



## **Europe's Online Extreme Right: A Snapshot of 2016 Versus 2018 Twitter Activity**

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### **Executive Summary**

- While a global increase in extreme right hate and violence has been mooted for some time, the Christchurch terrorist attack has ensured policy, media, and scholarly attention is now more firmly fixed on this threat than it has been since 2011's Oslo attacks. The New Zealand attack was peculiarly Internet-centric, including a pre-planned manifesto distribution strategy and Facebook Live video stream, which has ensured that the role of the Internet in contemporary extreme right activity is under particular scrutiny.
- This report provides a snapshot of the activity of a sub-set of 175 European Extreme right Twitter accounts drawn from all 28 EU member states in 2016 and again in 2018. The 'baseline dataset' is composed of all 59,679 tweets published or retweeted by the selected 175 accounts over a five-day period between 26 and 30 September, 2016. The 'comparison dataset' is composed of all 7,470 tweets published or retweeted by the 70 accounts still active on Twitter in the five-day period between 14 and 18 December 2018.
- Our analysis is small-scale, concerned with two very short time periods, and therefore preliminary. It is important to note, further, that these two datasets are not as directly comparable as they may first appear. This is due to a number of factors, including the decision to remove from the 2018 network all accounts with 5,000-plus followers and Twitter's upward revision of their character limit from a maximum of 140 to 280 characters per tweet in the period between 2016 and 2018.
- The report nonetheless raises a wide range of issues that warrant larger scale follow-up research, not least the prominence of many of the same concepts and themes in the European extreme right Twittersphere as appearing in the Christchurch shooter's manifesto.
- The first question addressed by the analysis was the impact on the selected extreme right accounts' activity of changes to Twitter's anti-harassment and hateful conduct tools and policies in November 2016 and the expansion of their hateful conduct and media policies in December 2017. The clearest impact of these changes was the 60% smaller size of the 2018 dataset, with most of the 105 removed accounts suspended by Twitter.
- While many of the removed accounts displayed symbols and used language more visibly associated with extreme right themes than other accounts in the 2016 dataset, this did not result in a softening of the tone of accounts remaining active in 2018. Nor did it mean that overall European extreme right activity declined on the platform in the 2016 to 2018 period. On the contrary, analysis of the follower numbers of the remaining accounts showed that a majority saw considerable growth.
- Multiple authors have found that language can raise a barrier to robust transnational extreme right online networks. Our findings segue with those because although there was indeed overlap between users from European countries especially around major events such as the 2016 US presidential elections or the *Gilet Jaunes* protests, users were largely clustered by language.
- As regards tweet content, the top most used hashtags for 2016 and 2018, #WhiteGenocide and #MarsTegenMarrakesh respectively, were illustrative of the intersection of two larger issues within the online far right; first, that some core ideas and concepts are widely shared but, second, are often refined for use in specific local contexts, whether geographical, cultural, linguistic, political, or other.
- The concept of 'white genocide' is persistent within the extreme right online scene. It denotes the belief that the 'white race' is directly endangered by the increasing diversity of Western societies, oftentimes



said to be at the behest of a global Jewish cabal. Despite dominating the 2016 hashtag analysis, with 899 appearances, explicit mention of white genocide occurred only 11 times in the 2018 dataset however; what explains this?

- Despite concepts such as ‘white genocide’ having long-term strategic level importance within the global extreme right online scene, such concepts and their associated hashtags are often overtaken by more tactical hashtags associated with specific, often ‘real world,’ events, which is what happened with the top returned hashtags in the 2018 dataset. The top 4 hashtags in the comparison dataset (i.e. #MarsTegenMarrakesh, #MarcheContreMarrakech, #Bruxelles, and #Brussels), which together appeared in some 44% of the 2018 tweets, all reference a far right-organised march in Brussels in December 2018 against the *Pacte De Marrakech*, framed by the extreme right as an agreement for unrestrained migration to the EU and ultimately a vehicle for ‘white genocide.’
- Other prominent hashtags appearing in the 2016 dataset were related to national politics in Germany and the United States. For example, the second most popular hashtag in the baseline dataset was #afd, which refers to the far right political party *Alternative für Deutschland*. Other prominent hashtags contained in the 2018 comparison dataset were #GiletsJaunes, #ActeV, #YellowVests, #France, and #Paris, all of which were contained in tweets about the so-called ‘Yellow Vest(s)’ protests.
- Analysis of the top used words in any given dataset is often times a useful complement to hashtag analysis. Words associated with one of the major events of 2016, the US Presidential election (i.e. Trump, Hillary, Clinton, debate) were prominently featured in content analysis of the 2016 baseline dataset. The majority of all references to then US presidential candidate Trump were positive whilst almost all references to then US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton were negative.
- The words ‘white’ and ‘people’ were also prominent in the ‘baseline’ dataset, generally used together in the phrase “white people.” Significant in the baseline dataset too were the numerous words associated with Islam (i.e. Islam, Muslim) and Judaism (i.e. Jewish, Jews), which each accounted for 2% of the words used in the 2016 dataset. All of these tweets were of either an anti-Muslim or anti-Semitic nature.
- Europe-related words (i.e. *Europa*, EU, Europe) were also prominent in the 2016 dataset and appeared in tweets written in English, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. These tweets largely continued the directly previous themes through their insistence that Europe is being “invaded” by Muslims, often times accompanied by the explanation that this is at the behest of George Soros, the Rothschilds, or some other shadowy Jewish conspiracy.
- Similar to the findings of the hashtag analysis, the most used words in the 2018 dataset were related to the Brussels march protesting adoption of the UN’s Global Compact on Migration, many by those apparently in attendance at the event and tweeting practical information regarding where the police were amassing and locations at which the latter were using tear gas and water cannon for crowd control purposes.
- Just five words appeared in the top 20 most used words in both the 2016 and 2018 word counts. These were ‘people,’ ‘Jewish,’ ‘Jews,’ ‘EU,’ and ‘police.’ All varieties of the extreme right have an emphasis on ‘the people,’ from the fascist idea that some people are superior and should thus dominate others to nativists who promote the interests of the native people of a country against those from outside. These ideas, were reflected in the words co-occurring with ‘people’ in our dataset, which included most prominently “white people.”
- The wide use of the words ‘Jewish,’ ‘Jews,’ and ‘EU,’ go to persistent themes of anti-Semitism and Euro-skepticism within the European—and obviously also wider—extreme right.
- The only other word appearing in both Top 20s was ‘police.’ The use of ‘police’ in the 2018 dataset was almost entirely uniform, relating to police activity at the Brussels march against the Global Compact for Migration and, to a lesser extent, the Yellow Vest protests. The uses of police in the 2016 dataset were more varied, with many accompanying links to news and other reports of crimes committed by black



people, Muslims, migrants, and refugees. None of the mentions in the 2016 dataset were with respect to real-time policing of protest events.

- Overall, in terms of content, the issue(s) of migrants and refugees dominated the datasets, with a particular emphasis on migrants and refugees from the Muslim world, the “influx” of which and their “destruction” of Europe often explained as part of a longstanding and nefarious Jewish plan.
- How did the wider European extreme right online scene—that is, beyond Twitter—change, if at all, between 2016 and 2018? The final section of the report addresses the Twitter out-linking patterns of users in our 2016 and 2018 datasets respectively, with a particular focus on the types and purposes of the platforms being out-linked to by each set of users and the implications of this.
- Websites were the commonest type of online space out-linked to by our sub-set of European extreme right Twitter users. The nature of the websites out-linked to change considerably between 2016 and 2018 however.
- The vast majority of all websites out-linked to in 2016 were termed News. When broken down further, it was found that 10 of these were the websites of newspapers or magazines, most of them high circulation newspapers in their country of origin. This pattern of out-linking to major news outlets is due to the propensity of extreme right users to link their comments to media articles that reinforce their viewpoints, especially newspaper articles reporting criminal activity by people of colour, migrants, and refugees.
- On the other hand, just over one-fifth of the websites out-linked to from the 2018 dataset fell into the ‘News’ category, only half of which were newspapers. The ‘Activism’ category, which was not represented in the 2016 dataset, accounted for roughly the same number of out-links as ‘News’ in the 2018 dataset. Three domains deemed activist were out-linked to; these were, in order of popularity, the website of the neo-fascist Polish political party National Rebirth of Poland (NOP), the website of the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement, and the NOP-affiliated “Radical Nationalist Daily” *Nacjonlista*. All three websites have an emphasis on ‘real world’ activism.
- Just two of the News websites out-linked to from the 2016 dataset were online only, the American ‘Breitbart News Network’ and Poland’s wPolityce.pl, but more than half of all website out-links from the 2018 dataset were to online-only domains that we categorised as ‘Partisan Commentary.’ The founder/publisher of just one of these, Andrew Anglin of the Daily Stormer, was discernible from his website. The founder(s), publisher(s), and/or contributor(s) to Daily Archives, Voice of Europe, and Right of the Right are unknown.
- Five domains were out-linked to by accounts from both the 2016 and 2018 datasets. These were (in order of their appearance in the 2016 listing) the Daily Mail, the Breitbart website, Russia’s RT television station’s website, Russia’s Sputnik radio network’s website, and the Daily Stormer website. What many of the sites discussed in this sub-section have in common, including those sites common to both the 2016 and 2018 Top 20s, is the publication of false and misleading narratives and disinformation.
- Just one of the domains out-linked to from the 2016 dataset self-described as “national socialist” (i.e. Nazi) in orientation and was no longer available in 2018 due to being removed by the platform. In contrast, at least a quarter of all domains out-linked to in the 2018 dataset openly identified on their websites and Blogs as nationalist socialist, including DailyArchives and the Nordfront website.
- Nearly a third of all out-links in both the 2016 and 2018 datasets were to major online platforms. As regards the baseline 2016 dataset, the top two most out-linked to spaces overall were YouTube and Facebook respectively. YouTube fell to just second place in terms of overall out-links in the 2018 dataset, whereas Facebook had sunk to thirteenth place.
- In conclusion, clear from this analysis is that many of the same concepts and themes prominent in the Christchurch shooter’s ‘manifesto’—and that of the April 2019 Poway, California synagogue attacker and a spate of other recent extreme right terrorists—are also prominent within the European extreme right online scene, including on mainstream platforms such as Twitter.



## 1. Introduction

The Christchurch terrorist attack has ensured policy, media, and scholarly attention is now firmly fixed on extreme right terrorism and the role of the Internet in it. In fact, a global increase in extreme right hate and violence and the Internet's role in it have been apprehensible for some time. 2015 and 2016 witnessed an eruption of hateful online content due at least in part to the US presidential campaign, the Brexit referendum, a spate of 'Islamic State'-inspired or directed terrorist attacks, and the continued arrival of large numbers of refugees to Europe from war torn Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency following a divisive presidential campaign bolstered the extreme right, particularly its "alt-right" variant, not just in the US, but globally. A manifestation of this movement's increasing boldness was the 11 and 12 August 2017 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, which featured a diversity of extreme right figures and groups, including significant cohorts of Neo-Nazis. The rally culminated in the death, on 12 August, of Heather Heyer, when a car rammed a group of counter-protesters. The fallout from this event was considerable and significantly impacted the online extreme right. A spate of additional extreme right terrorist attacks—in all of which social media were implicated to a greater or lesser degree—took place in the United States at the tail end of 2018, including the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, which killed 11 people. None of these received the same level of attention as Christchurch however, probably due to both the large number of fatalities and the peculiarly Internet-centric nature of the New Zealand attack.

On 15 March, 2019, 28-year-old Australian Brenton Tarrant opened fire and killed 50 people in two Christchurch, New Zealand mosques. He announced his intentions on the anonymous message board 8chan prior to the attack, produced a 'manifesto' linked on the website, and live-streamed his attack on Facebook via a link also posted to 8chan's /pol/ or 'politically incorrect' board. Tarrant's 'manifesto' is suffused with extreme right concepts and themes, along with a variety of inside jokes common to 'chan' culture. While major social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter appear to have largely resolved their 'Islamic State' problem,<sup>1</sup> they are under increasing pressure regarding the large amounts of extreme right content circulating on their platforms. In the wake of Christchurch, Facebook announced "a ban on praise, support and representation of white nationalism and white separatism."<sup>2</sup> On 2 May, 2019, it removed the accounts of a swathe of prominent extreme right figures from both Facebook and Instagram. YouTube has been heavily criticised for the propensity of its recommender system to suggest extreme right content to users.<sup>3</sup> Like Facebook, it has also recently come under pressure regarding the workings of its livestreaming service: YouTube was forced to shut down the comment section on its livestream of a 9 April, 2019 US congressional hearing on white nationalism after it was overwhelmed with hateful comments, including expressions of anti-Semitism and white supremacy. Twitter is however the platform most lengthily and consistently subject to complaints about its hosting of extreme right content. It is certainly the only social media company that, in the wake of any major change by it to its service, is faced with large numbers of the platform's users responding with variations of "But what about the Nazis?" or just "Ban Nazis."<sup>4</sup>

Twitter has not been unresponsive to calls for it to 'clean up its act.' On 31 May 2016, the European Commission along with Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Microsoft, unveiled a 'Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online' that included a series of commitments to combat the spread of "illegal

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<sup>1</sup> Maura Conway, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson and David Weir. 2018. 'Disrupting Daesh: Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and Its Impacts.' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Online First).

<sup>2</sup> 'Standing Against Hate.' *Facebook Newsroom*, 27 March 2019: <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/03/standing-against-hate/>.

<sup>3</sup> Kelly Weill. 'How YouTube Built a Radicalization Machine for the Far-Right.' *Daily Beast*, 17 Dec. 2018: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-youtube-pulled-these-men-down-a-vortex-of-far-right-hate>. See also Zeynep Tufekci. 'YouTube, the Great Radicalizer.' *The New York Times*, 10 March 2018: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html>; Derek O'Callaghan, Derek Greene, Maura Conway, Joe Carthy, and Pádraig Cunningham. 2015. 'Down the (White) Rabbit Hole: The Extreme Right and Online Recommender Systems.' *Social Science Computer Review* 33(4).

<sup>4</sup> See sample tweets in, for example, Jay Hathaway. 'Twitter Has a Fix for Its Nazi Problem—But It Won't Use It.' *The Daily Dot*, 22 June 2017: <https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/twitter-nazi-problem/>.

hate speech” via the Internet Europe-wide.<sup>5</sup> In November 2016, Twitter started rolling out new platform-wide anti-harassment tools, including the option to report an account for “hateful conduct.”<sup>6</sup> It followed-up in 2017 by expanding its hateful conduct and media policies to include abusive usernames and hateful imagery. At the same time, Twitter also updated its rules around violence and physical harm to include the glorification of violence and violent extremist groups.<sup>7</sup> The latter changes were widely reported to have resulted in a “purge” of extreme right accounts starting from 18 December, the date of their formal rollout.<sup>8</sup> Twitter made further updates to these policies in September 2018, including expanding their hateful conduct policy to include content that “dehumanises others based on their membership in an identifiable group.”<sup>9</sup>

This report presents an initial exploration of the impact of the above changes via a comparative analysis of the Twitter activity of a selection of extreme right users from across the European Union’s (EU) 28 member states over a five-day period in 2016 and again in 2018. In particular, the research inquired into the level of takedown of accounts between 2016 and 2018, the nature of the accounts removed, and whether the takedowns resulted in a decrease in hateful content production and distribution among the selected users and their networks or not. Overall, analysis of the account takedowns, interactions, tweet content, and out-linking activity of the selected users showed that while well over half of the accounts in our 2016 dataset had been removed by Twitter by 2018, and the tenor of the online conversation had appreciably changed, it was not in a positive direction. Not only do our findings show that hateful content is still being widely produced and circulated, particularly false narratives and disinformation regarding migration and related issues, but that the domains and their content being out-linked to from Twitter in 2018 may be more extremist than in 2016. This was certainly the case for the out-linked to domains in our 2018 dataset, which was however, due to the impact of account takedowns and other factors, considerably smaller than the 2016 dataset. Our findings are preliminary therefore and further research will need to be conducted in order to determine if this is part of a wider trend. What is clear from the analysis however is that many of the same concepts and themes apparent in the Christchurch attacker’s ‘manifesto’ are also prominent in Europe’s extreme right online scene.

This report is divided into eight sections. Section two provides some further background and context to the research, including why there is relatively little empirically-grounded research on how the online activities of the extreme right have evolved over time, and what we mean by ‘hateful content, the ‘extreme right,’ and ‘disinformation.’ Section three discusses our Twitter data collection and preprocessing, the size and composition of the final datasets, and the caveats attaching to these and thus also our overall findings. Presented in section four are some descriptive statistics about the 2016 ‘baseline’ and 2018 ‘comparison’ datasets, along with description and analysis of those accounts removed—largely by Twitter—between 2016 and 2018. The most prolific and influential tweeters in each of the datasets, their geographic origins, and the issues raised by them are addressed in section five. Section six is concerned with examination of tweet content via both hashtag and word analyses. Reported in section seven are findings of an analysis of all the

<sup>5</sup> The full text of the Code is available online at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/code-conduct-countering-illegal-hate-speech-online\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/code-conduct-countering-illegal-hate-speech-online_en). See also European Commission. ‘European Commission and IT Companies Announce Code of Conduct on Illegal Online Hate Speech.’ *Press Release*, Brussels, 31 May 2016: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-1937\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-1937_en.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Twitter Inc. ‘Progress on Addressing Online Abuse.’ *Twitter Blog*, 15 November 2016: [https://blog.twitter.com/official/en\\_us/a/2016/progress-on-addressing-online-abuse.html](https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2016/progress-on-addressing-online-abuse.html).

<sup>7</sup> Twitter Safety. ‘Enforcing New Rules to Reduce Hateful Conduct and Abusive Behavior.’ *Twitter Blog*, 18 December 2017: [https://blog.twitter.com/official/en\\_us/topics/company/2017/safetypoliciesdec2017.html](https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2017/safetypoliciesdec2017.html).

<sup>8</sup> Aja Romano. ‘At Long Last, Twitter Has Begun Banning (Some, Not All) Nazis.’ *Vox*, 18 December 2017: <https://www.vox.com/2017/12/18/16790864/twitter-bans-nazis-hate-groups>.

<sup>9</sup> Vijaya Gadde and Del Harvey. ‘Creating New Policies Together.’ *Twitter Blog* 25 September 2018: [https://blog.twitter.com/official/en\\_us/topics/company/2018/Creating-new-policies-together.html](https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2018/Creating-new-policies-together.html); see also, Del Harvey. ‘The Twitter Rules: A Living Document.’ *Twitter Blog*, 7 Aug. 2018: [https://blog.twitter.com/official/en\\_us/topics/company/2018/TheTwitterRulesALivingDocument.html](https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2018/TheTwitterRulesALivingDocument.html).



domains out-linked to from Twitter in each of the datasets. The Conclusion, section eight, provides a discussion of some of the overarching issues revealed in this preliminary analysis, including the segue between many of the ideas and concepts circulated and discussed amongst European extreme right Twitter users and those invoked by Brenton Tarrant (and other extreme right terrorists). Directions for future research are also supplied.

## 2. Background and Context

The extreme right has a very long online history, dating to the earliest days of the public Internet in the mid-1980s.<sup>10</sup> Measurement of the volume and frequency of production of extreme right online content is fraught with difficulty however, as is analysis of changes to extreme right online networks and content over time. With regard to social media in particular, there is a lack of historical data to base comparisons on. This is due to the difficulty and/or expense of accessing historical data from social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, the increasing assertiveness of social media companies in removing hateful content has made it more difficult to *retroactively* compare this activity in a way that would also allow for consideration of the suspended accounts. As a result, there is little empirically-grounded knowledge on how the social media activities of extreme right movements have evolved over the past few years.<sup>11</sup> Difficulties are also thrown up for researchers by the structure of the extreme right scene, which is composed of a fast-changing and complex overlapping of individuals, groups, movements, political parties, and media organs—both online and traditional—espousing extreme nationalist, National Socialist/Nazi, fascist, white supremacist, and/or so-called ‘alt-right’ ideology.<sup>12</sup> Important to acknowledge too is the struggle of differentiating users, social media accounts, websites, etc., espousing more traditionally violent extremist views (e.g. Nazi or neo-Nazi) from users who hold more radical populist views around, particularly, anti-immigration and Islam.

Having said this, much of the online content produced and disseminated by extreme right Internet users shares certain core values and commitments that can be described as ‘hateful’. In this report, the terminology ‘hateful content’ is used in order to avoid falling into complex discussions around the definition of ‘hate,’ with the term ‘content’ rather than ‘speech’ used in order to draw attention to the online aspects of the phenomenon focused upon herein. Hateful online content has a great many targets, chief amongst them people of colour, Jews, Muslims, migrants and refugees, the LGBTQI+<sup>13</sup> community, and women. Table 1 lists some of the common characteristics associated with each of these groups by extreme right posters in online settings. In terms of what constitutes the ‘extreme right,’ we follow Cas Mudde’s well known conceptualisation of it as an ideology that has at its core nationalism, welfare chauvinism—today, often encapsulated in the concept of ‘nativism’—a commitment to law and order, and xenophobia.<sup>14</sup> And therefore an individual, group, party, or movement—or in online terms, an account, page, channel, forum, site, network, or even platform—can be deemed extreme right if it exhibits three or more of the core tenets of the ideology.

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<sup>10</sup> Anti-Defamation League (ADL). 1985. *Computerized Networks of Hate: An ADL Fact Finding Report* (New York: ADL): <https://archive.org/details/ComputerizedNetworksOfHate>.

<sup>11</sup> An exception is J.M. Berger. 2016. *Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter: A Comparative Study of White Nationalist and ISIS Online Social Media Networks* (George Washington University: Program on Extremism): [https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2371/f/downloads/Nazis%20v.%20ISIS%20Final\\_0.pdf](https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2371/f/downloads/Nazis%20v.%20ISIS%20Final_0.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> For a primer on the alt-right’s Twitter activity, see J.M. Berger. 2018. *The Alt-right Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Audience for Alt-right Content on Twitter* (Dublin: VOX-Pol): [https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol\\_publication/AltRightTwitterCensus.pdf](https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/AltRightTwitterCensus.pdf). On the origins of the alt-right, see Angela Nagle. 2017. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-right* (London: Zero Books).

<sup>13</sup> ‘LGBTQI+’ is a shorthand reference to describe the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transsexual, queer, inter-sex, and other sexual identity-based communities.

<sup>14</sup> Cas Mudde. 2002. *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p.181.

**Table 1. Group Identities, Types of Hateful Discourses, and Their Characteristics**

Group Identity	Hateful Discourse	Characteristics of Discourse*
Black	Racism	Associated with criminality; trope of being ‘uncivilised’, lazy, ‘parasites’; the dehumanising trope of African men as animals <i>[Also targeted in the anti-immigrant/refugee and Islamophobic discourses]</i>
Jewish	Anti-Semitism	Targeted as hidden figures, ‘globalists’ scheming behind the scenes; as Shylocks (i.e. devious merchants and usurers); Holocaust denial (e.g. #HoloHoax)
Muslim	Anti-Muslim	Targeted as terrorists; clash of civilisations; Muslim men as misogynist and sexually deviant; a general and unspecified antipathy <i>[Also targeted in racist and anti-immigrant/refugee discourses]</i>
Immigrant, Refugee	Anti-immigrant, Anti-refugee	Targeted on basis of moral (un-)deservedness, especially access to welfare and housing; good versus bad immigrant trope; language of ‘rapefugees’ (e.g. #rapefugees) <i>[Also targeted in racist and Islamophobic discourses]</i>
LGBTQI	Homophobia, Transphobia	Targeted as sick, sinners, sexual deviants, degenerate <i>[Can also be targeted in all other discourses depending on other identities held]</i>
Woman	Misogyny	Targeted both as whores and unwilling to ‘put out,’ as grasping, two-faced, untrustworthy; only interested in money and status; a general and unspecified antipathy <i>[Can also be targeted in all other discourses depending on other identities held]</i>

\* Based on primary research, plus findings reported in Pohjonen. 2018. Horizons of Hate and Siaperä et al. 2018. Hate Track.

If it is possible for the Internet to play a role in American and Australian extreme right terrorism, as discussed in the Introduction, it is also possible for it to have a role in the violent radicalisation of EU-based individuals. Indeed, for a few hours after the November 2015 Paris attacks, #matadatodoslosmusulmanes (“kill all Muslims”) was the third most used hashtag in Spain.<sup>15</sup> In November 2016, the German Ministry of Justice released figures for its 2015 criminal investigations into accusations of hate speech, which showed an increase of 130% from 2014. Of the 5,700 such investigations conducted in 2015, 2,300 were based on online hate speech, as compared to only 500 such cases in 2014.<sup>16</sup> In the UK, Britain First’s Twitter follower count rose by over 700 in the five days following MP Jo Cox’s June 2016 murder, with positive online sentiment around Britain First also increasing by 7% in the same time period.<sup>17</sup> Ms. Cox, a Labour party MP, was both a ‘remainer’ and vocally pro both immigration and refugees. Her assassin, Thomas Mair, himself a former

<sup>15</sup> Olga Jubany and Malin Roiha. 2016. *Backgrounds, Experiences and Responses to Online Hate Speech: A Comparative Cross-Country Analysis* (University of Barcelona: PRISM): [http://www.unicri.it/special\\_topics/hate\\_crimes/Backgrounds Experiences and Responses to Online Hate Speech A Comparative Cross-Country Analysis.pdf](http://www.unicri.it/special_topics/hate_crimes/Backgrounds_Experiences_and_Responses_to_Online_Hate_Speech_A_Comparative_Cross-Country_Analysis.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Wolfgang Janisch. ‘Ausländerfeindliche Hetze im Internet nimmt dramatisch zu.’ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28 November 2016: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/bundesamt-fuer-justiz-auslaenderfeindliche-hetze-im-internet-nimmt-dramatisch-zu-1.3268733>.

<sup>17</sup> Melanie Smith and Chloe Colliver. *The Impact of Brexit on Far-right Groups in the UK: Research Briefing* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue), p.1: <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/the-impact-of-brexit-on-far-right-groups-in-the-uk-research-briefing/>.

member of the British National Party (BNP) and admirer of William Pierce, former leader of the US neo-Nazi National Alliance,<sup>18</sup> was widely reported to have shouted “Britain First” as he carried out the attack.<sup>19</sup>

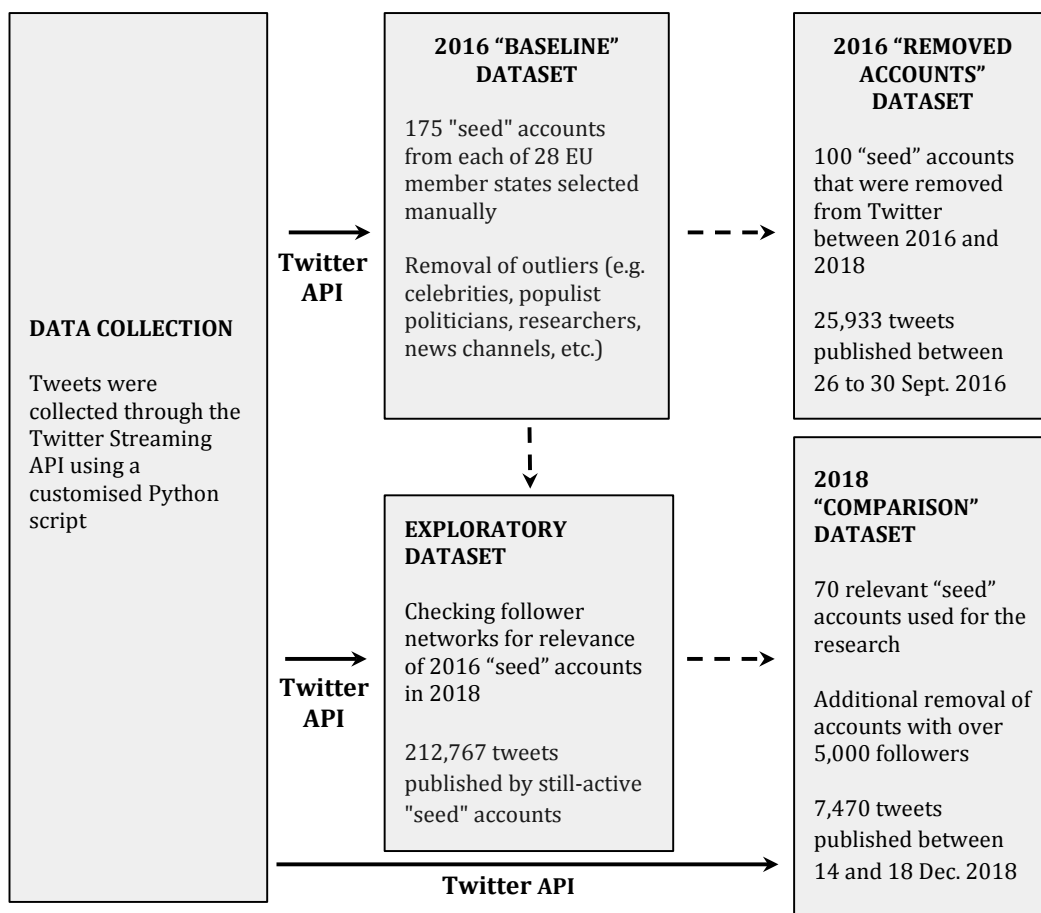
### 3. Data and Methods

#### 3.1. Twitter Data Collection and Preprocessing

This research is based on analysis of three datasets: (1) a 2016 ‘baseline’ dataset, (2) a 2018 ‘comparison’ dataset, and (3) a ‘removed’ accounts dataset. Figure 1 illustrates the data collection and preprocessing workflow for these three datasets.

##### 3.1.1. 2016 Baseline Dataset

The ‘baseline’ dataset was collected in 2016 through a multi-step sampling procedure aimed at identifying relevant accounts from each of the 28 EU member states.<sup>20</sup> The first step consisted of manually collecting



**Figure 1. Twitter Data Collection and Preprocessing Workflow**

<sup>18</sup> Ian Cobain, Nazia Parveen, and Matthew Taylor. ‘The Slow-burning Hatred that Led Thomas Mair to Murder Jo Cox.’ *The Guardian*, 23 November 2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-slow-burning-hatred-led-to-jo-cox-murder>

<sup>19</sup> This was however disputed in court; see BBC News. ‘Labour MP Jo Cox “Murdered for Political Cause.”’ *BBC News*, 14 November 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37978582>.

<sup>20</sup> Choosing such ‘seed accounts’ is always a challenging process given the different legislative responses to extreme right online content across EU member states (e.g. the strict ban on Nazi content in Germany), the different patterns of social media use across Europe (e.g. certain countries are more active on Twitter than others), and the relative anonymity provided by the platform that makes it difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to determine the national origin of accounts.





'seed' accounts based on the domain knowledge of researchers specialising in the extreme right. Accounts were chosen on the basis of their screen name, profile picture, tweet content, type of online interactions, and/or the visuals shared by them displaying some or all of the discourses identified in Table 1.<sup>21</sup> Selected accounts consisted of those representing a diversity of types of extreme right activity on Twitter in 2016. This included supporters of parliamentary far right political parties such as the French *Front Nationale*,<sup>22</sup> neo-fascist movements such as the Italian *Fiamma Tricolore* and the Polish *Młodzież Wszechpolska*, ultra-nationalist movements such as the *Movimiento Falangista de España* in Spain, official accounts of neo-Nazi movements such as the Pan-Nordic *Nordic Resistance Front*, as well as a varied range of individuals supporting extreme right ideology and causes and the so-called 'alt-right.'

The second step consisted of automatically extracting all the followers of the selected accounts, and then using social network analysis to better understand who the key actors and communities behind them were. This allowed the research to exclude outlier accounts from the data (e.g. accounts that had over 100,000 followers, celebrities, major news channels and popular politicians).<sup>23</sup> The final 2016 'baseline' dataset thus consisted of 175 Twitter accounts. A minimum of one account from each EU member state was included in the dataset, and 10 or more accounts were identified from large EU countries, such as France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the UK. All the tweets published by the selected accounts over a five-day period between 26 September and 30 September, 2016 were then collected using the Twitter Streaming API.

### 3.1.2. 2018 Comparison Dataset

A 'comparison' dataset based on the existing 2016 baseline dataset was collected in 2018. Three intermediary steps were taken to validate this new dataset for the comparative analysis. Firstly, the initial 'seed' account list used in 2016 was checked for accounts that had been deleted, suspended, or removed by Twitter in the interim or were otherwise no longer relevant for the research. Following this, all tweets from the still-active accounts were downloaded for a period of a month for exploration purposes. This intermediary exploratory analysis discovered that the conversation was still dominated by a number of active outlier accounts with tens of thousands of followers. It was thus decided to follow Berger's recent work on the alt-right Twitter community and remove all accounts with over 5,000 followers. This allowed us to capture as many 'ordinary' grassroots users as possible and thus a greater cross-section of the online European extreme right, rather than skewing the findings towards 'celebrity' super users. Building on an existing methodology also provided more generalisability for the research with other recent work done on extreme right Twitter. The final 2018 comparative seed account list consisted of 70 accounts that were deemed relevant for the research. Twitter's Streaming API was then used to collect all the activity by these accounts for a period of 5 days between 14 and 18 December, 2018.

### 3.1.3. Deleted Accounts Dataset

Out of the initial 175 baseline accounts identified as relevant in 2016, 100 accounts had been removed, locked, suspended, or temporarily suspended by Twitter by 2018. Based on the manual identification of these disappeared accounts, and the types of content in them, a 'removed' accounts dataset was also created to explore what types of extreme right accounts had been removed by Twitter in the period between our two bouts of data-gathering. The accounts composing this dataset are discussed at greater length in section 4.1 below.

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<sup>21</sup> Valentine Crosset, Samuel Tanner, and Aurélie Campana. 2018. 'Researching Far Right Groups on Twitter: Methodological Challenges 2.0.' *New Media & Society* (Online First).

<sup>22</sup> The name was changed to *Rassemblement National* in 2017.

<sup>23</sup> The research also used social network analysis on these follower-relationships to identify the most relevant users and communities and manually checked and chose seed accounts based on their relevance, representativeness, and level of activity. This was iterated until the most relevant accounts for the research were found.



### 3.2. Research Methods

A qualitative mixed methods approach was used to analyse the three above-described datasets. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to identify relevant patterns and trends in the datasets.<sup>24</sup> The descriptive analysis helped identify, in particular, what the relevant users and content were, including key influencers, trending hashtags, and most popular words, along with the most out-linked to domains from Twitter by the tweeters in our datasets.<sup>25</sup> The research also used social network analysis to identify prominent users and communities across the three datasets. This was done, in particular, through modelling the Twitter conversations into six different types of networks, based on which statistical and exploratory social network analysis and visualisations could be carried out.<sup>26</sup> The research also visually explored these networks by overlaying attribute data (e.g. the language of the tweets) on the networks in order to better understand, for example, the relationship of extreme right Twitter users across Europe's different language communities. Finally, qualitative exploration and content analysis of the relevant themes and content found in the three datasets was also conducted.

### 3.3. Caveats

There are a number of caveats attaching to the data collection and methods used in the research.

1. While we are confident that all 'seed' accounts appearing on our original 2016 list were relevant, the resultant dataset(s) cannot be considered a representative sample of Europe's online extreme right or of extreme right Twitter activity generally. Rather, what this purposive data gathering method provided was a snapshot of the Twitter activity of a sample of Europe's online extreme right users at two different points in time.
2. While removing those accounts with more than 5,000 followers in 2018 was relevant for the research to focus on a wider range of users and conversations, as opposed to only popular accounts with amplified activity, this also influenced the comparability of the 2016 and 2018 datasets, especially in terms of frequency and scope of Twitter activity. Comparison of the two datasets should thus not be viewed as a direct comparison of how much extreme right activity there was on Twitter during these two different time frames. Rather, this before and after approach was used to better understand the changes to the type of content and themes found in European extreme right Twitter activity between 2016 and 2018.
3. Similarly, the removal of a large number of accounts by Twitter between 2016 and 2018 significantly influenced the analysis. While using the same set of accounts was relevant for the comparative approach, it further skewed the tit-for-tat analysis of the datasets by making the 2018 dataset significantly smaller. The upward revision of Twitter's character limit from a maximum of 140 characters per tweet in 2016 to 280 by 2018 also made truly direct comparative analysis impossible.
4. The five-day samples used in the research also impose limitations. As Twitter activity often circulates around key events, these can become over-represented in the data especially when short time-frames are used. The 2016 data collection period was a particularly lively time period in the extreme

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<sup>24</sup> The analysis was done by using ORA social network analysis software, which generates statistical metrics for Twitter analysis. ORA is a software developed at Carnegie Mellon University and it contains hundreds of social network, dynamic network, and trail metrics, along with procedures for grouping nodes, identifying local patterns, and comparing and contrasting networks, groups, and individuals from a dynamic meta-network perspective. For further information, see <http://www.casos.cs.cmu.edu/projects/ora/>.

<sup>25</sup> A custom stop-word list was also compiled to remove hundreds of frequently-occurring words in major European languages that were not relevant to the research, including removing numbers and other non-informational words such as pronouns and prepositions, etc.

<sup>26</sup> These networks consisted of the different ways (a) Twitter users (i.e. agents), (b) hashtags used, (c) URLs shared, and (d) popular words used related to each other. The networks explored further for the purposes of this research were as follows: (1) Agent-Agent (i.e. all communication, common hashtags, common words, mentioned-by, reciprocal, replied-by, retweeted-yy); (2) agent-hashtag; (3) agent-shared URL; (4) agent-word; (5) hashtag-hashtag (i.e. co-occurrence); and (6) word-word (co-occurrence) networks.

right online scene, especially in the Anglophone world, as the populist radical right made two significant gains in the period: Brexit and Donald Trump’s potential US Presidential victory. During the 2018 data collection periods, the *Marche Contre Marrakesh* in Belgium and *Gilet Jaunes* protests in France were events that were similarly highly visible and thus reflected in a potentially outsized way in the dataset.

**Table 2. Description of ‘Baseline’ and ‘Comparison’ Datasets**

	2016 Baseline	2018 Comparison
Number of Tweets*	59,679	7,470
Number of Tweeters (incl. accounts RTed and mentioned by seeds)	7,506	2,324
Number of RTs	20,981	4,455
Number of Distinct Hashtags	4,213	406
Number of Distinct Words	66,568	11,639
Number of Mentions	58,482	7,721
Number of Distinct Mentions	27,569	4,906
Average Tweets per Tweeter	7	3
Average RTs per Tweeter	3	2
Average Followers per Tweeter**	70,122	103,665
Average Hashtags per Tweeter	4	2
Average Words per Tweeter	44	20
Average Mentions per Tweeter	8	3
Average Tweeters per Hashtag	2	1
<p>* The number of tweets here includes both the tweets published by the Followed accounts as well as the tweets by others retweeted and quoted by them.  ** These figures also include the users who were retweeted or mentioned by the ‘seed’ Twitter accounts, with the 2018 figure skewed by a single user (i.e. CNN News) having over 56M followers by that time.</p>		

These limitations are however somewhat accounted for by the mixed methods approach used. The combination of approaches allowed us to both identify macro-level trends, but also to provide more qualitative understanding of the online conversations described based on our background knowledge of online extreme right discourses and activism.

#### 4. Descriptive Findings

The final datasets used for comparison consisted of a total of 67,149 tweets published over two 5-day periods in 2016 and 2018 respectively. Table 2 provides a descriptive overview of these ‘baseline’ and ‘comparison’ datasets. As Table 2 illustrates, there were a number of noteworthy differences between the 2016 and 2018 datasets, with almost all measures being greater in 2016 than in 2018. This was due to Twitter’s increased account removal activity over the period. These removals are therefore worth discussing in some depth.

##### 4.1. Removed Accounts

The 2016 ‘baseline’ dataset consisted of 175 ‘seed’ accounts. In comparison, the 2018 dataset was 60% smaller, consisting of only 70 ‘seed’ accounts. That had a very significant impact on the 2018 dataset as the removed

accounts accounted for 53% of all the tweets published in 2016 and the number of RTs by removed accounts, in turn, accounted for 43% of the activity in 2016.<sup>27</sup> In turn, the number of distinct hashtags in the deleted accounts dataset included 69% of all the hashtags used and the distinct number of words included 66% of the number of distinct words used; albeit in this case there was a significant overlap between the hashtags and

<sup>27</sup> The deleted accounts dataset was generated by removing all the tweets published by the 2016 accounts, which had been removed, locked, suspended or temporarily suspended in the 2018 dataset. This did not include the accounts that may have retweeted or mentioned the users of the deleted accounts.

words used that is common to both datasets. The removed accounts were therefore some of the most prolific in the ‘baseline’ dataset. In fact, out of the 10 users identified as being the most prolific and influential tweeters in the 2016 dataset only three remained active in 2018. The most prolific and influential accounts in the dataset also reflected the major language groups in Europe, with accounts from Spain, the UK and Germany dominating the deleted accounts dataset.

Many of the removed accounts displayed symbols and used language more visibly associated with extreme right themes than other accounts in the 2016 dataset. Figure 2 shows the profile pictures and bios of two popular English-language accounts that were suspended by Twitter between 2016 and 2018. One of these was explicitly neo-Nazi in its orientation, employing the term “*mein führer*” in its profile picture, alongside a stylised image of Adolf Hitler combined with a swastika. The same account also used the numbers “1488” in its screen name. This is a common neo-Nazi code combining reference to David Lane’s ‘14 words’<sup>28</sup> and a simple letter-number substitution code that transforms ‘88’ into ‘HH’ for ‘Heil Hitler.’ The second example is less explicitly neo-Nazi in its orientation but is easily understood as such by those familiar with fascist ideology and symbology. Lane’s ‘14 words’ were again invoked in this account’s screen name and the slogan itself included in the account bio, but this user’s profile picture was perhaps less obviously extreme right than in the previous example. Rather than an easily identifiable swastika, this user employed a profile picture combining a snake surrounding a *sonnenrad* or sunwheel, with an *othala* rune at its centre. Both the *sonnenrad*, an ancient Indo-European symbol, and the *othala*, part of a number of runic alphabet systems common in pre-Roman Europe, were appropriated by Nazi Germany, which has resulted in contemporary white supremacists using them as hate symbols.

Some minor differences in the countries the removed accounts originated from were also observable. For instance, proportionally more English, Spanish, and Finnish accounts were removed from our dataset by Twitter between 2016 and 2018 than German and French accounts. One potential explanation for this may



**Figure 2. Examples of Profile Pictures and Bios of Extreme Right Accounts Removed by Twitter between 2016 and 2018**

<sup>28</sup> David Lane (1938-2007) was a prominent American extreme right figure who was involved, at various times, with the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nation, and was a founding member of The Order. He said his views were encapsulated by the fourteen-word slogan “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children,” sometimes also rendered as “Because the beauty of the White Aryan woman must not perish from the earth.”

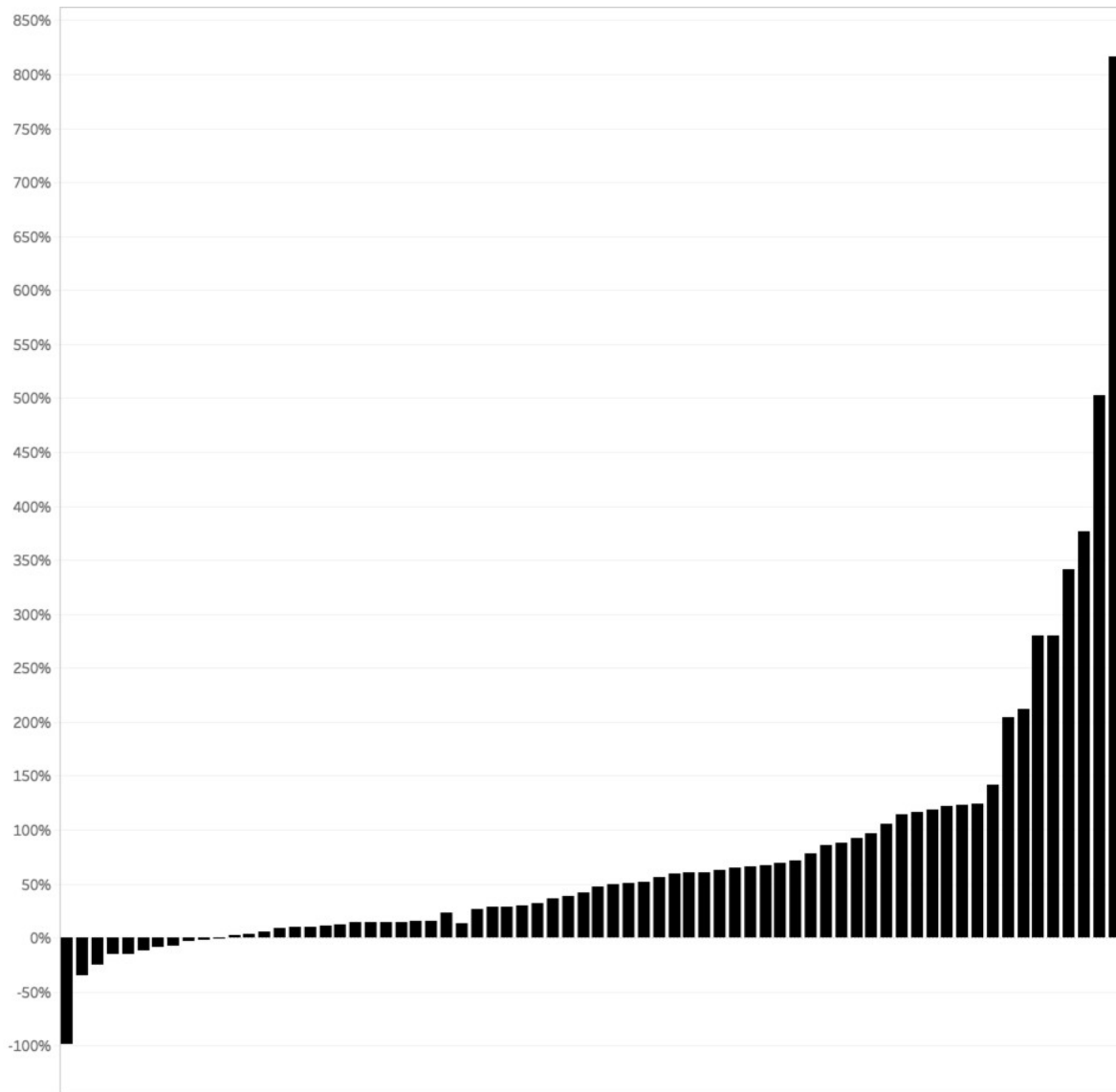
be that French, but especially also German users, were already primed prior to the changes to Twitter’s policies due to local laws to veil their extreme right views, particularly avoiding the use of language, codes, and symbols easily identified with Nazism. Users from other countries, especially English language users, appear to have been much more ‘loud and proud’ in their neo-Nazism and thus in clear contravention of Twitter’s changed rules from November 2016 onward. High profile and influential accounts also seem to have been targeted by Twitter for removal to a greater extent than lower profile and less influential accounts with broadly similar content. Table 3 shows the countries of origin of the five most influential and retweeted accounts in the 2016 dataset, which were all subsequently deleted by Twitter, and the hashtags used in them. It was the nature of the accounts removed by Twitter between 2016 and 2018 that caused us to hypothesise that perhaps the levels of hatred observable in the ‘comparison’ dataset would be lower, even if this were just due to users moderating their discourse in order to stay below Twitter’s threshold for removal. This is not how our analysis ultimately played out however. In addition, even though the dataset emergent from out 2016 ‘seed’ list was clearly significantly impacted by Twitter’s account removals, this does not mean that overall European extreme right activity declined on the platform in the 2016 to 2018 period. On the contrary, analysis of the follower numbers of the accounts from the original ‘seed’ list that remained active in 2018 showed that a majority saw considerable growth per Figure 3.

**Table 3. Top 5 Most Influential (i.e. Most Retweeted/Mentioned) Accounts Removed by Twitter Between 2016 and 2018**

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Tweet Count</i>	<i>Most Common Hashtags Used (No. of Uses in Five-day Period)</i>
1.	Spain	1,167	#StopRacismo (32),* #DefendEurope (8), #Blancofobia (6), #BastaMacri (4), #Debates2016 (3)
2.	UK	651	#WhiteGenocide (6), #BlackLivesMatter (4),* #DebateNight (4), #DumbGoogle (3), #antiWhite (2)
3.	Austria	523	#afd (9), #Dresden (8), #Einzelfall (7), #Merkel (5), #csu (4)
4.	Germany	188	#MerkelHerbst (9), #Euskirchen (8), #MerkelDeutschland (4), #islam (3), #Einzelfall (3)
5.	UK	192	#WhiteGenocide (7), #InternationalPodcastDay (2), #Russia (2), #antiWhite (2), #AltRight (2)
* In addition to utilising generic relevant trending hashtags (e.g. #Debates2016), extreme right users often also exploit trending hashtags that appear to directly contradict their ideas. Such hashtag hijacking is carried out by extreme right users in order to gain visibility for their opposing ideas and attempt to re-frame issues to their advantage. (See further examples in Table 4).			

## 5. Social Network Analysis

Multiple authors have found that language can raise a barrier to robust transnational extreme right online networks. This is especially relevant in the European context, which is characterised by a number of regional conversations often revolving around the languages spoken in the large EU member states, so English, French, German, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. This kind of fragmentation of online extreme right activity is exacerbated by the extreme right’s core ideological commitment to nativism (i.e. protection of the interests of native-born inhabitants of a country against those of immigrants), which means that local, regional, and national issues often dominate debates. This section explores the most influential and prolific tweeters in the 2016 and 2018 datasets and compares how this activity potentially reflects the major language-oriented



**Figure 3. % Difference in 'Seed' Accounts' Follower Numbers Between 2016 and 2018**

networks behind extreme right online activity in the EU. The main findings from the social network analysis were that, while there was indeed overlap between users from European countries especially around major events such as the 2016 US presidential elections or the *Gilet Jaunes* protests, the most influential users nonetheless tended to cluster around the major language groups mentioned above. This is reflected both in the hashtags and most common words used. However, influential extreme right users from smaller countries, especially the Nordic countries (i.e. Finland, Sweden), tended to communicate more in English because they had the facility do so and could thereby reach a wider readership.

*5.1. Most Prolific or Influential Tweeters*

Various social network metrics were used to explore influential users in the 2016 and 2018 datasets, including how often different users were retweeted or mentioned by others (i.e. out-degree centrality), how often they were iteratively retweeted or mentioned by others (i.e. page rank centrality), or how often they were retweeted by groups of others (i.e. members of a large k-core). The most prolific tweeter in the

'baseline' dataset was a now-banned Spanish user who tweeted, retweeted, or was retweeted/mentioned 1,951 times during the 5-day time window. This user was followed by other active and popular Spanish, German, and English language accounts. The 'comparison' dataset's most prolific tweeter was an English language user who tweeted, retweeted, or was retweeted/mentioned 632 times during the 5-day time window. Table 4 and Table 5 provide comparative overviews of the most retweeted and mentioned users by language in 2016 and 2018 respectively.

### 5.2. Language-based Extreme Right Online Networks in Europe

Exploration of the relationships between different language clusters in the 2016 and 2018 datasets was done through visualising the different ways users retweeted and mentioned each other in the datasets. Each time a retweet or a mention took place, this was modeled as a relationship between the users. The different accounts were then algorithmically clustered into communities based on how often they retweeted or mentioned each other. Finally, users were colour-coded based on which language was primarily used in their Twitter communication. Figure 4 and Figure 5 confirm the findings of a host of other researchers by showing that users in both our 2016 and 2018 extreme right networks were largely clustered by language albeit with some degree of overlap between the major European language clusters.<sup>29</sup>

As the network visualisations overleaf illustrate, there were both similarities and differences in the languages used in the 2016 and 2018 dataset. In 2016, the English-language cluster was slightly more dispersed across the language group, partially explained by the relevance of the US presidential elections in the dataset and the high visibility of the Trump presidency in European extreme right online debates. In the 2018 dataset, on the other hand, English, Italian, and Spanish conversations were more closely clustered together whereas

**Table 4. Top 10 Most Retweeted and Mentioned Users by Language: 2016\***

Rank	Country	Most Used Languages	Most Common Hashtags (No. of Uses in Five-day Period)
1.	Spain	Spanish (1,766) English (43) Portuguese (17) French (16)	#extremadura (58), #Badajoz (14), #PSOE (7), #noticias (7), #España (7)
2.	Spain	Spanish (1,190)	#StopRacismo (30), #ETA (4), #Equipopatriotas (3), #StopIslam (3), #España (3)
3.	Germany	German (1,077) English (48)	#afd (170), #Dresden (86), #islam (54), #SPD (39), #CDU (38)
4.	Spain	Spanish (989) English (36)	#ALVDE (62), #RACISTA (29), #StopRacismo (14), #RACISTAS (8), #nosdestruyen (8)
5.	Spain	Spanish (1,037)	#StopRacismo (32), #DefendEurope (8), #Blancofóbia (6), #BastaMacri (4), #Debates2016 (3)
* All but one of the most influential accounts mentioned here were removed between 2016 and 2018.			

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, J.M. Berger. 'The Alt-right in Europe.' *VOX-Pol Blog*, 7 November 2018: <https://www.voxpol.eu/the-alt-right-in-europe/>; Caterina Froio and Bharath Ganesh. 2018. 'The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter: Issues and Actors that Cross Borders in Western European Democracies.' *European Societies*, 20 July; Derek O'Callaghan, Derek Greene, Maura Conway, Joe Carthy, and Pdraig Cunningham. 2013. 'An Analysis of Interactions Within and Between Extreme Right Communities in Social Media.' In Martin Atzmueller, Alvin Chin, Denis Helic and Andreas Hotho (Ed.s), *Ubiquitous Social Media Analysis* (Heidelberg: Springer): <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1206.7050.pdf>.

**Table 5. Top 10 Most Often Retweeted and Mentioned Users by Language: 2018**

Rank	Country	Most Used Languages	Most Common Hashtags (No. of Uses in Five-day Period)
1.	Belgium	French (68)	#Bruxelles (13), #MarsTegenMarrakesh (10), #GiletsJaunes (6), #MarcheContreMarrakech (6), #Molenbeek (4)
2.	Ireland	English (505) French (65)	#GiletsJaunes (17), #YellowVests (5), #France (5), #Paris (3), #Bordeaux (3)
3.	UK	English (350)	#Edmonton (2), #Calgary (2), #comédiefrançaise (2) #AntiGlobalism (2), #Enrichment (2)
4.	Italy	Italian (210)	#GlobalCompact (4), #Draghi (3), #DUX (2), #GRANDE (2), #giletgialli (2)
5.	Finnish	Finnish (156) English (135) Swedish (17)	#FFD365 (2), #ylestudio (1), #GiletsJaunes (1), #KADONNUT (1), #Granskning (1)

German and Polish conversations were smaller and more siloed. One explanation for this was the high profile #GiletJaunes and #MarcheContreMarrakesh protests in 2018, which brought many extreme right users together around predominantly French-language events. This kind of network visualisation is, of course, subject to qualitative analysis about the types of content found in the tweets published and shared in different languages. Nonetheless, it can provide a novel entry point into understanding how differences and similarities in extreme right online debates played out across the 28 EU member states, the different languages utilised in them, and relationships between them.

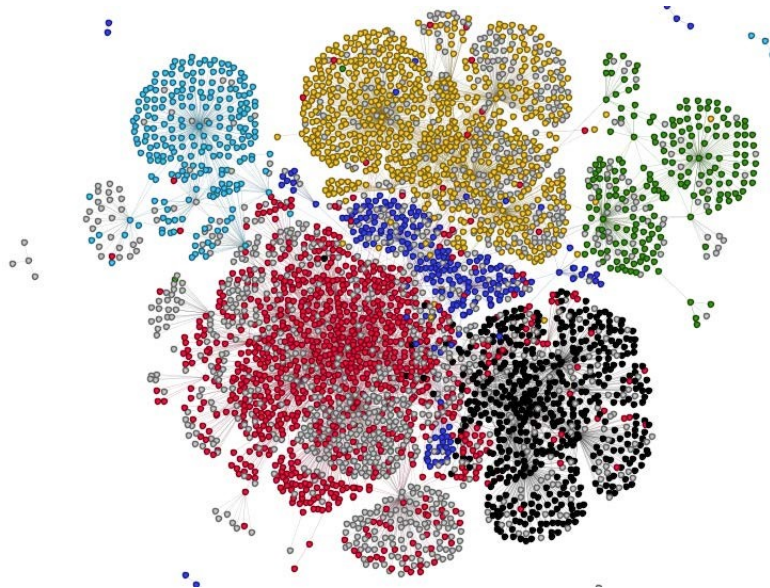
## 6. Tweet Content

This section supplies an overview of the content, in the form of ideas and issues, of both the baseline and comparison datasets, including the similarities and differences between the 2016 and 2018 content. This is accomplished via a hashtag analysis and an analysis of the most commonly used words in the datasets. The main finding is that while the language employed has morphed and changed over time, the core ideas espoused by users active in the network in 2016 were still being pushed by those that remained active in 2018.

### 6.1. Hashtag Analysis

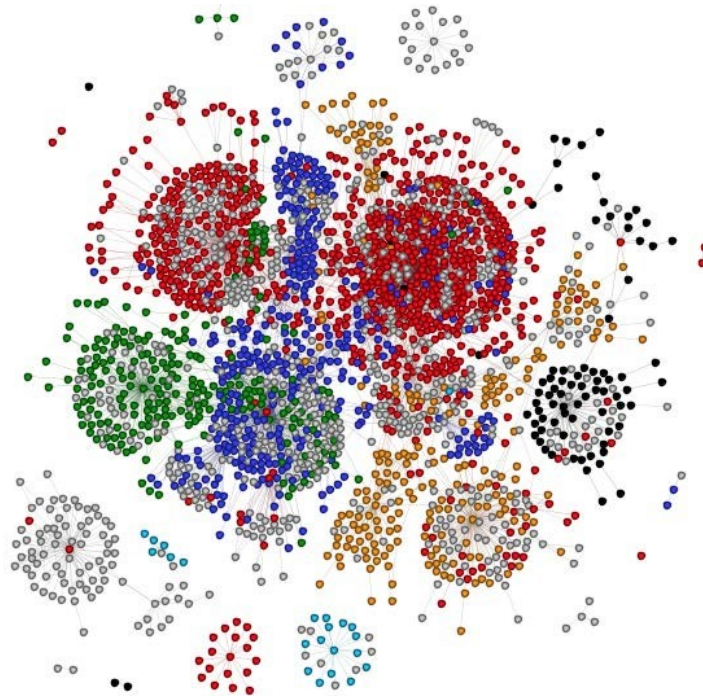
Hashtags are words or short phrases preceded by a hash mark (#), used within a tweet to identify a keyword or topic of interest. The use of hashtags facilitates content's indexing by Twitter and makes it more easily discoverable by other users. Users interested in some particular topic can employ hashtagging to discover other users with similar interests and/or to become part of the conversation on the topic. Trending hashtags (i.e. top-performing hashtags) are displayed by Twitter on their platform and are often the source of media coverage. This is at least one reason why groups of users, including those on the extreme right, often strategise to raise the profile of their preferred hashtags. Hashtag analysis is therefore a common way to discern groups of users' shared interests and concerns. Just under 9% of all tweets in our baseline dataset contained a hashtag versus 36% of tweets containing hashtags in the comparison dataset, which is a considerable uptick in hashtag usage between 2016 and 2018 and may reflect increased interconnection and coordination over time.





**Figure 4. Network Representation of Twitter Communication by European Extreme Right Users in 2016 Coloured by Language**

*Colour Key: German = Black, English = Red, Spanish = Yellow, Italian = Green, French = Blue, Poland = Light Blue, Language Undetected = Grey*



**Figure 5. Network Representation of Twitter Communication by European Extreme Right Users in 2018 Coloured by Language**

*Colour Key: German = Black, English = Red, Spanish = Yellow, Italian = Green, French = Blue, Poland = Light Blue, Language Undetected = Grey*

Table 6 shows the top 10 most popular hashtags (i.e. in-degree centrality) in each of our datasets. The top most used hashtags for 2016 and 2018, #WhiteGenocide and #MarsTegenMarrakesh respectively, are illustrative of the intersection of two larger issues within the online far right; first, that some core ideas and concepts are widely shared but, second, are often refined for use in specific local contexts, whether geographical, cultural, linguistic, political, or other. The concept of ‘White Genocide’—and its associated hashtags such as #GrandRemplacement and #eurocide—is persistent within the extreme right online scene.<sup>30</sup> It denotes the belief that the ‘white race’ is directly endangered by the increasing diversity of Western societies, oftentimes said to be at the behest of a global Jewish cabal. The hashtag #WhiteGenocide was particularly prominent in 2016, with J.M. Berger, in a report comparing Twitter use by US white nationalists and Nazi sympathizers with ISIS supporters, also reporting #WhiteGenocide as the top trending hashtag in his extreme right dataset.<sup>31</sup> Its persistence and wide geographical reach is illustrative of the concept’s core place within contemporary extreme right online discourse. Interestingly, just 11 uses of this hashtag were

**Table 6. Top 10 Hashtags Employed by European Extreme Right Twitter Users in ‘Baseline’ and ‘Comparison’ Datasets**

Rank	2016			2018		
	Hashtag	% of Tweets	No. of Tweets	Hashtag	% of Tweets	No. of Tweets
1.	#WhiteGenocide	1.5%	899	#MarsTegenMarrakesh (MarchAgainstMarrakesh)	15%	1,102
2.	#afd	<1%	527	#MarcheContreMarrakech (MarchAgainstMarrakesh)	13%	970
3.	#Dresden	<1%	503	#Bruxelles (Brussels)	10%	733
4.	#DebateNight	<1%	434	#Brussels	6%	476
5.	#Trump	<1%	328	#GiletsJaunes (YellowVests)	3%	195
6.	#ALVDE*	<1%	282	#ActeV** (ActV)	<1%	36
7.	#islam	<1%	261	#YellowVests	<1%	27
8.	#DossierTabou***	<1%	257	#France	<1%	23
9.	#Merkel	<1%	212	#Strasbourg	<1%	22
10.	#MAGA	<1%	188	#Paris	<1%	16

\* Acronym for *Aqui la Voz de Europa* (Hear the Voice of Europe); a Spanish far right movement.

\*\* Used by the *Gilets Jaunes* to refer to their planned protests of Saturday, 15 December, 2018.

\*\*\* Refers to a somewhat sensationalist French television news programme.

<sup>30</sup> Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner. 2017. *The Fringe Insurgency: Connectivity, Convergence and Mainstreaming of the Extreme Right* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue): <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Fringe-Insurgency-221017.pdf>; Siapera et al. 2018. *Hate Track*, p.24.

<sup>31</sup> Berger. 2016. *Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter*.



contained in English and French language tweets in the 2018 dataset. A representative tweet, in French, was “*Le racisme anti blanc n'existe pas c'est un fantasme de lestrêmdroate #WhiteGenocide*”<sup>32</sup> which contained a link to a UK *Daily Mail* article headlined ‘Black South African Politician Urges Followers to “Kill Whites.”’ The absence of direct references to the concept in the comparison dataset does not mean that the ideas it encapsulates have lost their currency however.

Despite concepts such as ‘white genocide’ having long-term strategic level importance within the global extreme right online scene, such concepts and their associated hashtags are often overtaken by more tactical hashtags associated with specific, often ‘real world,’ events. This is plainly the case with the top returned hashtags in the 2018 dataset. The top 4 hashtags in the comparison dataset (i.e. #MarsTegenMarrakesh, #MarcheContreMarrakech, #Bruxelles, and #Brussels), which together appear in some 44% of the 2018 tweets, all reference a far right-organised march in Brussels on Sunday, 16 December, 2018 against the *Pacte De Marrakech* or Marrakesh Agreement, a new UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted in mid-December 2018. The Compact’s purpose is to improve how states manage migration (e.g. by collecting better data, coordinating on human trafficking-related issues, etc.); on social media however, suggestions that the Compact would open Europe’s doors to millions of new migrants and that migration would now be considered a human right, were widespread. In fact, one tweet in our 2018 dataset made explicit connection between the Compact and ‘white genocide’ stating “*Au nom de la (((Laïcité)))! Il ne faut surtout pas rebuter nos futurs envahisseurs #PacteDeMarrakech #GrandRemplacement #WhiteGenocide*,”<sup>33</sup> and a link to a Sputnik news item headlined ‘*Belgique: Une Résolution pour Protéger les Traditions Chrétiennes de Noël Rejetée*.’<sup>34</sup> Most tweeters were less obvious in their reasoning however, and a large number of the tweets containing Compact-related hashtags appear to have been sent by users who were in attendance at the 16 December protest. These took the form of information such as where the police were amassing and locations at which the latter were using tear gas and water cannon for crowd control purposes. The purpose of the march however was to protest against the Global Compact on Migration framed as an agreement for unrestrained migration to the EU and ultimately a vehicle for ‘white genocide.’

Other prominent hashtags appearing in the baseline dataset were those related to national politics in Germany and the United States. The second most popular hashtag in the 2016 dataset was #afd, which refers to the far right political party (estbd. 2013) *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany), which is presently the third largest party in Germany. The #afd hashtag was attached to tweets addressing a variety of different issues, but most of which were negative in their tone and many of which were anti-black and anti-Islam. Representative examples of the latter were tweets reading “*Schwarze Plage in Deutschland #Merkelmussweg #afd*”<sup>35</sup> and “*Der #Islam nicht zu #Deutschland. Ich wähle #Afd*.”<sup>36</sup> The other Germany-related hashtags in the Top 10 were #Dresden and #Merkel. In addition to simply #Merkel, other hashtags included in this count were #MerkelDeutschland and the above-mentioned #Merkelmussweg (#Merkelmustgo). A majority of tweets using these hashtags employed a blaming tone, holding the German Chancellor responsible for a variety of alleged misdeeds, particularly as arising from the migrant crisis and her role in it. Examples included “*#Merkel vernichtet die Europäische Kultur und sie bringt Armut nach #Europa*”<sup>37</sup> and “*Die 130 Toten von #Paris sagen Frau #Merkel, dem Schutzengel des IS, ein aufrichtiges ‘danke schön*.”<sup>38</sup> Worth

<sup>32</sup> “Anti-white racism doesn’t exist, it’s a fantasy of the extreme right.” Also worth commenting on here is the triple brackets symbol, also known as an (((echo))), which are an anti-semitic symbol that has been used by the extreme right to highlight the names of individuals of a Jewish background, organisations who are thought to be owned by Jewish people, and similar. Others have since employed it to raise awareness about anti-Semitism and show solidarity.

<sup>33</sup> “In the name of secularism, we must not put off our future invaders.”

<sup>34</sup> “Belgium: A Resolution to Protect Christian Christmas Traditions Rejected.”

<sup>35</sup> “Black plague in Germany #Merkelmustgo #afd.”

<sup>36</sup> “Islam is not for #Germany. I choose #Afd.”

<sup>37</sup> “#Merkel destroys European culture and brings poverty to #Europe.”

<sup>38</sup> “#Paris 130 dead tell Ms. #Merkel, the guardian angel of IS, a sincere ‘thank you.’”



noting here too is that the *#Merkelmussweg* hashtag, although not dominant in our dataset, came to be widely used by the right, including official AfD social media accounts and others such as the extreme right *Reconquista Germania* channel on the Discord app. And on 9 September, 2017, fifteen days prior to Germany's federal elections, *#Merkelmussweg* was a Twitter top 20 trending hashtag in Germany.<sup>39</sup>

The *#Dresden* hashtag was largely attached to tweets lauding the weekly Monday evening marches undertaken by members of the anti-Islam *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident)—better known by its abbreviation 'Pegida'—in Dresden since the movement's founding in the city in October 2014. The *#Dresden* hashtag was also used in discussion of the bomb attack on a city mosque that took place on the evening of Monday, 26 September, 2016. In general, the attack—in which the mosque was damaged, but nobody was injured—was played down by users in tweets such as *"#dresden: 0 Tote, 0 Verletzte, 0 Verdächtiger, 1 leicht beschädigte Tür."*<sup>40</sup> In August 2018, a German man, Nino Köhler, received a nearly 10-year jail sentence for the bombing. German media reported that Köhler had, in the past, railed against "lazy Africans" and "criminal foreigners" at a Pegida rally.<sup>41</sup> Finally, with respect to the 2016 dataset, together three hashtags related to the US presidential campaign (i.e. *#DebateNight*, *#Trump*, and *#MAGA*) were also prominent. This is unsurprising given the global news media prominence of the 2016 US presidential campaign and the nature of the Trump campaign in particular, which energised extreme right supporters, including in Europe. The vast majority of these tweets were in English and lauded then-candidate Trump for 'winning' the first presidential debate of the 2016 election, which took place on 26 September.

Besides the hashtags associated with the Brussels march against the Compact on Migration, the majority of the other Top 10 hashtags in the 2018 dataset were also related to protest. The *#GiletsJaunes*, *#ActeV*, *#YellowVests*, *#France*, and *#Paris* hashtags were all contained in tweets about the so-called 'Yellow Vest(s)' protests. The protests kicked-off in France in November 2018 as a response to rising fuel prices, the high cost of living, and claims that the burden of French tax reforms were disproportionately falling on the middle and working classes. The movement is populist in orientation, attracting supporters of both the right and left. In our dataset, the *#GiletsJaunes*, *#ActeV*, *#France*, and *#Paris* hashtags were used in tweets containing practical real time information for those taking part in the protests by, apparently, others also taking part (e.g. where tear gas was being used, closed metro stations); to comment on the spread of the protests beyond France, especially to the UK, which was also the main issue addressed in English language tweets with the *#YellowVests* hashtag; mainstream media perfidy; and for general commentary in relation to the movement and its concerns. Lastly, as regards hashtags, the lone actor terrorist attack in Strasbourg on 11 December, 2018 in which five people died, made surprisingly few appearances in our dataset, with most of these reporting on the attack or linking to a video of a minute's silence held for the victims at a Yellow Vest protest.

## 6.2. Word Analysis

There are generally many more distinct words appearing in a Twitter dataset than distinct hashtags. An analysis of the top used words in any given dataset is therefore often times a useful complement to hashtag analysis, particularly in instances, such as our baseline dataset, where hashtags were not widely used. Such a word analysis proved useful in this instance as it both confirmed our findings with regard to the hashtags and introduced some other relevant issues and ideas.

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<sup>39</sup> Davey and Ebner. 2017. *The Fringe Insurgency*, p.22. See also p.20 for discussion of links between *Reconquista Germania* and the AfD.

<sup>40</sup> *"#dresden: 0 dead, 0 injured, 0 suspect, 1 slightly damaged door."*

<sup>41</sup> '10 Year Sentence Given to Man Who Bombed Dresden Mosque.' *The Local*, 31 August 2018: <https://www.thelocal.de/20180831/germany-jails-man-for-dresden-mosque-bomb-attack>.



Table 7 displays the top 20 most used words in each of our datasets. It is immediately apparent and relatively unsurprising that one of the major events of 2016, the US Presidential election, was prominently featured. Words directly related to the latter (i.e. trump, hillary, clinton, debate) made up 5% of all the distinct words in the 2016 dataset. The majority of all references to then US presidential candidate Trump were positive whilst almost all references to then US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton were negative. Many of the mentions of the word 'media' were in relation to the US presidential debate too, but others were more general comments regarding mass media "traitors," the *Lügenpresse* (i.e. 'lying press'), and similar.

The words 'white' and 'people' were also prominent in the 'baseline' dataset. In fact, these were generally used together in the phrase "white people," with tweets containing the phrase often also employing the hashtag #WhiteGenocide. Significant in the baseline dataset too were the numerous words associated with Islam (i.e. Islam, Muslim) and Judaism (i.e. Jewish, Jews), which each account for 2% of the words used in the 2016 dataset. All of these tweets were of either an anti-Muslim/Islamophobic or anti-Semitic nature. Europe-related words (i.e. *Europa*, EU, Europe) were also prominent in this dataset, accounting for 3% of all words used, and appearing in tweets written in English, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. These tweets largely continued the directly previous themes through their insistence that Europe is being "invaded" by Muslims, often times accompanied by the explanation that this is at the behest of George Soros, the Rothschilds, or some other shadowy Jewish conspiracy.

The top-ranking Spanish language words (i.e. *españa*, *sánchez*) in the baseline dataset were in reference to Spanish politics issues generally, and Pedro Sánchez particularly. Sánchez, presently the Prime Minister of Spain, was at the time of collection of the baseline dataset in 2016 Secretary-General of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and leader of the opposition in the Spanish parliament. The almost 400 tweets in which he was mentioned were largely negative, but the language used in them to describe him (e.g. "bobo" (idiot), "*el insensato sin escrúpulos*" (unscrupulous fool), etc.) was much less confrontational than the terms employed by other users in the dataset to refer to individuals and groups disliked by them. Angela Merkel was the other major European political leader receiving over 300 mentions in the 2016 dataset. Her name appeared not just in German language tweets, but also tweets in Spanish and English. As with already-discussed Merkel-related hashtags, her name was relentlessly invoked in discussions of migrants and refugees and blame placed on her, at a macro level, for the destruction of Germany and/or Europe and, at a micro level, for all violent acts carried out by migrants and refugees. Worth mentioning too is that aspects of Merkel's gender were on occasion invoked in this regard; for example, her "stupidity" was blamed on her being a "childless woman."

Similar to the findings of the hashtag analysis, an analysis of the most used words in the 2018 dataset threw up not macro-level issues such as the US presidential campaign or the state of the European Union, but was instead dominated by a specific event, the Brussels march protesting adoption of the UN's Global Compact on Migration. Of the top 20 words in the comparison dataset, 12 were directly related to events on the ground at this event (i.e. Commission, Schuman, *rond-point*, *assaut*, *manifestants*, *milliers*, police, *bâtiments*, *attaqués*, *lacrymogène*, *auto-pompe*, and *gaz*). The top-returned word '*européenne*' was employed in a variety of different contexts, as was the associated word 'union.' Sometimes they were used together to refer to the European Union project, with tweeters being overwhelmingly anti-EU, but, again, many of the mentions were to the 'European Commission' headquarters building or other 'European Union' buildings coming "under attack" during the Brussels march or being locations where tear gas and/or water cannons were being deployed. A much lesser number of mentions of the use of teargas, and references to police, protesters, and attacks were in relation to the Yellow Vest protests. Most of the mentions of France and Macron were also in the latter context.

**Table 7. Top 20 Words Used in Tweets**

Rank	2016			2018		
	Word	% of All Words	No. of Uses	Word	% of All Words	No. of Uses
1.	Trump	2%	999	<i>Européenne</i> (European)	9%	678
2.	white	2%	933	Commission	7%	507
3.	people	1%	923	Schuman*	6%	439
4.	Hillary	1%	816	<i>rond-point</i> (roundabout)	5%	415
5.	Islam	1%	733	<i>assaut</i> (assault)	5%	384
6.	Clinton	1%	587	<i>manifestants</i> (protesters)	4%	308
7.	don	1%	529	<i>milliers</i> (thousands)	3%	219
8.	Jewish	1%	498	union	2%	190
9.	Muslim	1%	498	police	2%	176
10.	Jews	1%	494	<i>bâtiments</i> (buildings)	2%	174
11.	Europa	1%	475	<i>attaqués</i> (attacked)	2%	173
12.	EU	1%	445	people	2%	142
13.	<i>España</i> (Spain)	1%	416	Jewish	1%	110
14.	Sánchez	1%	394	<i>lacrymogène</i> (teargas)	1%	110
15.	Europe	1%	365	<i>auto-pompe</i> (water cannon)	1%	106
16.	Merkel	1%	358	EU	1%	106
17.	debate	1%	339	<i>gaz</i> ((tear)gas)	1%	106
18.	media	<1%	333	France	1%	98
19.	police	<1%	330	Macron	1%	97
20.	time**	<1%	329	Jews	1%	89

\* Schuman is a Brussels metro and rail station.

\*\* Accounts for a variety of words and phrases, such as 'in time,' 'a matter of time,' 'sometimes;' also a variety of printed media (e.g. *Irish Times*, *LA Times*, *New York Times*, *Time Magazine*).

Just five words appeared in the top 20 most used words in both the 2016 and 2018 word counts. These were 'people,' 'Jewish,' 'Jews,' 'EU,' and 'police.' All varieties of the extreme right have an emphasis on 'the people,' from the fascist idea that some people—in Nazi terminology 'Aryans'—are superior and should thus dominate others to nativists who promote the interests of the native people of a country against those from outside. These ideas, and others, were reflected in the words co-occurring with 'people' in our dataset, which



included most prominently “white people,” but also commonly “the people of Europe,” “the British people,” “the French people,” “the German people”; also “our people” versus “your people.” In addition, the 2016 dataset contained numerous references to people of colour as “mud people” (also “subhuman muds,” “the muds,” and similar). The wide use of the words ‘Jewish,’ ‘Jews,’ and ‘EU,’ go to persistent themes of anti-Semitism and Euro-skepticism within the European—and obviously also wider—extreme right.

The only other word appearing in both Top 20s was ‘police.’ The use of ‘police’ in the 2018 dataset was almost entirely uniform, relating to police activity at the Brussels march against the Global Compact for Migration and, to a lesser extent, the Yellow Vest protests. The uses of police in the 2016 dataset were more varied. While many were links to news and other reports of crimes committed by black people, Muslims, migrants, and refugees (e.g. “German Police Find Suspected Components for Explosives in Car Carrying Refugees,” with link to *Sputnik* article bearing same headline), including attacks on police, other references to ‘police’ were with respect to their allegedly being instructed to ignore offences committed by, in particular, refugees (e.g. “Germany’s migrant rape epidemic; police instructed ‘not to report offences committed by refugees.’ #TheyHaveToGoBack”) and alleged police support of extreme right positions on, for example, migrants (e.g. “#Italy: a police officer (*Carabinieri*) against migrants: ‘It would be nice to use a bomb.’”). None of the mentions in the 2016 dataset were with respect to real-time policing of protest events.

Overall, the issue of migrants and refugees dominated the datasets, with a particular emphasis on migrants and refugees from the Muslim world, the “influx” of which and their “destruction” of Europe often explained as part of a longstanding and nefarious Jewish plan. This goes directly to European Commission concerns regarding the spread of disinformation and the way in which it “affects policy-making processes by skewing public opinion.” The Commission goes on to state that both “[d]omestic and foreign actors can use disinformation to manipulate policy, societal debates and behaviour” and then points to a number of areas in which this can occur, including “migration.”<sup>42</sup> This is underlined further by the findings of a public consultation conducted by the Commission, which found that respondents identified “[i]ntentional disinformation aimed at influencing elections and immigration policies” as the two top categories “likely to cause harm to society.”<sup>43</sup> The analysis contained in this section certainly points to a role for Europe’s online extreme right in contemporary disinformation networks, especially around the issue of migration.

## **7. Out-link Analysis: The Wider European Extreme Right Online Scene**

How did the wider European extreme right online scene—that is, beyond Twitter—change, if at all, between 2016 and 2018? Twitter, partly due to its 280 characters per tweet limit (i.e. micro-blogging function), can serve as a ‘gateway’ platform to other social networking sites and a variety of other online spaces. While the majority of recent research on the online extreme right focuses on the role of social media, a variety of other online spaces are also relied upon by extreme right users. This section addresses the Twitter out-linking patterns of users in our 2016 and 2018 datasets respectively, with a particular focus on the types and purposes of the platforms being out-linked to by each set of users and the implications of this.

Twitter datasets contain two types of links (URLs): out-links to other external URLs (i.e. web addresses), and intra-Twitter links to a Twitter URL. Intra-Twitter links, which are direct pointers placed within tweets to other tweets, are created via use of the ‘Quote Tweet’ function. Use of the ‘Quote Tweet’ function, which was introduced in 2015, is now very popular across Twitter and thus likewise in these datasets. Of all the links observed in our datasets, a substantial proportion is intra-Twitter links: 4,939 or 47% of the 2016 baseline dataset and, 582 or again 47% of the 2018 comparison dataset (see Table 6). Both out-links and intra-Twitter

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<sup>42</sup> European Commission. 2018. *Tackling Online Disinformation*, p.2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.



links operate in similar ways: by clicking on a link the user is taken to another location (where they might see new content or in turn be directed to another place). However, intra-Twitter links do not in themselves take users outside the ‘Twitter universe’—so they are not included here due to our focus on the use of Twitter as a gateway to other online spaces.<sup>44</sup>

URLs contained in tweets that navigate users away from Twitter are referred to in this report as ‘out-links.’ The focus in this section is on the top-level domains identified in the URLs, so not the content of the out-links *per se*, but the domains out-linked to. This was accomplished by automatically extracting all out-links from all tweets that contained them in each of our two datasets. The relevant macro- or top-level domain information was then extracted from each out-link, discarding the micro or individual link information. For example, all lengthy URLs out-linking to specific Daily Mail articles were simply recorded as ‘Daily Mail’ for out-link analysis purposes. In addition, certain domains were aggregated, where appropriate, into a single category. For example, on.rt.com, www.rt.com, es.rt.com, etc. were all amalgamated into a single ‘RT.com’ category. Removed from the final URL datasets were all out-links that could not be parsed. These were largely those associated with either standalone URL shortening services (e.g. Bitly, Owly, etc.) or those instituted by social media management services (e.g. Dlv.it) and accounted for 2,284 or 22% of the total links contained in the baselines dataset, but just 35 links or 3% of those contained in the comparison dataset. The final 2016 URL dataset thus contained 3,201 out-links and the final 2018 dataset just 458 (see Table 8). Given the smallness of the latter figure, reliable conclusions are difficult to draw, but a number of tentative findings are nonetheless made that warrant follow-up research.

	2016		2018	
	<i>% of Original URLs</i>	<i>No. of URLs</i>	<i>% of Original URLs</i>	<i>No. of URLs</i>
(-) Intra-Twitter URLs	47%	4,939	47%	582
(-) Not Parsed	22%	2,284	3%	35
(+) No. of URLs Linking to Top 20 Domains	21%	2,246	36%	441
(+) No. of URLs in ‘Tail’	9%	955	14%	176
<b>Total Original URLs</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10,474</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,234</b>
<b>Total in Final URL Datasets</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>3,201</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>458</b>

The overall number of discrete top-level domains identified as out-linked to in the 2016 dataset was 82 and in the 2018 dataset 84. The top 20 out-links from each dataset appear in Table 9. The top 20 most out-linked to platforms from the 2016 dataset represent 21% of that dataset’s total out-links, with the 2018 dataset’s Top 20 accounting for 36% of its total out-links. Both datasets have a ‘tail’ of additional domains, but which account for many fewer out-links (see Table 8), as compared to the Top 20, even though they represent a much greater number of platforms/sites (i.e. 62 for the 2016 dataset and 64 for the 2018 dataset). The

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that linking is not the only way in which tweet content can be augmented. Tweets can have images and videos directly embedded in them, which can be viewed directly without having to navigate to another site via a link. Similar to intra-Twitter links, embedded content does not take users outside Twitter and so is not considered further here.



**Table 9. Top 20 Domains Out-linked to From Twitter by Extreme Right Users in 2016 and 2018**

Rank	2016		2018	
	Domain	No. of Shares	Domain	No. of Shares
1.	YouTube	634	Dailyarchives.org	119
2.	Facebook*	361	YouTube	102
3.	Dailymail.co.uk	152	Nop.org.pl	25
4.	fuhrerious88blog.wordpress.com	145	Is.fi	20
5.	Breitbart	134	Nordfront.se	19
6.	RT.com**	125	Rt.com*	17
7.	Express.co.uk	119	Voiceofeuropa.com	17
8.	Die Welt	71	Nacjonalista.pl	16
9.	Politwi.de	70	Periscope	14
10.	Sputnik	64	Iltalehti.fi	13
11.	Krone.at	50	Sputnik	12
12.	Dailystormer.com	42	Dailystormer.name	11
13.	Jungefreiheit.de	38	Facebook	10
14.	Bild	38	Carolynyeager.net	8
15.	Focus.de	37	Rightoftheright.com	8
16.	Telegraph.co.uk	36	Hs.fi	8
17.	Abc.es	35	Blazingcatfur.ca	6
18.	WordPress	33	Dailymail.co.uk	6
19.	wPolityce.pl	31	Dailymotion.com	5
20.	Elmundo.es	31	Breitbart.com	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,246</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>441</b>
	* Amalgam of fb.me (i.e. Facebook Messenger URLs (325) and facebook.com (36)) ** Amalgam of on.rt.com (58), www.rt.com (37), es.rt.com (18), deutsch.rt.com (12), actualidad.rt.com (10)		* Amalgam of on.rt.com (11), www.rt.com (6)	

analysis in the remainder of this section is therefore largely concentrated on the Top 20 out-linked to domains from each dataset.

Each of the Top 20 most out-linked to domains from each dataset were manually categorised according to a bespoke coding scheme developed for this analysis.<sup>45</sup> This scheme focused upon the Type, Purpose, and, if relevant, Sub-type of each domain out-linked to. The three Types of domains identified were Blog, Social Media, and Website. As can be seen in Table 10, Europe’s extreme right online ecology is heavily dominated by traditional websites, but with social media platforms playing a not insignificant role. Given the dominance of the Website and Social Media Types, which together accounted for over 90% of all out-links from both datasets, these were disaggregated further according to their Purpose.

Type/ Out-links	2016			2018		
	No. of Domains	% of Links	No. of Links	No. of Domains	% of Links	No. of Links
<i>Website</i>	16	63%	2,028	15	70%	321
<i>Social Media</i>	2	31%	995	4	29%	131
<i>Blog</i>	2	6%	178	1	1%	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3,201</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>458</b>

### 7.1. Websites: Purposes

The major Purposes of the Websites included in our 2016 baseline and 2018 comparison datasets were Activism, News, and Partisan Commentary. ‘Activism’ was used to describe sites that were linked to some political party, group, or movement. Websites that delivered largely news content were categorised as ‘News.’ Sites of a highly partisan nature, the owners of or contributors to many of which were unable to be determined, were labeled ‘Partisan Commentary.’ Table 9 shows a distinctly different set of Purposes marking the websites out-linked to in the 2016 versus the 2018 datasets.

The vast majority of all websites out-linked to in 2016 were termed News. When broken down even further, it was found that 10 of these were the websites of newspapers or magazines (i.e. The Daily Mail, The Daily Express, *Die Welt*, *Kronen Zeitung*, *Junge Freiheit*, *Bild*, Focus, The Daily Telegraph, ABC, *El Mundo*), most of them high circulation newspapers in their country of origin and dominated by the German language (i.e. Austria and Germany) and UK press. Just two of the domains categorised as News in the 2016 dataset were online only, the American ‘Breitbart News Network’ and Poland’s wPolityce.pl. As regards Partisan Commentary, just one website, the *Daily Stormer*, was judged to fit into this category. The pattern of out-linking to major news outlets is due to the propensity of extreme right users to link their comments to media articles that reinforce their viewpoints, especially newspaper articles reporting criminal activity by people of colour, migrants, and refugees. A number of the newspapers out-linked to, including The Daily Mail, The Daily Express, *Kronen Zeitung*, and *Junge Freiheit*, are also well known for their right-wing tendencies. The

<sup>45</sup> This coding scheme was adapted from Conway *et al.* ‘Mapping the Contemporary Jihadi Online Ecology: Differential Disruption, Community Strength, Out-linking Practices, and Preferred Online Platforms.’ (Forthcoming 2019).



prominence of links to the online versions of traditional mass media outlets, particularly newspapers, should attract further study as the role of these online content providers has been largely overlooked in discussions of online radicalisation and disinformation to-date.

Having said this, the profiles of the websites out-linked to from the 2018 dataset were starkly different. Just 23% of the websites out-linked to fell into the 'News' category, only half of which were newspapers (i.e. the Finnish tabloid *Ilta-Sanomat*, Finland's biggest circulation newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, and The Daily Mail). The 'Activism' category, which was not represented in the 2016 dataset, accounted for roughly the same number of out-links as 'News' in the 2018 dataset. Three domains deemed activist were out-linked to; these were, in order of popularity, the website of the neo-fascist Polish political party National Rebirth of Poland or NOP, the Swedish-run site of the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement, and the NOP-affiliated "Radical Nationalist Daily" *Nacjonlista*. All three websites have an emphasis on 'real world' activism. Together then, 'News' and 'Activism' websites accounted for 45% of website out-links. More than half of all website out-links from the 2018 dataset however were to online-only domains that we categorised as 'Partisan Commentary.' The founder/publisher of just one of these, Andrew Anglin of the Daily Stormer, was discernible from his website. The founder(s), publisher(s), and/or contributor(s) to Daily Archives, Voice of Europe, and Right of the Right are unknown. Also worth noting here is that all four 'Partisan Commentary' sites are styled as news sites, but do not appear to adhere to even the most basic journalistic standards; the same is true of the NOP's *Nacjonlista*.

Five domains appear in both the 2016 and 2018 columns in Table 6 (i.e. are in the top 20 domains out-linked to for both sets of users). These are (in order of their appearance in the 2016 listing) the Daily Mail, the Breitbart website, Russia's RT television station's website, Russia's Sputnik radio network's website, and the Daily Stormer website. Britain's Daily Mail newspaper—the online version of which is one of the most widely read in the world—is well known for its antagonism towards migrants and refugees.<sup>46</sup> Reflecting the overall trend between 2016 and 2018 however, it slipped from being the third most out-linked to domain in the former to the 18th in the latter. The Breitbart website, the former executive chairman of which was Steve Bannon, who was also former White House Chief Strategist in the Trump administration, showed a similar decline. In July 2016, Bannon declared Breitbart "the platform for the alt-right."<sup>47</sup> Both RT—formerly Russia Today—and Sputnik are international media networks established and funded by the Russian government. In addition to Russian language content, RT and Sputnik provide online content in some 30 languages, including English, French, German, Polish, and Spanish. The Daily Stormer site and its founder Andrew Anglin gained widespread notoriety in the wake of the Charlottesville rally, when he wrote and published an article on his site mocking and abusing Heather Heyer, who was murdered by James Alex Fields Jr. who drove a car into a group of counter-protesters at the rally.

What many of the sites discussed in this sub-section have in common, including those sites common to both the 2016 and 2018 Top 20s, is the publication of false and misleading narratives and disinformation. According to the EU's Hybrid Fusion Cell:

"...disinformation by the Russian Federation poses the greatest threat to the EU. It is systematic, well-resourced, and on a different scale to other countries. In terms of coordination, levels of targeting and strategic implications, Russia's disinformation constitutes part of a wider hybrid threat that uses a number of tools, levers, and also non-state actors."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Harriet Rosalind Colette Gray and Anja K. Franck. 'Refugees as/at Risk: The Gendered and Racialised Underpinnings of Securitisation in British Media Narratives.' *Security Dialogue* (forthcoming 2019): <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/140712/>.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Posner. 'How Donald Trump's New Campaign Chief Created an Online Haven for White Nationalists.' *Mother Jones*, 22 August, 2016: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/08/stephen-bannon-donald-trump-alt-right-breitbart-news/>.

<sup>48</sup> European Commission. 2018. *Action Plan Against Disinformation* p.4.



Both RT.com and Sputnik were highly ranked in both the 2016 and 2018 datasets. They are both also prominently featured on the EU’s External Action Service’s East StratCom Task Force’s EU vs. Disinformation campaign’s website. The purpose of the campaign is “to better forecast, address and respond to pro-Kremlin disinformation.”<sup>49</sup> In addition, all of the websites appearing in the ‘Partisan Commentary’ category are also purveyors of egregiously distorted and false narratives.

Just one of the domains out-linked to from the 2016 dataset self-described as “national socialist” (i.e. Nazi) in orientation (i.e. Fuhrerious88 Blog). The WordPress-hosted Blog was no longer available in 2018 due to being removed by the platform however. In contrast, at least a quarter of all domains out-linked to in the 2018 dataset openly identified on their websites and Blogs as nationalist socialist. The top most out-linked to domain in 2018 was DailyArchives. The top article in the ‘Popular This Year’ sidebar on the site was prominent German Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel’s ‘The Hitler We Loved and Why.’ On the Nordfront website, “National Socialism” is described as “The Nordic People’s Natural World View.” Elsewhere on the site, a female contributor states that her most important goal “is to get other women to understand what national socialism really is and thus open the door to more female activists, support members and members.” Another female, Carolyn Yeager, of the eponymously-named Blog, is a Texas-based neo-Nazi and Holocaust denier; the site was previously at the domain whitewomenonly.com. Other domains within the top 20 listings are less vocal regarding their national socialism, but sites like the Daily Stormer, which was highly out-linked to from both datasets, are virulently anti-Semitic, in addition to also advocating against people of colour, Muslims, migrants, refugees, and women. Daily Stormer has, for example, prominent sections on the ‘Jewish Problem’ and ‘Race War.’ Very high levels of misogyny are also displayed, with a recent episode on its Radio Stormer entitled ‘Women Are Worse than Satan.’

### 7.2. Social Media: Purposes

The Social Media category was disaggregated further according to Purposes, which were Image Sharing, Live Streaming, Micro-blogging, Social Media Add-on, Social Networking, Sound Sharing, Video Sharing, and Wiki. In fact, users social media activity was quite narrow over both our datasets, with just three of the identified Purposes pursued; these were, Video-sharing, Social Networking, and Live streaming. Having said this, out-links to social media platforms accounted for

<b>Table 9. Purposes of Websites Out-linked to By European Extreme Right Users From Twitter</b>						
	<b>2016</b>			<b>2018</b>		
<i>Purpose/ Out-links</i>	<i>No. of Domains</i>	<i>% of Website Links</i>	<i>No. of Links</i>	<i>No. of Domains</i>	<i>% of Website Links</i>	<i>No. of Links</i>
<i>Activism</i>	----	----	----	3	22%	60
<i>News</i>	14	96%	961	6	23%	61
<i>Partisan Commentary</i>	1	4%	42	4	55%	145
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,003</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>266</b>

<sup>49</sup> See <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>.



nearly one third of all out-links in each dataset, with a slight decrease in out-linking activity between 2016 and 2018, which may probably be accounted for by the small size of the 2018 out-link data. Video-sharing was the top Purpose for social media use in both our datasets, with YouTube the most out-linked to overall domain in the 2016 dataset and the second most out-linked to online space in the 2018 dataset, pointing to both the overall importance of the platform and of video generally in the European extreme right online scene.

As regards Social Networking, Facebook is the only platform represented, which is unsurprising given its dominance in this domain. Two things are notable with regard to Facebook. Firstly, there was a significant decrease in out-linking to Facebook from Twitter by extreme right users between 2016 and 2018. Outlinks to Facebook accounted for 36% of all Social Media out-links in our baseline dataset, but only 8% in the comparison dataset, which may indicate increased attention to hateful content and those spreading it by Facebook in the period. On the other hand, secondly, the vast majority of all Facebook out-links in the 2016 dataset were to Facebook Messenger, which suggested it was mainly being used for one-to-one or group 'chats.' Finally, in terms of the Social Media category, live-streaming was in its infancy in 2016—Periscope was only established in 2015—but has become increasingly popular since. The 14 out-links to Twitter's live-streaming app, Periscope, in the 2018 dataset are therefore noteworthy albeit few.

## 8. Conclusion

Academic research into the removal of hateful content and associated extreme right accounts online is still in its infancy, but warrants continuation. Our preliminary data showed that, while Twitter has clearly taken steps to remove hateful content and accounts producing and circulating it, this content and these users nonetheless persist and, in many cases, have even prospered. While more than half of the original accounts identified in 2016 had been removed by Twitter, the remaining accounts grew their followers by an average of 78% in the 2016-2018 period. One 'seed' account of an Austrian *identitaire*/alt-right activist grew its followers by more than 800% between 2016 and 2018; the followers of the Polish All Youth Organisation, *Młodzież Wszechpolska* grew by over 500% in the same period.

This research is a first step toward developing a more comprehensive understanding of Europe's continually-changing online extreme right scene. The tentative findings paint a complex picture of both rapid changes as well as continuity in extreme right activity online. The social network portion of this research confirmed that, rather than modelling European extreme right activity online similar to, say, its more linguistically homogeneous US counterpart, the situation in Europe still remains to a large extent differentiated by language. This does not, however, mean that foundational concepts of the extreme right—such as 'white genocide'—do not percolate throughout the conversations. Yet how these sentiments are refracted within and across different languages groups and national debates remain largely under-explored in contemporary research. How does, for instance, the different extreme right content, spread across users from major EU language groups (e.g. English, French, German, Polish, Spanish)? Conversely, how do users from smaller language groups (e.g. Finnish, Swedish) often strategically need to use a mixture of their native language and English to mediate both the domestic and international dimensions of the extreme right? Further and deeper empirical exploration of the specific contours of these various EU language-based extreme right online networks, and the relationships across them, is warranted, as is follow-up comparison between them.

Analysis of the hashtags and popular words used in extreme right tweets, similarly, suggests that, while the extreme right language used by these accounts has morphed over time, perhaps to remain more resistant towards Twitter's takedown policies, the core extreme right ideas espoused by users active in the network in 2016 were still widely disseminated in 2018. The content of extreme right Twitter activity commonly revolves around key events relevant to the extreme right. In the 2016 data, popular hashtags were those



related to the US presidential election as well as themes more relevant to national debates in Europe, such as the Pediga marches. Discussion in the 2018 dataset was dominated by the Brussels *Marche Contre Marrakesh* and the *Gilet Jaunes* protests. Yet a more granular content analysis of the popular words used across the tweets strongly suggested that discussion around such events continues to be saturated with anti-Semitism, Euro-scepticism, and racism.

The out-link analysis draws attention to at least three important issues. First, the growing role of disinformation in the workings of the contemporary online extreme right. European Commission warnings regarding actors from within and without undermining democratic systems were reflected in our data. Following the out-links shared by European extreme right Twitter users reveals a multi-dimensional and well-networked ecosystem of accounts and websites spreading false narratives against migrants and refugees, Jews, Muslims, and people of colour. This ecosystem also contains clear traces of popular known state-sponsored disinformation disseminators, such as RT.com and Sputnik, as well as the many US-based sites (e.g. Breitbart, Daily Stormer), which have managed to become authoritative sources of knowledge to the extreme right. Second, is the continued—though potentially decreasing—role of traditional media in producing, maintaining, and even mainstreaming, extreme right discourses in Europe. Third, is the possibility suggested by our findings that Europe’s online extreme right is getting progressively more extremist, as illustrated by the number of explicitly national socialist domains out-linked to from the 2018 dataset. All of these findings, again, warrant further exploration, preferably using much larger datasets collected over longer time-frames.

Finally, clear from this analysis is that many of the same concepts and themes prominent in the Christchurch shooter’s ‘manifesto’—and that of the April 2019 Poway, California synagogue attacker and a spate of other recent extreme right terrorists—are also prominent within the European extreme right online scene, including on mainstream platforms such as Twitter. In particular, in the Introduction to his ‘manifesto,’ titled *The Great Replacement*, Tarrant points to immigration and states “This is ethnic replacement. This is cultural replacement. This is racial replacement. This is WHITE GENOCIDE” (capitals in original). He is also insistent throughout that he is “European” and his attack was a defence of variously “my people” (13 mentions), “our people” (26 mentions), and “European people” (15 mentions). Tarrant is currently being held at New Zealand’s sole high security prison, awaiting trial. In the meantime, New Zealand’s five largest media organisations have signed-up to a voluntary code of conduct that, amongst other things, sees them agreeing to limit their reporting of Tarrant’s trial with a view to containing dissemination of his white supremacist beliefs.