

THE EUROPEAN FAR-RIGHT ONLINE

An Exploratory Twitter Outlink Analysis of German & French Far-right Ecosystems

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of findings from a RESOLVE Research Report exploring European far-right online ecosystems and racially- and ethnically motivated violent extremist (REMVE) exploitation within them. Findings from the report provide insight into the outlinking activity of identified pro-far-right followers of the official Twitter accounts of two prominent far-right European political parties, Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and France's Rassemblement National (RN). Ecosystem(s)-based analyses is crucial in understanding the extent to which broader far-right and REMVE online activities and interactions might actually overlap. The report uses the term "far-right" to describe ideas and actors situated on the "right-wing" of the global political spectrum and sharing a "core ideology of nationalism, xenophobia, welfare chauvinism, and law and order" (Mudde, 1995). It does not presuppose a direct relationship or association between the groups, ideologies, content, and individuals it is used to define. "REMVE" is used to refer to specific, fringe subset of the far right, comprised of far-right individuals, groups, movements, or content that explicitly legitimate, promote, or support violence. To learn more about the research methodology and detailed findings, please refer to the RESOLVE Research Report by Stuart Macdonald, Kamil Yilmaz, Chamin Herath, J.M. Berger, Suraj Lakhani, Lella Nouri, & Maura Conway: [The European Far-Right Online: An Exploratory Twitter Outlink Analysis of German & French Far-Right Online Ecosystems](#) (2022).

Absence of REMVE and violence



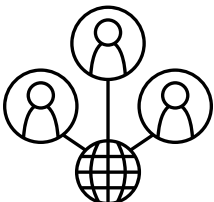
Explicit calls for violence were absent, as was neo-Nazi content, which is plainly anti-Semitic and may also be held to have an implicit violence factor. A small number of accounts had either been suspended or deleted during data collection. It was not possible to collect tweets from these accounts, nor is it clear how and why the accounts were removed or deleted (because of account holders' own decisions or violation of Twitter's terms of service).

Preponderance of hateful or "othering" content



The research turned-up a preponderance of content that, while not necessarily explicitly violent extremist in nature, was hateful or "othering" in its rhetoric and/or fell into the category of disinformation. Often this content took the form of both mainstream and fringe media-produced "news" articles. An array of the entities and content appearing in our overall dataset were assuredly anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, anti-Muslim, and Islamophobic.

Distinct ecosystems?



The data collected suggests relatively little overlap between the outlinks of the AfD and RN followers analyzed, despite their outlinking to similar website types. There was relatively little overlap between the confirmed far-right Twitter followers of AfD and RN within the dataset. In addition to AfD and RN's Twitter follower networks being fairly distinct, the relatively low number of hostnames that appeared in both top 30 lists indicates that the pro-far right users in these networks largely prefer different online spaces.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

Data gathered and analyzed in this report does not provide discernable evidence to suggest that the online ecosystems of far-right political party followers are (or are not) interconnected with REMVE online ecosystems or that there were any interactions between these two types of far-right actors.

02

Efforts to construct and denigrate the “Other” on mainstream platforms such as Twitter—whether that be immigrants, refugees, Muslims, or some other out-group—warrant further attention, as does the sharing of news articles that can have the effect of justifying and rationalizing these sentiments. Greater attention to these issues is needed from research, practice, and policy communities to better understand their impacts and implications for broader social and policy-oriented goals.

03

Findings, when combined, highlight the importance of adopting regulatory and other approaches that distinguish between violent extremist, including REMVE, activity and content, online dissemination of and engagement with hateful content, and the context in which otherwise legitimate news content is posted and spread. This includes the development of effective policy and practice aimed at addressing REMVE, including, but not limited to, properly discerning the appropriate communities and online spaces of focus.

RESOLVE NETWORK

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RESOLVE is housed at the U.S. Institute of Peace, building upon the Institute's decade-long legacy of deep engagement in conflict affected communities