also included KenFM in the selection of actors. This is not because KenFM belongs to the far or populist right, but because the narratives it employs overlap with those of the right-wing online sphere.

From these 10 pages, we collected and analyzed the 10 most-liked Facebook posts for each month during the period from April 2016 to February 2017, using the FanPage Karma tool. The accumulated value of reactions, shares and comments served as the basis for this analysis.

Following the first inspection, we carried out a qualitative analysis of the posts, examining the narratives formulated in each, assessing the clustering of related narratives, and identifying the abstract explanatory patterns employed, using the basic literature as a reference. All data reflect the survey situation as of April 2017.

Overall, we examined a total of 1,063 posts containing 2,908 individual stories or sub-narratives. These sub-narratives were then classified into 27 different basic narratives, which were further grouped into seven clusters representing so-called framing narratives. Here, each cluster reflects a theme common across its particular group of sub-narratives.

These framing narratives include:

- The downfall of the German people
- External threats
- Internal threats
- The manipulative establishment
- Global conspiracy
- Resistance and solutions
- The repression of resistance

Together, the framing narratives create a coherent pattern and represent elements of a meta-narrative that forms the overarching center of the far-right and populist-right explanatory world.

Observed framing narratives and meta sub-narratives

The opposite of an utopia is a dystopia, a negative visualization of the future. A sense of poor future prospects arouses anxieties and encourages a compulsion to take action and is thus a good source of motivation. It's a simple formula with a definite impact: Society is on the decline and risks downfall; Germany is being abolished.

It is precisely this dystopian scenario that serves as the meta sub-narrative for the right-wing sphere. It forms the backdrop against which the framing narratives are given their context: there is a conspiracy against the Germans and the aim of this conspiracy is their destruction. However, the means of eradication is not open war. Indeed, there are many ways and means, including extermination via mass immigration and Islamization – instruments that are employed from the outside against the Germans. At the same time, there are also internal forces that are working toward the destruction of the Germans. In this case, their tools are re-education and the undermining of the resistance. This conspiracy is orchestrated by a global elite that lords over the press and politics, using them as instruments for the eradication of the Germans.

The meta-narrative is seldom found with this degree of clarity. It nevertheless offers a coherent interpretive pattern for many events in domestic and foreign policy, as well as for social change processes, and is thus appealing.

While stories arouse emotions, they cannot perform this function indefinitely. The emotional effect diminishes the more often we hear a story. For this reason, sub-narratives are varied or only certain parts of a story are narrated, with the aim of ongoingly stirring up emotions and provoking an effect. In the case of the right-wing framing narrative, 27 narrations have been identified that were told with varying frequency at different times during the study period. In the following, these meta sub-narratives are elaborated according to their relationship to the corresponding framing narrative.

The downfall of the Germans

This sub-narrative tells of the demise of the Germans. This can refer to the own culture, but also to its physical existence. This narrative is the dystopian threat scenario that is the corollary of all other narratives.

Germany is dying out
Identically to the corresponding framing narrative, this sub-narrative tells that Germans are facing an imminent downfall – cultural and/or physical – and thus also their extinction.

The external threat

This narrative cluster includes sub-narratives about the threat posed to Germans by non-Germans.

Migration leads to destabilization
Narratives about the consequences of immigration. The assertion here is that if non-Germans come to Germany, they will perpetrate acts of violence and terror. Moreover, the welfare system will be exploited by unjustified social benefits and health insurance services.

Islamization
Behind this catchword is the narrative that Germany is threatened with becoming an Islamic country. The minority of Muslims would conceivably become the majority and would go on to enforce Islamic law, culture and religion.

Misuse of the asylum system
This sub-narrative tells of how the people who have fled to Germany are not those who would actually have the right to asylum. This is expressed using short phrases such as "economic migrants," "they have no right to asylum," "all just illegal immigrants." Frequently, this narrative is served by the use of the word refugee in quotation marks.

The downfall is upon us
The listing of terrorist acts and the use of terms such as "flood of refugees," "wave of refugees" and "mass immigration" equate incoming refugees with (natural) catastrophes. The catastrophe scenario invariably includes the ensuing downfall and suggests that it is already underway.

Foreigners are bad/barbarians
There are many variants of this sub-narrative, but at their core they are always the same: foreigners are barbarians. More specifically, people from Islamic countries are immoral barbarians who do not respect the law; they are brazen and dirty, treat women badly and hate homosexuals. German culture is perceived as better, and "the" Islamic culture as backward. This includes all of the sub-narratives in which Islam is portrayed as foreign and not capable of belonging to Germany. Also included are sub-narratives that Muslim men are murderers and rapists.

The replacement of the people – migration as a weapon
This sub-narrative, known for many years in right-wing extremist circles as "death of the people," is experiencing a renaissance under the catchwords "replacement of the people," "the great replacement" (Identitarian movement) and "migration as a weapon." Thereby, the Germans are supposedly becoming the minority, that is, they are being "destroyed" or "replaced" as a consequence of incoming refugees, migration and ➜ Islamization. As such, this narrative is highly compatible with concrete conspiracy narratives about how this replacement is desired and planned, either by "the politicians" or "the elite," whichever connotes Jewishness more effectively.

Attack on German identity/culture
While it remains unclear what exactly constitutes "German culture" or "German identity," it is threatened by ➜ the replacement of the people and ➜ Islamization. Specifically, these include sub-narratives on how Christmas is no longer permitted to be celebrated in kindergartens, or how Christmas markets are being forced to rename themselves winter markets. These kinds of sub-narratives are a negative overstatement of the notion of tolerance and are presented as disadvantageous for the own identity.

The internal threat

This narrative cluster includes sub-narratives of the threat posed to Germans by other Germans.

Attack on German identity/culture
The own culture is described as threatened not only as a consequence of external dangers. There are also variants in which it is not "foreigners" but political opponents that are blamed for these attacks. These are frequently in the form of sub-narratives in which, for example, the Green Party is said to be demanding something that is deemed antithetical to German culture. These demands are usually directly related to narratives about ➜ re-education.

Re-education
Emancipatory advances and equal rights are related in negative terms: Political correctness is responsible for bans on speech because terms that are marked out as racist, sexist and antisemitic were not recognized as such "before." Likewise, "our children" are being moulded into morally depraved people through early sexual education. Blame for these developments is laid on the "filthy left-green pack." In this way, the corresponding narratives construct the image of "everything was better in the old days," thereby evoking a yearning for some indeterminate point in the past.

Multiculturalism is destructive
Narratives that interpret the concept of multiculturalism as harmful and destructive. Here, the coexistence of people of different cultural backgrounds serves to dilute or destroy German culture and, in the worst case, leads to violence and war. In some cases, this is also presented as a conspiracy narrative that sees multiculturalism as a concept for the destruction of Germany from within.

The political opponent is bad
Sub-narratives that aim at the defamation of well-known politicians. For example, Justice Minister Heiko Maas is supposedly in favor of child marriage and pedophilia. Here, the corresponding narratives pursue the simple aim of devaluing the opponent.

Do-gooders hate Germans
Catchwords such as "do-gooders," "social welfare for the world" and "asylum lobby" refer to the sub-narrative that those parts of the general public that are in favor of welcoming refugees are guilty of treating newly-arrived people better than they treat Germans. Accordingly, they are accused of being more willing to "make an effort for foreigners than for Germans" or, for example, that they do not help the homeless. Also, these "do-gooders" would rather learn Turkish and Arabic than work toward the integration of refugees. Thus, the corresponding narratives are diagnoses of the reputed self-hatred of some sections of the population.

Betrayers of the nation
Narratives about politicians who do not represent the interests of the people. Instead, they even actively work against their "people" and "betray" them, for example, by allowing refugees into the country, through ➜ censorship, or by helping to promote ➜ Islamization. Consequently, politicians are acting only in their own self-interest, namely to maintain or extend their power, or they are agents of a ➜ world conspiracy. This heavy-handed criticism of the policies of the established parties is frequently expressed using such catchwords as "traitor," "Merkel must go" or the like.

The manipulative establishment

Included in this narrative cluster are sub-narratives that the establishment has conspired against the Germans and is working against their interests.

Censorship
Sub-narratives of supposedly ongoing censorship: The press and social media are being manipulated by the state or are acting on the state's behalf by not publishing or censoring undesirable opinions.

The lying media
The catchword "lying press" ("Lügenpresse") or "government press" refer to the sub-narrative that the established media are not reporting the truth about events at home and abroad. Also behind these catchwords is the assumption that the press is controlled by politics in order to manipulate the general public.

Politicians lie
Narratives about politicians who are said to be lying to the German population through the use of false figures and reports. The Germans are supposedly being lied to because politics is made up exclusively of ➜ betrayers of the nation, who are hard at work secretly promoting ➜ replacement of the people and ➜ Islamization.

Global conspiracy

This narrative cluster includes sub-narratives that there is a global conspiracy – controlled by a small group – that is directed against the Germans. For the most part, the connotation is that this group is Jewish.

World conspiracy
According to this narrative, the world is controlled by a small elite, usually connoted to be Jewish. All events and developments are interpreted as being part of a master plan, the goal of which is to control humankind.

Foreign rule
Narratives about foreign rule state that Germany is no longer a sovereign state; instead, it is the European Union that determines German politics. Thereby, the EU is portrayed not as a democratic system but as a dictatorship ("European Union of Socialist Republics") that, among other things, represses the Germans and dictates free trade agreements.

Dictocracy
The term "dictocracy" is an amalgam of the words democracy and dictatorship. The dictocracy narrative states that Germany is not a democracy, but a dictatorship of

betrayers of the nation in which the idea that the population can help shape policy is merely an illusion. This is exemplified by the election of the Federal President, which is not really an election but a "jostling for position."

Russia – USA
Sub-narratives for the interpretation of the role of Russia and the United States in world politics. This concerns the delineation of a simple idea of good and evil: the United States and the West are evil, and Russia is good. Because Russia is a peace-making power, other interpretations must be propaganda from the West. The United States, on the other hand, wanted to instigate a war against Russia.

Resistance and solutions

This narrative cluster includes sub-narratives about various forms of resistance and proposed solutions against the imminent downfall.

Resistance to Islam, resistance to immigration
Event such as a woman being thrown out of a bar because she was wearing a burka are related as acts of resistance to immigration and the threat of ➜ Islamization. Similarly, accounts of Angela Merkel's appearances in Poland or the Czech Republic, where she was booed, are related as narratives of resistance. The interpretation of such events as acts of resistance is intended to promote empowerment and to convey the impression that there is widespread opposition to the imminent downfall. Demonstrations and actions by PEGIDA and the Identitarian Movement are also included in this narrative.

Ethnopluralism
This is a catchword of the New Right, which is intended to convey a solution for combating the ➜ attack on German culture/identity. The term refers to the idea that German culture will be preserved and protected if there are no external influences. Accordingly, only Germans should live in Germany, and only French people in France, which would call for the closure of European external borders. Thus, ethnopluralism is merely racism in a new guise. This becomes apparent in the use of phrases such as "cultural purity" and "we have nothing against foreigners, only that they should be somewhere else."

National pride
Narratives about positive traditions from the homeland as well as vague "original values." For example: "If there was more national pride in Germany, German culture would be more respected." As with ➜ re-education,

there is a reference to an imagined point in the past where "everything was better." To paint this picture more vividly, a time is constructed in which values such as family, pride, homeland and tradition were of thoroughly positive significance. This is also accompanied by positive references to soldiers of the Second World War and the assertion that May 8 is not a day of liberation. Through this narrative, an attempt is made to outline a positive counter-visualization to the imminent downfall.

The uprising will come
A form of endurance narrative that promises an imminent reversal in politics and society. If the current policy were to continue, then the result would soon be an uprising and civil war. Violent resistance is ultimately the only means of combating ➜ Islamization, ➜ betrayers of the nation, ➜ re-education, ➜ EU dictatorship, ➜ censorship and ➜ replacement of the people. Frequently found alongside this idea are such phrases as "the people will not put up with this for much longer" and "if nothing changes, the coming election will be the last election."

The will of the people – bolstered by change
Immediately following the sub-narrative that "too little is done for us" is the narration that a change in the political system toward the greater use of referendums for major political decisions would show the real "will of the people." This is essentially in contrast to current political decision-making (➜ betrayers of the nation), which is why more direct democracy would reveal the actual "will of the people."

The repression of resistance

This narrative cluster includes narratives about reactions to the "resistance" on the side of society and politics.

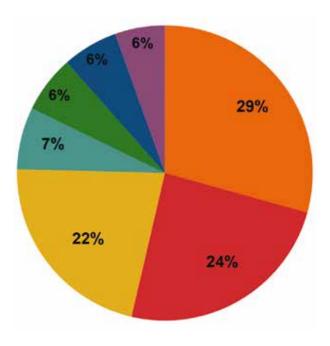### Critics of asylum are persecuted and labeled "Nazi bludgeons"
These two narratives about polarization within society serve to connect accounts of the impacts of the "resistance." If one were to openly state the problems with refugees and Islam, one would be called a Nazi and thus discredited. A catchword for this is the term "Nazikeule," which translates as "Nazi bludgeon." This is a part of the ➜ re-education. The same applies to people who are patriots and/or only critics of asylum policy and Islam, who would be persecuted, publicly denounced or lose their jobs. Examples of this are phrases such as "What used to be the center ground is today Nazi; as soon as you express criticism, you are muzzled."

The successes of the framing narrative

In the course of the 11-month study period, 2,908 narratives were identified in 1,063 articles. Not every narrative was related equally strongly; rather, there were significant differences in the frequency of clusters. Accordingly, it is possible to assign a ranking to the framing narratives.

Ranking of the main narratives:
- The external threat (853 occurrences, 29%)
- The threat from within (707 occurrences, 24%)
- Resistance and solutions (633 occurrences, 22%)
- The manipulative establishment (198 occ., 7%)
- Global conspiracy (182 occurrences, 6%)
- The downfall of the Germans (176 occurrences, 6%)
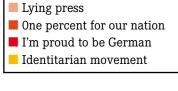- Repression of resistance (159 occurrences, 6%)

Clearly, scenarios of threat form the most successful and dominant narratives of all. These scenarios are derived in part from terrorist attacks, because narratives are most successful when they correlate with real events. This narrative of threat from external forces fluctuates between 55 mentions in November 2016 and 124 in July 2016. This account appears most frequently in July 2016 (124 times) and in December 2016 (101 times). This is most likely due to the terrorist attacks in these months; in July there were three attacks in Germany and one in Nice. Even when it became apparent that the Munich attack, in which an 18-year-old killed nine people and seriously injured ten on a shooting spree through the Olympia shopping center, was in part motivated by racism, in right-wing circles it was generally associated with the other attacks.

Less successful are conspiracy theories and concrete narratives of decline. For both of these clusters there were fewer triggers, or they were not as readily received. This shows that more explicit mention of conspiracy theories is less attractive to the wider public.

Which sub-narratives were successful?

The framing narratives are composed of 27 different sub-narratives. Although these narratives are connected to each other and often related together in articles or posts, we can discern differences in their frequency. The following list shows the ten most common individual narratives. Because many articles use and combine multiple narratives, there are higher overall percentages here.
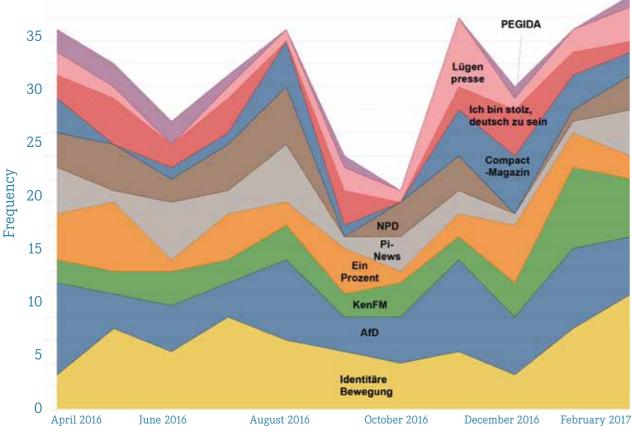
The ten most common sub-narratives:
1. Treason/enemy of the people (322 times, 30%)
2. Immigration leads to terror/violence/chaos/deterioration (230 times, 22%)
3. Foreigners are bad/barbarians (210 times, 20%)
4. Positive account of resistance (206 times, 19%)
5. Downfall is already underway (178 times, 17%)
6. Germany is being abolished/declining/being ruined/taken advantage of (176 times, 17%)
7. The political opponent is bad (135 times, 13%)
8. "Gutmenschen" ("do-gooders") hate Germans (123 times, 12%)
9. Lying press (123 times, 12%)
10. Resistance against immigration (119 times, 11%)

Even where the main narrative indicates otherwise, the most frequent narrative is "traitor/enemy of the people." It appears in 30% of all the posts that we checked. It is most commonly seen with the Identitarian movement and the AfD.
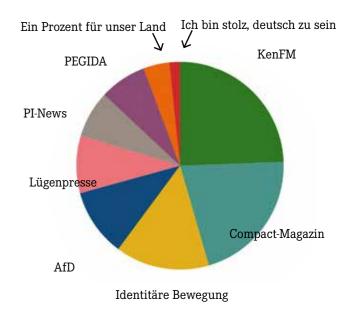
In February 2017, "traitor" was a particularly common word in the articles under examination (36 times). This month offers a particularly good example of the interpretive space that this narrative can cover. In 36% of posts the target was Angela Merkel, 36% were aimed at an unspecific elite and/or establishment, 14% against a current form of government (federal/state government
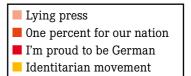
or mayor), 8 percent against representatives of the SPD and one article each against Claudia Roth (Greens) and Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU). Over the course of the year, Justice Minister Heiko Maas also assumed a central role.

The "lying press" narrative appears in 12% of the posts checked; in Compact magazine and KenFM they are among the ten most successful narratives. This narrative is consequently favored by "alternative" media, and thus fulfills a legitimizing function. By contrast, this narrative does not appear in any of the most popular articles of the NPD.
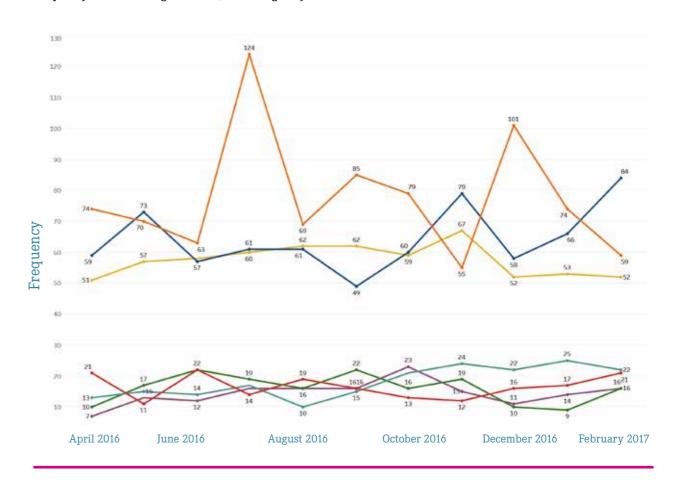
Although "lying press" ("Lügenpresse") was declared Germany's "non-word of the year" in 2014, the term and associated narrative is increasingly popular. While frequency in August 2016 was low, it increased to a peak value (16) in November. In this month, the narrative was primarily used in the context of Donald Trump's electoral victory in the United States; this association was seen in over half of the articles (56%). This month saw a peak in popularity for the terms "lying press" and "system media," but there were also terms like "lumpen media" (PI-News), "dirty leftist Bild" (Pi-News) and "journalistic watchdog of the establishment" (KenFM).

Distribution of the "traitor" narrative by actor and chronology

Distribution of the "lying press" narrative by actor

Frequency of the framing narrative, chronologically

On the function of the narrative in populism

At first glance, there appears to be no connection between the large number of different narratives distributed by hateful sites on the internet. However, a model of populism enables systemization. There is contention in social sciences around the term "populism" as a description for political phenomena. Disagreement focuses above all on the question of whether this is a "thin" ideology, or a discursive tool of other ideologies.[17] Nonetheless, it serves admirably as a description of commonalities between various forms of expression for group-focused enmity and the peculiarities of antisemitism.

Anti-Semitism fosters a construction of Jews as "the enemy" by depicting them as "foreign" and the embodiment of the "world's evil."

In general terms, populism is dependent on other ideologies and in its agitation it offers two different orientation levels for describing enemies: horizontal (against "them" out there) and vertical (against "them" up there).[18] Right-wing populist argumentation generally relies on the delineation against "those" out there, as the emphasis on and exclusion of the foreign is an essential aspect of the extreme right's ideological underpinnings. Those that don't belong to one's own community, presented as a homogeneous whole, are declared to be fundamentally different. In this model, individuals are decisively and irrevocably determined by apparently natural qualities such as their "race" or culture, which makes coexistence with others impossible. However, these foreign outsiders are accorded the right to exist, as long as they stay in their own territory ("ethnopluralism").[19]

The vertical orientation level functions differently. In its simplest form it takes what is assumed to be a homogeneous "people," or a community of people, and sets it in opposition to the interests-based, "parasitic elite."[20] In this conception, the elite represents an enemy from within which must either atone and dissolve into the community of the people, or face elimination. For the elite there is no territory, they simply have to go "away."

Here, antisemitism has traditionally played a particular role. It can serve as a hate figure in both horizontal and vertical levels. As a foreign, and presumably hostile element from within, of questionable loyalty, it functions like other groups (such as Muslims).[21] The

major difference, however, lies in the fact that Jews are not just perceived as other/foreign, but in prejudices passed down from history they are also seen as the all-encompassing "world's evil," or evil incarnate.[22] So here, in contrast to other minorities or "enemy groups," they are also charged with responsibility for any aspect of modern society perceived as negative. "No-one would think to blame Islam for progress, secularization, female emancipation, the culture industry, Marxism or liberalism, in other words all of the side effects of a universally oriented modernity that the right claim as damaging."[23] To bring about such upheavals requires power, or a powerful position within society.

This real power is – in contrast to the potential power within the people which is yet to be awakened – located among the elite. And it is precisely here that we find the interface between antisemitism, conspiracy theories and populist constructions of "the enemy." Jews are primarily described as enemies on the vertical level. They are said to control the economy, politics, media – the whole world, in fact. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Jewish or presumably Jewish names are constantly circulated when it comes to naming names among the "puppet masters": Rockefeller, Rothschild, Soros.

Constructions of people and community

The following analyzed narratives are anti-universalistic and anti-pluralist at heart. Rights are not accorded the individual, but rather to homogeneous constructions of the people. The individual must yield to the "will of the people," which represents the common good. The idea of a homogeneous "people" suppresses the diversity of religious, (sub-)cultural, sexual, political, rural and urban identities and lifestyles within society. The achievement of modern democracy is that all of these various groups and individuals have their own voice. An achievement, but at the same time a challenge. Within the "people," on the other hand, there is an assumption that there are no contradictions, but rather that one opinion, one interest prevails.

Modern populism is directed at the challenges, negative aspects and contradictions of a modernizing or modern society. Instead of analyzing abstract mediation processes of societal power relations, populists reduce this to an identification of those who are apparently to blame.

Complex social contexts are broken down into simplified dichotomies (good-bad, friend-enemy, ruler-ruled, etc.). The longing for theory and practice devoid of contradiction, which has broken new ground since the success of the right-wing populist movement, is satisfied by the idea of a homogeneous community of people which can react to every uncertainty in society ad hoc, as one.

Conspiracy theories as integrative link

A particularly dominant narrative, which can be seen in every German right-wing populist discourse, is the narrative of the coming decline of the German people. Depending on which tendency is circulating the scenario, the explanatory models differ to greater or lesser degrees. The conception of "genocide" through "foreign infiltration" or the "great replacement" ("Identitarian" movement) is widespread. While some narratives only separate "us" and "them" on the horizontal level, narratives like the "weapon of immigration" or "great replacement" combine the two levels. Here, for example, the "elite" are said to have devised a plan to provoke or stage conflict situations in the world and cause mass migration to Germany. The goal is the destruction of German culture and the eradication of its representatives. This is because a heterogeneous, "divided" society is easier to dominate – such is the populist explanation, anyway. This means that multiculturalism is ultimately a means for rulers to subjugate the world. (Not for nothing does this recall the Nazi ideology of "degradation of the body politic," which incorporated antisemitic, racist and homophobic elements while also defaming left-wing activists as "enemies of the people").

This leads right-wing populists to call for a homogeneous body politic that can stand together in the struggle against this imagined threat. This type of homogeneous "people," of one will, stands against the pluralist, liberal democracy and ultimately aims to dissolve the individual within the community. Conspiratorial ideological narratives offer populists and their supporters an explanation for a perceived evil in the world and an identity as victims of an "anti-popular" global conspiracy.

It is hardly surprising that antisemitic stereotypes are constantly reproduced in these contexts, in either coded or explicit form. The myth of the "global Jewish conspiracy" remains anchored in the cultural memory of modern society. And it uses both orientation levels – the horizontal, in which the Jew is excluded as other, non-German, and the vertical, in which the Jew is imagined to be part of a powerful global elite. The fictional, antisemitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which is widely

distributed on the internet, brings together all of these narratives – "global Jewish conspiracy," the negative aspects of Capitalism, democracy as deception, and so on. Even when you take individual narratives from this collection, society's inherited store of antisemitic stereotypes means you can always trace ultimate responsibility to "the Jews."

The **Protocols of the Elders of Zion** are an entirely invented document which is meant to prove the secret plan of the "global Jewish conspiracy." The writings, thought to have appeared around 1900, are said to represent the Jews' plan for global domination in the form of speeches by a rabbi. It includes, for example, the charge that Jews control the media and global finance. The work had a major impact under the Nazis and remains widely distributed in the present day.

Findings and recommended action

Right-wing extremists and right-wing populists are savvy and professional in their successful use of digital media. The research findings presented here offer an initial insight into the source of the effectiveness of the alternative right-wing media landscape – well-told, carefully placed and widely multiplied narratives. These narratives can be offered in numerous variants and a huge variety of guises. For a narrative to be successful, it must also be constantly adapted to new circumstances and details or change its coding. For narratives to remain relevant, they must not be fixed constructs, rather they should be constantly in flux. That's why they can't be automatically captured and categorized using keywords alone, rather the relevant articles must be very carefully sourced and examined. But it's worth the effort. Narratives help not just in spreading ideologies; their investigating can lead to high-quality conclusions. Close analysis and deconstruction of narratives help to remove the superstructure and reveal the hateful core of the convictions that lie behind it.

Yet how serious are these findings for the broader public and the "center"? Doesn't most of this, as mentioned previously, play out in right-wing echo chambers? Aren't we merely discussing a marginal phenomenon here which is only relevant and interesting to a small section of the population and those investigating them?

Unfortunately not. The narratives help to not only emotionally anchor, confirm and reinforce certain world views within the alternative right-wing scene, they also aid argumentation and are conveyed by their supporters to the comment boxes of the media landscape throughout Germany, from the Tagesschau to the Süddeutsche Zeitung. Alternative right-wing narratives assist in the dissemination of their ideology far beyond their own circles. They help to consolidate existing (latent) racist prejudice in the population or keep conspiracy ideologies in circulation and thus normalize them, so that they are accepted as credible alternative "theories" by broad sections of society.

Not everyone that picks up on such theories adheres to all facets of the antisemitic conception of a "global Jewish conspiracy" which is part of almost every conspiracy ideology. The fact that they perceptibly resonate in many narratives, or form their core, means that their dissemination leads to a normalization of these ideas and also provide an entry point for many who would otherwise reject the crude bluntness of con-

spiracy ideologies. Even a patently absurd narrative such as that of the "great replacement" is spoken about in the mainstream media over and over, keeping extreme right-wing views present. Without the transformation into a concise narrative, the idea that secret forces are working to eradicate the white population of Europe would certainly be much easier to recognize as a delusional conspiracy theory, which would remove the basis for discussing it. The spread and development of toxic narratives mirrors radicalization processes and conveys group-focused enmity far beyond the alternative right-wing scene.

The research and debate around hate in the internet has remained narrow for some years, largely restricted to statements that are potentially criminal. But toxic narratives cannot be forbidden or removed by legislation. Attempts such as the Network Enforcement Act and the call for operators to implement rigorous deletion policies miss the mark, because the narratives are rarely criminal – and can exert influence even in tempered form.

"Fears of the great replacement"
What happened during the weeks when the government lost control over its borders? The bestseller "Die Getriebenen" (The Driven) offers a new version of events. Its success shows just how toxic the refugee issue still is.

SPIEGEL Online, March 20, 2017

Pedagogical approaches for a democratic digital civil society

The answer must therefore be a digital democratic civil society. The traditional civil society must translate its activities to the digital space, joining forces with online activists. In this regard, prevention work online is becoming of increasing importance; youth in particular no longer distinguish between on- and offline and are being specifically targeted by alternative-right campaigns. Holistic prevention work should therefore consider the impact of narratives on young people and seek to counteract their radicalizing effects. Children and youth need trained contacts or mentors from within the youth and educational social-services milieu who can provide online-relationship assistance, who can evaluate and limit the impact of online hate, and who are familiar with the legal aspects of victim protection. However, many providers have only just begun the process of transferring proven pedagogical concepts to the digital environment – not only with regard to staffing, but also with regard to their own digital literacy and digital presence. Many tried-and-tested methods are ineffective online, and must accordingly be further developed or revised, for instance into a form of online outreach that takes narratives and their impact into account.

Peer-to-peer approaches, which have proven valuable in youth work over the last several decades, can be translated to a Web 2.0 setting with sufficient preparation and oversight. However, their success depends in large part on having credible speakers from within the target communities. Peer-to-peer activity can also promote or reinforce hate within filter bubbles and in closed groups; those seeking to influence youth with right-wing narratives often do so in precisely this way. Indeed, 30% of youth and young adults between the ages of 14 and 35 report that they have already encountered hate posts or other dubious media content within social-media networks, sometimes even within their own network of social-media friends. Therefore, in addition to the work with narratives, the role of the medium itself and its specific impact within the debate must also be clarified. To this end, educators and mentors must develop two types of skills, enabling them to impart media literacy in a contemporary and much more concrete sense than is currently the case – specifically, a "Web 2.0 literacy" – while also learning to recognize and decode the narratives circulating there. Peer-to-peer work can be very effective when embedded in this kind of context, as the debate//de:hate project's "train-the-trainer program" has shown.

Nor should these efforts be limited to youth work. The safe use of Web 2.0, its diverse contents and risks,

should certainly be integrated into school curriculums. However, children and youth should not be the sole focus. The data surveyed here suggest that young people are not the majority of narrative recipients, or even the primary target group for the actors examined. It is thus essential to make media-education services and resources available to adults and multipliers as well.

Moreover, these groups should be actively involved in the construction of a democratic digital civil society. We need our own social-media strategies that don't simply react to alternative-right narratives or reproduce our offline projects on the internet; rather, our strategies must help proactively shape the Web 2.0 environment with emboldening narratives.

From counter-narrative to democratic narrative

Far-right extremists and right-wing populists' great strength is their emotional authenticity. Their anti-democratic narratives are bolstered by their inner conviction and unconcealed hatred of minorities and political opponents.

Democracy is at a certain disadvantage here. It adheres to the fundamental principles of fair debate even as its opponents overstep these bounds. It allows the publication and discussion even of controversial content and strives for substance in debates. The alarmist narratives propagated by the alternative-right media landscape function like a background noise to which it is difficult to respond. This makes it all the more important to translate democracy's strengths and values

into powerful narratives. Our response to hate and aggressive agitation must be our own narratives: strong stories and images that – grounded in the reality of our own lives – champion values-oriented interactions and support human rights and an open society. In short, the alternative-right narratives must be answered from a social perspective, with creative political imagery. Indeed, the work with narratives and counter-narratives is becoming increasingly important for substantive engagement with ideologies of inequality and conspiracy narratives.

Moreover, in an era when the internet serves as an increasingly powerful and selective medium for shaping opinions, greater efforts are needed to bring all citizens to a point of self-confident media literacy. In this sense, media literacy means much more than just handling personal data and passwords carefully. It is just as important to be able to recognize and dissolve narratives, question and review sources, and understand and break through echo chambers. This media education must also help people navigate the contentious culture of debate, the "soul of democracy" – while also being aware of borders where discourse crosses into agitation and a calcified hostility. Engagement with the mechanisms of digital opinion formation will form the cornerstone for a stronger digital culture of democratic debate.

The fight against toxic narratives cannot end in laws and regulations for the platforms people use to interact.

Rather, we need an active and open discourse regarding how we can help shape a democratic society, and above all how we want to talk about it.

To this end, we need our own powerful narratives. These are often referred to as counter-narratives; however, they should in fact be called democracy narratives. We must learn not only to show and describe how democracy and pluralism function, but also to narrate how they are experienced, what impact they have on participants, what energies they unloose, what solutions they make possible, and where they can already be found in our society.

How should I respond to toxic narratives?

 # Question narratives
The fact that a story sounds convincing and is well told doesn't make it true. A substantive discussion at the factual level can make people think twice – especially those who are simply reading along, without joining in. However, this can be time-consuming if you're not already immersed in the issue. A simpler first step is to ask about sources and proof, while also noting that there are other opinions on the issue and pointing to opposing positions.

 # Show your own attitude
Not every narrative is backed by a cohesive ideology; indeed, they are built primarily around subjective impressions. Unlike the far-right slogans or right-wing populist ideologies they are associated with, narratives aren't fundamentally societally proscribed – rather, they generally fall into the category of the "speakable." For this reason, they're contradicted less often. Nevertheless, it is essential to openly reject and contradict toxic narratives. Any answer is better than letting alternative-right narratives stand without comment. It is helpful to respond with an attitude that appeals fundamentally to democratic values. The derogatory or racist core of a statement should also be labeled for what it is.

 # Decode narratives
When entering into discussions, it can be helpful to start by addressing a narrative's structure. What line of reasoning does it pursue? What explanatory patterns are being employed, and what relationships manufactured? What images are used, with what key words? It can also be useful to point to generalizations or aspects taken out of context.

 # Don't get pushed into a corner
Experience shows that anyone speaking out against specific narratives will run into resistance. They will likely need to explain themselves, providing their own proofs and identifying their own sources. However, if you do want to respond to narratives, don't let yourself be pushed onto the defensive, or be distracted from the original topic. Instead, simply confidently demand answers to your own points of criticism.

 # Make sure you have each other's backs
The goal of narratives is to influence other people's interpretations and set the thematic agenda. Very frequently, a speaker will assert that he or she represents the (pseudo) majority. People venturing into such a discussion shouldn't have to do so alone. In the course of your argument, try to support and encourage others, and endorse the statements you agree with.

It is critical to break through the logic in which the loudest, most aggressive statements are those that are most widely heard. Don't expect that you'll convince committed far-right extremists or right-wing populists. Always remember that in the context of narratives, you're primarily speaking to those who are simply reading along without engaging, and who might otherwise go along with the narratives.

www.benjerry.ie/whats-new/one-sweet-world, 07/06/2016

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Tolerance – More diversity for Germany
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https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CNbe9riUAAAfie6.png

Living here has helped me grow.
Muslim women in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania:
Whether local or recently arrived, each woman has a story to tell.

What does legalizing same-sex marriage change? Nothing. Other than the fact that some people would be happier and no longer feel like they were treated as second class citizens by the state because of whom they love.
SPIEGEL Online, June 27, 2017

Diversity everywhere.

Sources and notes

[1] Ministerkomitee des Europarats, Empfehlung Nr. R (97) 20, 30.10.1997.

[2] This understanding of the term borrows from the usage developed by online communities (e.g., the gaming scene or the Wikipedia community). For more on this topic, see www.wikihow.com/Handle-Toxic-People-on-Social-Media. In the English-language debate, the concept is closely associated with that of harassment (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harassment). However, not every instance of harassment or cyber-bullying is hate speech. As we use the term here, hate speech refers to the abuse of individuals because they belong to a certain gender, religion, nationality, race or other such category; thus, toxic communications in the context of group-focused enmity.

[3] Amadeu Antonio Stiftung (2015): „Geh' sterben!" Umgang mit Hate Speech und Debattenkultur im Internet, www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/hatespeech/geh-sterben-hate-speech-und-kommentarkultur-im-internet.

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Narratives – accounts of the world that link actions and events into meaningful contexts – help us order, explain and describe the world, no matter what our perspective. These accounts function like other stories, evoking emotions and providing us with motivations. But what if this form of narrative evokes fear, rejection or even hate?

Right-wing extremists and right-wing populists use digital media in the most up-to-date ways possible, and with considerable success. The functioning of social networks, where emotionally charged stories can turn quickly into viral hits, accommodates their narratives. Research, public debate and counter-reactions have to date focused primarily on the issues of fake news and criminally prosecutable content. However, the narratives cannot be legally prohibited or eliminated, because they are seldom punishable by law – yet they have an impact even when couched in a moderate tone.
In order to address toxic narratives effectively, we need our own powerful accounts of the world – in short, democracy narratives. We must learn not only to shape democracy and diversity, but also to tell their stories.