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DOCTORAL THESIS

Europe's far right online: Discourse and information ecology of parties, movements and alternative media across four social media

Summary

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Introduction

Political communication has been subject to constant transformation through new media, encompassing the Web and social media especially, enhancing interactions between political figures and the public. This evolution has facilitated the proliferation of ideologically charged communication, enabling political actors and especially right-wing populists to engage with global audiences directly and dynamically (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012; Herminda et al., 2012; Wodak, 2015). Notably, digital platforms serve as fertile ground for extensive networks among right-wing groups, promoting anti-establishment narratives that sharply define in-groups and out-groups (Druxes & Simpson, 2015; Mazzoleni, 2018; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). Concurrently, research into the use of social media by far-right activists and movements shows how these platforms shape community dynamics and digital political action. Studies have identified mechanisms of framing and gatekeeping that facilitate the dissemination of tailored political content, shaping both online and offline activities (Klein & Muis, 2019; O'Callaghan et al., 2013; Müller & Schwarz, 2018; Haller & Holt, 2019; Froio & Ganesh, 2019). Setting this into context, prior research has found evidence of how far-right actors can set the political and news agenda on a discursive level and garner exposure (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010; Biard, 2019; Nygaard, 2020), which is another indicator for how successful a variety of far-right actors can be with persistent discourse. This body of work, examining transnational far-right actors, like parties and movements for example, underscores the importance of digital media in mobilising and directing political discourse through specific narratives (Berntzen & Weisskircher, 2016; Stier et al., 2017).

Scholarly research describes four stages when it comes to far-right politics in Europe since World War II, marking the evolution and mainstreaming of movements, parties and politicians mainly (von Beyme, 1988; Carter, 2018; Mudde, 2019; Castelli Gattinara, 2020). The initial three stages encompassed the early 20th-century fascist regimes, post-war extremist movements like the French Poujadists and the National Front (nor National Rally), and the emergence of a new right during economic and immigration challenges, known variably as Nouvelle Droite, Neue Rechte, or Alt-Right. The fourth wave, identified in the 21st century, sees populist radical right parties integrated into mainstream politics, currently or in recent history participating in government coalitions in countries such as Poland, Austria, Italy, Hungary, or the Netherlands, signalling a significant shift in their acceptance and influence (Akkerman & Rooduijn, 2015; Wondreys & Mudde, 2022). This fourth wave is not only

marked by the mainstreaming of political actors and movements themselves, but also by the discourse and narratives they employ as part of this process (Kallis, 2013; Wodak, 2015a; Engesser et al., 2017). As far-right political organisations gain increasing electoral success, their discourse is increasingly mainstreamed, an urgent need arises to study how these actors communicate and relate to specific issues and actors in politics, media, and civil society, as three prominent arenas of public communication.

Outside of platforms and political ideology and organisations, contemporary scholarship on far-right communication emphasises the need for actor-centred approaches to the study of political discourse that can be shaped by a variety of stakeholders (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017), and has begun to do so (Froio & Ganesh, 2019). Even more so, adding to the need of considering various stakeholders in the process of political communication, current scholarship stresses the need for the comparison of platforms, temporal and geographical aspects in the study of digital political communication (Boulianne & Larsson, 2024). Therefore, research on far-right (populist) political communication indicates the necessity for considering key events in the study of this specific form of political communication. Studies have highlighted events like the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016 (Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017, von Nordheim et al., 2019), the 2016 United Kingdom referendum, also known as Brexit (Freeden, 2017; Brandle et al., 2022), national and international (EU) elections (Servant, 2019; Mudde, 2024), the COVID-19 pandemic (Boberg et al., 2020; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023), or the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Wondreys, 2023; Weisskircher, 2025). This means that there is need to map political communication not only around elections, but also events with political, economic, or societal impact, both domestic and international.

The present research therefore aims at connecting these notions of far-right digital political communication and aims at closing a series of research gaps concerning actor-centred approaches in the study of far-right discourse, cross-platform and transnational discourse employed by such actors, further setting this into context by examining platform-specific elements that possibly shape the information ecology of these actors and their audiences (mentions, forwarded messages, hyperlinks). These gaps will be addressed in further detail in the review of topic-specific literature, as well as the methodology of this research.

To this end, this work therefore analyses discourse, information ecology, and community building elements across four social media platforms and direct messaging services, namely Facebook, Twitter/X, Telegram, and YouTube, employing a mixed-methods

approach. Rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2012; Wodak, 2015b), it employs semi-automated quantitative content analyses, in some cases complemented by qualitative content analyses, to hone in on core-elements of far-right discourse and framing (Engesser et al., 2017; Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017), but also network analyses of forwarded messages and user comments, to study the audiences and communities around discourse. To accurately analyse European far-right discourse, a series of country-specific case studies are employed, looking at far-right actors from Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. In doing so, the present research aims at addressing a range of actors from various European contexts, some of which are understudied. The research is built on four larger samples collected from actors from these countries, consisting of 1) 510.272 Facebook posts, 2) 1.908.102 tweets, 3) 1.575.775 Telegram messages, and 4) 179.733 YouTube videos and 11.104.542 YouTube user comments, posted in a timeframe between 2015 and 2024.

Before proceeding to the research design and the subsequent analysis, this work will first conduct a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on the far right in Europe. This includes exploring the evolution of its defining characteristics, observations specific to various European countries included in this work, and the latest research on far-right parties and politicians, movements and activists, and alternative and partisan media as three relevant actor types for political communication. By first delving into the evolution of far-right actors in Europe, the literature review aims at generating a better understanding of what the current far right encompasses in terms of ideology and organisation, in order to further unpack the theoretical implications later on in the theoretical framework. This thorough examination, detailed in Chapter II, also aims to pinpoint existing research trajectories and identify gaps in current scholarship. Building on this foundation, Chapter III will then establish a theoretical framework that captures the essential nuances for studying contemporary far-right actors and discourse within digital settings. This framework will integrate Framing and Agenda Setting theories as its core components, supplemented by definitions of far-right ideology and a review of suitable discourse analytical approaches. Additionally, it will draw on theories of political communication, populism as ideology, strategy and discourse, social movement studies, and the research of alternative and partisan media, finishing with a broader context on new media and digital platform-specifics.

Overview of the contents included in the present doctoral thesis

The following overview will provide a summary of each chapter included in the present doctoral thesis, outlining the theoretical foundations included in the literature review (Chapter II) and theoretical framework (Chapter III), followed by the research design (Chapter IV), which consists of objectives and research questions, case selection, data collection and methodology for each of the four samples of this study. The overview will close with a summary of key findings (Chapter V) and conclusions (Chapter VI).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Chapter II surveys the scholarship on European far-right actors and the digital arenas in which they operate, establishing the empirical and conceptual ground for the dissertation. The review first traces the historical evolution of the far right, showing how scholars have moved from the study of fascist regimes and post-war extremism to what Cas Mudde calls a fourth wave in which radical right parties frequently enter government and routine politics (von Beyme 1988; Mudde 2019). This wave framework explains why veteran organisations such as France's Rassemblement National and Austria's Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs have been able to reinvent themselves, while newcomers like Germany's Alternative für Deutschland, Spain's VOX, or Romania's Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor have surged since the early 2000s.

A country-by-country synthesis reveals both diversity and convergence. Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom each display distinctive paths that depend on national party systems, economic change, and historical memory. Yet the same core themes recur across borders: nativist nationalism, hostility to immigration and Islam, distrust of supranational governance, and a populist opposition between virtuous "people" and corrupt "elites". These ideological threads are woven into dense ecosystems that connect parliamentary parties, street movements such as PEGIDA or Casa Pound, issue-specific coalitions like La Manif Pour Tous, and partisan news outlets from *Junge Freiheit* to *Libertad Digital*. Even at the level of the European Parliament, collaboration among groups such as Identity and Democracy or the European

Conservatives and Reformists demonstrates a shared communicative repertoire despite organisational fragmentation (McDonnell & Werner 2020).

After mapping the macro-historical and national terrain, the chapter turns to three strands of communication research that correspond to the actor categories defined by Engesser and colleagues. Work on parties and politicians shows how far-right leaders blend displays of professional competence with carefully curated intimacy on mainstream social media platforms, while recycling familiar populist frames once they move from opposition into government (Bast 2021; Kim 2020). Studies of movements document the rapid online diffusion of anti-immigration and anti-Muslim narratives through transnational hubs such as Generation Identity, as well as the growing importance of alt-tech spaces like Telegram and Gab for mobilisation and cross-border networking (Urman & Katz 2022; Jasser et al. 2023). Research on alternative and partisan media demonstrates that these outlets position themselves as corrective voices against allegedly biased mainstream journalism, using expert language to legitimise populist claims and leaning on crisis events—from the 2015-16 refugee arrivals to the Covid-19 pandemic—to tighten coordination with sympathetic parties and movements (Figenschou & Ihlebæk 2019; Rone 2021).

Taken together, the literature depicts a networked, multi-actor, crisis-responsive communication ecosystem. Transnational frames circulate quickly, yet diffusion is uneven and depends on elite nodes, media infrastructures, and event contexts. Comparative work has expanded beyond Western Europe, but Eastern and Central European cases remain understudied, and large-scale analyses that integrate multiple platforms and actor types are still rare. These gaps shape the design of the present dissertation. By examining politicians, movements, and alternative media across both Western and Eastern settings and by comparing discourse on mainstream and alt-tech platforms around key events, the study aims to clarify how infrastructure choice, network position, and temporal shocks jointly condition far-right communication. The chapter therefore provides both a synthesis of what is known and a roadmap for the empirical inquiries that follow, demonstrating that understanding Europe's contemporary far right requires tracking the interplay of actors, messages, and the digital venues that connect them.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework positions the dissertation at the intersection of framing theory, agenda-setting research, far-right ideology, populist political communication and platform studies. It does so by weaving together concepts that illuminate how contemporary European far-right actors (parties, movements and alternative, partisan media) construct and circulate meaning online.

Framing theory explains how communicators may select (bot consciously and unconsciously) aspects of reality and present them as coherent narratives. Work by Entman (1993) and Gamson (1989) shows that frames diagnose problems, prescribe remedies and mobilise audiences, while Snow and Benford (1988) emphasise diagnostic, prognostic and motivational tasks. Visual scholars such as Rodríguez and Dimitrova (2011) add stylistic, denotative, connotative and ideological layers that matter when images rather than words do the framing. Collective-action extensions (Hunt, Benford & Snow, 1994) map protagonists, antagonists and onlookers, and Heinisch and Mazzoleni (2017) distil a master populist frame that first identifies a homogeneous people, then names a threat and finally promises deliverance. Case studies of Génération Identitaire (Nissen, 2020) or PEGIDA (Virchow, 2016) confirm that far-right activists adapt these moves across countries and platforms, justifying an actor-and-issue-centred approach.

Agenda-setting research adds a second pillar. The first level tracks salience of issues, whereas the second attends to attributes, and the third, network agenda setting, follows how objects and attributes cluster in semantic networks (Guo & McCombs, 2011a). Studies of intermedia transfers (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2008), crisis priming (Kim, 2020) and hashtag publics (Harder, Sevenans & Van Aelst, 2017) show that both elite news outlets and social-media users can move topics from the fringe into the mainstream. When far-right parties govern, the agenda spirals differently than when they agitate from opposition, a distinction the empirical chapters exploit.

Defining the far right requires an umbrella that spans radical and extreme variants. Building on Mudde (1995) and Carter (2018), the framework treats nativist nationalism and authoritarian law-and-order doctrines as the ideological core, surrounded by xenophobia, cultural racism, Euroscepticism and anti-elite populism. Radical actors accept electoral democracy while rejecting liberal pluralism, whereas extreme actors reject democracy outright (Pirro 2022). Because these ideas are communicated through populist style, the framework

adopts Engesser et al.'s core elements of right-wing populist discourse, namely popular sovereignty, pure people, corrupt elites, dangerous others, and an idealised heartland (Engesser et al. 2017), and reads them through the master populist frame (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017).

Political communication scholarship describes a shift from mass-media dominance to hybrid arenas where citizens, journalists, parties and platforms intersect (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018). Far-right discourse rides this shift by exploiting algorithmic curation, personal publics (Schmidt, 2014) and the reduced gatekeeping of alternative outlets (Holt, 2018). Social movement theory reminds us that mobilisation depends on sustained identity work and media exposure (Tarrow, 1998). Transnational clusters such as Bloc Identitaire and Casa Pound gain visibility precisely because online communication precedes and amplifies street events (Castelli Gattinara & Froio, 2019).

Alternative and partisan media constitute the third actor group. They position themselves as correctives to alleged mainstream journalism, recycle anti-elitist frames and integrate activism with news production (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019). Research on Junge Freiheit (von Nordheim, Müller & Scheppe, 2019), Il Primato Nazionale (Rone, 2021) or Breitbart London (Tuomola, 2020) shows similar editorial logics despite national differences.

Finally, four digital arenas shape how messages travel. Facebook, still the top gateway for news in much of Europe (Newman et al., 2023), combines algorithmic feeds with group-based mobilisation. Twitter/X offers real-time hashtag publics and mentions that help trace diffusion chains (Rogers, 2014). Telegram provides lightly moderated channels ideal for post-deplatforming migration (Urman & Katz, 2022). YouTube hosts an "Alternative Influence Network" where influencer branding merges with extremist politics (Lewis, 2018). Each platform's affordances (feed curation, forwarding, mentions, video recommendation) condition visibility, interactivity and ultimately agenda power.

Together these strands furnish the thesis with a multi-layered and interdisciplinary theoretical foundation. Framing supplies the vocabulary for dissecting messages, agenda setting offers metrics for salience and diffusion, far-right ideology fixes analytic baselines, populism studies clarify stylistic choices, social movement and alternative media research identify organisational forms, and platform scholarship specifies technological contexts. The integrated framework thus enables a systematic comparison of actors, issues and networks

across time, space and media, illuminating how an increasingly transnational European far right constructs and circulates its digital publics.

Chapter IV: Research Design

The research design translates the theoretical framework into a comparative, mixed-methods inquiry that traces how far-right parties, politicians, movements and alternative media in eleven European countries communicate on Facebook, Twitter/X, Telegram and YouTube between 2015 and 2024. Its overarching purpose is to reveal where and when these actors converge or diverge in the frames and narratives they deploy, how those narratives evolve in time, such as the 2015 refugee movements, the Brexit referendum in 2016, successive national and European elections, the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and whether platform affordances foster distinctive discursive patterns.

Four interlocking objectives guide the study. First, it compares national and transnational contexts in order to map similarities and differences in far-right discourse across Europe, a task made urgent by the presence of radical or extreme parties in government coalitions or parliaments from Poland to Italy and by cross-border groupings in the European Parliament (Froio & Ganesh, 2019; Heft et al., 2021, 2022). Second, it introduces a temporal dimension by sampling a full decade and by anchoring analyses in the key events that previous scholarship identifies as narrative turning points (Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017; Freeden, 2017; Boberg et al., 2020; Wondreys, 2023). Third, it extends the unit of analysis beyond elected actors by incorporating social movement organisations and alternative or partisan news outlets, answering calls from Engesser et al. (2017), Heinisch and Mazzoleni (2017) and Heft et al. (2019) to treat the far-right information ecology as a multi-actor system. Fourth, it contrasts four platforms whose technical affordances invite different communicative strategies: Facebook's algorithmic news feed, Twitter's mention-based publics, Telegram's lightly moderated channels and YouTube's video-centred influencer culture (Lewis, 2018; Urman & Katz, 2020; Bucher, 2021).

To meet these objectives the present research adopts a mixed-methods approach. Quantitatively, it conducts semi-automated content analyses with the R interface KH-Coder (Higuchi 2016). For every language a dictionary links keywords and multi-word expressions to the five core elements of right-wing populist discourse (popular sovereignty, the pure people, corrupt elites, dangerous others and the heartland) identified by Engesser et al. (2017).

Co-occurrence patterns between codes disclose the three stages of the master populist frame that Heinisch and Mazzoleni (2017) describe: a collective under threat, an identified culprit and a promised deliverance. Term frequencies, time-series plots and chi-square tests of independence establish salience and statistical robustness. Qualitative validation occurs through concordance checks (KWIC) and close reading of the most engaging posts in each country. For networks, the study extracts mentions and hyperlinks on Twitter, forwards on Telegram and commenter overlaps on YouTube, calculates degree and centrality and detects communities (Blondel and co-authors 2008). Link domains are classified as mainstream, alternative, partisan or other following Holzer (2021) and Schatto-Eckrodt et al. (2024).

Sampling proceeds platform by platform yet follows a common logic. For Facebook more than half a million public posts were collected through Facepager between January 2015 and December 2022, a shorter window than on other platforms because of tightened API restrictions. Actor selection relied on electoral performance, protest size, follower counts and mentions in previous research. It yielded 510.272 posts from 151 pages. On Twitter/X 1.9 million tweets by 175 accounts were scraped with Apify in January 2025. Telegram contributed 1.6 million messages from 153 channels or groups exported via the platform's API. YouTube data encompass metadata for 179.733 videos and 11.1 million user comments. Octoparse retrieved titles, descriptions and engagement metrics, while the YouTube API (accessed via Facepager) supplied comment threads. In every country the sample covers the main far-right party and its leading personalities, at least one prominent movement, and the most visible alternative or partisan news brands.

Research questions arise directly from the objectives. For Facebook the inquiry asks how often and in which formats far-right actors post, which issue–actor combinations dominate their messages, how these patterns instantiate core populist frames and whether frame construction varies across national settings. For Twitter/X it probes differences in output between politicians, movements and media, the role of external links and mentions in shaping an information ecology, and the extent to which actor categories or countries share framing repertoires. On Telegram it explores whether channel activity, link-sharing habits and forwarded-message networks reinforce or destabilise national boundaries, and how discourse within communities implements the master frame. For YouTube it examines output, audience interaction networks, discursive content of video titles, and the transnationality of comment communities.

By weaving longitudinal, cross-national and cross-platform evidence into a single analytical framework, the research design positions the thesis to answer not only where Europe's far-right communicators speak, but how and to what rhetorical effect, as well as their interaction with each other and with their audiences.

Chapter V: Key Findings

Across the eleven European cases the findings show a recurring pattern in which far-right politicians, parties, social movements and alternative media exploit the distinctive affordances of Facebook, Twitter/X, Telegram and YouTube to cultivate audiences, spread familiar nationalist story lines and reinforce a shared sense of grievance against domestic elites, migrants and the European Union.

In Austria the Freedom Party and outlets such as Unzensuriert and Servus TV weave Muslims, refugees and Brussels into a single field of perceived menace. On Facebook criminality is tied insistently to Islam and migration, while tweets frame Covid-19 rules as assaults on sovereignty and fuse them with anxieties about border control. Telegram channels and YouTube uploads recycle these themes, portraying Social Democrats and conservatives alike as traitors to an authentic homeland. Interaction graphs confirm that messages, forwards and comments circulate well beyond national boundaries and bind Austrian actors to a wider transnational information sphere.

French far-right discourse is driven by alternative news brands such as CNEWS and Valeurs Actuelles and by figureheads like Éric Zemmour. Posting peaks around presidential elections and pandemic controversies and centres on immigration, national identity and scepticism toward the Union. On Twitter/X media outlets are the heaviest publishers but politicians attract the most reactions, while Telegram forward networks reveal systematic cross-posting of links that echo the same political leitmotifs. YouTube comment threads show that Valeurs Actuelles in particular functions as a hub that links several far-right communities and helps sustain a common narrative infrastructure.

In Germany outlets such as Junge Freiheit and ZUERST and the Alternative für Deutschland shape Facebook and Twitter agendas around censorship, campaign finance and border protection. Although the AfD posts less frequently than some movement actors its

material elicits disproportionate engagement. On Telegram and YouTube movement and media channels dominate during high-salience events, and audience overlap in comment sections points to an integrated community that repeats the master populist frame across platforms and actor types.

Hungarian communication is led by Fidesz, by proxies such as Civil Összefogás Fórum and by partisan portals including Vadhajtások. Messages link migration, Christian heritage and resistance to the Union and the Biden administration, and achieve strong resonance on Twitter/X through high-profile accounts like Zoltán Kovács. Telegram forwarding chains and YouTube comments show that these narratives travel easily within and beyond Hungary, especially when they connect national themes to the war in Ukraine.

Italian actors use Facebook and YouTube most intensively. Parties and news outlets respond sharply to the refugee rescue debate, to elections and to Covid-19. Salvini, Meloni and their organisations dominate Twitter/X engagement and coordinate with alternative media through link-sharing. Telegram is favoured by movements and magazines for mobilising during key moments. Across the environment the core story casts the governing establishment as corrupt, the Union as intrusive and migration as an existential threat.

In the Netherlands Geert Wilders and Forum voor Democratie achieve the highest Facebook interaction, especially when Islamic issues or pandemic regulations are in the news. On Twitter/X Wilders and Thierry Baudet inflate those themes into broader attacks on mainstream politicians and on Brussels, while simultaneously circulating mainstream and fringe links. Telegram forwarding joins Dutch channels to foreign far-right nodes, and YouTube comment maps confirm a transnational audience that trades in the same narrative repertoire.

Polish communication is structured by Law and Justice and by Catholic or nationalist media such as Radio Maryja and wPolsce24. Facebook posts defend traditional values and disparage Brussels, while Twitter/X disseminates a mixed flow of mainstream and fringe content that shores up sovereignty frames. Telegram groups promote Covid-19 scepticism and cross-reference the Union and immigration. YouTube communities overlap strongly, showing that far-right frames spread across movement and media boundaries.

Romanian results echo these tendencies. Politicians like George Simion and Diana Șoșoacă gain the largest engagements by coupling anti-EU rhetoric with nationalist and religious imagery. Twitter/X activity, led by Mihail Neamțu and ActiveNews, integrates

domestic issues with the war in Ukraine. Telegram channels circulate links from Russian and Western fringe outlets, creating an ideologically polarised space. YouTube comment hubs around Prodocens Media and Călin Georgescu attract audiences from disparate groups and reinforce a shared narrative of threatened sovereignty.

Spanish discourse is dominated by VOX and by news brands such as Elentir, esRadio and Gaceta de la Iberosfera. Messages cluster around elections, migrant arrivals in Ceuta and military themes. Twitter/X co-occurrence networks place VOX politicians at the centre of debate, and Telegram channels intensify coordination during crises. The recurrent frame praises national greatness, lambasts left-wing parties and calls for strict border control.

Swiss actors including the Swiss People's Party and Weltwoche emphasise independence, immigration and pandemic measures. Roger Köppel's profiles attract high engagement and link Swiss conversations to Austrian and German networks. Across platforms messages highlight free speech and depict the Union and migration as hazards to national autonomy.

In the United Kingdom Nigel Farage, Leave.EU and outlets such as Spiked and Guido Fawkes anchor discussions of Brexit, migration control and elite failure. Twitter/X link streams mix mainstream articles with posts from sites like Parler and BitChute, while Telegram forward networks tie British groups to Russian propaganda channels. GB News on YouTube functions as a central audience node, pulling users from many communities into an environment that reiterates anti-establishment and anti-migration frames.

Taken together, the cross-platform evidence indicates that Europe's far right articulates remarkably consistent story lines. Each national cluster foregrounds a virtuous people, an alien elite or out-group and a promise of deliverance. Actors exploit platform mechanics to weave these elements into the master populist frame, amplify them during conjunctural events and circulate them through networks that often transcend borders. The result is a loose but recognisable communicative sphere in which nationalist grievances echo and reinforce one another across time, space and medium.

Chapter VI: Conclusions and Discussion

The present research set out to examine contemporary far-right populist political communication in Europe across four major social media environments. It combined discourse

analysis with a mapping of the information ecology and, where data permitted, of community structure. A central objective was to develop and test an analytical framework that can handle wide geographic and temporal coverage, account for differences among actor types, respect platform-specific affordances and remain compatible with the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis articulated by Fairclough (2012) and Wodak (2015b).

The findings confirm earlier observations by Heinisch (2003) and Ellinas (2009): politicians and parties are the most successful far-right actors online. Across all eleven countries and on every platform analysed, the personal or organisational accounts of politicians consistently attracted more followers, likes, shares, retweets and comments than did the profiles of social movements or partisan media. The broad temporal span of this research, which extends previous case studies that were limited to single moments or single platforms, shows that this advantage for political actors is stable over time and not confined to specific national contexts.

Cross-platform sharing emerged as a second defining feature of the digital far right. The analysis of outbound hyperlinks on Twitter, of forwarded messages on Telegram and of URLs embedded in YouTube descriptions revealed persistent traffic to three destinations: mainstream news outlets, partisan or alternative news sites and other social-media services, including fringe video hosts such as BitChute, Odysee and Rumble. Except in France, Germany and Hungary, at least one fringe platform ranked among the most frequently shared domains in every country. These patterns validate the argument of Brants and Voltmer (2011) and of Davis (2019) that scholars must track political communication across multiple, interconnected platforms; they also demonstrate the practical value of the mixed-methods design implemented here. Because YouTube links appear in the top tier of shared domains for every country, future studies should pay closer attention to video transcripts and to the audiovisual rhetoric that is paired with text-based messaging.

Community-building is visible not only in the content of posts but also in patterns of interaction. On Telegram large volumes of forwards knit movement channels, alternative-media feeds and party accounts into national and transnational clusters. On YouTube comment networks reveal audiences that roam across multiple producers and reinforce shared narratives, confirming tendencies noted by Doerr (2017) and by Rauchfleisch and Kaiser (2020). These structures embed each national far-right scene in a wider communicative space and help to explain the rapid diffusion of slogans and frames from one

country to another, a trend already sketched by Froio and Ganesh (2017) and by Weisskircher and Berntzen (2019).

With regard to substantive content three issues dominated the period studied: immigration and asylum, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In every country these topics were tied to emblematic out-groups (migrants, the European Union, political elites, the pharmaceutical industry) and were narrated through the dualism that Engesser et al. (2017) identify as central to right-wing populist discourse. Whether in opposition or in government, far-right actors retained the core elements of the master populist frame described by Heinisch and Mazzoleni (2017). They invoked a homogenous people, depicted an imminent threat and promised decisive action that would restore national sovereignty. The balance among these elements varied. Hungarian, Polish and Italian communicators, whose parties were in office for some or all of the period, attacked domestic opponents more than European institutions, whereas French and Dutch actors foregrounded Islam, immigration and Brussels. Religious references were markedly stronger in Poland and Romania. Yet the underlying logic of threat and salvation remained the same.

The link analysis shows that far-right narratives rely heavily on news of every variety, even though mainstream media are denounced as hostile. This confirms the conclusions of Heft et al. (2019) and of Figenschou and Ihlebæk (2019) while adding comparative breadth. It also implies that any attempt to counter extremist mobilisation will have to consider how conventional journalism is appropriated, reframed and redistributed through partisan channels.

Several limitations are acknowledged. Facebook data were available only until 2023 because of tightened API access, which prevents perfect synchronicity across platforms. The text-mining tool used here, KH-Coder, does not natively support Hungarian, Polish or Romanian; although supplementary routines mitigated this gap, future projects would benefit from a full R-based pipeline that can integrate language-specific lemmatisation and part-of-speech tagging. Comprehensive actor mapping requires deep local knowledge and must be updated continually: in some countries the roster of movements and media changed between the start and end of data collection, which means that longitudinal comparisons are necessarily approximate. Despite these constraints the study demonstrates that a single, mixed-methods design can capture the multi-actor, multi-platform, transnational character of Europe's far right. It also provides a replicable template for analysing other ideological formations and for

tracking the evolution of online political communication as new platforms emerge and older ones reform their data policies.