

WHAT AUTHORITARIAN POPULISTS REALLY WANT



EXAMINING GRIEVANCES, DISINFORMATION, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN
COUNTERING ELITE AUTHORITARIAN POPULISTS

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WHAT AUTHORITARIAN POPULISTS REALLY WANT —
Examining Grievances, Disinformation, and Civic Engagement in
Countering Elite Authoritarian Populists

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Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this dissertation do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of State or the United States government.

For my mom, Fata Hodžić-Levis

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Abstract

Qualitative interview data collected in Germany and analyzed alongside and in support of populism and violent extremism research, shows that while elite authoritarian populists (EAPs) claim to represent “average voters” and the “disenfranchised,” they are very much elites who benefit from the establishment, who look down upon those groups, and are leveraging those groups’ grievances and democratic institutions, including civil society, for self-aggrandizement and anti-democratic aims. In comparing the role of cultural versus economic grievance narratives in political communications and extremism, the data indicate that cultural narratives are more ubiquitous and potent; EAPs weaponize grievances by turning them into “us versus them” disinformation which is then used as a bridge between elite political and cultural aspirations and working- and middle-class economic grievances. EAPs use fear and outrage-inducing culture- and victimhood-related disinformation, particularly pertaining to gender roles and non-white immigrants, in a mix of civic engagement, in-person, online, and hard-copy communications (in which social media is secondary to traditional media and in-person communications) and which undermine democratic values and institutions and creates a permissive environment for intolerance, extremism, and violent extremism. The data did not support the hypothesis that civic and community engagement are in and of themselves effective tools for reducing the pull factors of political extremism and radicalization for those already radicalized but did provide some evidence of them as effective tools for countering extremism’s effects on society and for inoculating non-extremists when used in intentionally pro-democratic context.

Keywords: Populism, Counter Violent Extremism (CVE), Disinformation, Democracy, Civic Engagement

Abstract

Qualitative Interviewdaten, die in Deutschland gesammelt und neben und zur Unterstützung der Populismus- und gewaltbereiten Extremismusforschung analysiert wurden, zeigen, dass Elite autoritäre Populisten (EAPs) zwar behaupten „Durchschnittswähler“ und „Entrechtete“ zu vertreten, aber in hohem Maße Eliten sind, die vom Establishment profitieren, die auf diese Gruppen herabblicken und die Beschwerden dieser Gruppen und demokratischen Institutionen, einschließlich der Zivilgesellschaft, für Selbstverherrlichung und antidemokratische Ziele nutzen. Beim Vergleich der Rolle kultureller versus wirtschaftlicher Beschwerdennarrative in der politischen Kommunikation und im Extremismus zeigen die Daten, dass kulturelle Narrative allgegenwärtiger und wirkungsvoller sind; EAPs benutzen Beschwerden als Waffen, indem sie diese in „Wir-gegen-sie“ Desinformationen verwandeln, die dann als Brücke zwischen den politischen und kulturellen Bestrebungen der Elite und den wirtschaftlichen Beschwerden der Arbeiter- und Mittelklasse dienen. EAPs verwenden angst- und empörungsfördernde Desinformationen mit Bezug auf Kultur und Opferstatus, insbesondere in Bezug auf Geschlechterrollen und nicht-weiße Einwanderer. Sie benutzen eine Mischung aus bürgerschaftlichem Engagement, persönlicher, Online und gedruckter Kommunikation (in der Social Media zweitrangig gegenüber traditionellen Medien und persönlicher Kommunikation sind) und die demokratische Werte und Institutionen untergraben und eine tolerante Atmosphäre für Intoleranz, Extremismus und gewalttätigen Extremismus erzeugen. Die Daten unterstützten nicht die Hypothese, dass bürgerschaftliches und gemeinschaftliches Engagement allein stehend

wirksame Instrumente sind, um die Sogfaktoren von politischem Extremismus und Radikalisierung für bereits radikalisierte Menschen zu verringern, aber lieferten jedoch einige Beweise dafür, dass sie wirksame Instrumente sind, um den Auswirkungen von Extremismus auf die Gesellschaft und Nicht- Extremisten entgegenzuwirken, wenn sie in einem bewusst prodemokratischen Kontext eingesetzt werden.

Schlagwörter: Populismus, Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), Desinformation, Demokratie, Bürgerschaftliches Engagement

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Abstract	2
Table of Contents	4
Definitions	6
Summary in German/Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch	12
I. Introduction and Background	22
What We Know and Don't Know	25
Why You Should Read This Book	29
Into the Field	30
II. Who are they, what do they want, and how do they go about getting it?	36
1. Who Are They?	37
Anti-Democratic Elites Claiming to Represent the Disadvantaged	39
2. What Do They Want?	40
Culture and Values Grievances	41
Economic Grievances	44
“Refugee Issues” vs. “Welcoming Culture”	46
Victimhood Narratives	49
“Us versus Them”	56
Economic vs. Cultural and Identity Grievances	59
3. How Do They Get What They Want?	66
Civic Engagement and Networking	66
Demonstrations, Protests, & Rallies	70
Weaponized Civic & Community Engagement	73
An Ecosystem of Authoritarian Populist Communications Techniques	75
III. Impact on Mainstream Society	80
1. Differentiating between non-violent and violent extremism	81
Anti-Democratic Actors Claiming to Speak for “Concerned Citizens” & “Silent Majority”	84
Mainstreaming Polarization and Extremism & Sowing Distrust in Institutions	87
2. Tolerance for Violence & Radicalization	92
Individual, Group, and Mass Radicalization	98
Anti-immigration Mass Movements	102
Reciprocal & Cumulative Radicalization	104
IV. Countering Authoritarian Populism	106

1. Civic & Community Engagement	108
2. Effective Counter-Extremism Efforts	113
Assimilation & Contact Theory	115
3. Actionable Insights for Practitioners	117
Acknowledge Impact, Protect Civil Liberties, and “whole-of-society” Counter Effort	119
Support Pro-Democratic Networks	121
Acknowledge Elites’ Role & Address Vulnerable Audiences	121
Governmental and Political Actors	122
Law Enforcement and Judicial Professionals	124
Civil society and the Private Sector	124
Media Professionals	124
Civic Engagement, Counter-Disinformation, and Counter-Extremism Practitioners	125
Strategic Communications and Counter-Narratives	126
4. Implications for Researchers, Limitations, and Opportunities	131
V. Key Takeaways	138
Conclusions	140
Reasons for Optimism	143
Appendices	145
Hypotheses, Accompanying Working Research Questions, and Interview Questions	145
Hypotheses Results Summary	151
Research Results Summary	153
Bibliography	156

Definitions

Alienation: Being or feeling that one is separate or “withdrawing or separation of a person or a person's affections from an object or position of former attachment”¹

Civic education: The provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes. The education can take very different forms, including classroom-based learning, informal training, experiential learning, and mass media campaigns.²

Civic engagement: A broad set of practices and attitudes of involvement in social and political life that converge to increase the health of a democratic society.³ Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual volunteerism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy.⁴

Community engagement: The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members.⁵

Countering Violent Extremism: The term “countering violent extremism,” or CVE, refers to proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence. Fundamentally, CVE actions intend to address the conditions and reduce the factors that most likely contribute to recruitment and radicalization by violent extremists.⁶

Counterterrorism: “counterterrorism corresponds to actions to ameliorate the threat and consequences of terrorism. These actions can be taken by governments, military alliances, international organizations (e.g., INTERPOL), private corporations, or private citizens. Counterterrorism comes in two basic varieties: defensive and proactive measures. Defensive

¹ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “alienation,” accessed August 20, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alienation>.

² Jennifer Rietbergen-McCracken, “Civic Education - CIVICUS Global Alliance,” accessed April 18, 2022, https://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/PGX_B_Civic%20Education.pdf.

³ M. E. Banyan, “Civic Engagement,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/civic-engagement>.

⁴ Michael Delli Carpini, “Civic Engagement,” *American Psychological Association*, created 2009, <https://www.apa.org/education-career/undergrad/civic-engagement>.

⁵ Stephen B. Paine Fawcett, Adrienne L., Vincent T. Francisco, and Marni Vliet, Chapter: “Promoting Health through Community Development”, in *Promoting Health and Mental Health in Children, Youth and Families* (New York, U.S.A.: Springer Publishing Company, 1993).

⁶ Government of U.S.A., “What Is CVE?,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security, accessed 2018, <https://www.dhs.gov/cve/what-is-cve>.

countermeasures protect potential targets by making attacks more costly for terrorists or reducing their likelihood of success [...] By contrast, proactive measures are offensive as a targeted government directly confronts the terrorist group or its supporters.”⁷

Discrimination “is understood as a social phenomenon in which an individual experiences inferior treatment or lesser access to social, political, or economic opportunities than others within society as a result of critical identity characteristics such as race, religion, sex, nationality, or ethnicity. Discrimination can manifest itself in many ways such as through disparaging political narratives/rhetoric, legal inhibitions for particular groups, social exclusion, or unequal pay, among other things. Efforts are also concentrated on working with the concept of institutional discrimination, which is understood as an organisation’s/institution’s failure to provide an appropriate and professional service to users because of their colour, culture or ethnic group - including the impact of employees' unwitting prejudice and ignorance, etc.”⁸

Disenfranchisement refers to the act of depriving an individual of rights, privileges, or immunities inherently possessed through membership in a particular group or association, sometimes including the complete revocation of membership. This normally describes the process through which a free citizen loses fundamental rights, especially the right to vote or to be represented in government.⁹

Disinformation is information which is deliberately created or disseminated to “mislead, harm, or manipulate a person, social group, organization, or country.” This is distinct from malinformation, which is factual information, but when it is shared out of context is harmful or misleading. Disinformation is also distinct from misinformation, which is false information which wasn’t created or disseminated with harmful intent.¹⁰

Diversity is the inclusion of “all types of individual differences, such as ethnicity, age, religion, disability status, geographic location, personality, sexual preferences, and a myriad of other personal, demographic, and organizational characteristics. Diversity can thus be an all-inclusive term that incorporates people from many different classifications. Generally, "diversity" refers to policies and practices that seek to include people who are considered, in some way, different from traditional members. More centrally, diversity aims to create an inclusive culture that values and uses the talents of all would-be members.”¹¹

⁷ Todd Sandler, "Terrorism and counterterrorism: An overview," *Oxford Economic Papers* 67, no. 1 (2015): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oeq/gpu039>.

⁸ Toke Agerschou, "Preventing Radicalization and Discrimination in Aarhus," *Journal for Deradicalization*, 1 (2014): 5-22, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/2/2>.

⁹ Lehman Jeffrey and Shirelle Phelps, "Disenfranchisement," *West's Encyclopedia of American Law*. 2nd ed (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2005)

¹⁰ Government of U.S.A., “Mis, Dis, Malinformation,” Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency U.S. Department of Homeland Security, accessed April 2022, <https://www.cisa.gov/mdm>.

¹¹ Cedric Herring, “Does Diversity Pay?: Race, Gender, and the Business Case for Diversity,” *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 2 (2009): 208-224, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27736058>.

Elite In social and political science, including Elite Theory, it is a minority group which makes all political decisions and rules over the majority. This includes those in governing positions as well as those who influence those elected and governmental decisions more broadly.¹²

Extremism is the belief that an in-group's success is inseparable from hostile action against an out-group. Accordingly, the following types of actions against an out-group are examples of extremism: harassment, discrimination, segregation, hate crimes, targeted violence, terrorism, oppression, some wars and insurgency, and genocide. Even when a group's ideology is central to society, it can be extreme such as Nazi ideology preceding World War II.¹³ Also "a psychological state in which an individual rigidly adheres to an ideology that is characterized by behaviors that marginalize other-minded individuals through a variety of means, up to and including the use of physical violence."¹⁴

Violent extremism: The same definition as for "extremism" but explicitly including violence. The following additional points apply, "Violent extremism refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political views. Violent extremist views can be exhibited along a range of issues, including politics, religion and gender relations. No society, religious community or worldview is immune to such violent extremism."¹⁵ Also noting that while not all violent extremism is terrorism, all terrorism is violent extremism.

Grievances are an individual or group's dissatisfaction with their or their group's material and political situation or status.¹⁶ In political science, these can be real or imagined, and usually apply to a social or religio-political group.

Ideology is "a more or less coherent system of norms and ideas which thrives on clear-cut oppositions, such as between good and bad."¹⁷ It is a set of ideas which aid in the "diagnosis of a problem, a possible solution to this problem, and a vision for the future."¹⁸

¹² Ali Ashraf, L N Sharma, *Political Sociology: a New Grammar of Politics*, (New Delhi, India: University Press, 1983), 62.

¹³ J.M. Berger, *Extremism*, (Cambridge, MA, U.S.A.: The MIT Press Pub, 2018.)

¹⁴ Kurt Howard Braddock, "Fighting Words: The Persuasive Effect of Online Extremist Narratives on the Radicalization Process," (Doctor of Philosophy Pennsylvania State University, 2012), 69, https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/files/final_submissions/7610.

¹⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "A Teacher's Guide to the Prevention of Violent Extremism," (Paris: UNESCO, 2016), 11, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002446/244676e.pdf>.

¹⁶ Karin Dyrstad, Solveig Hillesund, "Explaining Support for Political Violence: Grievance and Perceived Opportunity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Volume 4 (Issue 9), (2020): 1724–1753, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720909886>.

¹⁷ Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, "Ideology," *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman, (Cambridge, U.K.: 2007), 217.

¹⁸ Lore Colaert, *De-radicalisation' Scientific Insights for Policy*, (Brussels, Belgium: Flemish Peace Institute, 2017), 157.

Extremist ideology is a set of norms and ideas which support “a psychological state in which an individual rigidly adheres to an ideology that is characterized by behaviors that marginalize other-minded individuals through a variety of means, up to and including the use of physical violence.”¹⁹

Marginalization “describes the position of individuals, groups or populations outside of ‘mainstream society’, living at the margins of those in the centre of power, of cultural dominance and economical and social welfare.”²⁰ It is defined as, “a process by which a group or individual is denied access to important positions and symbols of economic, religious, or political power within any society...a marginal group may actually constitute a numerical majority...and should perhaps be distinguished from a minority group, which may be small in numbers, but has access to political or economic power.”²¹

Mobilization to violence: “engaging in preparation and planning for an attack or for travel to join like-minded violent extremists or a [Foreign Terrorist Organization], and developing motivation for violent extremist activity.”²²

Narrative: The representation of an event or a series of events containing an action.²³ It can also be defined as “any cohesive and coherent story with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end that provides information about scene, characters, and conflict; raises unanswered questions or unresolved conflict, and provides resolution.”²⁴ Narratives are frequently repeated, spoken, or written accounts with a particular set of actors and themes, which may be accounts of a particular event or a series of events, or part of discussions of societal problems and their solutions. They are shared through political communications, traditional media, social media, through word of mouth within a community, or through public manifestations, such as protests, or political campaign events, and even through graffiti. Narratives are frequently a part of ideology and can drive the “compelling storylines which can explain events convincingly and from which

¹⁹ Braddock, 2012

²⁰ Katrin Schiffer and Eberhard Schatz, "Marginalisation, Social Inclusion and Health," (Netherlands: Foundation Regenboog AMOC Correlation Network, 2008), 6.

²¹ John Scott and Gordon Marshall, "Marginalization," A Dictionary of Sociology, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/marginalization>.

²² Government of U.S.A., “US Violent Extremists Mobilization Indicators 2021 Edition,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021, https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/Mobilization_Indicators_Booklet_2021.pdf.

²³ Braddock, 2012

²⁴ LJ Hinyard and MW Kreuter, “Using Narrative Communication as a Tool for Health Behavior Change: A Conceptual, Theoretical, and Empirical Overview,” *Health Education & Behavior*, Volume 34 (5) (2007): 778, <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019810>.

inferences can be drawn.”²⁵ And, within the counter violent extremism field, “narratives” frequently support and intersect with a given extremist ideology.²⁶

Nationalism “[is the foundation of far-right ideology, by drawing] on the myth of a homogeneous nation that puts the nation before the individual and their civil rights.” It is the doctrine of “extreme-right” and part of an “effort to construct an idea of nation and national belonging by radicalising ethnic, religious, lingual, and other cultural and political criteria of exclusion, in which there is no place for the “other.”²⁷

Political agency refers to an individual’s (particularly a free citizen’s) capacity to exercise political power and make things happen within their political system, especially in a way that positively or negatively influences the collective future of their society through transformative change. A citizen’s political agency can manifest itself through petitioning representatives, campaigning for political candidates, lobbying, or running for office, among other things.^{28 29}

Populism: A political philosophy and movement within democracies which claims that they alone represent the will of “the people” and juxtaposes those and “the general will” against “the elite.”³⁰ While it is a contested term which is used to describe both left-wing and right-wing actors, in this study populism is understood to be a form of anti-pluralist and xenophobic nationalist form of identity politics which seeks to exclude those they perceive as enemies, thrives on “us versus them” conflict, and encourages polarization.^{31 32}

Authoritarian populism values and prioritizes security for the group and conformity to traditional values at the expense of individual freedoms.³³ Furthermore, authoritarian populists “typically constrain electoral choice by dismantling the system of checks and balances on executive power and by weakening the rule of law [...and, opposition] alternatives are systematically undermined, press freedoms are curtailed, and incumbents

²⁵ Lawrence Freedman, "The Transformation of Strategic Affairs: Networks, Culture and Narratives," in Adelphi Paper No. 379 (London, U.K.: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006).

²⁶ Herman and Vervaeck, 2007

²⁷ Annemarie van de Weert, “Between Extremism and Freedom Of Expression: Dealing with Non-Violent Rightwing Extremist Actors,” Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), European Union, 2021, 5.

²⁸ Diana Coole, "Agency: Political Science," Encyclopedia Britannica, March 8, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/agency-political-theory>.

²⁹ Karen O'Brien, "Political Agency: The Key to Tackling Climate Change," Science, Vol 350, Issue 6265, 1170-1171, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aad0267>.

³⁰ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism A Very Short Introduction*, (New York, U.S.A., Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

³¹ Jan-Werner Mueller, *What is populism?*, (Philadelphia, U.S.A., University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

³² Pippa Norris and Ronald F. Inglehart, “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash,” Faculty Research Working Paper Series Harvard Kennedy School, 2016.

³³ Ibid.

use public resources to get reelected. Monopolization of power takes place along extensive clientele building...”³⁴

Radicalization/radical: Radicalization refers to “the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs,”³⁵ including when “individuals come to believe that their engagement in or facilitation of nonstate violence to achieve social and political change is necessary and justified.”³⁶ It is also “an incremental social and psychological process prompted by and inextricably bound in communication, whereby an individual develops increased commitment to an extremist ideology resulting in the assimilation of beliefs and attitudes consistent with that ideology.” Radicalization is the “process by which an individual develops a sense of rigid commitment to an ideology that may condone the use of violence against a particular group for the sake of that ideology.”³⁷

Right-wing Extremism: is an ideology that includes authoritarian, anti-democratic and exclusionary beliefs, including nationalism.³⁸

Terrorism: “Terrorism can be both a tactic and ideology. The revised academic consensus definition (2011) describes terrorism on the one hand as “[...] a *doctrine* about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand,[as...] a conspiratorial *practice* of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action [...] targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effect on various audiences and conflict parties.”³⁹ Likewise, it is “the use of violence or threat of violence against civilians to achieve ideological goals [...]” and is one “possible manifest result of extremism (and more distally, radicalization).”⁴⁰

³⁴ Zoltán Ádám, “Authoritarian populism at work: A political transaction cost approach with reference to Viktor Orbán’s Hungary,” *UCL Centre for Comparative Studies of Emerging Economies Working Papers*, Volume 2018 Issue 2 (2018): 11.

³⁵ Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2012): 7-36. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1>

³⁶ Government of U.S.A., U.S. National Counter Terrorism Center, “Radicalization Dynamics: A Primer,” Washington D.C., 2010.

³⁷ Braddock, 2012

³⁸ Elisabeth Carter, “Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23(2):1-26 (2018): DOI:10.1080/13569317.2018.1451227.

³⁹ Alexander P. Schmid, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (London, U.K.: Routledge, 2011), p. 86.

⁴⁰ Braddock, 2012.

Summary in German/Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

Heute hat sich die extremistische Bedrohung der Demokratie zu einem vielschichtigen Problem entwickelt, das ausländische, inländische, staatliche und nichtstaatliche Akteure umfasst. Der autoritäre Populismus (AP) und die Propaganda, Fehl- und Desinformation, die ihm zugrunde liegen, ist eine Kernkomponente der Bedrohung die das Vertrauen in demokratische Werte, Institutionen und Praktiken erschüttern wollen. Populismus, Nationalismus, Identitätspolitik und die umfangreiche Forschung inspiriert von der Bekämpfung des Dschihadismus und gewaltbereiten Extremismus und die daraus gewonnenen Erkenntnisse aus der Praxis bieten wertvolle Strategien zum Verständnis und zur Bekämpfung dieser neuen Bedrohung. Es bestehen jedoch grundlegende Lücken die antidemokratischen Stimmungen und Bemühungen einheimischer autoritärer Populisten, die von legitimen Beschwerden, Propaganda, Fehl- und Desinformation gedeihen, wirksam entgegenzuwirken, und gleichzeitig demokratische Freiheiten und Institutionen schützen. Noch komplizierter wird es, wenn die Grenze zwischen gewalttätigen und gewaltfreien Akteuren nicht klar definiert ist, die Quelle der Beschwerden unklar ist und die Bedrohung als nebulöser „Kulturkrieg“ dargestellt wird. In den USA wurde bei der Bekämpfung des von Dschihad-inspirierten Extremismus im Inland, und nicht ohne viele Fehlritte, in der Praxis zentral, dass Meinungen und Gedanken durch freie Meinungsäußerung und andere demokratische Gesetze und Werte geschützt sind und dass Gewalttaten, und nicht eine bestimmte Ideologie, verhindert werden müssen. In einigen anderen Demokratien waren diese Linien weniger klar.

Gleichzeitig in Europa, parallel zum „Krieg gegen den Terror“ und darüber hinaus, verändern frühere und aktuelle Wellen von Flüchtlingen und Einwanderern die Demografie und verwandeln europäische Identitäten. Und in den Vereinigten Staaten haben Spannungen im Zusammenhang mit Rassenungleichheit, Einwanderung und demografischen Veränderungen in ähnlicher Weise zu einem Anstieg der Identitätspolitik und den sogenannten „Kulturkriegen“ beigetragen. Während viele Europäer und Amerikaner die Vorteile der Vielfalt anerkennen, zeigt uns psychologische Forschung zum Multikulturalismus leider, dass Menschen dazu neigen, sich wohler mit denen zu fühlen, mit denen sie Kontakt und Gemeinsamkeiten haben, wie z. B. dieselben Gewohnheiten, Kultur oder ethnische Zugehörigkeit.⁴¹ Dies hat sich in der Zunahme von politischer Rhetorik, Erzählungen, Propaganda, Fehl- und Desinformation gegen die Vielfalt gezeigt sowie durch Angriffe auf ein breites Spektrum von Minderheiten. Diese drohen das Vertrauen und die Stabilität demokratischer Normen, Institutionen, Werte und Praktiken zu untergraben und unterstützen die Rekrutierung extremistischer und gewaltbereiter Organisationen wie dschihadistisch inspiriert- und rechts-extremisten, einschließlich autoritär-populistischer (AP) Gruppen, Organisationen und Parteien.

Während des „Krieges gegen den Terror“ folgte die akademische Forschung der staatlichen Finanzierung und konzentrierte sich weitgehend auf *dschihadistischen gewalttätigen* Extremismus und Terrorismus. Tausende von Büchern, Artikeln und Berichten wurden von Anti-Terror-Forschern und Praktikern geschrieben: eine überwältigende Anzahl von ihnen konzentrierte sich auf die Faktoren die zur Radikalisierung und Deradikalisierung von Einzelpersonen beitragen, und die spezifischen Erzählungen in der dschihadistisch inspirierten Ideologie und den Inhalten Sozialer Medien. Diese wurden sorgfältig analysiert und ihre

⁴¹Fathali M. Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations: Psychological Implications for Democracy in Global Context* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2008).

„slickness“ und innovativen Verbreitungsstrategien bis es lästig wurde festgestellt. Doch außerhalb begrenzter Kreise oder nur in wohlmeinenden, aber oberflächlichen Gesten der Inklusion oder Antidiskriminierung wurde dem parallelen Phänomen, dass wächst und den stetigen Rückgang sowohl der Quantität als auch der Qualität von Demokratien beeinflusst, nämlich, dem Rechtsextremismus bzw. Autoritärer Populismus, und die Wirkung von antidemokratischer Propaganda, Fehl- und Desinformation auf das Massenpublikum in demokratischen Nationen, nur sehr wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt.

Erst nach den 2016 und 2020 U.S. Wahlen begannen sich die Gespräche von Forschern und Praktikern sinnvoll von der Bekämpfung des dschihadistischen Terrorismus wegzubewegen und zur Bekämpfung von Fehl- und Desinformationen staatlicher und nichtstaatlicher Akteure zu wechseln, und einige kritische Lücken in den relevanten Disziplinen wurden offensichtlich: 1) mit dem Schwerpunkt auf *dschihadistischen* Extremisten, konzentrierten sich sehr wenige wissenschaftliche Forschungen und staatliche und nichtstaatliche Bemühungen auf den Rechtsextremismus, trotz Beweise für seinen Aufstieg; 2) mit dem strikten US-Fokus auf die Unterschied zwischen *gewaltbereiten* und *gewaltfreien* Extremisten haben relativ wenige die Auswirkungen von (nicht unbedingt gewalttätigem) Extremismus wie Nationalismus, Populismus oder Identitätspolitik untersucht, die begleitenden Erzählungen die diese Bewegungen hervorbringen, und die Verbindung zwischen gewalttätigen und gewaltfreien Extremisten; 3) indem sie sich auf die Merkmale von Personen konzentrierten, die letztendlich Gewalt begehen, und auf einige wichtige dschihadistische Galionsfiguren, erforschten nur wenige die Rolle der Eliteschichten die diese Gruppen und Bewegungen inspirieren, organisieren und versuchen Massen von Menschen durch nationalistische Propaganda, Fehl- und Desinformation zu beeinflussen; 4) der Fokus auf technologiegestützte Radikalisierung hinterließ eine Lücke im Verständnis des ganzheitlichen Umfelds, das Extremismus hervorbringt und ermöglicht, insbesondere, wie Extremisten legitime demokratische Prozesse und Organisationen nutzen, um antidemokratische Ziele voranzutreiben; 5) durch die Konzentration auf dschihadistische Erzählungen und die Rolle des Islams, abgesehen von der gelegentlichen Warnung „Regierungsführungs-Fragen“ oder „Grundwahrheit“⁴² nicht zu vergessen, wurde sehr wenig über die Rolle und die Auswirkungen säkularer Beschwerden bekannt; und 6) schließlich stellte sich auch heraus, dass Anti-Terror-Wissenschaftler nur sehr wenige Primärdaten sammelten, insbesondere Daten die aus Quellen kamen die nicht Soziale Medien sind, geschweige denn Feldarbeit zu tun.

Da demokratische Nationen erneut mit zunehmendem autoritärem Populismus, Propaganda, Fehl- und Desinformation und Herausforderungen für demokratische Werte und Prozesse konfrontiert sind, müssen wir Fragen stellen und Antworten suchen über die Gruppen, Prozesse und Auswirkungen, die diesen kritischen Problemen Platz machen. Wir sind aufgefordert Lösungen zu suchen die den destabilisierenden Auswirkungen dieser Kräfte entgegenwirken und dabei helfen uns in multikulturelle Gesellschaften zu führen die von Individuen bestehen die andere Ansichten und Lebensstile als ihre eigenen tolerieren und die Vielfalt und andere demokratische Normen respektieren und schätzen. Als Teil dieses Unterfangens hat diese Studie die folgenden drei primäre Forschungsziele: 1) die Rolle und den Einfluss kultureller und wirtschaftlicher Beschwerden narrative bei Extremismus, politischer Radikalisierung und Radikalisierung in Richtung Gewalt zu untersuchen; 2) Untersuchung der Auswirkungen von Anti-Vielfalt Fehl- und Desinformation und Propagandanarrativen, wie z. B. jene gegen

⁴² „governance-issues“ und „ground truth“

Immigranten; und 3) zu untersuchen, ob bürgerschaftliches und gemeinschaftliches Engagement genutzt werden kann, um die Anziehungskraft von politischem Extremismus und Radikalisierung zur Gewalt zu verringern. Neben der Originalforschung stützt sich diese Studie auf unzählige zusätzliche Studien aus der Politikwissenschaft und angrenzender Literatur wie Psychologie und Kommunikation; die Studie enthält Erkenntnisse aus der Forschung zu Nationalismus, Populismus, politisch motivierten kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Beschwerdenarrativen, Extremismus, gewalttätigem Extremismus, Bekämpfung von gewalttätigem Extremismus und der Nützlichkeit von bürgerschaftlichem und gesellschaftlichem Engagement als Instrument zur Deradikalisierung.

Wir wissen, dass rechtsextreme Populisten behaupten, den Willen des Durchschnittsmenschen zu vertreten und anti-elitär zu sein, und dass viele in der Mittel- und Arbeiterklasse von diesen Ideen verzaubert werden können. Während die Schlüsselfiguren und Organisatoren der Bewegung manchmal durchschnittliche Bürger der Mittel- oder Arbeiterklasse sein können, scheinen Forscher die Rolle und den Einfluss der Eliten jenseits der Aushängeschilder, die diese Bewegungen inspirieren und koordinieren nicht angemessen behandelt zu haben. Darüber hinaus fehlt ein Verständnis dafür wie diese Eliten untereinander und mit extremeren Fraktionen dieser Bewegungen verbunden sind und auf welche Weise sie versuchen legitime politische Prozesse zu reflektieren und für ihre Ziele benutzen. Diese Lücke in der Forschung zum autoritären Populismus überschneidet sich mit dem mangelnden Verständnis der Rechtsradikalisierung und ihrer Hebelwirkung von und Auswirkungen auf demokratische Institutionen.

Damit überschneiden sich auch Lücken in der strategischen Kommunikationsforschung im „Counter Violent Extremism“ Feld in der Forscher viel Zeit und Mühe darauf verwendet haben dschihadistischen Propaganda und Desinformation in der Online-Kommunikation zu erforschen und zu verstehen, aber: 1) mit sehr wenig Fokus auf den Boten der Kommunikation; der Schwerpunkt liegt in der Regel auf die Botschaft oder das Publikum, und daher fehlt es an einem klaren Verständnis dafür wie extremistische Eliten Beschwerden für strategische Kommunikation nutzen, um extreme politische Überzeugungen zu verbreiten, und wie dies auf die Gesellschaft auswirkt; 2) die Betonung des Online-Raums hat zu einer Lücke in den Erkenntnissen darüber geführt, wie sich der Offline- und der Online-Raum überschneiden, insbesondere im Fall von Rechtsextremismus und Massenprotestbewegungen; und 3) während die Forschung darauf hinweist, dass Beschwerden die nicht über die Wirtschaft sind eine wichtigere Rolle im dschihadistisch inspirierten gewaltbereiten Extremismus spielen, gibt es wenig Forschung zu den Auswirkungen, die diese Ergebnisse auf multikulturelle Demokratien haben in denen Rechtsextremismus wächst und sie häufig wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Beschwerden benutzen gegen diejenigen, die sie als „die anderen“ wahrnehmen.

Ebenso verwirrend ist der deutliche Mangel an forschungsbasierten Lösungen für Gruppen- und Massenradikalisierung, insbesondere im Zusammenhang mit Rechtsextremismus und Radikalisierung, die noch nicht in Gewalt übergegangen ist. In Bezug auf Gegenerzählungen und Gegenbotschaften konnten sich die Forscher nicht auf die Breite des Publikums einigen oder darauf, ob Gegenbotschaften überhaupt wirksam sind. Schließlich gibt es auch trotz einiger vielversprechender Indikatoren nur sehr wenige empirische Untersuchungen zu Behauptungen, dass bürgerschaftliches und gesellschaftliches Engagement Extremismus entgegenwirken kann, und es ist daher schwierig endgültig zu schlussfolgern, ob diese tatsächlich einen Einfluss auf Extremismus haben und unter welchen Umständen. Die Forschung zu dschihadistisch inspiriertem gewaltbareitem Extremismus scheint einige Hinweise darauf zu liefern, dass die

Bereitstellung von Mechanismen und Möglichkeiten für gefährdete Jugendliche, um Veränderungen herbeizuführen, wie man z.B. Ungerechtigkeit durch bürgerschaftliches Engagement bekämpft. Aber es gibt nur wenig Einsicht wie gewaltbereite Rechtsextreme legitime demokratische Prozesse und Zivilgesellschaft nutzen, um ihre antidemokratischen Ziele voranzutreiben. Während das Allgemeinwissen westlicher Regierungen und Praktiker der Extremismusbekämpfung davon ausgeht, dass die bloße Existenz einer robusten Zivilgesellschaft ein Hinweis auf eine gesunde Demokratie ist, haben Autoritäre Populisten sich gut in zivilgesellschaftlichen Organisationen verankert.

Unter Berücksichtigung dieser Lücken versucht diese Studie, die aufkommenden Forschungsfragen zu beantworten und die Untersuchung zu gestalten. Einfach ausgedrückt versucht dieses Forschungsprojekt zu verstehen, wie Beschwerdennarrative in AP-Propaganda, Fehl- und Desinformation verwendet werden, welche Auswirkungen diese haben und ob bürgerschaftliches und gesellschaftliches Engagement als Instrumente zur Extremismus Prävention eingesetzt werden können. Um die Forschungsanfragen zu operationalisieren, werden die folgenden drei Forschungsfragen gestellt: 1) um die Rolle von Beschwerdennarrativen im politischen Extremismus zu untersuchen: Welche Rolle und Wirkung haben kulturelle und wirtschaftliche Beschwerdennarrative in der politischen Kommunikation und Radikalisierung?; 2) Für die Untersuchung der Auswirkungen von Narrativen gegen Immigranten: Welche Rolle und welchen Einfluss haben Narrative gegen Flüchtlinge/Immigranten auf die politische Radikalisierung und die Radikalisierung in Richtung Gewalt?; und 3) Für die Untersuchung der Wirksamkeit von bürgerschaftlichem und gesellschaftlichem Engagement zur Reduzierung von politischem Extremismus und Radikalisierung hin zu Gewalt: Unter denjenigen, die dem politischen und gewalttätigen Extremismus gefährdet sind, sind bürgerschaftliches und gesellschaftliches Engagement oder bürgerschaftliches Engagement Bildung wirksame Instrumente oder Resilienzfaktoren zur Reduzierung der Pull-Faktoren von politischer Extremismus und Radikalisierung zur Gewalt?

Viele Forscher, die sich auf Extremismus und gewalttätigen Extremismus konzentrieren, haben entweder strenge Definitionen vermieden oder sich ausschließlich auf gewalttätiges (und daher illegales) Verhalten konzentriert. Diese Studie findet in der Grauzone statt, in der sich Extremismus und gewalttätiger Extremismus überschneiden können. Die Sozialwissenschaften diskutieren weiterhin, wo das eine endet und das andere beginnt und was die spezifischen Definitionen sind. Daher ist es wichtig festzuhalten, dass diese Studie und ihre Parameter weder für die Einschränkung der freien Meinungsäußerung einsetzt, noch für die Lockerung von Beschränkungen auf Meinungsäußerungen, die von demokratischen Regierungen als illegal angesehen werden, wie z. B. deutsche Gesetze zu Antisemitismus, Nationalsozialismus, Holocaustleugnung, usw. Jedoch, diese Forschung fest verankert in dem Verständnis, dass Äußerungen und Handlungen, die Einzelpersonen oder Gruppen diskriminieren oder ihrem Wesen nach antipluralistisch sind, antidemokratisch und extrem sind. Es ist auch wichtig anzumerken, dass diese Studie zwar in den Kontext der Untersuchung von autoritärem Populismus, Radikalisierung, politischem Fundamentalismus und Extremismus gestellt wird, aber dass diese Konzepte in den Sozialwissenschaften jedoch nicht klar definiert sind und es nicht der Zweck dieser Studie ist, bestimmte Einzelpersonen, Gruppen oder politische Parteien endgültig zu definieren. Stattdessen versucht diese Studie zu verstehen, wie legitime Beschwerden sich mit Desinformation und Hass Fremdgruppen überschneiden, in der Hoffnung, zu Modellen zur Milderung der Auswirkungen beizutragen, die die demokratische Lebensweise

untergraben. Die Studie ist jedoch auch in dem Verständnis fest kontextualisiert, dass antipluralistische Stimmungen und Äußerungen ihrem Wesen nach antidemokratisch sind.

Methode

Neben dem kritischen Besprechen und Einbeziehung früherer Forschungsergebnisse stützt sich diese Studie stark auf empirische Originaldaten aus Feldstudien, die im Sommer 2019 in Deutschland durchgeführt wurden. Obwohl verschiedene alternative Standorte hätte ausgewählt werden können, wurde Deutschland als Standort für die Studie aufgrund seiner hohen Rate an einwanderungsfeindlichen Stimmungen und Angriffen sowie der Präsenz eines breiten Spektrums extremistischer und gewaltbereiter extremistischer Organisationen und politischer Akteure ausgewählt. Die Daten wurden durch Schneeballproben in Chemnitz, Leipzig, Erfurt, Berlin und Saarbrücken erhoben. Während es deutliche Unterschiede zwischen APs in Deutschland und anderswo gibt, gibt es auch angemessene und gut dokumentierte Überschneidungen zwischen ihnen, ihren Erzählungen und Taktiken und APs in anderen Ländern, was es zu einem gut passenden Ort für Fallstudien macht, um anwendbare Schlussfolgerungen zu AP im weiteren Sinne zu ziehen. Die Daten für diese Studie wurden unter Verwendung eines qualitativen Forschungsdesigns und unter Verwendung von „Grounded Theory“ und induktiver Logik erhoben, d. h. von den speziellen Daten zu den allgemeinen und theoretischen argumentiert.

Hypothesen und Interviewfragen

Um die Interviewgespräche in einem objektiven Format zu führen, wurden achtzehn halbstrukturierte, offene Interviewfragen entwickelt, die auf Arbeitsforschungsfragen und begleitenden Hypothesen basieren und sich auf die vorhandene Literatur zum Thema Untersuchung stützen. Die folgenden Hypothesen wurden entwickelt, um eine wissenschaftliche Herangehensweise an das Thema zu gewährleisten:

Hypothese 1: Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (z. B. Proteste, Abstimmungen in Wahlen, Gemeinschaft Organisieren) steht in negativem Zusammenhang mit der Wahrnehmung von Gewalt als akzeptierbares Mittel zur Lösung gesellschaftlicher Probleme. Anderes gesagt, diejenigen, die sich bürgerlich engagieren, glauben seltener, dass Gewalt zur Lösung gesellschaftlicher/politischer Probleme akzeptabel ist. Entsprechende Interviewfragen konzentrierten sich weitgehend darauf, ob sich die Untersuchungspersonen bürgerlich engagieren und ob sie glauben, dass sie die Entscheidungsfreiheit haben, ihre Beschwerden anzugehen, und ob sie glauben, dass bürgerschaftliches Engagement hilft, gesellschaftliche/politische Probleme anzugehen.

Hypothese 2a: Identitätsunsicherheit vermittelt die Beziehung zwischen der Exposition zu einwanderungsfeindlichen Narrativen und Beschwerden gegen die deutsche Gesellschaft; und Hypothese 2b: Wirtschaftliche Unsicherheit vermittelt die Beziehung zwischen der Exposition zu einwanderungsfeindlichen Narrativen und Beschwerden gegen die deutsche Gesellschaft. Einfach ausgedrückt, Untersuchungspersonen haben Beschwerden gegen die deutsche Gesellschaft, die sich auf Anti-Immigranten-Erzählungen beziehen, und die die Anti-Immigranten-Erzählungen ausgesetzt sind entwickeln „Beschwerde-Erzählungen“ gegen ihre

Gesellschaft, weil sie sich fühlen als ob ihre Identität/Kultur oder Wirtschaftslage bedroht ist. Entsprechende Interviewfragen konzentrierten sich allgemein darauf, ob die Untersuchungspersonen Beschwerden über ihr Leben haben, und wenn ja, welcher Art diese Beschwerden sind, und ob sie diese Probleme mit Einwanderung/Migranten in Verbindung bringen. Weitere Fragen konzentrierten sich darauf, wie sich die Untersuchungspersonen in Bezug auf ihre soziale und kulturelle Identität und ihren wirtschaftlichen Status fühlen und wie sie mit einwanderungsfeindlichen Narrativen konfrontiert werden.

Hypothese 3: Beschwerden über die deutsche Gesellschaft stehen in positivem Zusammenhang mit Gefühlen der Entfremdung von der deutschen Gesellschaft. Anders gesagt, Anti-Immigranten-Erzählungen entfremden die Untersuchungspersonen von der deutschen Gesellschaft/Land/Kultur, indem sie zu Beschwerden gegen deutsche Gesellschaft, Land, oder Kultur führen. Die entsprechenden Interviewfragen konzentrierten sich darauf, wie sich die Untersuchungspersonen in Bezug auf ihre Rolle in der deutschen Gesellschaft fühlen und ob sie sich als Teil einer größeren deutschen oder europäischen Gemeinschaft fühlen.

Hypothese 4: Gefühle der Entfremdung von der deutschen Gesellschaft stehen in positivem Zusammenhang mit der Gefahr für Überzeugung von gewalttätigen extremistischen Narrativen. Oder einfacher ausgedrückt, Personen, die einwanderungsfeindlichen Narrativen ausgesetzt sind und sich von der Gesellschaft entfremdet fühlen, sind hilfloser gegen gewalttätige extremistische Narrative. Die entsprechenden Interviewfragen konzentrierten sich darauf, ob die Untersuchungspersonen auf gewalttätige extremistische Ideologien stoßen, wie sich diese auf sie auswirken, wen sie für die Quelle dieser Narrative halten und ob sie der Quelle vertrauen. Weitere Fragen konzentrierten sich darauf, ob sie glauben, dass Gewalt gerechtfertigt ist, um gesellschaftliche/politische Probleme zu lösen, und was ihrer Meinung nach politischen Wandel beeinflusst. Eine letzte Frage war, was sie über diejenigen denken, die einen anderen nationalen Hintergrund als ihren eigenen haben.

Untersuchungspersonen

Im Sommer 2019 wurden über einen Zeitraum von drei Wochen 17 Interviews mit 19 Personen in deutscher Sprache geführt. Eins der Interviews fand gleichzeitig mit drei Radikalisierungsinterventionsexperten statt. Vierzehn Interviews mit sechzehn Personen wurden in den endgültigen Datensatz aufgenommen:

Sechs der Befragten werden in der Studie als „Eliten autoritäre Populisten“ (EAPs) kategorisiert und bezeichnet. Davon sind drei Befragte gewählte Beamter zweier rechtspopulistischer Parteien: davon ist einer ein „hochrangiger Bundespolitiker,“ einer ist ein „Stadtpolitiker,“ und einer ist ein „junger Stadtpolitiker.“ Beide Parteien – die eine auf nationaler und die andere auf kommunaler Ebene – werden vom Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV) für rechtsextreme Aktivitäten, einschließlich Verbindungen zu gewaltbereitem Extremismus, beobachtet. Die nächsten drei Befragten werden als „EAP-Kommunikatoren, Berater oder Beeinflusser“ kategorisiert: Sie werden weiter als „Kommunikator/Geschäftsmann,“ „Wissenschaftler/Social-Media-Manager“ und „einflussreicher Kommunikator“ bezeichnet. Sie engagieren sich jeweils bürgerlich für die Ziele der beiden oben genannten Parteien und sind von beträchtlicher sozialer und finanzieller Stellung (d.h. einflussreiche Wirtschaftsführer, Gelehrte, einflussreiche Gemeindevorsteher.) Ein weiterer AP-Interviewpartner wird als „AP-Verschwörer“ kategorisiert

und bezeichnet, da seine Ideologie mit der Reichsbürger- und der Selbstverwalterbewegung übereinstimmt und antisemitische Elemente enthält.

Zwei der Befragten werden sowohl als „linksextreme“ als auch als „Anti-diskriminierung Experten“ bezeichnet. Beide Personen haben aktuelle oder frühere Verbindungen zur extrem linken Bewegung. Einer von ihnen ist aktives Mitglied einer linksextremen Bewegung und wird gegebenenfalls als solches bezeichnet. Einer von ihnen ist auch eine Person mit Migrationshintergrund. Der Extremist wurde zu seinen extremistischen Aktivitäten und gegebenenfalls als Experte befragt.

Kumuliert werden neun Befragte als Anti-diskriminierungs-, Gegenradikalisierungs- und/oder Einwanderungsexperten eingestuft (und wie gesagt, zwei sind gleichzeitig extremem linken). Zwei sind Personen mit Migrationshintergrund. Die Personen ohne Migrationshintergrund wurden als Fachexperten befragt, während Personen mit Migrationshintergrund sowohl als Fachexperten als auch als möglicherweise gefährdete Zuhörer für extremistische Propaganda befragt wurden. Beiden haben nicht extremistische Ansichten vertreten.

Analyse, Kapitelorganisation, und die wichtigsten Erkenntnisse

Im Anschluss an die Feldarbeit wurden die geführten Interviews zunächst mit der AI-Transkriptionssoftware von Amazon transkribiert, die etwa 70-80% genau ist. Die verbleibenden Korrekturen wurden vorgenommen, indem die Interviews angehört und die Transkripte manuell bearbeitet wurden. Anschließend wurden die Transkripte in die qualitative Datenanalyse-Software Nvivo hochgeladen und die Datencodierung und -analyse mittels manueller kategorialer Analyse durchgeführt. Die verbleibenden Kapitel dieses Buches beschreiben die relevantesten Daten und Erkenntnisse im Detail und stützen sich auf bestehende akademische Forschung, um Erkenntnisse und Hauptmitnahmen zu analysieren und zu diskutieren. Kapitel II versucht, die erste Forschungsfrage zur Rolle kultureller und wirtschaftlicher Beschwerdenarrative in politischer Kommunikation und Radikalisierung zu beantworten. Es fasst die wichtigsten Ergebnisse und Verbindungen zu früheren Forschungen zur Rolle kultureller und wirtschaftlicher Beschwerdenarrative in der politischen Kommunikation und Radikalisierung zusammen. Dazu erforscht und analysiert es das Selbstverständnis der autoritären Populisten und Extremisten unter den Untersuchungspersonen, ihre Rolle in der Gesellschaft, ihr kulturelles Umfeld, ihre Beschwerden, Ziele, und ihre Mittel zur Zielerreichung. Das Kapitel untersucht ihre Beschwerdegeschichten, einschließlich in Bezug auf Kultur, Wirtschaft, Einwanderung und ihre Wahrnehmung, Opfer von Verbrechen und Ungerechtigkeit, Zensur, Verschwörungen und der Geschichte zu sein. Von besonderem Interesse in diesem Abschnitt ist die vergleichende Analyse ihrer wirtschaftlichen versus kulturellen Beschwerden. Darüber hinaus untersucht das Kapitel die Ansichten autoritärer Populisten und Extremisten zur Wirksamkeit des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements, ihre Strukturen und Beziehungen des bürgerschaftlichen und gesellschaftlichen Engagements, einschließlich internationaler Verbindungen, Demonstrationen und nicht-politischer Räume. Der letzte Abschnitt des Kapitels ist eine ausführliche Beschreibung ihrer Kommunikationsmittel, einschließlich Medien, sozialer Medien, persönlicher und gedruckter Inhalte.

Das Kapitel argumentiert und verwendet Beweise, dass Elite autoritäre Populisten (EAPs) fälschlicherweise behaupten, den Willen und die Interessen der Bürger der Mittel- und

Arbeiterklasse zu vertreten, und die legitimen wirtschaftlichen Anliegen dieser Klassen durch Identitätspolitik (kulturelle Beschwerden) als Waffen nutzen, um Wähler, Extremisten und gewaltbereite Extremisten wirksam einsetzen, um Unterstützung für ihre eigenen Machtbestrebungen und politischen Agenden zu mobilisieren. Die Beschreibung des Ökosystems der Techniken und Strukturen zeigt, wie diese Akteure ein mitfühlendes Publikum, einschließlich Extremisten und gewaltbereiter Extremisten, einbeziehen, beeinflussen und mobilisieren. Die Beweise umfassen EAPs Muster, die behaupten, für nicht-Eliten zu sprechen, die Verwendung von Angst und Empörung auslösenden Narrativen, die sich auf „wir-gegen-sie“ Themen konzentrieren, und Narrativen der Opferrolle als Brückenthema für Gruppen mit denen es keine Überschneidung wirtschaftlicher Interessen gibt, und Beschreibungen des Ökosystems zu dem persönliche und Online-Kommunikation und Netzwerke für zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement, Extremisten und gewaltbereite Extremisten gehören.

Kapitel III versucht, die zweite Forschungsfrage zu beantworten, nämlich über den Einfluss von Rhetorik und Erzählungen gegen Flüchtlinge/Immigranten bei politischer Radikalisierung und Radikalisierung in Richtung Gewalt. Es untersucht die Wirkung autoritärer Populisten auf die Mainstream-Gesellschaft, einschließlich Beweise für die Förderung antidemokratischer Stimmungen und Misstrauen gegenüber Institutionen, Angst und Hass, Radikalisierung und Toleranz gegenüber Gewalt sowie die Auswirkungen ihrer Behauptungen, für die Mehrheit in politischen und gesellschaftlichen Räumen zu sprechen. Dies beinhaltet eine Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Ergebnisse und Verbindungen zu früheren Forschungsarbeiten über die Auswirkungen von Anti-Flüchtlings-/Immigranten- und anderen „Wir-gegen-sie“-Erzählungen auf politische Radikalisierung und Mobilisierung zur Gewalt. Es wird argumentiert, dass EAPs Verwendung von „Wir-gegen-sie“-Erzählungen Extremismus und Gewalt ermöglichen und die Demokratie schwächen können, indem sie das Vertrauen in demokratische Institutionen wie Regierungen oder Medien untergraben. Dieses Argument wird durch Beweise dafür gestützt, dass sie antidemokratische Akteure sind, die antidemokratische Stimmung und Spaltung durchsetzen, unter anderem indem sie Massenprotestbewegungen nutzen, Beziehungen zu gewaltbereiten Extremisten unterhalten und ein tolerantes Umfeld für gewalttätigen Extremismus und Terrorismus schaffen.

Kapitel IV versucht, die dritte Forschungsfrage zu beantworten, ob bürgerschaftliches und gesellschaftliches Engagement und Bildung zu bürgerschaftlichem Engagement wirksame Instrumente oder Resilienzfaktoren sind, um die Push-and-Pull-Faktoren des politischen Extremismus und die Radikalisierung zur Gewalt für diejenigen zu reduzieren, die für politischen und gewaltbereiten Extremismus gefährdet sind. Das Kapitel untersucht die Ergebnisse dieser Studie und ihre Verbindungen zu früheren Forschungsarbeiten zur Nutzung von bürgerschaftlichem und gesellschaftlichem Engagement zur Bekämpfung von politischem Extremismus und Radikalisierung zur Gewalt und argumentiert, dass bürgerschaftliches Engagement kein wirksames Instrument zu sein scheint, um den Ansichten von AP und Extremisten entgegenzuwirken innerhalb dieser Gruppen, aber dass es nützlich ist, um gefährdete Personen zu gegen diese Auswirkungen zu „impfen“ und sie entgegenzuwirken. Das Kapitel umreißt auch Ergebnisse und frühere Forschungen im Zusammenhang mit effektiven Bemühungen zur Bekämpfung von Extremismus, einschließlich in Bezug auf die Kontakttheorie, kompetitive Opferrolle und Jugendengagement, die Wirksamkeit solcher Bemühungen, Lücken und zukünftige Möglichkeiten, Gegenbotschaften und die Grenzen des Autoritären populistische Ideen. Dieser Abschnitt beschreibt dementsprechend die wichtigsten Lücken und Möglichkeiten in diesem Bereich und gibt Empfehlungen für ein breites Spektrum von Praktikern, um eine

„gesamtgesellschaftliche“ Anstrengung zur Bekämpfung von AP zu ermöglichen, einschließlich für Regierungen, politische Akteure, Strafverfolgungsbehörden, Medien und Privatpersonen Sektor und Zivilgesellschaft. Es bietet mögliche Erzählungen für Gegenbotschaften und Beweise für die Grenzen der Werte und der Reichweite von AP. Dieses Kapitel enthält auch eine Analyse der Grenzen dieser Studie, ihrer Implikationen für Theorie und zukünftige Forschung sowie möglicher zukünftiger Forschungsmöglichkeiten.

Kapitel V schließt das Buch ab, indem es die wichtigsten Erkenntnisse zu Forschungsfragen und Hypothesen sowie die wichtigsten Erkenntnisse für Praktiker und Forscher zusammenfasst. Das Kapitel und das Buch schließen mit einem Hinweis darauf, warum es Gründe für Optimismus geben kann. Schließlich finden die Leser im Anhang die tatsächlich verwendeten Feldarbeitsinterviewfragen, und eine Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Ergebnisse, wie sie jeder Forschungsfrage und Hypothese entsprechen.

Abschluss

Ziel dieser Studie war es zu untersuchen, wie sich Beschwerden auf die politische Radikalisierung im Kontext zunehmender antipluralistischer und antidemokratischer Stimmungen und Ideologien wie autoritärem Populismus, und die damit verbundener Fehlinformation, Desinformation und Propaganda, auswirken und wie bürgerschaftliches Engagement zur Milderung des Problems beitragen kann. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass demokratische Regierungen und prodemokratische Akteure viel wachsamer gegenüber der Rolle intoleranter Akteure sein sollten, die legitime Prozesse und Freiheiten nutzen, um das Vertrauen in demokratische Institutionen, Werte und Prozesse zu untergraben, um für sich selbst Macht zu erlangen. Ihre Instrumentalisierung von Angst und einigen der dunkelsten Tendenzen der Menschheit, wie Spaltung und Hass, droht, hart erarbeitete demokratische Freiheiten zu untergraben, wie Toleranz für Vielfalt, auch in Lebensstilen und Überzeugungen, und die relative Stabilität, die Demokratien seit vielen Jahrzehnten genießen. Die zentrale Bedeutung ihrer Anti-Minderheiten-, Anti-Frauen- und Anti-LGBTQ+-Erzählungen heißt, dass diese Gruppen an erster Stelle stehen, wenn es darum geht, negative Auswirkungen zu erfahren, und dass konservative, weiße, heterosexuelle Männer die glaubwürdigsten Stimmen sein könnten, um autoritären populistischen Narrativen entgegenzuwirken für diejenigen, die dafür gefährdet sind.

Darüber hinaus deuten die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass die allgemeine Resignation, dass autoritäre Populisten auf die „Benachteiligten,“ die „Wütenden,“ und die „Zurückgelassenen“ abzielen, nur eine Seite der Medaille ist und die Möglichkeit vernachlässigt, Eliten verantwortlich zu machen, die Angst und Wut schüren, und eine begleitende antidemokratische Ideologie fördern, um sich selbst zu stärken. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass Wähler legitime wirtschaftliche Beschwerden und natürliche Ängste vor dem Unbekannten haben, die von autoritären populistischen Eliten entführt werden, indem sie sich verändernde kulturelle Normen kulturellen Normen, und dass was sich sichtbar von ihrer Version der Norm unterscheidet, die Schuld geben, obwohl diese Sachen Wähler nicht greifbar beeinflussen. In ihren Narrativen geben sie weder den Mächten von denen sie profitiert haben – Globalisierung und Kapitalismus – die Schuld, noch nutzen sie nuancierte fiskalpolitische Debatten, um die Sozialpolitik zu verbessern; diese abstrakten und komplexen Themen rufen nicht die Empörung hervor, die notwendig ist, um Unterstützung für AP Kandidaten zu mobilisieren, die zu kurz kämen, wenn Wahlen von robuster Erfahrung in demokratischer Konsensbildung und

Regierungsführung abhängen. Demokratien und prodemokratische Akteure müssen anerkennen, dass Globalisierung und Kapitalismus nicht alle auf die gleiche Weise vorangebracht haben, und wachsende Lücken in Bezug auf Wohlstand, Gesundheit und Lebenserwartung müssen anerkannt und angegangen werden. Die Lücken zwischen dem, was demokratische Regierungen versprechen und halten, müssen verringert werden.

Die Ergebnisse weisen auch darauf hin, dass es sich bei autoritärem Populismus nicht um Akteure handelt, die nicht wissen, wie Demokratie oder bürgerschaftliches Engagement funktionieren, sondern dass diese Akteure die Offenheit demokratischer Systeme proaktiv für antidemokratische Ziele nutzen. Dennoch müssen die Bürgerrechte dieser Akteure geschützt werden; anstatt die Rede oder politische Partizipation autoritärer Populisten einzuschränken, müssen pro-demokratische Akteure eine multisektorale, „gesamtgesellschaftliche“, pro-demokratische Antwort auf den Rückgang der Demokratie stärken und unterstützen und Gesetze zum Schutz der Rechte von Menschen umsetzen und durchsetzen, die von autoritären populistischen Hassreden und Gewalt betroffen sind.

I. Introduction and Background

Following the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and until recently, democracies and their allies heavily focused on combating jihadist-inspired violent extremism. The threat largely stemmed from and manifested itself outside of democratic nations, where most efforts to counter it also took place, including military, law-enforcement, and so-called “soft” approaches, such as Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) programs, to win the hearts and minds of those deemed “vulnerable” to jihadist-inspired violent extremism. Academic researchers filled associated knowledge gaps and largely focused on this form of violent extremists and terrorists, their ideology, and what became to be known in counterterrorism policy and practice as “vulnerable audiences.” Abroad, ultimately, the United States and its allies fought their way out of the problem militarily. This book is not about these jihadist-inspired violent extremists and the law-enforcement or military solutions which drove the so-called “War on Terror.”

Today, the extremist threat to democracy has evolved to a multi-faceted problem which includes foreign, domestic, state, and non-state actors. Authoritarian populism (AP) and the propaganda, mis-, and disinformation which give rise to it is a core component of the threat; it spans across all of the aforementioned actors to shake trust in democratic values, institutions, and practices. Populism, nationalism, identity politics, and the extensive body of counter jihadist-inspired violent extremism research and practice-based lessons learned offer valuable strategies for understanding and combating this new threat. However, a fundamental gap exists in countering domestic authoritarian populists’ anti-democratic sentiments and efforts, which thrive not only on legitimate grievances, but also propaganda, mis-, and disinformation, while simultaneously protecting democratic freedoms and institutions. It becomes even more complicated when the line between violent and non-violent actors is not clearly defined, the source of the grievances is unclear, and the threat is portrayed as a nebulous “culture-war.” In the US combating jihadist-inspired extremism domestically, and not without many missteps, central to the practice became the notion that opinions and thoughts are protected by free speech and other democratic laws and values, and that it is acts of violence that needed to be prevented rather than a specific ideology. In some other democracies these lines were less clear.

Simultaneously in Europe, in parallel to the “War on Terror” and beyond, previous and current waves of refugees and immigrants are shifting demographics and evolving European identities. While in the United States tensions surrounding racial inequality, immigration, and demographic shifts have similarly contributed to a rise in identity politics and the so-called “culture-wars.” While many Europeans and Americans recognize the benefits of diversity, unfortunately, psychology research on multiculturalism tells us that people tend to be more comfortable with those with whom they have contact and things in common, such as sharing the same habits, culture or ethnicity.⁴³ This has been evident in the rise of anti-diversity political rhetoric, narratives, propaganda, mis-, and disinformation as well as attacks on a broad range of minorities. These threaten to erode trust and the stability of democratic norms, institutions, values, and practices and aid the recruitment of extremist and violent extremist organizations, such as jihadist-inspired and right-wing extremist (RWE), including authoritarian populist (AP) groups, organizations, and political parties.

⁴³ Fathali M. Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations: Psychological Implications for Democracy in Global Context* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2008).

During the height of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), their recruiters used narratives of the “West’s humiliation of Muslims” and discrimination against Muslims to appeal to those who are disenfranchised and who faced some kind of trauma⁴⁴ to manipulate youth into joining them by giving them a false and destructive outlet for their frustration.⁴⁵ Similarly, authoritarian populists use narratives of a society that welcomes and favors refugees, immigrants, or other minorities over the White population. As a result, RWE and AP propaganda centered around “taking back” or “defending” one’s culture and traditions against outside influences becomes a classic “us versus them” struggle over the future of our societies and the democratic way of life.⁴⁶ Failure to address this propaganda, mis-, and disinformation, and accompanying recruitment efforts can lead to instability or conflict, and economic and cultural grievances are prime narrative topics for these groups’ rallying cries.⁴⁷

During the “War on Terror,” on the practitioner side, both overlapping with and outside of military and law-enforcement-focused solutions, CVE became the catch-all for a broad range of communications-based activities and research. These activities included both strategic messaging and counter-messaging to combat jihadists’ disinformation and propaganda, community-based capacity and resilience building programs, as well as various forms of interventions, including one-on-one interventions into the radicalization process. The target audiences and participants for these activities, depending on the location, time, and project, became a broad range of largely Muslim groups or individuals, ranging from individuals who were disseminating extremist content, considering joining a terrorist organization, or even entire communities deemed to be vulnerable or influential in the fight against violent extremist narratives and actions. These activities ranged from messaging and financial campaigns to win the hearts and minds of people in Afghanistan, to soccer games for young Iraqi men, and U.S. government-led roundtables with the Muslim community in the U.S. state of Michigan.

On the research side, academic research followed governmental funding and largely focused on *jihadist violent* extremism and terrorism. Thousands of books, articles, and reports were written by counter-terrorism researchers and practitioners: an overwhelming amount of them focused on the factors which contribute to radicalization and deradicalization of individuals and the specific narratives in jihadist-inspired ideology and social media content which were agonizingly analyzed, and their “slickness” and innovative dissemination strategies noted ad nauseum. Yet, outside of limited circles, or only in well-meaning, but superficial, gestures of inclusion or anti-discrimination, very little attention was paid to the parallel phenomenon growing and influencing the steady decline of both the quantity and quality of democracies: namely, far-right extremism or authoritarian populism and the effect of anti-democratic propaganda, mis-, and disinformation on mass audiences in democratic nations.

⁴⁴ Jessica Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence: What Have We Learned and What Can We Do About It?," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668, no. 1 (2016).

⁴⁵ Alexander Ritzmann, "The Role of Propaganda in Violent Extremism and How to Counter It" (Barcelona, Spain, European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2017), <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-role-of-propaganda-in-violent-extremism-and-how-to-counter-it/>.

⁴⁶ Timothy G. Baysinger, "Right-Wing Group Characteristics and Ideology," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (2006).

⁴⁷ Moghaddam, 2008.

It was only after the 2016 and 2020 U.S. elections that researchers' and practitioners' conversations began to meaningfully shift away from counter-jihadist terrorism to countering state and non-state-actors' mis- and disinformation, and some critical gaps in relevant disciplines became evident: 1) with the focus on *jihadist* extremists, very little scholarly research, governmental, and non-governmental efforts focused on far-right extremism, despite evidence of its rise; 2) with the strict U.S. focus on differentiating between *violent* and *non-violent* extremists, relatively few researched the impact of (not necessarily violent) extremism, such as nationalism, populism, or identity politics, the accompanying narratives which give rise to these movements, and the nexus between violent and non-violent extremists; 3) by focusing on the characteristics of individuals who ultimately commit violence, and on a few key jihadist figureheads, few researched the role of the elite strata who inspire and organize these groups and movements, and attempt to influence masses of people through nationalist propaganda, mis-, and disinformation; 4) the focus on technology-enabled radicalization left a gap in understanding of the holistic environment which produces and enables extremism, especially, how extremists are using legitimate democratic processes to advance anti-democratic goals; 5) by focusing on jihadist narratives and the role of Islam, outside of the occasional warning not to forget "governance issues" or "ground truth," very little became known about the role and impact of secular grievances; and 6) finally, it also eventually became evident that counter-terrorism scholars collected very little primary data, especially non-social media data, let alone ventured out into the field.

As democratic nations once again face rising authoritarian populism, propaganda, mis-, and disinformation, and challenges to democratic values and processes, we are required to ask questions and seek out answers about the groups, processes, and impacts giving way to these critical problems. We are required to seek solutions to counter these forces' destabilizing effects and to help lead us into multi-cultural societies of individuals who tolerate views and lifestyles different from their own and who respect and value diversity and other democratic norms. As such, it is also important to note that while this study is contextualized within the study of authoritarian populism, radicalization, political fundamentalism, and extremism, these concepts are not clearly defined in social science, and it is not the purpose of this study to definitively define specific groups or political parties. Instead, this study seeks to understand how legitimate grievances intersect with disinformation and out-group hatred in hopes of contributing to models for mitigating effects which undermine the democratic way of life. The study is, however, also firmly contextualized in the understanding that anti-pluralist sentiment and expressions are anti-democratic in their essence.

What We Know and Don't Know

In considering the world of right-wing identity politics and populism in their broadest sense, Hirschman's research on anti-democratic reactionism helps to situate the question of who these individuals and movements are by showing that conservative elite actors and communicators have historically played significant roles in the creation and propagation of anti-progressive ideas and narratives. In 1988 his research explained the reemergence of the anti-democratic values and tendencies also observable today: all major waves of democratic reform for civil and social progress have each time been met by "counterthrust" reactions in a pattern of progressive action and conservative reaction. After each major progressive democratic thrust there are dire and explicit warnings (i.e., narratives) by the elite of the dangers of such democratization and conservative elites seek to roll back progress. These three reactive-reactionary narratives seek to undermine progressive social changes by arguing that progressive reforms exacerbate the very social problems they seek to solve (the perversity thesis), that it is impossible to make changes (the futility thesis), and that reforms may jeopardize older reforms (the jeopardy thesis). For example, in the perverse effect thesis, reactionaries try to make the case that particular (progressive) actions will produce unintended consequences, in direct opposition to the desired goal. Hirschman traces this narrative from the French revolution all the way to narratives of the "inefficient" welfare state," and notes that this effect "does not exist in nature to the degree that it is claimed." However, over the course of the past centuries these arguments have been continuously used by those who hope to roll back progressive policies and ideological movements.⁴⁸

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser explain that while there is little academic consensus on what exactly constitutes populism, with some explaining it in economic terms and others as "amateurish and unprofessional political behavior that aims to maximize media attention and popular support," they argue—albeit not uncontested—that the phenomena is neither left- nor right-wing, and that there are two key attributes: an appeal to "the pure people" and a denunciation of "the corrupt elite." Populist leaders project themselves to be a voice of the people, action-oriented, and political outsiders, yet they are usually very much part of the elite.⁴⁹ The populist leader, who is typically a male, develops or uses one or more of the three following mobilization structures: 1) he builds a simplistic "political organization" to mobilize and organize, so that the actor can maintain an image of himself as a "clean actor" with few barriers between himself and the people; 2) he leverages social movements, such as protest movements, composed of informal networks who have identified a clear opponent, and who may not have centralized leadership and do not have direct access to formal political processes; or 3) he can take over political parties, which are made up of "individuals working in political parties" and who discover issues, propose a plan, and coordinate activists, members, and elite leaders who can serve as vehicles for populist leaders, despite being part of the establishment. Typically, populist mobilization is at least initially independent of existing political structures but cannot survive long-term without connection to organized groups and broader networks. While the two

⁴⁸ Albert Hirschman, "Two Hundred Years of Reactionary Rhetoric: The Case of the Perverse Effect," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A., The University of Michigan, 1988), https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/h/hirschman89.pdf.

⁴⁹ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, 6, 73.

researchers declare populism “neither good nor bad” for democracy⁵⁰, Jan-Werner Mueller asserts that populism is always anti-democratic, because it is anti-pluralist, regards political opponents as enemies undeserving of democratic freedoms, and falsely claims to speak for a supposed ‘silent majority’.⁵¹

But politics are not only a dynamic that plays out between individual politicians and the people: civil society organizations can play a significant role in the implementation of political agendas. Nor are civil society organizations inherently pro-democratically disposed: for example, Berman’s research showed that if Germany’s civil society had been weaker in lead up to World War Two, Nazis may never have been able to engage so many citizens for their genocidal goals.⁵² Similarly today, as a result of what Kriesi et al. are calling "a new 'demarcation-integration' cleavage" in society and politics, elements of German and other Western civil society have been once again become weaponized for anti-democratic aims.⁵³

Globalization’s impact on economic, political, and cultural spaces has transformed socio-economic political conflict into a cultural-identarian "cleavage" which cross economic classes. While these issues still encompass economic matters, matters related to belonging and authority have become much more important, and authoritarian populists are driving the transformation. They leverage structural political elements, such as by leveraging parties and elections by pushing controversial, but of little concrete impact on average individuals, to drive voters into polarized camps. This new “cleavage” is also transforming civil society, regardless of whether the organization is engaged in politics or traditionally apolitical activities such as sports, socializing, professional networking, etc.⁵⁴ Simultaneously far-right extremist parties are pressuring non-political civil society organizations not aligned with their values to be "neutral" in political matters.⁵⁵

While Western governments and counter violent extremism work from the assumption that the mere existence of a robust civil society is an indication of healthy democracy or the pathway to one, Kriesi et al.’s research shows that authoritarian populists are well embedded in civil society organizations across not only Germany, but throughout Western nations. Their research argues that the disposition or orientation of civic engagement efforts and the conflict within civil society are critical because antagonistic civic society organizations reinforce political conflict and

⁵⁰ Ibid, 43-56, 79.

⁵¹ Mueller, 2016.

⁵² Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic”, *World Politics* Vol. 49, No. 3 (1997): 401-429, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25054008>.

⁵³ Hanspeter Kriesi, Edgar Grande, Romain Lachat, Martin Dolezal, Simon Bornschier and Timotheos Frey, *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), doi:10.1017/CBO9780511790720.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 3-5.

⁵⁵ Wolfgang Schroeder, Samuel Greef, Jennifer Ten Elsen & Lukas Heller, “Interventions by the Populist Radical Right in German Civil Society and the Search for Counterstrategies”, *German Politics* (2022), DOI: 10.1080/09644008.2022.2062326.

weaken democracy.⁵⁶ This reality is rarely, if ever, discussed in the context of research on combatting the impact of extremism or disinformation.

It is on this foundation that throughout this study, in addition to original research, countless additional scholarship from political science and adjacent literature, such as psychology and communications, is drawn upon to extract the answers we seek and meet the above outlined research goals. This study incorporates insights across research on nationalism, populism, politically driven cultural and economic grievance narratives, extremism, violent extremism, counter violent extremism, and the utility of civic and community engagement as a deradicalization tool. However, the research covered does not purport to be comprehensive; as with all research, the body of knowledge is wide and in constant flux, and by the time of publication, there may be new relevant publications, models, and definitions. Nonetheless, it is helpful to briefly outline some of the critical gaps in existing literature to help frame the lens of inquiry and guiding research questions.

Based on the aforementioned and other identity politics and populism research, we know that far-right populists claim to represent the will of the average person and to be anti-elitist, and that many in the middle- and working-class can be enchanted by these ideas. However, while at times movement figures and organizers can be average middle- or working-class citizens, researchers do not appear to have adequately addressed the role and impact of the elites beyond the figurehead leaders who are inspiring and coordinating these movements. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding how these elites are connected to each other and more extreme factions of these movements and in which ways they seek to mirror legitimate political processes. This gap in research on authoritarian populism overlaps with the lack of understanding of right-wing radicalization and their leveraging of and impact on democratic institutions, including civil society organizations. As already briefly touched upon above, this is a result of relevant research up until now having largely focused on: strict differentiation between ‘extremism’ and ‘violent extremism’; the individual violent extremist foot soldier (vs. elite leaders) as the subject of inquiry; and jihadist-inspired violent extremism. The consequence is a lack of understanding of the effects of far-right extremism on democracy and society, as well as leadership/elite-level variables which influence extremist political beliefs and how these are translated into political action, including violent extremism.

There is an especially big gap in understanding of how extremists are using legitimate democratic processes and institutions to advance their anti-democratic goals. The majority of group and mass radicalization studies are focused on small groups of jihadist-inspired violent extremists, and beyond analysis of propaganda content, there is little research on elite communicators and the structures and processes they use to influence and direct vulnerable audiences and individuals’ attitudes or behavior, and the impact this has on modern-day mass radicalization (the effect it has on moderate citizens), anti-democratic norms, violence, and tolerance for violence. While some limited research, such as that conducted by Daniel Koehler, has uncovered the relationship between far-right parties, mass movements, and right-wing terrorism and violence, there remains a need to study authoritarian populism, terrorism, and

⁵⁶ Kriesi et al., 2008.

violent extremism in the context of larger protest movements.⁵⁷ This line of inquiry is complicated by echoing and often competing advice by researchers, such as Bartlett and Birdwell⁵⁸ and Busher and Macklin⁵⁹, that in the study of radicalization differentiations between extreme forms of *action* versus extreme *narratives* must be made, while a better understanding is needed of how the phenomena intersects with other social and political processes and in-group and out-group formation.

Overlapping with this are also gaps in CVE strategic communications research, in which researchers spent much time and effort exploring and understanding the nature of jihadist propaganda and disinformation in online communications, but: 1) there is little focus on the messenger; the focus tends to be on the message or the audience and therefore there is a lack of clear understanding of how extremist elites use grievance-based strategic communications to spread extreme political beliefs, and their effect on society at large; 2) the emphasis on the online space has led to a gap on insights on the how the offline and online spaces overlap, especially in the case of right-wing extremism and mass protest movements; and 3) while research points to non-economic grievances playing a more important role in jihadist inspired violent extremism, there is little research on the implications these findings have for multi-cultural democracies where right-wing extremists are gaining momentum, frequently leveraging both economic and cultural grievances against those they perceive as the other.

Equally confounding is the distinct lack of research-driven solutions for group and mass radicalization, especially related to right-wing extremism and radicalization that has not yet crossed over into violence. In terms of counter-narratives and counter-messaging, researchers have not been able to agree on the breadth of the audience or whether counter-messaging is effective at all. Finally, despite some promising indicators, there is very little empirical research on claims that civic and community engagement can counter extremism and it is therefore difficult to conclude definitively whether civic and community engagement indeed has an impact on extremism and under which circumstances. Research on jihadist-inspired violent extremism seems to offer some indication that giving vulnerable youth tools and avenues to affect change, such as fighting injustice through civic engagement, may stem radicalization, but there are no insights into the implications for right-wing extremists and violent extremists who can use legitimate democratic processes, and civil society organizations, to advance their anti-democratic goals.

It is with these gaps in mind that this study seeks to answer the emerging research questions and frames the inquiry. In simple terms, this research project seeks to understand how grievance narratives are used in AP propaganda, mis-, and disinformation, what their impact is, and whether civic and community engagement can be used as tools to prevent extremism. To operationalize the research inquiry, the following three research questions are posed: 1) to investigate the role of grievance narratives in political extremism: What is the role and impact of

⁵⁷ Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe Current Developments and Issues for the Future," *PRISM*, 6 (2) (2016), https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_6-2/Koehler.pdf?ver=2016-07-05-104619-213.

⁵⁸ Jamie Bartlett and Jonathan Birdwell, "*Cumulative Radicalisation Between The Far-Right And Islamist Groups In The Uk: A Review Of Evidence*," (London, U.K., Demos, 2013).

⁵⁹ Joel Busher and Graham Macklin, Interpreting "Cumulative Extremism": Six Proposals for Enhancing Conceptual Clarity," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27(5), (2014): 884-905.

cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and radicalization?; 2) to investigate the impact of anti-immigrant narratives: What is the role and impact of anti-refugee/immigrant narratives on political radicalization and radicalization toward violence?; and 3) to investigate the effectiveness of civic and community engagement to reduce political extremism and radicalization toward violence: Among those vulnerable to political and violent extremism, are civic and community engagement and civic engagement education effective tools or resilience factors for reducing the pull factors of political extremism and radicalization toward violence?

Delimitations of Scope and Key Assumptions

This research seeks to contribute to the broader conversation about issues of intolerance, fundamentalism, and its effects on democracy and democratic values. This study's core assumption is that on a left-to-right political spectrum, right-wing fundamentalism and extremism are close to authoritarian populism, however, the study does not purport to answer where lines of separation lie, nor whether this study's AP subjects are definitively authoritarian populists, extremists, or otherwise. However, the study does differentiate between moderate right-wing or conservative groups and individuals and those groups. Even if individuals cannot always be neatly categorized, an important distinction is whether individuals or groups discriminate against groups or individuals different from their own, and in ideology and practice respect democratic rights and processes. It is not this study's aim to definitively define individuals or groups who participated in this study or otherwise, but rather to glean patterns and insights to help understand motivations and effects of certain beliefs and grievances.

Similarly, this research is not focused on "hard" (i.e., military or law enforcement) approaches to countering extremism, but rather on "soft" or preventative approaches, what some call Countering Violent Extremism or Preventing Violent Extremism. However, this study is not intended to offer generalized understanding on what creates extremism or violence, but rather to explore the effects of a limited set of narratives and processes. While thus far the focus of CVE and counterterrorism research has been on preventing acts of terror, this study seeks to explore whether and how this body of research can aid in understanding how extremism, including non-violent extremism, can affect democratic institutions and values.

Many researchers focused on extremism and violent extremism have either avoided strict definitions or have strictly focused on violent (and therefore illegal) behavior. This study takes place in the gray zone where extremism and violent extremism can overlap. Social science continues to debate where one ends and the other begins and what the specific definitions are. Therefore, it is important to state that this study and its parameters neither advocate for limiting free speech nor for loosening restrictions on other speech which democratic governments have deemed illegal, such as Germany's laws on anti-Semitism, Nazism, the Holocaust, etc. However, this research is firmly embedded in the understanding that speech and actions which discriminate against individuals or groups, or are anti-pluralist in their nature, are anti-democratic and extreme.

Why You Should Read This Book

Previous US-led and global counter violent extremism efforts have largely focused on jihadist-inspired terrorism; colossal amounts of financial, military, and human resources have been poured into it, and entire institutions and common lexicons have been built around this threat. These resources are struggling to adapt to the impact of anti-democratic mis- and disinformation, which can take place within the non-violent extremism space. For American free speech values and laws this is a deeply complex and sensitive area, which has affected the scope and breadth of efforts to counter it. A key aim of this research is to help build a bridge from the body of knowledge surrounding counter violent extremism and counter-terrorism communications research to the newly blossoming counter-disinformation field, in hopes of identifying overlaps and offering insights and opportunities where there are important differences and gaps. Governmental counter-terrorism strategic communications and public diplomacy experts who are now finding themselves shifting to combating state and non-state actors' using mis- and disinformation and propaganda may find these insights to be actionable.

An additional important goal is to help expand and reinforce US-European mutual understanding on efforts to counter the effects and impacts of mis- and disinformation on democratic values, institutions, and practices. This research pulls broadly on academic literature from both continents and the decision to conduct fieldwork in Germany was made in large part in hopes to investigate differences and similarities in both the problem and solutions under discussion. Additionally, given the overlap between Germany's experiences combating fascism, the emerging American anti-democratic movement, and nexuses between actors, it is imperative that governmental and civil society stakeholders build a joint awareness and understanding of the issues and joint efforts to combat them.

Finally, issues of mis-, disinformation, and extremism ultimately affect everyone, from the local to the global, from the impact it has on your health and election results, to whether climate change action and legislation will succeed in time to prevent the most catastrophic predictions. The renewed attacks on democracy, democratic values, and institutions—our democratic ways of life—require and deserve that we promote and embrace evidence and research-driven counter-disinformation and counter-extremism solutions. This book makes an attempt at consolidating current research, investigating some of the critical priorities and gaps, and making recommendations for how to counter the phenomena by providing ideas for practical actions for everyone, from individual to nations.

Into the Field

In addition to reviewing and incorporating previous research, this study heavily draws upon original empirical data from fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2019 in Germany. While any number of alternative locations could have been selected, Germany was selected as the location for the study due to its high rate of anti-immigrant sentiment and attacks and presence of a broad range of extremist and violent extremist organizations and political actors. Furthermore, Germany was also selected as it is easily traversed by car, allowing for flexibility as new interview subjects emerged in the snowball sample. Initially Saarbrücken, Munich, Dresden, Berlin, and Leipzig were selected as possible cities for data collection for the presence of multiculturalism, extremist organizations, and counter-extremism NGOs. In the end, as a result of snowball sampling, the data was collected in Chemnitz, Leipzig, Erfurt, Berlin, and Saarbrücken. While there are distinct differences between APs in Germany and elsewhere, there

are also adequate and well-documented overlaps between them, their narratives, and tactics and APs in other nations, making it a well-fitting case study location from which to draw conclusions applicable to AP more broadly.

To gain access to interview subjects over forty academic, governmental and non-governmental professional contacts in the Counter Violent Extremism field, as well as personal and “cold” contacts were made starting six months before the commencement of data collection fieldwork. All contacts were provided with a short description of the research on the role of grievances or concerns over immigration, discrimination, and civic engagement in radicalization and prevention of radicalization. Contacts were also provided with a letter of intent from the University of Munich and the researcher’s background as having lived in Germany as a child, and for the sake of transparency, current U.S. government affiliation. The goal of the research was described as wanting to better understand the effects of discourses against immigrants and refugees. A request was made for help in finding interview subjects who encounter anti-immigrant discourses in everyday life, and especially young adults who may have faced recruitment by radical or extremist organizations.

While many of those contacted did not reply, many individuals also wanted to be helpful, but were only able to provide additional academic, NGO, or governmental contacts; there were few inroads to interview subjects affiliated with extremist organizations. Surprisingly, most academic and governmental contacts ultimately proved to be dead ends in this regard. This is likely due to the request for access to interview possible CVE program participants, whose identities and privacy are closely protected. NGOs were ready to engage and offer expert interviews but hesitated at the idea of providing access to their program participants. Further, most academics appeared to have no direct access to such individuals, or if they did, they did not want to share access; governmental contacts had contacts to NGOs and readily provided contact information or email introductions, but the utility of those also proved to be limited. Ultimately, it proved most difficult to gain access to young, radicalized adults, and ultimately all but one interviewee was over the age of thirty. In the end, the majority of the interview subjects were reached through direct unsolicited contact requests (i.e., “cold” email and direct social media messages) and through personal (i.e., not professional) contacts. After the initial outreach through social media to a key gatekeeper, most other far-right interviewees were obtained through snowball sampling.

The data for this study was collected using a qualitative research design and using grounded theory and inductive logic, i.e., arguing from the particular data to the general and theoretical. Four hypotheses were developed based on the following three research questions: 1) What is the role of cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and radicalization?; 2) What is the impact of rhetoric and narratives against refugees/immigrants in political radicalization and radicalization toward violence? 3) Among those vulnerable to political and violent extremism, are civic and community engagement and civic engagement education effective tools or resilience factors for reducing the push-and-pull factors of political extremism and radicalization toward violence?

Hypotheses and Interview Questions

To guide the interview conversations in an objective format, eighteen semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were developed based on working research questions and

accompanying hypotheses and informed by existing literature on the subject of inquiry. The below anticipated results and corresponding hypotheses were developed to help ensure a scientific approach to the subject. Key findings and how they compare to these anticipated results are discussed throughout the remaining chapters.

Anticipated Results

- Anti-immigrant/discriminatory narratives are damaging to social ties, which aids in creating an environment in which radical ideologies thrive.
- Civic and community engagement fosters a greater sense of belonging to society, which in turn reduces vulnerable individuals' propensity to violence.
- Civic and community engagement fosters a greater sense of political agency (a chance to speak one's voice and feel heard), which in turn reduces vulnerable individuals' propensity to violence.
- If individuals are given opportunities for civic and community engagement that tangibly benefit their community, then push-and-pull factors into violent extremism will be reduced.
- Civic engagement helps elect representative leaders, which results in less perceived and real discrimination against their communities through more beneficial laws and improved optics for vulnerable communities/individuals.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Civic engagement (e.g., protests, voting, community organization) is negatively related to perceptions of violence as a viable means of addressing societal issues. In other words, those who engage civically are less likely to believe that violence is acceptable for addressing societal/political issues. Corresponding interview questions broadly focused on whether the subjects engage civically, and whether they believe they have the agency to address their grievances and that civic engagement helps to address societal/political issues.

Hypothesis 2a: Identity uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society; and Hypothesis 2b: Economic uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society. In simple terms, subjects have grievances against German society, related to anti-immigrant narratives, and interviewees who are exposed to anti-immigrant narratives develop "grievance narratives" against their society, because it makes them feel as if their identity/culture or economic situation is under threat. Corresponding interview questions focused broadly on whether subjects have grievances about their life, and if so, what the nature of these grievances, and whether they attribute these issues as being related to immigration/migrants. Additional questions focused on how subjects feel about their social and cultural identity and economic standing, and their exposure to anti-immigrant narratives.

Hypothesis 3: Grievance against German society is positively related to feelings of alienation from German society. In other words, anti-immigrant narratives, by leading to grievances, alienate subjects from German society/country/culture. The corresponding interview questions focused on how the subjects feel about their role in German society and whether they feel as though they are part of a larger German or European community.

Hypothesis 4: Feelings of alienation from German society are positively related to vulnerability to persuasion via violent extremist narratives. Or in simple terms, subjects who are exposed to anti-immigrant narratives, and feel alienated from society, are more vulnerable to violent extremist narratives. The corresponding interview questions focused on whether the subjects encounter violent extremist ideology, how it affects them, who they believe is the source of those narratives and whether they trust the source. Additional questions focused on whether the subjects believe that violence is justified to address societal/political issues and what they believe influences political change. A final question was about what they believe about those of who have a national background different from their own.

The detailed list of hypotheses and corresponding interview questions can be found in the appendix.

Interview Subjects

Seventeen interviews with nineteen individuals were conducted in German over the course of three weeks in summer 2019. One interview took place with three radicalization interventions experts at the same time. Fourteen interviews with sixteen individuals were included in the final data set. The three remaining interviews with individuals who came to Germany as immigrants were excluded from the dataset, because they weren't experts, civically engaged, or extremists. They were suggested as interviewees by an NGO to share their views on discrimination or violence against immigrants in Germany, however, they did not meet the parameters of this study.

Since it is beyond the parameters of this study to evaluate specific parties, groups, or individuals as extremists, violent extremists, or to engage in politically motivated labeling, specific party affiliations and subjects' names (even where approval was received) are not mentioned. Instead, six of the interviewees are categorized and referred to in the study as "elite authoritarian populists" (EAPs). Of those, three interviewees are elected officials of two far-right populist parties: of those one is a "high-ranking national level politician", one a "city-level politician", one "young city-level politician". Both parties—one national and one city-level—are being observed by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) for far-right extremist activities, including connections to violent extremism. The next three interviewees are categorized as "EAP communicators, advisors, or influencers": they are further referred to as a "communicator/businessman", a "scholar/social media manager", and an "influential communicator." They are each civically engaged for the goals of the two above-mentioned parties and are of substantial social and financial standing (i.e., influential business leader, scholar, influential community leader). An additional AP interviewee is categorized and referred to as a "AP conspiracist" as his ideology consistent with Reich Citizen (Reichsbürger) and Sovereign Citizen (Selbstverwalter) movements and includes anti-Semitic elements.

Two of the interviewees are referred to as “far-left” as well as “counter-discrimination” experts. Both individuals have current or former ties to the far-left movement. One of them is a current member of a left-wing extremist movement and is referred to as such where relevant. One is also an individual of immigrant background. The extremist was interviewed about his extremist activities, and when relevant as an expert.

Cumulatively, nine interviewees are classified as anti-discrimination, counter-radicalization, and/or immigration experts (two are simultaneously members of the far-left). Two are individuals of immigrant background. The non-immigrant individuals were interviewed as subject matter experts, whereas those with an immigrant background were interviewed as both subject matter experts and possible vulnerable audience members for extremist propaganda. Neither was deemed to hold extremist views.

Analysis and Chapter Organization

Following the fieldwork, the interviews, which were conducted in German, were first transcribed using Amazon’s AI transcription software, which is about 70-80% accurate. The remaining corrections were made by listening to the interviews and manually making edits to the transcripts. Following this, the transcripts were uploaded into the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo, and the data coding and analysis was conducted using manual categorical analysis. The remaining chapters of this book describe the most relevant data and findings in detail and draw upon existing academic research to analyze and discuss insights and main takeaways.

Chapter II looks to answer the first research question on the role of cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and radicalization. It summarizes key findings and connections to previous research on the role of cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and radicalization. To do so it explores and analyzes how authoritarian populists and extremists see themselves, their role in society, their cultural environment, their grievances and goals, and their means of achieving their objectives. The chapter probes their grievance narratives, including pertaining to culture, economics, immigration, and their perception of being victims of crime and injustice, censorship, conspiracies, and of history. Of particular interest in this section is the comparative analysis of their economic versus cultural grievances. Further, the chapter examines authoritarian populists and extremists’ views on the effectiveness of civic engagement, their civic and community engagement structures and relationships, including international links, demonstrations, and apolitical spaces. The last section of the chapter is an in-depth description of their communications vehicles, including media, social media, in-person, and hard-copy content.

The chapter uses evidence of elite authoritarian populists (EAPs) falsely claiming to represent middle- and working-class citizens’ will and interests, and weaponizing of these classes’ legitimate economic concerns through identity politics (cultural grievances), to make the case that EAPs leverage voters, extremists, and violent extremists to mobilize support for their own power-aspirations and political agendas. The description of the ecosystem of techniques and structures shows how these actors engage, influence, and mobilize sympathetic audiences, including extremists and violent extremists. The evidence discussed includes patterns of EAPs claiming to speak for non-elites, use of fear and outrage inducing narratives focused on “us

versus them” and victimhood narratives as a bridge issue where there is no overlap in economic interests, and descriptions of the ecosystem which includes in-person and online communications and civic engagement networks, extremists, and violent extremists.

Chapter III seeks to answer the second research question, on the impact of rhetoric and narratives against refugees/immigrants in political radicalization and radicalization toward violence. It examines authoritarian populists’ effect on mainstream society, including evidence of promoting anti-democracy sentiment and distrust in institutions, fear and hate, radicalization, and tolerance for violence, and the impact of their claims to speak for the majority on political and societal spaces. This includes a summary of key findings and connections to previous research on the impact of anti-refugee/immigrant and other “us versus them” narratives on political radicalization and mobilization to violence. The case is made that EAPs use of “us versus them” narratives can enable extremism, violence, and weaken democracy by undermining trust in democratic institutions, such as government or media. This argument is supported by evidence of them as anti-democratic actors, mainstreaming anti-democratic sentiment and division, including by leveraging mass protest movements, having relationships with violent extremists, and creating a permissive environment for violent extremism and terrorism.

Chapter IV seeks to answer the third research question, whether civic and community engagement and civic engagement education are effective tools or resilience factors for reducing the push-and-pull factors of political extremism and radicalization toward violence for those vulnerable to political and violent extremism. The chapter explores this study’s findings and connections to previous research on the use of civic and community engagement to combat political extremism and radicalization toward violence and makes the case that civic engagement does not appear to be an effective tool for countering AP and extremists’ views and behaviors within those individuals or groups, but that it is useful for inoculating vulnerable individuals, and for countering the impact of AP. The chapter also outlines findings and previous research related to effective efforts to counter extremism, including as pertaining to contact theory, competitive victimhood, and youth engagement, the effectiveness of such efforts, gaps and opportunities, counter-messaging opportunities, and the limits of authoritarian populist ideas. This section correspondingly describes key gaps and opportunities in this realm and makes recommendations for a broad range of practitioners for enabling a “whole-of-society” effort to counter AP, including for governments, political actors, law-enforcement, media, the private sector, and civil society. It offers possible narratives for counter-messaging, and evidence of the limits of AP’s values and reach. This chapter also includes an analysis of the limitations of this study, its implications for theory and future research, and possible future research opportunities.

Chapter V concludes the book by summarizing key findings pertaining to the research question and hypotheses, and the main takeaways for practitioners and researchers. The chapter and book conclude with a note on why there may be reasons for optimism. Finally, in the appendix, readers can find the actual field work interview questions used, an executive summary of the key findings as they correspond to each research question and hypothesis.

II. Who are they, what do they want, and how do they go about getting it?

Authoritarian populists claim to be anti-establishment and anti-elite and typically attract supporters from the middle and working-class. However, beyond analysis of figureheads, researchers have paid little attention to the role and impact of the elites who are inspiring and coordinating these movements and who claim to represent the will of the average person. Given these movements emphasis on emotion-inducing rhetoric and deemphasis of concrete policy articulation, there is also a nebulous understanding of their goals and why and how they manage to attract many with whom they have little in common. Furthermore, previous research does not adequately describe how these elites are connected to each other and more extreme factions of these movements and in which ways they seek to mirror legitimate political processes. Framing the discussion around those gaps requires shedding light on who these individuals are, what they want, and the mechanisms they use to meet their goals. This line of inquiry is organized around the first research question (RQ1), on the role of cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and radicalization.

To gain insights into the authoritarian populist elites' landscape and to answer the specific question, interview subjects were asked about how they see themselves, their roles and places in society, their grievances and concerns, and communications and civic engagement activities. The resulting interview data, and analysis of accompanying previous research, indicate that APs weaponize legitimate economic grievances through fear and outrage inducing "us versus them" propaganda, mis-, and disinformation, which are largely centered around cultural and victimhood grievance narratives to help bridge elite and audience concerns, and shows how they spread these through a broad range of communications mediums to gain support and power for themselves. This chapter discusses the body of evidence indicating that authoritarian populist elites falsely claim to represent populations with which they do not share economic interests, and their use of political parties and other legitimate civic engagement vehicles for anti-democratic and anti-pluralist aims.

The original data making up this body of evidence falls into two overarching categories: 1) (a) data showing patterns of elite communicators claiming to speak for non-elites and (b) evidence of their weaponizing concerns and grievances by turning them into "us versus them" propaganda and disinformation narratives to advance their personal political aspirations and economic objectives. More specifically, the research shows that these elites are using cultural concerns and victimhood narratives as a bridge between working- or middle-class concerns and elite interests; and 2) data which show these elite actors using a broad ecosystem of techniques and structures as a means of engaging and mobilizing sympathetic audiences and voters, including extremists and violent extremists. The connections between their in-person and online communications and civic engagement networks play a key role. These findings help to expand understanding of the role authoritarian populist elite communicators play in inspiring and coordinating anti-democratic movements; how these extremist elites leverage grievances, are connected to each other and more extreme factions of these movements, and the means by which they seek to exert influence over society by directing audiences' and individuals' beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. These findings also help build a bridge between previous radicalization literature and research on nationalism and populism by shedding light on AP elites leveraging grievances for propaganda and their role in radicalization.

1. Who Are They?

A natural way to start the discussion of findings is to outline who the key subjects are and how they see themselves. Of the fourteen interviews with sixteen individuals included in the final dataset,⁶⁰ seven individuals were categorized as Authoritarian Populists (AP); six were categorized as elite authoritarian populists (EAPs) based on their self-declared affiliation or support of authoritarian populist organizations, expressed beliefs, and their self-reported social and financial standing and roles. The seventh AP subject is referred to as an AP conspiracist as his ideology is consistent with Reich Citizen (Reichsbürger) and Sovereign Citizen (Selbstverwalter) movements and included anti-Semitic elements. His self-described social and economic standing did not indicate elite status. In the remaining sections of this study, this group of seven AP subjects or interviewees is referred to as “authoritarian populists” or “APs” and when referred to separately, the six elite subjects are referred to as “elite authoritarian populists” or “EAPs.” While most of the APs gave permission to use their names and direct quotes, only the synonyms corresponding to their roles are used throughout this book.

Three of the AP subjects were elected officials, with one being a high-ranking national level politician, one a city-level politician, and one a young city-level politician; these descriptors are also used throughout this analysis when they are also referred to as individuals. These three subjects were elected officials of two AP parties: the first two being members of a party with national-level (i.e., Bundestag) representation, and the last one being a representative of a different AP party with only city-level representation. It should be noted that the German government classifies their organizational affiliations and ideologies as far-right extremist, and both parties are being observed by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz or BfV) for right-wing extremist activities. The next three AP subjects fall into the following category and are throughout the analysis referred to as: AP elite communicators, advisors, or influencers. As individuals they are at times also referred to as a communicator/businessman, a scholar/social media manager, and an influential communicator. Just as the aforementioned three individuals, each of these three also indicated that they civically engaged for the goals of the two above-mentioned AP parties and are of substantial social and financial standing (i.e., an influential business leader, university-affiliated scholar, and influential community leader.)

All AP subjects were white males with an age range between late twenties and early seventies. The concept of diversity in terms of age, sex, and background was raised by these interviewees on several occasions with the goal of communicating that the movement is not monolithic, although the high-ranking AP politician, in the context of distancing the party from violent far-right youth, claimed the party was that of “old white men.” Several of the subjects also pointed to a particular young woman, who has ties to Israel, to make the case that their efforts were supported by a diverse coalition.

The remaining nine interviewees (including the two described below as members of the far-left) are classified as anti-discrimination, counter-radicalization, and/or immigration experts based on their organizational affiliations. Three are individuals with an immigration background; this

⁶⁰ As noted in the “Into the Field” section of the introductory chapter, three interviews with individuals who came to Germany as immigrants were excluded from the dataset, because they did not meet the parameters of this study.

includes an individual categorized as a far-left extremist. In terms of socio-economic standing, the only interviewees who answered affirmatively to whether they felt disadvantaged were two experts of immigrant background, one of which is also a far-left extremist individual. Of the experts, three were women, two men of Arabic-speaking background, and the remaining four individuals were white men. Their ages ranged from about mid-twenty to fifty years old. For brevity, this group is also referred to as “the experts” in the remaining sections of this study, although where necessary the far-left and far-left extremist subjects are identified separately. Experts with a far-left, extreme-left, and immigrant background were interviewed for both their professional subject matter expertise, but also their civic engagement experiences, and experiences as immigrants.

Two individuals in the dataset were categorized and are in this study referred to as “far-left” and “counter-discrimination” experts. Both individuals had self-declared current or former ties to the far-left movement and were affiliated with a counter-discrimination NGO. One of them was a self-described current member of the left-wing extremist movement, although unaffiliated in terms of a specific extremist group. He was also categorized as an individual with an immigration background. These two individuals were interviewed for both their professional subject matter expertise and civic engagement experiences.

When interview subjects were asked about their identity and feeling of community in relation to Germany or Europe, unsurprisingly, the AP identified strongly as Germans and East-Germans, had less connection to a European community, and saw the EU as a political, rather than cultural community, which did not represent the best interests of Germany. They mentioned festivals, food and drinks as cultural commonalities or markers, and pointed to restaurants serving food from another culture, when wishing to show their acceptance of immigrants. But they also frequently used food and drinks as examples when differentiating between cultures, norms, and values, such as emphasizing Muslims not eating pork or drinking alcohol.

The AP subjects expressed strong opinions on which cultural representations or art is worthy of funding, such traditional or nativist German cultural depictions in theater, art, or festivals, versus what is not, such as non-traditional, modern, or international cultural representations. Furthermore, when considering their cultural connections to the international community, several AP subjects expressed affinity and an emotional or cultural connection to Russia over western European neighbors, despite noting Russian oppression of citizens of the GDR. Two AP subjects explained that when they were young, the educational system’s focus on non-capitalist countries had an impact on their cultural identity and feelings of community with Russia.

While the AP subjects strongly rejected the idea of multiculturalism or internationalism as an identity, not only for themselves, but even as a possibility for others, they see feelings of world citizenship or internationalism as a threat to German culture and their identity. On the other side, most of the remaining subjects drew on multiple nationalities, community identities, or cultures, and described the focus on a traditional interpretation of German culture as problematic because multiple generations of immigrants have changed the face of Germany. Both groups described a tension and competition within themselves in matters concerning identity, but those with an immigrant background or international mindset (i.e., seeing themselves as Europeans or citizens of the world) used more nuance in describing the complexity of their identity, whereas AP subjects were more set in what they considered their culture or identity.

For example, one of the anti-discrimination experts, who emigrated from Egypt to Germany as a young man, explained his identity and feelings toward Germany as following:

For me, Germany is just like Egypt. That means every morning when I go out on the street, I just enjoy the air, I enjoy the trees, I just enjoy the nature, and that means this is already my country. This is already my home. No matter what happens here, what is in mass media, inside some heads, none of that bothers me. It is not so annoying for me that I lose my feeling of belonging to Germany. I belong to Germany - and I also belong to Egypt. Both are my home countries, so to speak. Of course, Egypt is the culture where I was born, where I grew up and I connect many thoughts and many memories and experiences [with Egypt] much more than with Germany. But still Germany is a beautiful country, a just country, a free country, and these few [right-wing extremist] voices are not everything. They are not all of Germany. Germany is different. It does not matter whether there are many or a few [right-wing extremists]. For me, at least now, they are not the majority.

Anti-Democratic Elites Claiming to Represent the Disadvantaged

The data provide empirical support for previous researchers' assertions that the APs subjects think of themselves as doing the "will of the people,"⁶¹ and there is evidence that this form of populism is anti-pluralist.⁶² Among the AP subjects, the theme of representing the will of the average citizen, "concerned citizens", and "silent majority" is omnipresent, although several of them simultaneously noted that in their opinion average citizens did not actually understand the issues APs deem important. They continuously vacillate between claiming to speak for others, who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised, and explaining that they themselves do not fall into those categories. All subjects which were classified as APs (and far-left/far-left extremist) saw themselves as role models in their communities and as civically engaged for those who are disadvantaged in society: women, children, and the elderly in the case of AP subjects, and various groups of minorities and immigrants in the case of the far-left subjects. It is noteworthy and it was unexpected that cumulatively, none of them felt concerned about their personal economic future, but they expressed both economic and cultural concerns about society's future.

Just as previous studies have shown, these data show a pattern of authoritarian populist elites claiming to speak for groups, however, the data also show that these individuals are elites who do not belong to these groups of people; they do not share the same economic interests or concerns as those groups; and that the groups they claim to represent may not even exist as they are described by the elites. Instead of being anti-establishment and anti-elite representatives, the individuals see themselves as role models, repeatedly and eagerly explain that they are of exclusive status and have access to power, and, as outlined in more detail below, repeatedly show distaste for democratic values and those they claim to represent, such as non-voters or those of lower economic status.

⁶¹ Thomas Grumke, "Globalized Anti-Globalists: The Ideological Basis of the Internationalization of Right-Wing Extremism," *Perspectives in Politics* 10, no. 1 (2017).

⁶² Mueller, 2016

Interestingly, Fischer, among other researchers, also observed this anti-democratic elite tendency amongst anti-democratic Islamist elites and violent extremists who claim defend their cultural identity and reject democracy and feminism even at grave costs to other members of their societies while having benefited from the same forces they purport to combat. These individuals have benefited from globalization and education and in return use their privilege and these skills for “anti-modernist goals.” They seek political power to create a “moral order beneficial, to their own, often economic, interests” using narratives which are not only centered on a cultural battle, but also reject any exchanges which seek to promote understanding between the West and Islamic countries.⁶³ In the same vein, in research on far-right extremism, Koehler argues that while the far-right groups’ lower ranks, i.e., foot soldiers such as skinheads, are perceived as highly radicalized and as a threat or danger to the society, those in the upper ranks, such as lawyers, politicians, or doctors, may only be viewed as “conservative” or “extreme”, and therefore not necessarily as dangerous. However, in “ideological terms and structural importance to the movement, these higher-ranking members may be more dangerous to society in the long run (e.g. by leading groups, bringing innovation and new recruits, and/or radicalizing others).”⁶⁴

2. What Do They Want?

Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright in her warning against populism’s most extreme outcome—fascism—explained that the role of the movements’ highest ranked elite political leaders (e.g., heads of states) is the propagation of extremist ideas and narratives. They do not seek to outline a cohesive ideology or political agenda, but rather to use rhetoric as means for seizing power. These figureheads promise everything, rather than having a specific plan; they leverage people’s feelings of being denied rewards they feel entitled to and create fear which reaches into all levels of society. By connecting emotionally with crowds and drawing energy from people who are upset by the loss of a war or job, or the feeling that the country is in a state of decline, they are able to leverage popular dissatisfaction for their ascension to power. Fascism is built on popular support but includes wealthy and poor supporters by urging all classes to come together against the “foreign” in the form of classical “us versus them” narratives.⁶⁵ By misdirecting the blame at the foreign, the “other”, it is easier to create an imaginary bridge between opposing classes and interests.

While some organizational, logistical, and communications support may come from the grassroots, ‘charismatic’ AP leaders cannot move the masses by themselves and have to rely on other individuals to support them: the elites who support them play important roles in coordinating and organizing the movements. Underscoring the importance of the need to understand these powerful influencers is Robert Paxton’s explanation that studying fascist

⁶³ Karsten Fischer, “Fundamentalist Elites and the Politics of Identity,” in *Religion and Politics in the United States and Germany Old Divisions and New Frontiers*, ed. Dagmar Pruin, Rolf Schieder, Johannes Zachhuber (Berlin, Germany: LIT, 2007), 178:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296704673_Fundamentalist_Elites_and_the_Politics_of_Identity.

⁶⁴ Daniel Koehler, “Contrast Societies. Radical Social Movements and their relationships with their target societies. A theoretical model,” *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 7:1 (2015): 18-34, DOI: 10.1080/19434472.2014.977325

⁶⁵ Madeleine Albright, *Fascism—A Warning* (New York, U.S.A.: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018)

leaders alone gives an “alibi to nations that approved or tolerated fascist leaders, and diverts attention from the persons, groups, and institutions who helped them.”⁶⁶ The party, civil society, and mass movements have each played a role in creating and supporting fascist movements of the past. But even more critically, in considering whether fascism could come back, he describes the enabling factors and new enemies since the 1980s, such as “globalization, foreigners, multiculturalism, environmental regulation, high taxes, and incompetent politicians” who are creating a new extreme right.⁶⁷ This study’s interviews confirm the presence of each of those grievances amongst the elite subjects and more deeply evaluates the weight and implication of the major categories which emerged.

In the context of delving into the specifics of what the AP subjects’ want and their grievances, it is worth first noting the function of grievances in political strategic communications to help frame the analysis and discussion: strategic communications are broadly the study of how individuals or organizations navigate their role in society or pursue their mission through purposeful communications. Within this field political strategic communication takes its place among business management, marketing, public relations, and other related strategic communications fields.⁶⁸ Purposeful or strategic communications, are the vehicle through which each of the thus far described and upcoming dynamics and processes from identity politics to radicalization toward violence are enabled. Communication, be it through one-on-one conversations, speeches by leaders to the masses, or online groups, are the foundational mechanism through which individuals or groups can obtain political power or influence. Grievances (i.e., concerns or problems) form a core component of the message and ideology around which political actors, including extremists, and their constituents organize collective action through communication and mobilization.

Culture and Values Grievances

In what is by far the largest theme in the dataset, there are one-hundred-forty-three (143) references across fourteen interviews to culture-related grievances over immigration, which can be best summed up as concerns over societal changes. This category includes references to (in order of prevalence): 1) perceived problems of multiculturalism or differing cultures (62 references over 13 interviews), such as concerns over integration in terms of language and food differences. These grievances which can also be summed up as being related to the visibility of immigrants in German society, such as seeing immigrants downtown. 2) The second largest category is concerns over perceived differences in values (59 references over fourteen interviews), which includes concerns over religious differences (largely between Christianity and Islam), the role of the older versus younger generations, and belief that immigrants and leftists “hate” Germany. 3) Concerns related to women appear in 34 references across 12 interviews and focus on themes such as protecting women from being harassed or raped by immigrant men and

⁶⁶ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, (New York, U.S.A., Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2004), 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶⁸ Kirk Hallahan, Derina Holtzhausen, Betteke van Ruler, Dejan Verčič, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh (2007) “Defining Strategic Communication,” *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1:1 (2007): 3-35, DOI: 10.1080/15531180701285244

the anti-woman symbolism of the headscarf. Additionally, concerns in this category also include what's described by AP subjects as "gender politics" and "gender mainstreaming"; namely, women and sexual minorities living outside of traditional gender norms. 4) The fourth largest category of cultural concerns, overlapping with the previous category, is related to matters of sexuality (23 references across 12 interviews), which includes so-called demographic concerns (which overlap with the below discussed data related to economic grievances) and references to immigrants' fertility rates, and anti-LGBTQ+ references.

As just noted, explicit cultural grievances over perceived differences in values, especially concerns related to women and gender roles were not only central, but equally noteworthy is the pattern of contradiction within the theme: for example, AP subjects ridicule feminist ideas while at the same time criticizing Muslim women's headscarves and a perceived lack of support among Muslims for women's rights. APs similarly contradicted themselves in narratives about sexuality, while expressing having so-called demographic concerns about a decrease in children being born in Germany, while also criticizing immigrants for having "too many" children. The narratives also included references to rape and other sexual crimes allegedly committed by immigrants, and rejection of modern gender roles and LGBTQ+ rights. It is evident that conservative gender norms are core EAP narratives, which is interestingly also consistent with jihadist extremist narratives. However, interestingly, these themes are not commonly or explicitly explored in mainstream academic populism and extremism research.

In addition to overlapping with themes related to economic grievances (described below), themes concerning the role of women in society play an important role in AP narratives as they span across multiple culture-related grievance themes. An illustrative example is that of the city-level politician explaining that he told his local kebab vendor that he "did not think it was good" that his wife wears a headscarf, because it gives the impression that there is a hierarchy in his family, and that this is not a German or western cultural attribute. Paradoxically, the AP subjects expressed concern over Muslim women being oppressed and being forced to stay at home with many children, while they shared that they loathed feminists and modern gender norms.

Intersecting in often conflicting ways are also reported grievances over Muslim women's rights, concerns over religion and values, and undermining of those and other human rights: while explaining that defending women's rights is a western value, the city-level politician simultaneously contradicts the western value of freedom of religion as he criticized those who want to build a mosque—adding that he did not mind if Muslims practice their religion behind closed doors, but that they shouldn't do so publicly. He asserted that "Arabic men" do not allow their wives to learn German by speaking German with their children, so that they do not gain the ability to learn about women's rights, but then argued for the need to regulate not only how and where people worship, their clothing choices, but also both language and communication volume in public spaces:

[It] should be a duty to speak German and communicate in German in public spaces. First of all, in terms of perception, because that is of course not nice for me when I walk through the downtown [of the city in which I live] and think I'm walking through the Turkish bazaar, because I only hear Arabic-speaking people who are also definitely talking loudly. So normal communication should be the norm in the city centers. What they do behind doors, in their apartment, or when they meet in their clubhouse, is rather uninteresting, but in matters concerning public spaces, I have to enforce rules.

Additionally, frequently immigrants from European countries, such as Poland or Russia, who are according to the AP subjects integrating effectively, were juxtaposed with those from the Middle East or Maghreb whose perceived lack of skills and motivation for work and learning German and religion were frequently cited as core hurdles to effective integration. AP subjects also simultaneously claimed that they have no problem with immigrants who work hard and integrated into German society, while also outlining racist concerns about current immigrants' ability to integrate. For example, while recognizing that economic migration has been occurring in Germany for a long time, and that many previous generations of so-called "guest" workers stayed and integrated effectively into German society, the influential AP communicator explained that he does not believe that today's immigrants can effectively integrate, and said:

[...] you know what level of education these people have, especially when I think of black Africans. I don't mind people being helped, but let's do it on site. We could do so much on site in Africa. What is driving them here now is actually the cause of the eternal colonial policy. Whether it was America, Germany, Holland, or England. They [Africans] haven't made it big in Africa because they have a different mentality. They really prefer dancing to working, yes? We know that they really have a different mentality.

Similarly, the conspiracy theorist described how well he was received throughout European countries as he worked in different places, but that it couldn't work with non-EU immigrants, because: "I knew how to behave there and so on, I knew their rules. I followed the rules. I did not show up there [and say]: 'I'm German and who are you?' I did not do it, I came to work there, to do my job. We met each other personally, [I met their families]."

The data also shows a strong pattern of food and alcohol being used as examples of important cultural differences, including two of the AP politicians citing examples of visiting Italian, Chinese or Greek restaurants, and "drinking vodka" and "eating pickles" as examples of their welcoming of diversity in their communities. Meanwhile, Islam's prohibition of pork and alcohol, in addition to conservative gender roles, were pointed out as an important example of the lack of compatibility between Muslims and German culture. By comparison, the AP subjects' conservative Christian family values, eating meat, and drinking beer were lauded as standards of German culture. Incongruously, the city-level AP politician also described discomfort seeing young "Muslims" walking down the street downtown, while carrying alcohol, when they are "not even supposed to be drinking alcohol." The high-ranking AP politician feared a loss of another, according to him, important German cultural norm—punctuality—and included the fear that a multi-cultural or international society will lead to the establishment of "child pornography rings, where the police have no access." By comparison, one of the anti-discrimination experts described how his immigrant wife was chased down the street while eight months pregnant by a construction worker with a knife who screamed that he'd cut out the baby.

Multiple AP subjects expressed that when it comes to immigration, the role models are countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia, which they believe to only take in skilled and university educated immigrants, and those who "learn the language and want to integrate." The AP national politician added that in addition to these criteria, immigrants should also:

[...] possibly bring money [...] all others are rejected. And we do it exactly the other way around: we take everyone who is rejected, we take them in, and say that they are skilled workers, that they are gold pieces, that they are our future. It's not our future - it's our downfall - this surrender and submission [...].

The AP city-level politician explained that children’s school grades are an example of effective or ineffective integration, but as the young politician explained, in their view ultimately even having a German passport does not make someone German: “The cat won't become a pig in the pigsty either. It’s still a cat.”

However, the migration expert argued that the tension in her city did not start with the influx of refugees, but that:

[When] I started studying, there were very few foreigners, there were a few at the university, but it wasn't really a topic. But there are a lot of old people here, a lot of retirees, and I think the acceptance for differences, different people, such as for young people, is not there at all. It does not always have to have something to do with foreigners, but the fact that we have unfriendly retirees in this city has always existed. We have a situation where retirees are constantly rude to us on the buses. I think they are sometimes afraid of changes in society and that so many young people are suddenly out on the streets at night.

Economic Grievances

Across fourteen interviews there are ninety-eight (98) references to economic grievances and concerns. The most frequent topics were those of the impact of immigration on economic issues, such as on employment and social benefits, including the negative effect of globalization and internationalization (including the EU)—of which there are sixty-seven (67) references. The second largest number of references are forty-four (44) references to what can be summed up as family-related economics, “Familienpolitik and Kinderpolitik,” as the high-ranking AP politician called it, which he explained includes concerns for children’s future, and the quality of childcare and education. Naturally, there was some overlap between the two categories.

Among AP subjects, there is a strong consensus that the state is not taking adequate care of native Germans, especially the elderly and children, because resources are being spent on immigrants, who are frequently described as lazy, incompetent, and as taking advantage of Germany’s social benefits. However, despite contempt and even hate of non-white immigrants and certain other groups, when asked directly what or who is to blame for their concerns, AP blamed globalization, capitalism, and the EU for creating the problem. There was frequent comparison between the financial benefits afforded to immigrants versus native Germans based on questionable information and discredited narratives related to the social service benefits immigrants or refugees receive from the state. These narratives intended to produce outrage by claiming that non-working immigrants receive monthly support equating to what amounts to about the average German monthly income. A corresponding narrative, exemplified by the communicator/businessman explained that native Germans at the age of entering the workforce were leaving his region for West-German cities and other countries for better opportunities, that this led to a lack of skilled labor, and claimed that immigrants were “too lazy” to fill those gaps.

Grievances against the economic impact of Germany’s reunification were also mentioned frequently, such as the ensuing privatization of companies and job losses, and the relative deprivation when compared to West-Germany. The influential communicator explained the economic effect of the reunification and his experience as following:

[After the reunification] I made [boatloads] of money. In a few years we were able to work our way up to the standards of a West-German, but in the end the book hit us on the nose, because we did not know about the fine print. We jumped into an ice-cold pool - voluntarily - nobody pushed us into it. We and friends rushed into the reunification pool, into the cold water, and only then did we notice that everything, that I had said before, was coming. Unemployment came. Of the 5,000 standing there looking and yelling, 4,000 looked stupid when their houses, that had been bought on credit in the first rush, had to be sold, because they had to declare bankruptcy and lost their jobs. I knew everything that was coming. But I thought: 'You're a clever boy, you could do it.' And I got it done. But at what price?

Family & Child Politics

Twelve interviewees mentioned grievances related to family or children forty-four (44) times, including concerns over childcare and education. The high-ranking AP politician explained that unlike today, thirty years ago, in the GDR, the state would give money to families when they were expecting a child, and that "Familienpolitik" and "Kinderpolitik" (family and child-related political issues) were central to the AP's political agenda:

Family policy and child policy are essential to maintaining a folk. And child policy is related to educational policy, so it is connected, because I can only maintain a healthy country if I have enough offspring who will at some point co-finance the social system and thus create the balance that allows pensioners to do well. It starts at the bottom, but we haven't done anything for 30 years. The existing parties have completely failed in the area of family support, because so many people tell me 'I cannot afford a second child.'

Furthermore, while the city-level AP interviewee explained that the problem of underfunding social benefits for children and the elderly has been going on for decades (preceding the recent increase in immigration), nonetheless narratives at the nexus of immigration and child and family-related issues were raised frequently. For example, while AP subjects frequently mentioned the high birth rates among immigrants as problematic, they also maintained that there aren't enough children being born to ethnic Germans. Correspondingly, one AP interviewee explained grievances over birth-rates as being driven by economic concerns, and that immigrants wouldn't be able to fill the gap because they are "lazy" and "unskilled," even while they at times recognized that previous generations of immigrants worked hard and integrated effectively. Likewise, AP subjects argued that most immigrants are young single men who should stay and rebuild their societies, while other times they described migrants as men followed by their wives and children in what they deem a problematic issue described as "chain migration." Similarly, immigrants are both accused of having too large of families, while at other times they are accused of there being no fathers to raise the sons.

Among AP subjects', grievances related to education are also prevalent in the data: they expressed concerns over the declining educational performance expectations and quality, and claimed that "cultural differences" are influencing the way boys are treating girls. While recognizing a shortage of teachers, the focus remains on the presence of immigrant children as the key source of the problem, saying that they are holding back other children due to their need to learn the language, which leads to "a huge problem of motivation" among native Germans.

“Refugee Issues” vs. “Welcoming Culture”

Throughout the dataset, narratives pertaining to immigration combined and spanned broadly across cultural, economic, and crime and justice related grievances. An anti-discrimination expert shared that while Muslims only make up 0.01% of the population in Saxony, the fear of a foreign takeover or invasion (“Überfremdung”) is strong and the support for extremist parties, who have leveraged narratives against Muslims, is higher than in areas with more Muslims in the population. While multiple AP communicators argued that a focus on migration is not enough to advance their goals, they also shared their thinking on why anti-immigration narratives serve as the cornerstone of their efforts. The high-ranking AP politician explained the central role of the anti-immigration narrative in the evolution of his party as following “[...] this party was Euro-critical in 2013, and then in 2015 when us old guys added the patriotic question through the refugees, it turned out that the professor’s party became superfluous, and it became a people’s party (“Volkspartei”).” Further, he explained that from his perspective “[Immigration] is supposed to create a new society - a new way of thinking - and that’s what I worry about.” He described an immigrant wedding in his community in terms of a threat to Christianity: “We recently had a wedding in [city name] that looked like a Tel Aviv bus station. Don’t know if you’ve been to Tel Aviv before, but all the Arab-African immigrants live there. That means that on the one hand the occidental, the Christian faith, the Christian conviction is being pushed back.”

The young city-level politician explained that:

[Immigration] is the main problem, one builds on the other. You could say [they are] the root of the evil - where the problems start, no? If I have fewer migrants, I have to teach fewer people how to behave here. I have to teach the language to fewer people at the same time [in school], while others are actually falling behind in [curriculum] material. So the education level would also increase again. I think it’s all somehow interconnected.”

He also described that looking back he realizes he did not know much about politics when he began to engage as a fourteen-year-old, and that even though his life standard steadily improved, he had a general feeling that the state is not doing anything for him, that something major is not right in the system, and that there are mistakes being made. He said that even back then he was concerned about a foreign takeover or an invasion (“Überfremdung”) as he noticed that there were fewer German children being born and his school had more foreign students who held up the learning speed of the class because they had to first learn the German language. At a separate point of the interview, he claimed that there are no examples of functioning societies made of more than one race.

Differentiation of types of immigrants and asylum seekers was a frequent theme whereby the right-wing communicators claimed to support giving asylum and aid to immigrants they perceive as “real refugees,” but not to those they perceive as “economic migrants.” Occasionally workers from EU-member countries, or Russian-Germans, are juxtaposed to non-EU economic migrants or refugees to make the case between “good” and “bad” immigrants. The EAPs used inconsistent criteria for whom they deemed a legitimate immigrant or refugee, who would be able to integrate, and who is welcome and who is not, with frequently blatant or only thinly veiled racist images and language appearing throughout the interviews. For example, some of the AP subjects described the first generation of earlier economic migrants in a positive light for having done work Germans did not want to do (one interviewee referred to them coming to do the “dirty

work”) and for bringing new cuisines to Germany. However, an optimistic outlook wasn’t afforded to today’s immigrants, nor to the children born in Germany to those early immigrants, who are described multiple times as problematic, as bringing “rats and vermin” to the neighborhood, “criminals and murderers, child murderers, mass murderers” or “lazy.” For example, while acknowledging that his city has had positive infrastructural and economic developments in the last ten years, the young city-level politician added the following, equating immigration to the Plague:

[And this is where we arrive] back to the decadence points, right? The Romans spread their aqueducts and their streets all over Italy, Europe, and the Plague then came to the cities, because of course it works the same way, the plague then more or less took the fast route, the expressways, into the big cities, and the majority of people died from it. [also shows that it’s not economic, but cultural concerns]

The influential AP communicator described conflicting thoughts pertaining to immigration and refugee asylum: “I thought, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West [PEGIDA], what nonsense! Why did they not they just write Against Germany's Failed Asylum Policy? That would have been a lot easier. My first speech was that the right of asylum is a human right and that it has to stay that way.” While he claims that he is against a failed policy, rather than refugees, he later claimed that only a fraction of those who have sought asylum in Germany recently are actual “refugees.” Juxtaposed to this, an anti-discrimination expert argued that the ratio of refugees to economic migrants is actually higher in eastern German cities, due to fewer economic opportunities.

When asked directly about his feelings toward foreigners, the AP conspiracy theorist, said that he had no problem with foreigners and that people from many backgrounds have over the years come to Germany, worked hard, and integrated, but that new refugees should only stay until the war in their country is over and then should go back to rebuild. According to him the problem lies with the government and with the younger generation:

Because of this separation, this division [in Germany], I can hardly talk to the young people now, whether they belong to the Left or the Green Camp. They don't listen at all anymore. They are no longer willing to listen to the elderly. [...] I'm worried because they are pushing things so far that our government, which is not a government at all, because it is a company, but the young people do not understand that they are hounding so much that it came to a bloody confrontation.

However, when asked about who is to blame for the issues the APs want to address, only the young AP politician described immigration as the origin of societal problems, whereas the rest of the AP subjects did not blame immigrants directly. Among them, there was no agreement who or what is to blame for the societal ills they see themselves as fighting: one blamed Chancellor Angela Merkel and her party, the CDU, and claimed that for decades there were no refugees being permitted to enter Germany, and for some reason they do not understand the Chancellor changed this and set off mass immigration into Germany. Another interviewee claimed the problems started under Chancellor Helmut Kohl who was also from the CDU and led Germany from the 1970s through most of the 1990s and “wanted to save money.” Another interviewee blamed the Marshall Plan which rebuilt West-Germany, whereas East-Germany had to pay reparations to Russia for World War II. Yet another interviewee blamed the “1968 Neo-Marxists, Cultural-Marxists of the Frankfurter School.” And the conspiracy theorist went back over one-hundred years to point to “certain circles” and “Rothschild and Rockefeller” who have been

planning to destroy the German folk, because it's "too good—it's just too good." All AP subjects agreed that they feel very negatively when they hear that immigrants allegedly cause problems or receive more social benefits than native Germans. They frequently mentioned fear, powerlessness, and drive to engage and bring about change. For example, the AP scholar/social media manager said that he feels he's not being represented by the government and therefore supports the party with which he is affiliated.

The immigration expert explained that in the early stages of the 2014-2015 refugee influx, the narrative pushed by the government was one of "Wirkommenskultur" (a culture of welcoming), but that it shifted as media began to raise questions related to refugees and immigrants and security (during the height of ISIS attacks). Then doubts, fears, and conspiracy theories began to spread on social media and in private conversations and the AP narrative of "Fluechtlinkgspolitik" (Refugees Issues) emerged. She added that the local soccer hooligan club also played a role in lighting the initial spark of anti-refugee/immigration sentiment and that perhaps it became a topic because "one finally had an even more marginalized group in eastern Germany than oneself and one could finally give another group the fault [for one's circumstances]."

The anti-discrimination expert/far-left extremist described how political dialogue focusing on how many refugees could be integrated evolved over time into populists' driven dialogue on whether immigrants even could be integrated into German culture and society. He explains:

At the beginning they tried to quantify to which extent we can take in [immigrants].- how many and Germany's capacity to provide training and send the children to school to send and so on. But now it's always more in the direction of do we want to accommodate these people, do they fit our society? You have switched from "how many can come" to "do they even fit"? Does the cultures fit, do the values fit? What now happened again in the Mediterranean with the distress dispute, the question is not whether we can take them in. That was 40 people and Europe has 500 million. The 40 people make no difference. It's more of a core concept of culture, whether that fits in or not [...].

Offering an explanation of the meaning and implication of "Wirkommenskultur," the AP scholar/social media manager described the nexus as following:

There are demographic forecasts for 2050—then I will no longer be alive—then it will tip over. I am afraid we will have Islamic majorities here. That is a completely unsuitable means to remedying our shortage of skilled workers. And that is the main argument of the welcoming culture. I think that's completely wrong.

Later in the interview he also concluded:

The expression "immigration" is already wrong --- that is prejudice. Those are illegal economic migrants --- illegal economic migrants --- immigrants would imply that it is people who are needed—who come because they offer a skill that is needed by us. And of course, we welcome them. Immigrants should come, but no illegal economic ones.

However, it is noteworthy that several of the AP subjects explained that refugee and migration related messaging does not suffice for their parties' platforms because the focus is too narrow. The high-ranking AP politician asserted that they have lost that fight and that they will have to focus on social issues. Nonetheless, he linked migration and other issues, such as retirement benefits or educational quality, as being in competition with each other for limited resources: "There is always a link [between the refugee crisis and social programs], of course, but we still

have to do social policy, even without the bitterness of emigration or migration. Otherwise, we will only deal with this mono topic. It is not enough for the [far right extremist party].”

The communicator/businessman also saw it similarly:

The big weakness of [the city AP party] is that too much is attached to the migration issue. Our problems go much further. [The scholar/social media manager] sees it similarly: we haven't been satisfied with our economic policy for 20 years. We are not satisfied with our social policy, education policy, actually with everything. [The focus on migration] was decided at the local politics level. I'm trying to bring in more. I'd rather try to bring in [average] citizens. And [the scholar/social media manager], too. Among those, early childhood education is one of the most important points for me [...]

Victimhood Narratives

The interview data also show the centrality of victimhood narratives in AP's grievances; these pertained to crime and justice, perceived censorship and conspiracies against the group, and concerns about unfair historical interpretations and treatment. Thirteen interviewees made forty-six (46) references to grievances and fears related to crime, security, law & order, and justice. Themes of selective implementation of laws for or against one group versus the other, or selective media coverage, especially concerning violent crimes or those of a sexual nature—especially against women—are prevalent in the data. According to the counter-radicalization experts these narratives are a key driver of radicalization by driving feelings of injustice.

Interestingly, similar to parallel descriptions of their in-group's treatment in media, both anti-discrimination experts and the AP communicators pointed to the same sources of official crime statistics to argue their point and claimed that the justice system is against the group they seek to protect. AP argued that the police are on their side, but also that they do not report or enforce laws against law-breaking immigrants, because media and higher-ranking governmental ministries are conspiring against them. Nonetheless, the right-wing interviewees frequently point to these very same ministries and institutions when quoting statistics for support of their arguments.

There's a blending of themes related to crime and culture, as exemplified by the high-ranking politician's description of German culture as orderly, just, lawful, whereas in cities with “international people” criminals are allowed to “destroy German life” though illegal activities such as bicycle theft and riding one's bike and electric scooter on the sidewalk, sometimes two to three people on it at a time. Similarly, the businessman/communicator claimed [that before immigrants came there had been no knife attacks or attacks against women], unlike “in this misanthropic (menschenverachtende) [Muslim] culture, that basically comes from the Stone Age and will never work for [Germany].” The AP communicators frequently described immigrants as “illegal economic migrants,” and when describing their own positive treatment in foreign countries, they attribute it to having followed rules and laws. Meanwhile, anti-discrimination experts described scenes of immigrant individuals being publicly shamed and berated for speaking languages other than German in public and being admonished for going the wrong way down the street on their bikes.

The AP subjects' perception of injustice or what they perceive to be unfair treatment toward their in-group is reflected in anecdotes about the difficulty with which an immigrant can receive a new

washing machine from the state, because they are considered needy, while a German must jump through additional bureaucratic hoops. And the far-left extremist explained that when he has experienced or observed racism or injustice he thinks violent thoughts. The theme of injustice also blends beyond issues related to the legal system, into historical narratives, narratives of economic deprivation, and unfairness over perceived censorship.

The group of counter-radicalization experts explained that justice and hate play an important role in radicalization, with one arguing that:

People who go into [the extremist] scene, especially right-wing extremism, believe that their activities lead to more justice, to more of what they believe others all want. They really believe that. This sense of justice is one of the two triggers. The other is hate and that is always a mixture. Most of them start believing that they are fighting for a just cause. That is a motive that goes through an extremist constellation. And I think so too for leftists. It's always about justice. [...] they will all say, I tried to fight for the just cause. But developing hatred of others is part of this, and that is also the second motive. It always works together, even if that does not really fit for me.

Perceived Censorship & Calls for Dialogue

The topic of seeking and engaging in dialogue with those who think differently from oneself is referenced at least twenty-three (23) times by both extremists and counter-discrimination experts. Cumulatively, the counter-discrimination experts described dialogue between different groups as playing a role in inoculating youth against discrimination but admitted that those who are violent aren't reachable by their NGOs, nor that extremists' victims are reassured by the existence of dialogue workshops. The city-level AP politician also repeatedly mentioned the benefit and need to talk with people to "exchange opinions" and said that he wanted to show average citizens that he is able to "talk and have a beer" with those who think differently than him and to be a role model. He also said that those writing violent messages on social media have to be engaged in a dialogue in order to bring them into "normal societal structures." Meanwhile, the AP influential communicator argued in the same sentence that there must be dialogue around issues of disagreement with the left as he also referred to them as "monkeys."

The AP communicator/businessman showed a video in which he had been invited (ahead of time) to pose a question to a high-ranking politician of an opposing party at a town-hall dialogue. The video shows him pulling out a piece of paper and beginning to give an extensive speech-like introduction of himself and his background, asking politically charged rhetorical questions without pausing for answers, and inviting all attendees to the right-wing rally outside of the townhall:

[...] please talk with one another, exchange opinions, without hate [...] and I now cordially invite everyone to go over to the demonstration, because I am one of those middle-class citizens—who was at every demonstration and where families, from children up to 80 year-olds—and no Nazis...or very few...[the moderator cuts him off at this moment]

It is noteworthy that in this video, the speaker has obviously not asked a question intended for the presenter and instead used this opportunity to take an incongruous amount of time, when the moderator cuts him off.

Thematically similar to the AP subjects' calls for dialogue, six of seven AP subjects described concerns over censorship at least forty-four (44) times: most frequently in the context of media and social media, and oppression by the state—although not through police—but non-political spaces such as in church, the arts, and classrooms are also mentioned. For example, claims that media and the justice system are conspiring not to report on immigrant men sexually assaulting German women, or other crimes committed by immigrants, and the prohibition of Christian symbols in governmental and educational buildings is described as evidence of Muslim appeasement.

Contradicting the perceived lack of dialogue and censorship are AP subjects' accounts of frequent lengthy engagement with a broad range of domestic and international media outlets, publications of magazines, research, and books, public demonstrations, being invited to speak at townhalls, including with the Chancellor, a reportedly good relationship with police, reported political gains, and effective social media outreach. Similarly, AP subjects argued that media did not reflect their side objectively and that they were censored, however, they simultaneously boasted about the broad range of media engagements they enjoyed, support among some journalists, the many diverse platforms they were using to get their message out, and welcomed the increased support from voters when they are being portrayed as the enemy in the media. A further noteworthy example of inconsistency is also that of the conspiracy theorist simultaneously describing that there is censorship and no freedom of thought as he also described how he was able to access information online which shows that the [German state does not exist, that it is a company, and that citizens aren't humans anymore, but only financial share certificates.] Similarly, contradicting himself in the same sentence, the young AP politician, who was being interviewed inside of the town hall, complained that: "national pride is stripped from Germans, whereas the American has his U.S. flag on every house. You have to try hard to see where you see one hanging [in Germany] - you might not find any...well, we actually have some at the front of the town hall." Finally, unlike all other remaining interviewees (experts, far-left, and immigrants), most of the AP subjects permitted, some even encouraged, the researcher to both use their names and direct quotes—two underscored that they have no fear of retribution.

'It's a conspiracy!'

A further AP narrative which emerged in the data, can be summed up as following: most media and governmental institutions, with the exception of police, are infiltrated by a conspiratorial political left who are bent on destroying traditional German Christian values and are lying to protect immigrants and refugees who are criminal and lazy. The AP communicators frequently used known conspiracy theories and discredited information to make their points, but also claimed to cite federal statistics and sources.

During the interviews, AP subjects frequently distilled policy issues into simple yet discredited narratives, such as that refugees receive thousands of euros each month or that hundreds of women are raped and killed by refugees and migrants. One expert who participated in townhall dialogues with concerned citizens following anti-immigrant riots and protests in the town noted the difficulty trying to untangle the narratives and described being surprised at:

[...] how little democracy was defended and how many concerned citizens wanted to indeed talk, but then you talk with them, and you have the feeling that the arguments go from A-Z - everything is mixed up. Perhaps the problem is also the complexity of the

world - or that you feel that you no longer understand everything and then you trust conspiracy theories [from the Internet].

History

There are fifty-nine (59) historical references made by nine interviewees: thirty (30) references to the times of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Six interviews include twelve (12) references to World War II, usually including being against continued shaming of Germany for the atrocities they committed and distancing oneself and one's political affiliations from WWII Nazis. References to the GDR include examples of state oppression by the Stasi, interviewees organizing against the state to bring down that system, nostalgia for the social benefits citizens received, disappointment and disadvantage East-Germans faced when industries were privatized for the benefit of a capitalist system rather than for citizens. When asked about the future of Germany and its culture, the influential AP communicator summarized the complexity of a nostalgia for what could have been: "I think [we] would all be satisfied if we had the Germany back, which we believed in 1990. If you would start there together, East and West, because it was a historic opportunity."

The young city-level AP politician also described the impact of growing up in what he described as a "shortage economy" ("Mangelwirtschaft"):

[I] started to deal with the world and then realized that not all that glitters is gold. And then [I] started going against the state saying: 'man, that's not okay what you're doing here' At the time in Cottbus, it looked like Yugoslavia - the houses were relatively run down, windows broken. You could almost say you grew up in a lawless zone, right? So, the transition from GDR to BRD did not go smoothly in all cities [...] So now I could buy as much as I wanted [...], but all of a sudden, I did not have the money for it anymore. Before I had the money I needed but couldn't buy the product. [I was 8 or 9 years old and I was] already aware that money was getting tight [...]. You went to a supermarket, it was like paradise [...].

The Nazi Label

Straddling the censorship and historical narratives were grievance narratives related to the AP being equated with Nazism. Nine subjects referred to the Nazi label, Adolph Hitler, or swastika forty-five (45) times, with the highest frequency by the AP influential communicator and far-left extremist. The context was frequently references to World War II and attempts by the APs to distance themselves from its atrocities and complaints over being labeled or insulted as such. For example, the EAP scholar/social media manager interviewee described it as following: "The entire publication community, radio and press publications, including the government, are now left-wing liberal. Anything deviating from the center to the right, is [labeled] Nazi and this is completely wrong. We basically no longer have a free society. We are deeply divided." The communicator/businessman complained over perceived double standards: "When the leftists do something, it's activists. Whether ANTIFA or left-wing extremists, if they set fire to something in Leipzig, attack the police [...] they are activists. A positive representation. If right leaning

individuals do the same, then it's Nazis, neo-Nazis, right-wing extremists, evil, bad—not activists.”

However, interestingly the label is also viewed as helpful in galvanizing support, as explained by the high-ranking politician:

We were called dark Germany, meaning Nazi, we were called white trash, we were everything. And through these insults one creates a solidarity, and this solidarity is then called the Lone Star, which at some point says: We'll do it alone, Texas, Saxony or East-Germany. It is also said that it welds together over time into a castle mentality like the Americans when the Indians attacked them. One puts the flag in the middle of the castle and then you hold out until everything is finished. And this pressure creates the counter pressure. These insults, these untrue claims, with the press, these lies on TV have helped us and are still helping us.

The scholar/social media manager shared the following example of the use of the Nazi label:

The whole left scene is promoted and supported by government agencies through subsidies. They can create organizations [and] associations and they get support for it. They get buildings and social workers who support them. The left-wing scene is promoted and the right-wing one is suppressed. This is also the case in the music scene. That means the right scene is “Nazi Rock” and the other... There is now again a big “we are more” (“Wir sind mehr”) concert [here and] under the hashtag “we are more” famous people are performing.

Competitive Victimhood

The interview data show that there is a predominance of fear-based narratives and feelings among the subjects. There is broad consensus among them that “people” are afraid of their outgroup, violence, economic uncertainty, and cultural changes; the word “fear” appears almost eighty times in eleven interviews across all categories of interview subjects. Cumulatively, these patterns suggest, as one anti-discrimination expert hypothesized, that it is simpler to blame ‘the other’ for what may be wrong, than it is to try to understanding decades of policies and how those have shaped and impacted once society. EAPs are weaponizing fear inducing grievance narratives and leverage a “whole-of-ecosystem” approach for political gain.

To understand why members of a group with clear access to resources, power, and influence—especially when compared to their outgroup—are expressing victimhood narratives, it is helpful to consider the role of victimhood in political communications. Fischer explains that regardless of objective realities, “[it] pays to be perceived as a victim.” Victimization narratives emerged and evolved during the 20th century and are manipulated to serve strategic functions in the promotion of political agendas by aiming to shift public perception. What is more, narratives of victimhood can shift not only the self-description of a group, but also outside observers’ perception of legitimacy and morality. Adding to this, media, “in their role as mediators of social meaning”, has become one of the main actors in building and promoting these narratives through the words they use, and can have political implications and consequences. Thus, depending on word choice and the implication of the legitimacy, those presented or perceived as victims may gather public support and successful control of a discourse centered around victimhood becomes

control of the political agenda that determines political action. Fischer concludes that extremist elites leverage those sentiments and narratives in order to achieve their political goals.⁶⁹ Adding to this, in the context of multiculturalism's impact on intergroup relations and democracy, Moghaddam explains that intense feelings of relative deprivation or injustice are central to social movements and intergroup conflict and feelings of collective deprivation are associated with aggression against those outside of one's group.⁷⁰

AP elite fundamentalist communicators understand that being viewed as a victim and the underdog can elicit solidarity and support and motivate individuals to commit so-called heroic acts against all odds,⁷¹ as is evident through the centrality of victimhood narratives, such as conspiracy theories and perceived censorship, against the right-wing and in favor of those they perceive as adversaries. The interview data show that these strategic disinformation narratives are aimed at bolstering support even if there is much evidence disputing those claims. For example, the very elite authoritarian populists complaining of censorship simultaneously shared countless examples of both online and off-line communications and media coverage, holding political office, meeting freely and publicly, and enjoyment of what they perceived to be a broad base of supporters. This also explains elite authoritarian populists selectively embracing, revising, and rejecting World War II history, Nazi labels, and their role in the fall of the Berlin Wall: the narratives seek to simultaneously portray their victimhood and heroism throughout German history in order to motivate and mobilize supporters for their political agenda.

The same patterns of victimhood narratives, selective interpretation of facts, and use of disinformation also emerges in the data related to security-related concerns and grievances: elite authoritarian populist communicators are exploiting people's legitimate concerns for security—especially during the height of ISIS attacks—for their political gain by selectively shining the light on crimes committed by immigrants, while minimizing, and at times condoning, right-wing violent extremism and terrorism (this is discussed in depth in the next chapter). When it comes to crimes committed by those with an immigrant background, the image elite authoritarian populists project is even more distorted as frequently blatant fabrication of facts and manipulation of statistics are readily employed to breed fear and distrust for the purpose of gaining political support and influence.

This study's findings show a pattern of victimhood narratives being used as a tool for gathering power, to create group cohesion, or to rid their group of guilt or responsibility for harms. The data show that these individuals, who are by their own accounts privileged, are leveraging victimhood narratives both for strategic objectives, but also as a justification for extremist attitudes and behavior. Young and Sullivan research on Competitive Victimhood (CV) explains that both victims and perpetrators use CV depending on whether they seek power or to be seen as morally superior, and that groups can use this to "achieve greater group cohesiveness, provide justification for violence performed in the past, reduce feelings of responsibility for harmdoing,

⁶⁹ Karsten Fischer, "Between Scarification and Victimization. On Political Semantics and Its Strategic Functions" in *Large-Scale Victimization as a Potential Source of Terrorist Activities. Importance of Regaining Security in Post-Conflict Societies*, ed. Uwe Ewald and Ksenija Turkovic (Amsterdam, Netherlands: IOS Press, January 2006), 70.

⁷⁰ Moghaddam, 2008.

⁷¹ R. Bennett Furlow and H. L. Goodall, "The War of Ideas and the Battle of Narratives: A Comparison of Extremist Storytelling Structures," *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 3 (2011).

increase perceived control through the elicitation of social guilt from the outgroup, and elicit support from third parties.”⁷² As such, they note that even groups which enjoy a privileged status in society use victimhood narratives (such as a racial majority reporting feelings of being discriminated against) if they believed that they were being relatively deprived (such as through affirmative action) to alleviate feelings of guilt and maintain a positive image of themselves. What is more, when these groups feel that they have been wronged (such as through accusations of perpetuating inequality), they become more likely to justify their higher social standing. Additionally, when:

[Groups] feel oppressed, that their group has been subject to violence and discrimination, and that their way of life is threatened are all predictors of prejudice and fundamentalism. This brings the real-world consequences of CV into sharp relief: beliefs about relative ingroup victimization may facilitate the emergence and retrospective justification of extremist attitudes.⁷³

Importantly, Young and Sullivan also note that CV research has found that when a victimized group feels that their group’s suffering is being acknowledged (e.g., a racial minority group), along with acknowledgement of suffering by a larger group to which they belong (e.g., a socio-economic class), and a suffering by other groups (e.g., a racial majority group), it can facilitate reconciliation.⁷⁴

The data also show a pattern of APs using victim narratives to play on people’s frustration and promoting hate toward the supposed sources of the problem. In related violent extremism research, researcher and commentator Mazarr’s analysis of the role of grievances in jihadist violent extremist groups shows how these groups use victim narratives to play on popular frustrations and create a psychological drive to violently react to the supposed sources of the problem if one wants to reclaim dignity. He argues that these types of “grievance narratives arise when social progress stalls, modernization fails, rifts appear between social groups, or a group loses a major conflict.” When societies or groups feel alienated or left behind by the dominant liberal order, they may resort to violence as a way of reasserting their own traditional or historical narratives or principles. He describes that:

The typical narrative has a few central themes. It views history as a contest between forces of good and evil. It contends that a true people, some honored nation or group, was once great and has been brought low by conspiracies of evildoers, usually immigrant outsiders. It warns that cosmopolitan influences are undermining the values of said true people, and it usually promises that a charismatic leader will guide those people out of the despoiled present to reclaim an idealized past.⁷⁵

⁷² Isaac F. Young and Daniel Sullivan, “Competitive Victimhood: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature,” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 11, October 2016, 30-34, 31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.04.004>

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Michael J. Mazarr, "The Age of Grievance: How to Play Resentment Politics," *Foreign Affairs*, July 3, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2014-07-03/age-grievance>.

Both the central themes, such as an honored group being brought down by a conspiracy, and the preexisting criteria, such as feelings of being left behind by modernization, are present throughout the dataset.⁷⁶

Adding to this, Scott Kaufman's synthesis of the victimhood mindset explains that those who come to believe that their life is outside of their control, and completely directed by external forces, may come to see themselves as victims. These individuals and groups also lack empathy for others and frequently see themselves as highly moral and everyone else as immoral. Furthermore, individuals and groups have learned that victimhood used to gain power and to justify aggression as legitimate given their own (real or perceived) suffering. Consequently, the belief that oneself or one's group are always victimized leads to out-group hostility, even in neutral situations.⁷⁷

"Us versus Them"

The above outlined results show that APs are concerned about societal changes, largely encompassing topics around gender norms and non-white immigrants. These topics play an important function, because they simultaneously span across multiple culture, economic, and victimhood grievance narratives to establish an "us versus them" metanarrative for drumming up support for EAPs' political goals. Interestingly, while culture-related grievances about visible societal changes are predominant, these are not issues which affect the individual in their day-to-day life in the same way that economics or security do.⁷⁸ To underscore, the data show a pattern of anti-multiculturalism themes, focused on superficial issues, such as immigrants' use of their native language, their clothing choices, and food and alcohol consumption differences. Since none of these behaviors have a direct effect on authoritarian populists or their supporters, it can be reasoned that these visible differences make it easier to establish immigrants as 'the other' and the out-group, or that these are stand-ins for perceived differences in values that help to combine all fears into one simple narrative.

To be clear, the next section analyzes and compares the relative importance of economic versus cultural issues, including analyzing one possible assertion that anti-immigrant grievances are driven by economics or relative deprivation, however, the data does not support this premise. Analysis of findings on cultural grievances and concerns pertaining to immigrant integration uncovers that the focus on superficial visible cultural differences, such as type of food and language differences only thinly conceals racism and a deeper concern over larger societal changes which have nothing to do with immigrants, such as the conservative and religious values of an aging population being taken over by socially liberal and non-religious values. For example, on one hand APs claim advocate for conservative family structure and gender roles, but the data show that they simultaneously reject conservative Muslim values pertaining to gender and family rather than recognizing that are actually rather closely aligned with their own conservative values. This hypocrisy also emerges in discussions of religious differences,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Scott Barry Kaufman, "Unraveling the Mindset of Victimhood," *Scientific American*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/unraveling-the-mindset-of-victimhood/>.

⁷⁸ Mueller, 2016.

whereby the extremist elite argue that Islam is intolerant of others, while simultaneously advocating for the denial of religious freedom to Muslims in Germany.

The data also show that AP cultural-grievance narratives are not about concerns for maintaining their own cultural practices, such as a lack of funding or support for those, but are instead based on sexist and racist tropes. It could also be hypothesized that their anti-immigrant grievances are the result of deeply held appreciation for certain cultural practices, such as wearing certain clothes and eating certain foods, and the perception that one may not be allowed to practice those customs in the future because immigrant or modern practices are replacing traditional German customs. However, there is no evidence in support of this in the dataset beyond a couple of mentions of their own support for traditional arts, over modern art. Conversely, the data show that the racism within their ideology is both overt and implicit. For example, AP's criteria for what would make acceptable immigrants or refugees is not compatible with the realities of why people emigrate or seek refuge and creates unattainable, paradoxical, and contradictory parameters.

Perhaps surprisingly, there is an overlap between AP's "us versus them" and simplistic black and white narratives and the propaganda and disinformation tactics used by jihadist-inspired violent extremist. For example, an analysis of Al-Qaida's magazine 'Inspire' showed that "the friend-foe scheme" is central to the construction of the terrorists' worldview; the word 'USA' makes a more frequent appearance than the word 'Allah'.⁷⁹ Baysinger's similar research on the ideology of right-wing populism also shows that victimhood and "us versus them" narratives, including about being discriminated against by a society that welcomes and favors refugees or immigrants or other minorities, are central to the far-right propaganda and disinformation. As a result, right-wing extremists desire to "take back" or "defend" their culture and traditions against the influences of the "foreigners" in a classic "us versus them" struggle over the future of the society. Such a dichotomous perspective leads to violence as right-wing extremists attempt to assert superiority over minority groups.⁸⁰ Both radical Islamists and far right groups feed off the othering of 'oppositional' groups and use violence as a solution. Interestingly, both groups' ideologies also include anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-woman sentiments and narratives.⁸¹

Moreover, Furlow and Goodall's comparison of extremists' narratives shows that in addition to victimhood and "us versus them" narratives, far-right extremists, just as Islamists, claim that the world is in chaos and disorder, connected to an ongoing historical battle, and it must be made "right again" by "political action inspired and ordained by the divine. [...] The purpose of the core narrative is to create a way of understanding the world through the metaphor of war and to see specific issues as battles that must be fought to ultimately prevail in that war."⁸² These

⁷⁹ Katharina Leimbach, "Die (De-)Konstruktion Eines Extremistischen Weltbildes: Eine Mixed-Methods Analyse Von Al-Qaidas Online Magazin "Inspire"," *Journal for Deradicalization* 11 (Summer 2017), 148-207, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/104>.

⁸⁰ Timothy Baysinger, "Right-Wing Group Characteristics and Ideology," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, 20 (July 2006): https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235188527_Right-Wing_Group_Characteristics_and_Ideology

⁸¹ Tahir Abbas, "Ethnicity and Politics in Contextualizing Far Right and Islamist Extremism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11(3) (2017): 54-61, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297841>.

⁸² Furlow and Goodall, 2011.

narratives seek to inspire those who identify closely with them to assume the role of hero or martyr for the cause, whether this is through death and violence or by running for political office “against all odds.” Additionally, these binary “black or white” narratives are used to cast the “enemy,” the other, in a dark light, where there is no place for nuance, and the only way to make things right is by destroying the enemy. Through these narrative techniques, words can lead toward violence⁸³ as people who believe that there is a conspiracy against their in-group tend to have stronger intentions to engage in violent extremism.⁸⁴

In investigating the specific strategic communications process utilized by extremists, Braddock explains that they use communication, in the form of narratives—the representation of an event or a series of events⁸⁵—as tools to radicalize audiences and gather support for their goals. In this context, persuasive narratives can change beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors.⁸⁶ Extremists and violent extremists use a broad range of narrative themes and content formats to persuade possible supporters and recruits; a chief element of their propaganda centers around real or perceived grievances. They use specific narratives as a key component to communicate their ideology, comprised of the perceived problem (i.e., grievance), a proposed solution, and mobilize action toward the perceived solution.

Therefore, when groups or individuals face undesirable conditions, for example, those created by modernity or globalization, grievance narratives serve the foundation for strategic communications and an organizing ideology. When this occurs, narratives contain a pattern of central themes woven together to form a grand us-versus-them narrative. The black-and-white themes tend to be focused on a special status group or people who are victimized, or whose values are being brought down, by the other in an ongoing fight of good versus evil. In their essence, there is usually a doomsday scenario warning against one or more elements of modernity, a call to action against all odds, and a special leader who will help the group return to the glorified past.

There are multitudes of factors which contribute to and interact in the process of extremism and radicalization, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, for now it is helpful to note that these factors vary greatly from individual to individual and the contexts in which those individuals live. Within those contexts, social or religio-political grievances, whether real or imagined, play an important role in an individual’s vulnerability by contributing to the conditions that give rise to radicalization toward violence,⁸⁷ and by amplifying the strength of other so-

⁸³ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁴ Bettina Rottweiler, Paul Gill, "Conspiracy beliefs and violent extremist intentions: The contingent effects of self-efficacy, self-control and law-related morality," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 7 (2022): 1485-1504, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1803288>.

⁸⁵ Braddock, 2012.

⁸⁶ H. Porter Abbott, “Story, Plot, and Narration,” in *The Cambridge Introduction To Narrative* (2nd edition), ed. David Herman (New York, U.S.A.: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 39-51.

⁸⁷ John Horgan, "From Profiles To pathways and Roots To routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618 (2008): 80–94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40375777>.

called radicalization “push or pull” factors by eroding an individual’s social ties and trust that serve as buffers against radical violent ideologies.⁸⁸ These grievances can include real, legitimate, or collective grievances, such as distrust of the state or law enforcement, corrupt government, or disagreements with foreign policy⁸⁹, but can also be built upon mis- and disinformation and propaganda narratives. What is more, the prevalence of grievance narratives, followed by explicit calls to violent action in violent extremist propaganda, points to the important role that grievances play in motivating extremism and violence. The link then between grievances and extremism is built, channeled, and promoted through narratives and rhetoric.⁹⁰

Within the complex set of drivers of radicalization, relative deprivation, social and religio-political grievances and accompanying resentment play a key role in the formation of an ideological foundation from which violent extremists’ motivations and mobilization are drawn. Briggs and Feve explain that their ideology is communicated through narratives and using persuasive techniques:

[jihadist extremists’ messaging] layers together a mix of ideological, political, moral, religious and social narratives based on a range of real or imagined grievances. Mixing historical and political facts with half-truths, lies and conspiracy theories, these messages often convey simplistic argumentation which promotes thought-processes that include black and white thinking, de-sensitisation, dehumanisation, distancing of the other, victimisation and calls to activism and militancy.

What is more:

In recent years, the target audience for these products has broadened beyond the ‘hard core’ support base toward a more mainstream constituency. This has included attempts to justify their actions among neutral populations and manipulate passive sympathisers who might share similar grievances.⁹¹

Economic vs. Cultural and Identity Grievances

In evaluating the function of economic versus cultural grievances in AP narratives, it is helpful to briefly consider how various branches of political science research have investigated economic, governance, and cultural factors and grievances in identity politics and in predicting or preventing violence and extremism. In doing so, it is important to note that even what is defined as economic versus cultural or socio-political varies broadly given broad overlaps between those

⁸⁸ Sarah Lyons-Padilla et al., "Belonging Nowhere: Marginalization & Radicalization Risk among Muslim Immigrants," *Behavioral Science & Policy* 1, no. 2 (2015): 1-12, 10.1353/bsp.2015.0019.

⁸⁹ Witold Mucha, "Polarization, Stigmatization, Radicalization. Counterterrorism and Homeland Security in France and Germany," *Journal for Deradicalization* 10 (Spring 2017): 203-254, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/89/79>.

⁹⁰ "Daesh Meta-Narratives: From the Global Ummah to the Hyperlocal," (Atlanta, GA, U.S.A., The Carter Center, June 2017), https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/narratives-report-final-02june2017.pdf.

⁹¹ Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, "Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What Are the Implications for Government?," (London, U.K.: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, July 2013): 4, <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/CounterNarrativesFN2011.pdf>.

categories of variables. For example, in the broadest sense of research on the intersection of grievances and conflict, Collier and Hoeffler's 2004 cornerstone research on the role of "greed vs. grievance" in civil wars found that social and political grievances have little explanatory power for civil wars, and that economic variables (i.e., a clear economic cost-benefit analysis) provide considerably more explanatory power than identity-based grievances (e.g., cultural identity, social-class, inequality) for indicating the risk of civil war. They found no evidence that in and of itself high levels of inequality have a strong effect on the risk of conflict.⁹² On the other hand, Gurr's 1970 and 1993 foundational research states that it is relative deprivation (political or economic differences relative to another group), cultural identity issues, and historical loss of autonomy all contribute substantially to the grievances of minorities and are critical in the early stages of group mobilization. However, these factors do become less significant than group organization, leadership, and state response once campaigns of organized political action, including protests and violent rebellion are underway.⁹³ ⁹⁴ Pizzolo summarizes the debate this represents as follows: researchers focusing on (non-economic) grievance-driven factors explain that actors are not purely rational and that economic-driven explanations are not methodologically sound because they oversimplify important psychological or social variables.⁹⁵

In looking at how violent extremism and terrorism researchers think about how socio-economic and political factors influence violent extremism, we find similar debates, including considerations of how to differentiate what is considered an economic versus cultural grievance. For example, Nesser conducted four case studies which show that sometimes "seemingly well-adjusted and well-integrated individuals" can commit acts of terror; yet he nonetheless concludes that "dealing with the causes of terrorism, one must address socio-economic and political issues in all the contexts or levels of analysis relevant to potential Islamist terrorists." Several of the cases he outlines indicate that "problems related to being Muslim immigrants" in the West had some influence on the jihadist terrorists' motivations, and that these problems seem to have made them receptive to indoctrination from radical Islamist recruiters.⁹⁶ Researchers and practitioners are coming to understand that relative deprivation and other factors are more significant than purely economic considerations.

Elefteriadou's research underscores this with the finding that second-generation Muslim refugees, who are relatively better off economically than the preceding generation, and had

⁹² Paul Collier, P., & Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2004): 563-595, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3488799>.

⁹³ Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁹⁴ Tedd Gurr, "Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict Since 1945," *International Political Science Review*, 14 (2) (1993): 161-201.

⁹⁵ Paolo Pizzolo, "The Greed versus Grievance Theory and the 2011 Libyan Civil War: Why grievance offers a wider perspective for understanding the conflict outbreak," *Small Wars Journal*, 2020, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/greed-versus-grievance-theory-and-2011-libyan-civil-war-why-grievance-offers-wider>.

⁹⁶ Petter Nesser, *Jihad In Europe: A Survey of the Motivations For Sunni Islamist Terrorism In Post-Millennium Europe*, (Kjeller, Norway: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2004): 55, <https://publications.ffi.no/nb/item/asset/dspace:3048/04-01146.pdf>

“resentment toward their lives in the West and an ill-defined affiliation to their suffering brethren in the Middle East.”⁹⁷ Moreover, while some counter-terrorism researchers have argued that governance issues, such as corruption or lack of access to basic services, is a factor in jihadist-motivated violent extremism in developing countries⁹⁸ yet others have found the inverse, namely that living above the poverty line and having a higher education correlates with increased support for violent extremism.⁹⁹ Ultimately, the consensus among conflict researchers is that poverty cannot predict violence or violent extremism, but that relative deprivation, and socio-political and socio-economic grievances play an important role in extremists’ ideological foundation-setting.

In looking at the relationship between economic versus cultural grievances in non-violent extremism, it is helpful to consider Fukuyama’s research on today’s far-right identity politics, and the so-called “culture war,” which shows the interrelated nature of the two. He explains that authoritarian populism, or as he calls it “populist nationalism,” is accompanied by grievances based on deeply intertwined economic and identity-based cultural narratives: economic matters, such as poverty or unemployment, are closely linked with identity and dignity and humans are not necessarily motivated by material resources and goods, as much as by a desire for status, to be acknowledged, and recognized by one’s fellow man. Thereby comparative or relative economic deprivation, or a sense of loss of resources, induces anger about the injustice of the situation and a perceived loss of identity, rather than about actual resource deprivation.

Fukuyama invokes Samuel Huntington and Alexis de Tocqueville’s work and notes that “the most politically destabilizing group tends not to be the desperate poor, but rather middle class who feel they are losing their status with respect to other groups. [...] The poor tend to be politically disorganized and preoccupied with day-to-day survival.” He describes that the middle class feels they are “the core of national identity,” and that “the perceived threat to middle-class status may then explain the rise of populist nationalism in many parts of the world in the second decade of the twentieth century.” Under economically distressing conditions, nationalists are able to translate economic loss into a loss of identity by telling these audiences that they “have always been a core member of our great nation, but foreigners, immigrants, and your own elite compatriots have been conspiring to hold you down; your country is no longer your own and you are not respected in your own land.” Under these conditions it is easy to see how immigrants and other minorities become scapegoats. Far-right extremists—including elites—have been extraordinarily good at weaponizing economic concerns, despite the lefts’ much more working-

⁹⁷ Marina Eleftheriadou, “Refugee Radicalization/Militarization in the Age of the European Refugee Crisis: A Composite Model,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32:8 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1516643>.

⁹⁸ Olaniyi Evans and Ikechukwu Kelikume, “The Impact Of Poverty, Unemployment, Inequality, Corruption and Poor Governance On Niger Delta Militancy, Boko Haram Terrorism and Fulani Herdsmen Attacks in Nigeria,” *International Journal of Management, Economics and Social Sciences* 8 (2019) 2: 58-80.

⁹⁹ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malečková, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 17 (4) (2003): 119-144.

and middle-class friendly economic policies, because the left has been busy with their own form of identity politics.¹⁰⁰

However, while Fukuyama explains the role of the middle and working class “struggle for recognition” in the rise of populism and ultimately attributes it to the middle-class being enchanted by nationalist ideas, this kind of analysis misses the agency of those leading and enabling the movement—specifically, elite activists and communicators—who inspire, organize, and mobilize the masses. While the data provides support for Fukuyama’s explanation of identity loss under economically distressing conditions, the data also show the importance of elite agency and their role in influencing, inspiring, and coordinating these movements by weaponizing voters’ economic concerns through oversimplification and disinformation. What is more, while today’s far-right populism has strong anti-elitist and anti-establishment elements, it is difficult to ignore that typical movement figures and organizers are elite individuals who are only claiming to represent the “concerned,” “middle-class,” and “average” citizens, and not actually of middle- or working-class citizens.

Building on Fukuyama’s assertion that concerns for safety or the economic grievances experienced by the working- and middle-class AP supporters are frequently legitimate, as are their very real connections to a perceived loss of identity and dignity, the data shows that AP elites neither have incentive nor intentions to resolve those grievances. Instead, there is evidence of identity issues being used as bridges and stand-ins for economic concerns and being used as a means for engaging and mobilizing sympathetic audiences. These findings show that anti-immigrant grievances, and specifically the narrative of “economic migrants” versus “legitimate refugees” playing an important propaganda role in bridging economic issues and grievances of the working- and middle-class with the political aspirations and objectives of the elite class. EAPs weaponize legitimate economic grievances through identity politics to motivate and mobilize support for their own political objectives. This finding builds on the explanation of the emotion-driven interplay between economics and identity politics, by showing detailed examples of how the cultural and victimhood-related narratives are turned into a cornerstone of authoritarian populists’ disinformation and propaganda, at the cost of addressing economic grievances.¹⁰¹

When asked directly, the AP subjects blame the EU, moderate parties, globalization, and capitalism for the issues they describe, and acknowledge that immigrants are not directly to blame, but much less hateful language is used to depict non-immigrant-related issues. It can be deduced that it is much easier to gain support by using fear- and anger-based communications, which are targeted at a clearly visible source of the problem, than it would be to do so using economic or financial ideas, or to develop, communicate, and implement economic policies which would simultaneously meet right-wing elite and working-class objectives. The messengers blame immigrants and refugees for needing a share of resources but complain that there aren’t enough workers (or children being born) and share very few clear ideas for economic reforms which could ease their supporters’ economic grievances. This makes sense, since it is an economic system that has worked well for them as individuals, and complex economic policies

¹⁰⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York, U.S.A., 2018), 85-89.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

are not only much harder to navigate, but they also do not make for great emotionally loaded content unless it is loaded with oversimplification, exaggerations, and falsehoods.

Non-white refugees or immigrants make a particularly convenient scapegoat for APs given their visibility in day-to-day life, the ease with which they can be made into scapegoats given their lack of political representation, and misleading ease of solving the issue by simply not allowing them to enter the country. It is neither expedient nor in their own self-interest to focus their energy on the complex and counter-elite economic and social policies which would actually be required to solve their audiences' economic grievances. Instead, they blame newly arrived, mostly voiceless individuals, either because the status quo benefits them or because it is easier to blame "the other" than to attempt to finetune or change complex financial policies. After all, nations and elites benefit from immigrants' cheap labor, among other reasons for taking in immigrants and refugees, such as moral and international responsibilities. Another similar example is AP elites voicing concerns over teacher shortages, but there are no proposed solutions, such as to pay teachers more or to promote more interest in the profession, but rather they only claim that immigrant children are destroying the German educational system—leading listeners to fill in the blank on how exactly a solution would be implemented. At the most extreme end of examples, which fall into this category, is the accusation that immigrant criminals are inspiring German criminals; implying that the latter wouldn't be as bad if it weren't for immigrants.

The data suggests that inducing fear of the other, by weaponizing economic and cultural grievances, is a simple mechanism to mobilize support and votes, and immigration becomes the lowest common denominator which can be used conveniently to connect all issues under one umbrella. The AP elites interviewed in this study directly admit as much, when they describe themselves as the "Kümmerer Partei" ("Caring Party") and admit that there is too much focus on "Fluechtlingspolitik" ("Refugee Politics"), and that there's no direct connection between migration and social services funding. Just as Fukuyama explains, "[when] economic decline is interpreted as loss of social status, it is easy to see why immigration becomes a proxy for economic change."¹⁰²

While it is beyond the parameters of this study to confirm or refute whether middle-class economic grievances are about tangible financial gaps, or perceived injustice, to identify whether grievance narratives originate with non-elites or elites, or to compare EAPs' socio-economic status with those who vote for them, the data in this study show evidence of elites explaining that they benefited from globalization and capitalism and that they do not share the same economic experiences as their declared target audiences. While they claim to represent people who may in fact be facing economic uncertainty, the APs use oversimplified economic narratives as part of their outreach and mobilization activities and ideology by turning them into dichotomous, "us versus them" narratives, versus messaging on more complex narratives, surrounding economics, capitalism, or globalization. This is despite their recognition that the latter are the origins of the issues they describe. This suggests that they are leveraging middle- and working-class economic concerns—which they do not share—for their own agenda.

Simultaneously, the findings show that they are largely men who are influencing other men using culture-related propaganda, mis-, and disinformation narratives, such as those against

¹⁰² Ibid., 89.

immigrants, Muslims, liberated women, or the LGBTQ+ community, more frequently than actual economics-related themes. As outlined above, there is indication that this may be the case because culture-related narratives are more potent in playing on emotions, such as inspiring fear and outrage, when compared to strictly economic grievances. What is clear is that there is a deep and multi-faceted disconnection between these populist elites and the disadvantaged average citizens for whom they claim to speak.

These data provide support for previous research on the lack of a relationship between poverty and extremism¹⁰³ as it shows a pattern of AP organizers being elite individuals who are not disengaged, disenfranchised, or disadvantaged. They enjoy strong domestic and international political, financial, social ties, and influence; they are connected to each other and more extreme factions of these movements and use legitimate political processes for anti-democratic aims. While the subjects frequently mentioned abstract economic concerns for people they claim to represent, there is also a pattern of them bragging about their success and wealth and declarations of not being concerned about their own economic wellbeing. As such this finding builds on Fischer's 2007 notion of the anti-modernist and anti-democratic goals of Islamist fundamentalist elites also being applicable to understanding right-wing fundamentalists who also seek influence to benefit their own interests at the cost of non-elites.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, there is also ample confirmatory evidence for Koehler's 2015 observation on the danger of extremist elites, who use legitimate societal processes to advance their anti-democratic goals, versus lower-ranked extremists (e.g., 'skinheads' or 'neo-Nazis').¹⁰⁵ Fundamentalist elites, such as authoritarian populist elites play a key role in promulgating anti-democratic ideologies.

These findings also confirm and build on previous research on right-wing extremists' ideology, narratives, and propaganda techniques, such as Baysinger's 2006, Furlow and Goodall's 2011, and Abbas' 2017 research, by showing the centrality of AP elite communicators manipulation of "us versus them" cultural narratives by blending them with economic and victimhood themes, such as those related to women's roles, "economic migrants," or censorship. EAP communicators, just like jihadist inspired violent extremists, overgeneralize and oversimplify, or frequently used outright false or discredited information about complex economic or security concerns, and turned grievances into fear-, outrage- and anger-inducing narratives, because, as Dillard and Seo have shown, these emotions are much more effective at mobilizing sympathetic audiences. It compels voters by focusing their attention on the perceived threat (i.e., immigrants, Muslims, liberated women, the LGBTQ+ community, etc.) and influencing the message recipients' behavior (i.e., voting, organizing, etc.) including at times violence against the stimuli.¹⁰⁶

Finally, the findings discussed thus also far allow for testing some of the study's second and third hypotheses. The data related to how the AP subjects see themselves (as role models and as

¹⁰³ Krueger and Malečková, 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Fischer, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Koehler, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ James Price Dillard, "Affect and Persuasion," *The SAGE Handbook of Persuasion: Developments in Theory and Practice 2nd Edition*, ed. James Price Dillard and Kiwon Seo (Thousand Oaks, CA, U.S.A.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012), https://sk.sagepub.com/reference/hdbk_persuasion2ed.

representing the majority), who they blame for the problems they experience (globalization/capitalism and outgroups), and their use of grievance narratives (as tools for gaining supporters) provide some support for Hypothesis 2a which predicted that identity uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society. The AP subjects are indeed exposed to anti-immigrant narratives and have grievances related to immigration. They also feel that their identity (i.e., culture) is under threat; there is a correlation between the two variables. However, the data is insufficient to show causality; it is insufficient to argue that exposure to anti-immigrant narratives trigger feeling that their culture is under threat. Therefore, the results add to the literature by showing that the variables are indeed correlated, however, additional data is needed to determine which comes first: exposure to anti-immigrant narratives, identity uncertainty, or grievances against society.

This finding is also in line with psychologist Michal A. Hogg's Uncertainty Identity Theory findings. Hogg's research shows that when individuals are unsure about their identity it motivates them to identify with groups, particularly high entitativity groups, which have clear boundaries, internal homogeneity, social interaction, clear internal structure, common goals, and a common fate. This study's data supports the theory and shows that when individuals feel their social identity is under threat it strengthens identification with more radical (versus moderate) elements of these groups' behaviors, agendas, or structures, because it provides certainty and clarity on how to deal with threats.¹⁰⁷

By comparison, Hypothesis 2b predicted that economic uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society. The data shows that while EAP subjects have grievances related to immigration and against German society more broadly, they are not economically disadvantaged. As such, the data do not provide support for this hypothesis. Even though they claim economic uncertainty or concerns about the future on behalf of others, the data show that they are not concerned about their own economic standing and that cultural concerns are much more central to their fears and grievances. Even if "economic uncertainty" refers more broadly, not only to the subjects' own economic standing, but concerns for others' economic wellbeing, the data shows that cultural issues are more prevalent in their narratives. However, it is important to note that this may not hold true for non-elites, and that data obtained from non-elite AP supporters may show a different relationship.

Cumulatively, the Hypothesis 2 test results and related findings imply that cultural concerns are more important than economic concerns in authoritarian populist grievances. However, additional research is necessary to show which variable triggers the other. Related data show that anti-immigrant and other culture-related themes are a core part of AP narratives and incite outrage, anger, and fear in both them and in their audiences, and suggest that anti-immigrant (and other related) narratives may originate with the EAPs. In line with previous research findings on the role of economics in violent extremism, these findings show that non-violent elite extremists were not influenced by concerns about their economic standing. Instead, they have grievances about broad cultural changes and see themselves as responsible for fighting those.

¹⁰⁷ Michael A. Hogg, Christie Meehan, and Jayne Farquharson, "The Solace of Radicalism: Self-uncertainty and Group Identification in the Face of Threat," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 46, Issue 6, (2010): 1061-1066, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.05.005>.

Results based on findings related to how the subjects feel about their role in society and whether they feel part of a larger German or European community and exposure to anti-immigrant and other extremist narratives provided insights for testing Hypothesis 3, which predicted that grievances against German society are positively related to feelings of alienation from society. This prediction was not supported by the research findings as the subjects, who indeed had a broad range of grievances, did not feel alienated from German society. Instead, their grievances spurred them on to engage civically to try to influence change. It could be argued that APs even held an outsized opinion of themselves and their role in society as they claimed to be representing the majority. However, an important distinction must be made about *feelings* of alienation versus objective alienation from society. While the data show the AP subjects criticizing the mainstream, perceiving some alienation, such as conspiracies against them, they do not feel that they are either separate from or on the edge of the mainstream, which they claim to represent. However, while outside of the parameters of the hypothesis, the data provides evidence of their actual alienation from mainstream society. It must also be noted that most of them are elites and that the same may not be true for non-elite APs. Elite status may mediate (i.e., affect) the relationship between grievance and alienation and different groups may be affected differently; additional data collected from non-elite APs could provide those insights.

3. How Do They Get What They Want?

Civic Engagement and Networking

The AP subjects explained how they connected and engaged civically by organizing or participating in various political, societal, or cultural structures or organizations. They were connected both to political elites as well as violent extremists and were running for and holding political office, volunteering by conducting recruitment and communications for AP parties, organizing and participating in demonstrations, rallies, and other large group gatherings such as “Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamification of the Occident” (PEGIDA), concerts, and mourning events/protests for those who died allegedly at the hands of immigrants, and volunteered in non-profit organizations, such as youth, cultural, religious, or professional organizations. The immigration expert interviewee explained that it is not surprising that eastern Germany is supportive of AP ideologies and groups, because after World War II west-German Nazis went to the east with the intention of building these structures. These findings support Kriesi et al.’s research, namely, that certain civil society organizations can and are being used by authoritarian populist actors for their aims.¹⁰⁸

Half of the AP subjects believed their civic and community engagement efforts were effective, while the other half had mixed beliefs about their ability to influence societal and political change through civic engagement and expressed frustration: the high-ranking national level politician, the city-level politician, and the AP conspiracist felt that their civic engagement was effective. The high-ranking politician explained that while other parties have instituted a de-facto ban on cooperation with this party, they are nonetheless they are setting the issues agenda, because voters say that the party cares about them. He further explained: “We are the new caring party. We take care of the concerns of the little people and the old parties have to jump on it and deal with the same issues so that they don't drift away completely.” He gave examples of

¹⁰⁸ Kriesi et al., 2008.

retirement benefits and internet freedom policies on which he argues they have pushed moderate parties to follow their party line.

Meanwhile, the EAP influential communicator, communicator/businessman, and young politician had mixed views on whether their engagements are working or not. While believing that protests brought down the GDR, the communicator/businessman was explained as following:

I did not believe [that it was effective] back then and then the critical mass came, and it tipped in our direction. I still hope it will happen this way now, too, because the longer it takes, the worse it gets. I asked [other EAP influencer]: do you think there will be civil war? and he firmly assumes that a civil war will come if nothing changes beforehand, because the average citizen has not yet woken up. The average citizen has no problems, he is fine. Status quo. It's okay too, but not what the future is about.

Later in the interview he further described his frustration when friends and supporters of the party do not vote:

If I am unable to reach my circle of friends, how do I want to achieve that with average citizens? I feel this powerlessness - it does not matter - I have maybe shot 50 videos, made 20 speeches, given lectures. A few million have seen my Merkel video. I am recognized everywhere in the Erzgebirge region—everywhere. And I say: 'did you go voting too?'—'Nope. We cannot change anything. You did a good job with the protest, but we don't vote.' What more can I do? I am one citizen - I only have a pen and can articulate myself, but I do that completely non-violently. So what more can I do?

When asked if he believed these demonstrations and his other activities are effective, he described the protests in which he participated during the fall of the Berlin Wall, as the number of protesters grew larger and larger until the Wall eventually fell. The AP conspiracy theorist also shared this belief in the effectiveness of their protests in bringing down the Wall. Meanwhile, the young AP politician described his perception of reality in Western versus Eastern-Germany as following: "There it is not like it is here. [...] here there's a feeling that we could turn something around. Whereas there it is actually the situation that the world has ended." However, his limited knowledge of even the closest regions in his vicinity was underscored when he described a travel destination" less than an hour away as a strange place he did not know much about.

Similarly, the left-wing extremist described the anti-discrimination activities he participates in through an NGO and conversations in his private life as effective at changing people's minds about issues such as racism or sexism, and said:

I think that's more important than [what you show students in schools]. You sometimes have to just - or on Instagram or Facebook or in private conversation. When the family is together on Sundays [...] [or] over beer on campus - just talk about racism or that people are still drowning in the Mediterranean [...].

Additionally, the data show that overlapping networks and relationships play a key role in advocating for and advancing AP goals. The AP elite communicators and advisors had known each other for long periods of time, had close personal relationships with each other and others who share similar views, and engaged what one of them described as "cooperation", which overlapped in formal and informal group and party memberships, verbal and written support and

communications, and volunteering. However, two of the individuals specifically and repeatedly denied being part of a “network”, being an “official administrator” for the extremist party’s social media page (despite being a manager of the social media page) or having formal ties to a political organization or party (despite having run for political office under the party’s umbrella.) Infighting or distrust among the individuals or branches of an influential mass protest movement and organization or within the extremist parties were also mentioned on several occasions as an obstacle to more effective influence.

Nonetheless, they explained how these organizations, events, and networks were the civic engagement channels they used for influencing politics and society as likeminded individuals who pool their power to affect change in areas seen as beneficial to the groups they represent. And, in addition to their traditional and social media messaging engagements, these were also described as membership recruitment and ideological persuasion vehicles as they offered access to individuals who may not yet be part of formal structures. For example, when the influential communicator explained the funding of a youth center, which will be established as an alternative to the one he described as being influenced by the left, he mentioned a professional business networking group managed by the communicator/businessman as financial contributors.

"Globalized Anti-Globalists"

Counter to what most democratic governments are willing to openly admit and similar to the pre-World War II German far-right, Grumke’s 2017 research on the "globalized anti-globalists" shows how today’s U.S. and European nationalist and right-wing extremist groups, including white supremacists, are building international networks and cooperation against pluralism and immigration in support of their domestic political goals. They view globalization as a mechanism through which “globalists” dominate and destroy unique and autonomous cultures and nations in order to maximize profits. Their ideological umbrella of pan-Aryanism is based on the identity of the white man and opposition to modern liberal democratic systems. They believe that in order to ensure the survival of the white race, it will take an international effort of like-minded individuals and groups to fight against Jews, the U.S. led international system, and racial mixing. They also believe themselves to be fulfilling the will of the people, who desire to have their nations, cultures, languages, and identities preserved.¹⁰⁹ Koehler’s research on radical movements is relevant here: it provides insights into how their networks of individuals, groups and organizations seek to influence or change their societies. He describes how these networks aim to alter or target a society, including through the use of violence, in order to create a new version of it. As such, they define a target, be it society or an enemy, couple it with “hardware” of the movement, such as rallies, or other events, economic networking, such as merchandise, and an ideology—the “software”—which frames the culture, values, and beliefs. Another component is the internal stratification by which “Radical Social Movements organize to align themselves with their positive Target Societies with respect to this internal architecture. In other words, they may strive to mirror the positive Target Society in order to achieve greater credibility and further legitimize themselves as movements.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Grumke, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Koehler, 2015.

Indeed, thirteen of the sixteen interviewees mentioned international links fifty-one (51) times: with mentions of Russia, the U.S., and Israel emerging as recurring themes. While the left was described as not having many well-established or effective links to other international leftist movements, EAPs were described and spoke about themselves as not only inspiring and supporting each other across country lines in the online space, including through one-on-one conversations, and even in the European parliament, but also as meeting regularly in real life, such as at concerts and rallies or demonstrations.

In addition to describing Russia as a close neighbor, with whom they identify more closely than with western neighbors, the AP subjects mentioned the Russian-government media outlet RT as a source of information. Western countries' "injustice" against Russia reflected in modern day and post-World War II sanctions were also mentioned frequently. Similarly, the national-level AP party's local headquarters office was hosting a guest speaker that week for an event entitled: "Russian-Germans: second class citizens? Pension, Culture, Future!" A negative impact of foreign propaganda outlets, such as Russia's RT, was also mentioned by two of the anti-discrimination experts.

A noteworthy individual-level example of these relationships emerged out of the AP interviews: the founder of the city-level AP political party was described by one interviewee as having "a bunch of Russian friends," and is in addition to running the local AP party simultaneously serving as a lawyer to individuals who provided security at one of the local AP rallies and who were accused of plotting a right-wing terrorist attack, while also being an immigration lawyer for immigrants from Russia. This individual also started a Russian cultural organization in Germany and is married to an American woman.

The U.S. and Donald Trump were frequently invoked by AP subjects: the seven AP subjects mentioned Donald Trump by name thirty-one (31) times, frequently praising and quoting him. They explained that Trump's slogan of "America first" appeals to them, because it reflects their goal to put "Germany first." Finally, positive mentions of Israel and claims to have Jewish friends were mentioned frequently enough to deserve mention. The businessman/communicator mentioned his links to Israel ten times, including referring several times to Arabs and Islam as a common threat for Germany and Israel: "Which Islamist country works? I admire little Israel - how it asserts itself and contests these attempts at overpowering. It's just fascinating."

Finally, at least two of the EAP communicators/advisors explained that they ran for city council alongside several additional candidates for the same local AP party and appeared together in a large visually appealing multi-page flier, which was systematically distributed to every mailbox in the city. However, they explained that they neither intended, nor expect to win. One explained that winning was only:

[...] a secondary goal. The [two who were elected] designed it well—they were elected nicely—everything is ok—I only let [the head of the local extremist party] persuade me because he needed it", and the other wanted to "lend his name, which is known to some people [in the city], to the citizen movement." The influential communicator was intended to serve as the campaign manager for one of AP party candidates and was only kept from doing so due to illness.

Demonstrations, Protests, & Rallies

Nine of the sixteen interviewees discussed the importance and symbolism of demonstrations and rallies, among other large group gatherings; the word demonstration itself comes up in the dataset a minimum of thirty-three (33) times. All opportunities made possible by demonstrations were described as being channels for bringing about change. Demonstrations and other large group gatherings were described as where one persuades, creates dialogue, brings together different factions of supporters, and verbally and frequently also physically encounters and counters one's ideological opponents. The AP demonstrations were described as opportunities for showing one's supporters, by-standers, opponents, and observers—including media—the size and composition of the movements' supporters, as well as being an opportunity to communicate to AP audiences in-person. The young AP politician described the beginning of his civic engagement as a fourteen-year-old joining protests against 5G cell phone towers, and how this experience led to his “questioning of the whole system” and further civic and political engagement.

In describing a recent wave of AP protests, the immigration expert explained that protesters were invited and came from outside of the city, adding to the number of participants and creating the illusion of out-sized support, which had an impact on observers and persuaded by-standers to become supporters. She also described AP demonstrations as a tool for mobilizing supporters for follow-on activities, and explained that in the past AP protests were pushed to the side-streets under the guise of “security reasons,” but having elected representatives in the city council allowed them to obtain permits for the city center, where they became much more visible to citizens.

The AP communicator/businessman described in detail how media covered the demonstrations at which he spoke to thousands of individuals, proudly including how he and the other AP communicators were called “heroes” for their “Zivilcourage” (moral or civil courage) in the AP populist magazine *Compact*, which is closely linked with the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and PEGIDA. He also described speaking to a group of up to 13,000 protesters outside an event attended by the German Chancellor, which was not only covered by German media, but also by international outlets, and led to him receiving thank you notes of support from: “[...] Tirol, Austria --- from Austrian parties, from governors from Switzerland, from patriots from Poland, the Czech Republic, from Argentina, and from [Germans in] China”, and adds: “people realize what's happening through the internet and write thank you letters—really, really great.”

The young city-level AP politician also shared an example of demonstrations as an effective vehicle for bringing about change:

We also have groups in [the city I represent] who see [the AP party] demonstrations more as National Socialists or racists and ... somehow, we created a situation so I could talk to younger people [...] and I think that's the important thing. We can talk to each other again, no matter if we think differently [...] we can exchange ideas and there I see that it works with some young people [...] I think that's a good thing. You had for years [a situation] where people just shouted at each other, [as] we saw at the demonstrations last year: some are screaming from there, the others there, but it does not come to conversation. Of course, you have to provoke sometimes by going there and trying to start a conversation. And that's what we've done - this year I had a lot of conversations

with young people, and I think that's good, because then when they see me somewhere they greet me. And we don't agree politically, but we talk to each other [...].

The local anti-discrimination expert painted a picture of AP demonstrations by describing the extremist language, fliers, and banners against foreigners and that following one of the above-described demonstrations, violent far-right extremists destroyed several minority-owned restaurants. Multiple of the EAPs admitted the presence of violent far-right extremists at the demonstrations but minimized the number and justified the violence. This justification of violence is described further in chapter III, the Impact on Mainstream Society, section on Tolerance for and Violence Radicalization.

The EAP influential communicator, who also regularly spoke at AP demonstrations saw them as “an opportunity for the people to let out emotions by screaming for an hour” that gives people a vision, which has to be translated into concrete action and activities behind the scenes. He described telling a Nationalist Socialist acquaintance that he is not against his attending the demonstrations because he knows that he will not be “bringing the slogans the press is waiting for.” He also described seeing his granddaughter on the counter-protesters’ side. Meanwhile, in describing the same demonstrations, the EAP communicator/businessman explained that while there was indeed at least one Hitler salute, it must have come from ANTIFA or the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), and that it was the AP side who had brought it to the police’s attention; he adds that it must have looked very badly to the average citizen. He also explained that one of the individuals arrested for his ties to the local far-right terrorist group provided security services at the demonstrations.

These findings support and build on Koehler’s 2016 assertions on links between far-right parties and mass radicalization through anti-immigrant movements, as it provides evidence of the overlapping relationships, narratives, and structures between the mass protest movements, authoritarian populists or right-wing extremists, and violent extremists. APs are leveraging migration by running on anti-immigration platforms and contributing to increased racism and xenophobia through their “us versus them” narratives. The results build on Koehler’s research by providing evidence of AP elites not simply leveraging anti-immigrant public opinions and mass movements, which supposedly spring up spontaneously from homes to the streets, but evidence that they have a hand in organizing these protests and media stories and are pro-actively trying to shape and influence narratives in their favor by increasing extreme viewpoints through anger and outrage-inducing messaging. The data show a pattern of AP elite-driven structures, processes, and disinformation leveraging and enabling anti-immigrant mass protest movements which contribute toward the disinhibiting and mainstreaming of extreme views. This undermines trust in democratic institutions, such as government or media, foments polarization through the narrowing of political and societal views, promotes fear and hate of the other, and helps to incite extremism and violent extremism.

In addition to overlap between violent and non-violent extremists in the information space and in personal networks, the data show that demonstrations provide key opportunities for physical interactions between them and current and potential supporters. This supports Koehler’s observations of militant right-wing extremists organizing or participated in anti-immigrant demonstrations, and creating direct noninstitutional links between organized, militant, and explicit neo-Nazis and citizens not previously known for right-wing extremist involvement. Counter-terrorism research has thus far only been able to offer limited insights into the specific

and unique processes by which AP elites connect with violence, and this study is able to provide concrete examples of relationships between actors and shed light on their tactics and goals, including their overlap with mass anti-immigrant movements.

While the online space and media are important vehicles for sharing and exchanging ideas with a broad audience, the results show that in-person activities play a key strategic communications role. EAP communicators use demonstrations, protests, and rallies to message to, energize, and mobilize their supporters, to reinforce ties between loosely affiliated groups of supporters (including violent and non-violent extremists), and to recruit new ones by communicating their presence and goals to by-standers and the uncommitted—including average citizens with traditionally centrist political views. These in-person gatherings serve as an important vehicle for sending a visual message to observers of the size and supposed diversity of the movement. In addition to size and audience make-up, the physical location of the gathering also signals the relative acceptance or relevance of the gathering. A gathering in a central urban location is more advantageous to signaling the groups' standing to by-standers than a gathering where the view of the gathering is blocked off from view. The findings support and build on Koehler's research on right-wing extremism and anti-immigration mass movements, as it shows how far right-wing extremist parties engage right-wing populist social movements and provides further evidence of anti-immigrant violence and hive-terrorism following far-right demonstrations.¹¹¹

According to the expert interviewees, media and social media coverage of these events focus on numbers of attendees, and images of the types of individuals in attendance, communicate to audiences how much and the type of support present. It is particularly advantageous when the group can claim large numbers, even if enhancing numbers of attendees by bringing in individuals from other cities (or even countries), to be visibly diverse in some way such as by including families with children, the elderly, or persons of color. Adding to previous research on the role of media in helping share extremist propaganda with a broader audience through its coverage, the findings show that both right- and left-wing interviewees believe media outlets are biased and misrepresent ideologically important in-person events, which may also indicate that media representatives are not blindly funneling information to their audiences, but that there is editorializing or contextualizing of information. The results notably also show that while APs complain of what they perceive as censorship, they also mentioned frequent interactions with media outlets at these events, such as coverage and being interviewed by well-known outlets, and clearly view these as important signals of their access to mainstream society and audiences. These findings also add to Fisher's discussion on the centrality of media as mediators of meaning and framing of victimhood for broad audiences¹¹², and provides important implications for journalists' training on these topics.

Apolitical Spaces

Eleven interviewees, in at least thirty (30) references mention traditionally apolitical spaces in the context of political conflict or engagement. Interviewees argue that a ban on crosses in classrooms is due to the "Islamification" of the West; that churches not including AP speakers is an example of "censorship"; and that the police is full of sympathizers and friends of APs.

¹¹¹ Koehler, 2016.

¹¹² Fischer, 2006.

Others point to how youth and cultural organizations have become physical manifestations of the political divide between the right and left and how some concerts have become celebrations of extremist ideologies and places for recruitment and indoctrination.

The AP scholar/social media manager explained:

What really upsets me now: at the German Evangelical Church Assembly (“Kirchentag”) [...] the Evangelical body decided not to allow AfD representatives at the podium. Of course, this only helps the AfD because it creates the impression that they are being bullied and excluded. [The Evangelical Church] always talk about dialogue and having to talk to each other and having to hear each out, but when it comes to the meeting, the AfD is marginalized and accused of being Nazi filth.

He also described leaving a local environmental sustainability organization because of political disagreement (he separately pointed out that windmills are a symbol of failed energy policy). On the other hand, the communicator/businessman repeatedly boasted about his large business network and influence in the community from which he draws upon for political needs and influence: “I have a network and there are always exchanges with universities. I always work with universities. [Local university]— with the department chairs, in Dresden. I also do marriage counseling—generation counseling—these things.”

Weaponized Civic & Community Engagement

While populism researchers acknowledge that populists leverage democratic institutions and practices, such as parties and social movements, they do not unequivocally classify it as extremism, with some even noting positive effects. Nonetheless, as Berman and Kriesi et al. have show, civil society can be weaponized for anti-democratic outcomes.¹¹³ However, extremism and violent extremism research, on the other hand, rarely considers how extremists are using legitimate democratic processes and institutions to advance their anti-democratic goals. This study’s results provide a bridge between these two fields of research on the topic by providing evidence of how authoritarian populists are leveraging legitimate institutions and processes for anti-democratic aims. This supports Furlow and Goodall’s 2011 discussion on right-wing extremists using running for political office “against all odds” as a messaging narrative¹¹⁴, and Bartlett and Birdwell¹¹⁵ and Busher and Macklin¹¹⁶ call for better understanding how cumulative radicalizations intersects with other social and political processes.

Therefore, high civil society participation, or value-agnostic support for civil society organizations, does not necessarily lead to more democratic outcomes, because just as in the prelude to World War II, extremists are able to leverage civil and community organizations to undermine democratic values and processes. The *impact* of this finding at the intersection of civic engagement and Counter Violent Extremism related literature is discussed further below in

¹¹³ Berman, 1997, and Kriesi et al., 2008.

¹¹⁴ Furlow and Goodall, 2011.

¹¹⁵ Bartlett and Birdwell, 2013.

¹¹⁶ Busher and Macklin, 2014.

section below on the impact of anti-diversity narratives, but for now it is important to understand that the results show that EAP communicators understand how civic engagement and political engagement work, and that they use these structures to advance their goals. This finding also suggests support for Berman's expressed need for strong and responsive political and governmental institutions in order to prevent anti-democratic effects on society, but further research could help confirm the exact support for the governmental and civil society organizations would enable and support pro-democratic outcomes.¹¹⁷

An interesting datapoint to reiterate here is EAP's use of running and campaigning for political office without a path to victory to communicate with their target audiences and motivate them to support the extremist part: multiple core supporters, who are viewed as credible voices in their local communities due to their social standing, are encouraged to campaign for political office under the umbrella of extremist parties without the expectation of winning. Their image and name alongside the party logo and its platform signal to neighbors and average citizens the endorsement of the extremist party. However, further research should be done to investigate whether running for office knowing that victory is impossible is a common technique used for strategic messaging. The results also show evidence of early civic engagement through extremists' group activities, such as demonstrations and "sticker-campaigns," to ongoing support for these groups and even running for and holding political office for an extremist party. This result shows that these actors use democratic tools and mechanisms to advance their anti-democratic goals.

These findings also contribute to Bartlett and Birdwell¹¹⁸ and Bushner and Macklin's calls for more insights into how far-right cumulative radicalization intersects with other social and political processes by showing how legitimate civic and community organizations can be leveraged for anti-democratic goals.¹¹⁹ However, on their point for the need to differentiate between extreme *action* versus *narratives*, the data shows that while in the past extreme action has been defined by acts of violence, in the case of APs, researchers need to investigate how to protect freedom of speech while holding elite actors responsible for creating a permissive environment for violence or using their political actions to undermine democratic processes, values, and intuitions, including endangering minority and women's rights

These results also support and build on Koehler's 2014 and Grumke's 2017 findings on the interconnectedness and international connections of right-wing extremists and radicalization. The data show that EAP communicators are using their personal, professional, cultural, and political networks and relationships, including international links and networks with like-minded groups and individuals in Russia, the U.S. and Israel, to engage and mobilize sympathetic audiences and supporters. Mirroring domestic outreach, the international exchanges take place through social media and in person gatherings. The results show that these are multi-faceted networks, which include violent and non-violent extremists, and legitimate organizations.

¹¹⁷ Berman, 1997.

¹¹⁸ Bartlett and Birdwell, 2013.

¹¹⁹ Bushner and Macklin, 2014.

An Ecosystem of Authoritarian Populist Communications Techniques

As noted in the introductory chapter, counterterrorism researchers have spent much time and effort exploring and understanding the nature of extremist propaganda and disinformation in online communications, but thus far there has been very little focus on the messenger or the whole-of-ecosystem of communications. Instead, thus far the focus has tended to be on the message (i.e., ideology), the audience (i.e., those vulnerable to radicalization), and on social media. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of the role of extremist elites, how they use legitimate grievances to spread extreme political beliefs, and their effect on society at large. The overemphasis on the online space has led to a gap on insights on the how the offline and online spaces overlap. All of this is especially acute in the case of right-wing extremism, mass protest movements, and impact on democracy.

In describing where AP subjects receive their information, the data point to several key categories: media, social media, mix of media and in-person communications, and hard-copy material (i.e., books, stickers, fliers, and promotional trinkets.) Traditional media (TV and newspapers), including “lying press” and “alternative media” are mentioned a minimum of forty (40) times by twelve interviewees throughout the dataset. In addition to media as a source of information, interviewees describe using media as a vehicle for sharing their opinions, and they complained about how one’s political group is being represented by the media. Interestingly, both right- and left-wing interviewees believe media outlets are biased and misrepresent facts and events of importance to their causes. Also noteworthy is that while the elite authoritarian populists frequently complain of censorship, they also mentioned frequent interactions with media outlets, being interviewed by well-known outlets, such as The New York Times, Der Spiegel, and Deutsche Welle, and even spending entire days with journalists from Japan’s NHK.

While they deemed social media to be secondary in importance compared to traditional news and in-person communications, most interviewees discussed how social media is simultaneously used for messaging to and engagement with their audience and other like-minded individuals, and to organize for physical meetups such as for demonstrations or smaller group gatherings. The high-ranking AP politician explained that his party has a lot of social media profiles, because it is the only medium where they can “do something”, because of the [considerable repression] of the party. The influential communicator, who appeared to be in his late sixties or early seventies, was also very active on social media and explained that he was repeatedly blocked by his preferred platform and gets around this by frequently changing his pen name and opening new accounts.

The AP city-level politician also described a more strategic and complex use for social media as a mechanism for forcing media to cover an alleged sexual or violent crime committed by an immigrant even if traditional media outlets initially do not want to cover the case. He explains that while their party has a few people they work with the local media, when those do not want to cover an alleged crime, the party publishes it on their platforms. According to him, the press then inquires with the police about the alleged crime and then reports on it.

Two of the anti-discrimination interviewees explained that even though many Germans have never interacted with a foreigner or Muslim, fear of so-called “over-foreignization” or foreign infiltration (“Überfremdung”) is transmitted though social media because right-wing groups, unlike pro-democratic civil society and those against discrimination, are very active on those

platforms. The immigration expert described engaging with citizens at a town hall meeting and learning that they had picked up false information online about how much financial aid refugees receive or how they treat women.

Mix of Media, In-Person, and Hard-Copy Propaganda

The data show that AP individuals receive their political information from a mix of traditional media and in-person communications; they also use a mix of the two to get their message out to their audiences. In-person conversations, particularly those with family, neighbors, friends, or at the bar, play key roles in the dissemination and gathering of politically relevant information. The scholar/social media manager explained that information is sometimes indirect, and details are implied (“durch die Blume gesagt”). Similarly, in a post interview conversation with the girlfriend of the young city-level politician she shared that immigrants sexually molest women at the local pool, however, when asked if it had happened to her or someone she knew and how she had heard about it, she explained that “one just hears about it.” Similarly, when describing where he learns of immigrants causing problems, the city-level AP politician described:

Sometimes in the media, or sometimes you hear it up close, for example in shops from salesmen and saleswomen. How [immigrants] behave there, whether there are thefts or how they treat the salespeople when they are caught. About [salespeople] being spat on or hit. Then we talk about assaults that take place—sexual—sexual attacks on women, which are also taking place [here...] I have been saying since 2015 that it is very dangerous if we do not differentiate between the good foreigner and the bad foreigner, or, or refugee, because if there are two foreigners over there, I don't know who the criminal is and who goes to work.

One of the anti-discrimination experts pointed to the website www.hoaxmap.org, which tracks the types of discredited rumors about crimes, many sexual in nature, allegedly committed by immigrants, which have been resolved as hoaxes, whereas AP subjects pointed to an alleged media cover-up of the “Cologne mass rape” on New Year’s Eve in 2015.

The migration expert also explains:

Ten years ago, the refugee topic wasn't a theme and suddenly you saw [migrant] people and you might get scared of what's actually happening here. You don't fully understand the connections. You read the newspaper, where it's also made out to be a problem. Then you might read something on the Internet. I think there are so many parts that come together. And then if there is a group that is becoming more politically active, then you might think that there is a need for it—that there has to be a reason why people continue to get involved or why the media are also becoming more critical [of immigration]. I don't think I can really explain why the topic [of immigration] was so politicized, however, it definitely takes place in private conversations—at family celebrations.

On the same topic, the communicator/businessman, while describing that he actively engages with traditional media to get out his message, such as by giving interviews and writing letters to the editor, described that he receives his information through “alternative media,” personal relationships, and through one-on-one relationships online:

[I get] almost nothing through the news. So we read the Neue Zuercher Zeitung (NZZ), that is foreign press. Junge Freiheit is the only one. Junge Freiheit is the AfD magazine. And the Compact-Magazin, as a magazine, and otherwise we are scientifically

networked, with universities, with professors such as [the scholar/social medial manager] and we exchange information, collect it, check the sources, and that you don't fall for fake news. [...] from Israel, from the USA. I am connected with writers [...] [through] social media, Email, not Twitter—it's so impersonal, Facebook, and I exchange ideas with writers. As I said—from Berlin.

In addition to sharing propaganda and disinformation through social media and news outlets, hard-copy materials such as self-published memoirs, magazines, stickers, fliers, flags, shirts, and promotional trinkets (such as grocery shopping bags and grocery cart token resembling the former Deutsch Mark currency) play a role in messaging and reaching a broad range of target audiences. The young AP politician described participating a “campaign” during which a loose group, rather than a formal organization, of forty or fifty fourteen to eighteen-year-old far-right youth gathered to paste far-right stickers throughout a part of town. The arts were mentioned several times; EAP communicators described their appreciation for nativist art and the banning of far-right artists from exhibits. And, the influential communicator, who is repeatedly banned from social media, and the communicator/businessman promoted self-published multi-volume memoirs (one of which can be purchased online on a major website). The book appears to be selling out quickly among the local community and the influential communicator described a local neo-Nazi coming to buy a copy of it and how they used the visit to have a political conversation.

Coupled with the above-described findings on the importance of demonstrations, the communications vehicle data show in-person gatherings, such as communal or cultural events, and tangible communications paraphernalia play a central role in the building of extremist networks. One-to-one individual communications at social events or in public spaces, play a key role in the transition of propaganda and mis-/disinformation and are considered very credible sources of information, especially when these conversations take place with family, friends, or among neighbors. Their multi-platform and multi-medium messaging efforts create a sphere of mutually reinforcing lines of effort to influence audiences, recruit supporters, and reinforce and enable political efforts. Off-line hard-copy material and face-to-face communications remain, just as in pre-internet times, an important radicalization and extremism vehicle.

Psychology researchers such as Horgan and Taylor¹²⁰, and Moghaddam¹²¹, as well as researchers studying push-pull models, investigated radicalization environmental factors, but largely focused on individuals, rather than the whole ecosystem. This study's data on helps to build onto their research by showing that elites play a critical role in perpetuating harmful narratives. The impact on radicalization is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Nonetheless, is important to note here, that this study's findings also support previous findings on populist mobilization techniques and builds on extremism research by providing insights on authoritarian populists domestic and international outreach ecosystem, and evidence of their simultaneous and complimentary use of traditional media, the online space, and in-person activities, including civic engagement, to reach

¹²⁰ Max Taylor and John Horgan, "A Conceptual Framework for Addressing the Psychological Process in the Development of the Terrorist," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18(4) (2006): 585-601, 10.1080/09546550600897413.

¹²¹ Fathali M. Moghaddam, 2008.

target audiences. As such, this also helps fill the gap, identified by Neumann, of insufficient research on the offline aspects of radicalization and the need to study the issue holistically.¹²²

Additionally, there is support for Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's explanation that populist leaders mobilize by leveraging social movements or taking over political parties, as well as the notion that they have to use organized networks to sustain their efforts.¹²³ The findings help build a bridge on these topics to extremism research, as this has not yet adequately empirically examined the full extremist ecosystem, including the nexus of extremism and populism, relationship between right-wing violent and non-violent radicalization, the role of elite communicators, and how the ecosystem comes together to amplify populist messages.

Online vs. off-line

By shedding light on the role of elite AP messengers, their techniques, and their audiences, the findings also build on counter violent extremism strategic communications literature, which has thus far been largely focused on jihadism and the accompanying online space, narratives, message receiver, and how to counter those messages. The findings have important implications for counter-messaging and counter violent extremism practice: for example, researchers such as Ritzmann¹²⁴, typically advise a narrow target audience for counter-messaging programs, and researcher such as Rudner explain that for jihadist inspired extremists the Internet is more important than in-person spaces¹²⁵, but the data shows that APs are using multi-medium outreach to target a broad audience and that the mix of mediums, including off-line, in-person, hard-copy, and both new and traditional media is extremely important both for recruitment and counter-efforts. These findings furthermore indicate that research findings based on jihadist-inspired extremism do not automatically apply to AP.

However, it is worth considering how APs use of the online space in parallel with what we know from counterterrorism and counter violent extremism research, where there is relatively broad consensus about the critical role the Internet and social media play in radicalization of jihadist-inspired individuals. It is understood that extremists use narratives and content with an emotional pull to persuade audience members to join their cause. This content is most effective when it is consumed in a group, for which the online space creates the ideal setting because it can take the place of the offline social interaction needed for radicalization to occur. And while not all individuals become radicalized when exposed to the same content, the highly social nature of online content may contribute to inspiring violence by creating an echo chamber of

¹²² Paul Neumann, "The Trouble with Radicalization," *International Affairs*, 89(4) (2013): 873-893, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12049>.

¹²³ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, 20.

¹²⁴ Ritzmann, 2017.

¹²⁵ Martin Rudner, "'Electronic Jihad': The Internet as Al Qaeda's Catalyst for Global Terror," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40 (1) (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157403> <https://goo.gl/KSx2oF>.

reinforcement.¹²⁶ The Internet allows for fast spread of propaganda narratives and social media technologies create echo chambers of like-minded individuals. This is a driving factor in establishing contrasting societies, converting violent ideologies into political activism, and connecting extremists to off-line communities and activities such as concerts or rallies. (pg. 118) What is more, online status directly translates into offline status, meaning radicals can build their reputation online, while the perceived privacy motivates individuals to use more radical language or call for direct action. Online presence also gives recruits the opportunity to assure themselves of the strength of the movement.¹²⁷

Online communication permits individuals to gain strength from mutual support, provides a low-cost environment, can lead to echo chambers, and is a workaround to closely monitored physical locations; this is frequently referred to as the “bunch of guys theory.” Instead of traditional leaders being in control of the movement, followers can independently decide to act and leaders can then claim operations retroactively.¹²⁸ In this vein, the Internet as a key technology for Al Qaeda and other jihadist movements because of its multiplier effects and broad geographic and demographic reach. They use the Internet for operational planning such as incitement to action, recruitment, militant training, financing, planning attacks, and cyberwarfare. For jihadist inspired extremists, the Internet has become a more important instrument for radicalization than conventional meeting spaces.¹²⁹

Supporting earlier findings on the role of the online space in radicalization, such as Sageman’s 2008, Rieger’s 2013, and Koehler’s 2014 research,¹³⁰ this study’s results show that the Internet indeed plays an important role in extremists’ messaging and recruitment efforts, but the data also show an overlap between AP’s strategic communications and civic engagement mobilization and an overlap between their online and offline strategic messaging mediums. Media places information into a wide public discourse; and social media enhances this and allows APs to hone in on specific online audiences and supporter groups. The findings show, however, that media, social media, and Internet-based messages are not reaching individuals in a vacuum. It enhances and builds on real life relationships and networks: personal links and relationships play an important role in the solidifying of views and mobilization to action. Both media and social media are used as means for communicating to like-minded supporters what is happening on the ground, such as through coverage of protest or rallies, or to organize group events to bring together like-minded individuals. Online tools also serve to connect international and otherwise geographically distant actors, for which one-on-one online exchanges, be it through email or social media, are an important engagement tool.

¹²⁶ Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, “The Edge of Violence: Toward Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* Volume 24 Issue 1 (2012): <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.594923>.

¹²⁷ Daniel Koehler, "The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet," *Journal for Deradicalization* 1 (2014), <http://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/viewFile/8/8>.

¹²⁸ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia, PA, U.S.A., University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhhbt>.

¹²⁹ Rudner, 2016.

¹³⁰ Koehler, 2014.

Media

Interestingly, all groups of interviewees were severely critical of media as a legitimate source of information and felt it was biased against them. They nonetheless consume it and underscore the importance of media engagement for their political objectives. There is also evidence of media outlets and journalists being used by extremist right-wing communicators to strategically place information, including propaganda, mis-, and disinformation, into the public conversation. This finding supports Eatwell research on media amplifying far-right narratives: far-right parties, such as the British National Party, encourage and provoke tension and violence among ethnic minorities and seek to chip away at the idea of “peaceful multiculturalism.” Far-right extremist narratives are further legitimized through the influential weight of local media and mainstream politicians when they employ media or propaganda campaigns in hopes of creating hostility or provoking other groups to react in order to generate support for themselves. When media publicizes alleged public opinions on concerns about immigration-related crimes, even when these are exaggerated or completely false, it enables mainstream racism and parties who promise to be ‘tough’ on such issues.¹³¹ The EAP communicators are particularly adept at engaging media outlets, who may be drawn to them for the emotion-inducing narratives they provide, and the ensuing salaciousness of covering a deep societal conflict in a way that is not dissimilar to the way gossip magazines cover celebrity personal drama and tragedies. A final note on a noteworthy data-point is the reported use of social media to push traditional media to cover a particular topic. This technique and its impact on readers’ attitudes and behaviors is worthy of additional research.

III. Impact on Mainstream Society

The previous chapter shed light on the role of grievance narratives in political communications and showed that elite authoritarian populists leverage voters’ fears, grievances, and concerns through identity politics as part of their strategic communications and civic engagement efforts to amass power and influence by mobilizing support for themselves. This study’s second research question (RQ2) served to investigate the *impact* of a specific type of grievance narrative—those against refugees/immigrants—on message receivers. In this chapter, built on this study’s data, the case is made that EAPs use anti-immigrant narratives as part of a broader set of “us versus them” narratives which can enable extremism and violent extremism in individuals, and when mainstreamed, can have a negative impact on democratic norms and values. Immigrants come to represent fear related to a broad range of issues related to cultural changes, economics, and security. This finding is supported by data which suggest that in addition to mobilizing supporters to vote for authoritarian populists, these narratives, including those against refugees and immigrants, promote and mainstream anti-democratic sentiment,

¹³¹ Roger Eatwell, “Community Cohesion and Cumulative Extremism in Contemporary Britain”, *The Political Quarterly*, Volume 77 Issue 2 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-923X.2006.00763.x>.

division, extremism, hate, radicalization, and even violence. The evidence for this falls into three overarching categories and themes: 1) evidence of EAPs being anti-democratic actors by falsely claiming to speak for others and undermining trust in democratic institutions; 2) evidence of EAPs playing a key role in mainstreaming polarization and extremism; and 3) evidence of EAPs playing a role in creating a permissive environment for violent extremism and terrorism. Cumulatively, the data show that they reject democratic values, such as pluralism or freedom of religion, and excuse political violence which indicates that these actors promote anti-democratic attitudes and behaviors.

1. Differentiating between non-violent and violent extremism

To understand the role and impact of AP elites, it is important to first consider the concept of *extremism*. Today's academic understanding of extremism intersects heavily with research on violent extremism. In studying this body of knowledge, it becomes quickly evident that while modern day far-right populism, and by extension extremism and violent extremism, have arisen in parallel to globalization and modern-day Islamism and jihadist-inspired violent extremism, there are relatively few practitioner-oriented studies dedicated to the phenomena. Due to the September 11, 2001, attack on the U.S. World Trade Center, there is ample research on Islamist radicalization and extremism—especially focused on what may drive jihadist inspired *individuals* to commit acts of terror—while there is much less nuanced research and understanding of the far-right radicalization processes, the role of elites, and especially of its effects on society. Moreover, while creative counter-extremism or counterterrorism practitioners can draw valuable lessons based on jihadist inspired terrorism research for countering far right extremism, there are few studies investigating empirical overlaps, differences, and gaps which can be leveraged to more effectively combat the issue or channel research priorities.

Unsurprisingly, the concept and definition of 'extremism' is complex and frequently controversial, but researchers are coming to some consensus that although extremism is not necessarily violent or illegal, it includes an intolerance toward others which can evolve into violence. In exploring a sampling of some mainstream academic definitions one can get a taste of the whole picture and some of the boundaries: for example, Sotlar described extremism as "essentially a political term which determines the activities that are not in accordance with norms of the state, are fully intolerant toward others, reject democracy as a means of governance and the way of problem solving and also reject the existing social order."¹³² One can add to that Eatwell and Goodwin's consideration of 'extremism' as having two core elements: one action-based and one value-based¹³³, or Wintrobe's distinction of three types of extremists: those extreme by method but not their goal, those extreme by goal and method, and those extreme by goal but not method.¹³⁴ Another way to think about extremism is to consider Braddock's

¹³² Andrej Sotlar, "Some Problems with Definition and Perception of Extremism within Society," in *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe: Dilemmas of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, ed. Gorazd Mesko, et al., (Maribor, Slovenia: University of Maribor, 2004), 1, <https://www.fvv.um.si/conf2004/papers/sotlar.pdf>.

¹³³ Robert Eatwell and Matthew J. Goodwin, "Introduction: The 'New' Extremism in Twenty-First Century Britain," in *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2010), 11.

¹³⁴ Ronald Wintrobe, *Extremism: The Political Economy of Radicalism* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 84.

consideration of an ideological and psychological component in describing it as “a psychological state in which an individual rigidly adheres to an ideology that is characterized by behaviors that marginalize other-minded individuals through a variety of means, up to and including the use of physical violence.”¹³⁵ Adding to all of those, and exemplifying an important element of the debate around definitions, is the notion that extremism is not necessarily illegal and does not automatically lead to violence or harm. Finally, in 2018, J.M. Berger became widely recognized for providing an influential definition of the much-debated concept as the belief that an in-group's success is inseparable from hostile action against an out-group and that the types of actions against the out-group can include harassment, discrimination, segregation, hate crimes, terrorism, oppression, some war/insurgency, and genocide. According to Berger, even when a group's ideology is central to society, it can be extreme, such as Nazism preceding World War II.¹³⁶

While Berger defines “violent extremism” as the same as “extremism” but with violence, to better understand the nexus between the two groups, it's helpful to look at some of the earlier research on the differences between non-violent political extremism and radicalization and violent extremism or terrorism. It follows, that just as with “extremism,” the term radicalization and terrorism are also highly contested, and different political, cultural, and historical contexts produce different notions of what is considered radical and terrorism. It is also worth noting that “terrorism,” which strongly overlaps with the concept of “violent extremism,” also has endless definitions, but that in this context it suffices to add that while not all violent extremism is terrorism, all terrorism is violent extremism.

Moskalenko and McCauley's 2009 research on the distinction between activism and radicalism, asserts that one cannot link activism and radicalism as being part of a “conveyor belt” model to terrorism. They conclude is that a “conveyor belt” metaphor is ineffective, as the process from activism to terrorism is rare and suggest that suppressing those with radical ideas can further exacerbate grievances and strengthen group identification, thus leading to violent action. They also note that the majority of individuals who justify political violence will never engage in it.¹³⁷ In 2017, the authors proposed a two-pyramid model to advance the academic debate: the “opinion pyramid” and the “action pyramid,” and according to them radicalization of opinion and action should be studied separately. The separation allows for more research to be conducted in terms of ideas versus actions. They describe the two pyramids as following:

Opinion Pyramid

At the base of this pyramid are individuals who do not care about a political cause (neutral); higher in the pyramid are those who believe in the cause but do not justify violence (sympathizers); higher yet are those who justify violence in defense of the cause (justifiers); and at the apex of the pyramid are those who feel a personal moral obligation to take up violence in defense of the cause. This is not a stairway model: Individuals can skip levels in moving up and down in the pyramid.

¹³⁵ Braddock, 2012.

¹³⁶ Berger, 2018.

¹³⁷ Sophia Moskalenko and Clark McCauley, "Measuring Political Mobilization: The Distinction Between Activism and Radicalism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* Volume 21, 2009 - Issue 2 (2009), 239-260, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550902765508>.

Action pyramid

At the base of this pyramid are individuals doing nothing for a political group or cause (inert); higher in the pyramid are those who are engaged in legal political action for the cause (activists); higher yet are those engaged in illegal action for the cause (radicals); and at the apex of the pyramid are those engaged in illegal action that targets civilians (terrorists). Again, this is not a stairway model; individuals can skip levels in moving up and down in the action pyramid.¹³⁸

The authors conclude that there is a need to focus more on the emotional side of radicalization of opinion and action. However, due to the study's focus on the extremely limited number of individuals who commit violence, it does not offer sufficient insight about the role of non-violent extremists in enabling violent extremism, or about what their findings mean for far-right violent extremism.¹³⁹ Separating extremism from violent extremism is not a clear line until the act of violence has been committed. Yet this research, just as many other relevant studies, implies that extremist communicators, who may inspire, but do not commit violence, are not worthy subjects of inquiry or intervention. Furthermore, by labeling only illegal behavior as radical, the authors leave those who justify or inspire violence off the hook.

Similarly, in their 2012 research on the differences between violent and non-violent Islamist radicalization, Bartlett and Miller explained that it “is extremely important [to differentiate between the two] because targeting the wrong people can breed resentment and alienation and erode the very freedoms Western governments want to preserve. Violent radicals are clearly enemies of liberal democracies; but non-violent radicals might sometimes be powerful allies.” They explain that while radicals reject the status quo, they do not necessarily do so in a violent manner. And they found that while some radicals conduct, support, or encourage terrorism, many others do not or may even actively fight against terrorism and violence. When they compared terrorists with non-violent control groups, they “saw that many of the claims regularly deployed to explain terrorism apply to far wider, non-violent populations,” such as perception of social discrimination, distrust of government, uncertainty about their own identity, etc. Interestingly, they also found that “terrorists often refused to engage in the political process or even peaceful protest. Conversely, many radicals channeled their energy through community or political work and were more likely to have been involved in political protest—well over a third compared with under a quarter of terrorists.”¹⁴⁰ However, in regarding their studies, it is unclear what these findings bring to bear on far-right extremism and violent extremism, especially when extremist goals are pursued through non-violent political expression (i.e., civic and community engagement), but are loaded with extremist or anti-democratic rhetoric or policies.

These models' strict focus on differentiating between violent and non-violent extremists make it difficult to understand the broader impact of extremists on society. They do not consider the role played by those who organize extremists movements even if they themselves never commit acts

¹³⁸ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Understanding Political Radicalization: The Two Pyramids Model,” *American Psychologist*, 72(3) 2017, 211-212, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000062>.

¹³⁹ Idid., 217.

¹⁴⁰ Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, 2012, 7, 15.

of violence. Furthermore, while there is an acknowledgement of the need to focus on more of the emotional side of radicalization of opinion and action, given that ultimately very few individuals cross over into committing terrorism, the focus on what motivates the individual violent extremist may be too narrow to be truly helpful. Underscoring this point is Neumann's argument that just as "terrorism," the concept of "radicalization" serves political agendas rather than describe a phenomenon that can be studied objectively. He concluded that radicalization, extremism, and political violence will be a more or less permanent feature of western societies and that addressing the issues requires a more holistic understanding which aims to understand how political beliefs and political action come together.¹⁴¹

Anti-Democratic Actors Claiming to Speak for "Concerned Citizens" & "Silent Majority"

While AP communicators frequently invoked democracy and democratic principles when speaking about themselves and their work, anti-democratic themes emerged consistently throughout the interviews and it became evident that they neither believed in democratic principles for all, nor that the state acted upon what they felt are their (un-)democratic demands. A quote by the young AP politician exemplifies this well as he explained that he thinks democracy itself is the problem:

[In my work] on the one hand [I] feel in the minority, but on the other hand [I] don't. When you see how many people actually think [my] way, I think the biggest problem in Germany is democracy. I think that's the biggest problem because, people are not interested in it. [I see it] with so many people. The people [say]: 'Oh the system, it sucks, it does not work.' [and I ask:] 'Are you going to vote?' And they respond: 'Oh I don't go voting.' So 50%—40% to 60% do not vote.

When he was asked if a different system would be better, he responded:

Well, I'll say there are surely better ways to do it than democracy. For example, I'll say, Germany was ruled by monarchies for centuries, although I am not a fan of royalty either. Difficult, is it not? That is tough and I always think it depends on society what system is currently in charge. The system does not last forever. It is always changing, is it not? So sometimes it's an emperor, sometimes it's a king, sometimes it's a Führer, sometimes it's a dictator, sometimes it's a democracy. I think nothing in the world is eternal.

Simultaneously, AP elites repeatedly claimed to represent average citizens, and to be speaking for "concerned citizens" and a supposed "silent majority." The migration expert explained that the term "concerned citizens" is frequently used by the far-right and represents a [group of people who believe far-right fear inducing propaganda.] According to her, the far-right stokes and leverages these citizens' dissatisfaction, who, even thirty years later, feel disadvantaged by the fall of the Wall when many lost their jobs as companies were privatized, and lost in a changing and internationalizing society. For individuals who do not understand democratic and policy processes well, far-right demonstrations and rallies gave the impression they were finally heard and provided "scapegoats" in the form of refugees and the EU. Underscoring this point, the high-ranking AP politician explained that while his party was established by academic elites interested in economics, it is now seen by citizens as the party which cares about the average citizens' concerns, because mainstream parties have become disconnected from the "Volk." The

¹⁴¹ Neumann, 2013.

effect, according to him, is that even those parties now have to pay attention to his party's agenda, which works on issues traditionally used to be "socialist democratic, such as retirement benefits, or salaries," and have had to issue legislation and votes in support of those issues.

However, many comments underscored the disconnect between the elite APs and the disadvantaged or average citizens for which they claimed to speak. For example, of the seven AP subjects, six enjoyed high social status as elected officials, wealthy businessmen, lawyers, a professor, and community leaders with the power and platforms to influence politics. Those subjects shared repeatedly that they are financially well or very well off. One AP subject also pointed out that the elected representatives of the AP party they support are [...former officers, lawyers, doctors, locksmiths, engineers, all of whom have a relatively high level of education...]. All AP subjects shared that they do not feel disadvantaged ("benachteiligt") in their communities or societies, recognized their ability to influence, and were eager and proud to share their professional and personal accomplishments and viewpoints.

These data show the EAP communicators' conflicting beliefs to be simultaneously representing average citizens, while also claiming that these citizens do not actually understand the issues and showing disdain for average people. For example, while claiming to speak for average citizens, the communicator/businessman also explained that "most citizens do not yet grasp the negative impact of allowing immigrants who are going to bring the downfall, surrender, and submission of Germans." Similarly reflecting the disconnection between average citizens and the EAP politicians who claim to speak for them was reflected in an interruption of the interview by a tailor who had come to the party headquarters to receive approval on custom-designed dress-shirts from the city-level AP politician in the very moment as he is explaining that there is a lack of funding for schools and the negative impact of large numbers of immigrant children in classrooms; the juxtaposition of expensive fashion choices with there not being enough space for children was jarring.

Another time, at the beginning of the interview the high-ranking national level AP political leader jovially exclaimed that he is a farmer since he lives outside of the downtown, only to later explain that he used to be a lawyer before becoming a famous politician. Similarly, in describing issues of class size in his child's childcare facilities, the communicator/businessman provides insight into his views on those of a lower socio-economic class and immigrants:

It is a very good kindergarten, small institutions with very good parents, all committed parents, lawyers, company bosses, notaries, teachers, scientists, professors. We have no...German problem children, no [social welfare program] Hartz IV [recipients], no drug addicts, and no migrants...children. Only good...good children [...]

These data suggest that AP elites falsely claim to represent others' interests, especially when they claim to be doing so for an imaginary majority. However, their claim to speak for non-elites is not only problematic because they are manipulating these groups' economic grievances (e.g., child-care, retirement, social welfare) by turning them into fear and outrage-inducing "us versus them" culture- and values-related propaganda, mis-, and disinformation narratives to inspire and mobilize support for themselves; their claims to speak for a majority of citizens, who are supposedly "silent," is deeply undemocratic in its essence. In a democracy the people speak for themselves through democratic processes, rather than a small number of fringe communicators or representatives. In fact, if the alleged majority of citizens were indeed supportive of APs, they would have many more electoral wins; the reality is that their narratives only represent a small

segment of society that is enjoying outsized attention due to disinformation and propaganda narratives and tactics. However, if society does not counter this and its impact, it can destabilize the benefits of a democratic system, such as voting rights, political representation, and minority rights.

These findings are also in line with Jan-Werner Mueller's observation that populism is always anti-pluralism, as it is a form of identity politics and treats opponents as 'enemies of the people', and therefore a danger to democracy. As he explains: "[what] matters for populists is less the product of a genuine process of will-formation or a common good that anyone with common sense can glean than a symbolic representation of the "real people" from which the correct policy is then deduced." Their claim of the existence of a supposed 'silent majority', which is outside of existing democratic institutions and is being ignored by elites, is "a fictional entity."¹⁴² They stoke fear of cultural changes, such as about same-sex marriage or majority-minority populations and leverage economic grievances to create the anger and identity politics that fuel populist movements. While authoritarians are far from the only ones using identity politics for their own goals, on their abuse of cultural grievances Mueller notes that: "It is necessary, [...] to remember one important difference between cultural and economic changes: many of the former do not, in the end, directly affect many individuals."¹⁴³

These data show the applicability of McCauley and Moskalenko's 2008¹⁴⁴ and 2011¹⁴⁵ findings on **mass radicalization** in the case of authoritarian populists. Their research on the psychology of mass radicalization shows that perceptions of public or average opinions (such as out-group hate or victimhood) can lead to mass radicalization, even if they are not actually broadly held opinions, as individuals feel pressure to align their opinion with those of the group. The findings show that AP parties, just like violent extremists, benefit from shifts or perceived shifts in the average opinion of the group (i.e., the public) and their communicators seek to influence public perceptions through propaganda, mis-, and disinformation about out-groups and claims to represent the majority opinion. The results coupled with previous findings on public opinion shaping further suggest that APs narratives about representing the majority opinion could in and of itself aid in mass radicalization by shifting opinion and perceptions of what the majority thinks. This can happen either through APs actually shifting public opinion by influencing it with their narratives or by simply by claiming to know the public's opinion and thereby shaping the meta-opinion. Additionally, the data show evidence of APs dehumanizing those they perceive as the other, such as referring to them as "locusts" or "monkeys", which provides further evidence of a link between APs and the "extreme stage" of mass radicalization described by McCauley and Moskalenko.¹⁴⁶ While their research focused on perpetrators of political violence, the results show that authoritarian populist use the same tactics, and that there is an overlap with far-right extremists and violent extremists (further discussed below), and that this can affect a much broader segment of the population.

¹⁴² Mueller, 2016, 24.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 65.

¹⁴⁴ McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*, (New York, NY, U.S.A.: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁴⁶ McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008.

The findings show that when extremists claim to speak for average citizens and the majority of people, such as in their online communications or at their rallies and protests, the narratives and tactics lead to their also reaching moderate citizens, leading to more people coming into contact with right-wing extremism and violent organizations. These citizens come to falsely believe that more of their co-citizens agree with the extremists than actually do, and that extremists enjoy outsized support in comparison to more moderate political actors. Anti-democratic disinformation and practices and extremism become mainstreamed through these communications channels and creates a vicious cycle which erodes democracy as working-class individuals get the impression of finally being heard, while extremists' policy goals do not appear to bring them the economic help, justice, or dignity they seek. Ultimately, these citizens may end up voting against their own self-interest.

Mainstreaming Polarization and Extremism & Sowing Distrust in Institutions

This study shows that APs' words and actions seek to disenfranchise groups they see as the other (including liberated women, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ+ community, etc.), sow division and extremism, and undermine trust in government, civil society, and among populations; this constitutes a threat to the stability of pluralist democracies. The real-life impact of AP propaganda and disinformation is also corroborated by Abram's 2021 research on the impact of exposure to far-right narratives shows that it has tangible, negative, real-life (versus online) consequences, and shows that far-right individuals are particularly susceptible. She found that far-right extremist disinformation has a negative impact on personal and public health, as observed in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation efforts, and also degrades democratic values and institutions as it leads to distrust in traditional media and impacts voting behaviors.¹⁴⁷

The theme of distrust in media is ubiquitous among both the AP communicators, politicians, and anti-discrimination experts. Both feel that the media does not reflect their side objectively. However, according to the high-ranking AP politician even the mainstream media which, according to him, was biased against them, is beginning to represent their views and concerns, as their supporters are also beginning to include journalists. Interestingly, however, he also credits the media's representation of his party as the "enemy" to increased support among voters.

Similarly, the AP communicators had a strong distrust in most government agencies. The groups' sentiment is reflected in a comment made by the AP scholar/social media manger which echoed other AP subjects' comments:

An unaccompanied youth costs 5000 euros per month. That is about eight times what the average retiree gets. And the annual cost of the refugees is estimated at thirty to fifty billion euros. [...] And the money, these stupid politicians tell us, is not taken away from anyone. Of course, it is taken away from us. It is taken away from taxpayers and is not available for infrastructure, for improving social systems, for improving retirement benefits. Every euro the government spends on refugees has to be earned by us, by the population.

¹⁴⁷ Zara Abrams, "Controlling the Spread of Misinformation Psychologists' Research on Misinformation May Help in The Fight to Debunk Myths Surrounding COVID-19," *American Psychological Association*, Vol. 52 No. 2, 2021: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/03/controlling-misinformation>.

The distrust in both media and government, however, is selective, as both APs and counter-discrimination experts use government statistics related to crimes committed by immigrants and use the information to make directly opposing points.

EAPs showed a disdain for democratic institutions, values, principles, and practices, but also explained how they take advantage of them to gain power and influence, while seeking to limit access to them for groups with whom they do not agree. The data show that EAPs' narratives aim to undermine trust in the democratic processes' ability to represent the will of the majority of citizens by claiming that they alone represent the majority, and in open and free media and governmental institutions through vast conspiracy theories. However, as discussed earlier, their own examples frequently disprove their own claims: for example, while EAPs call for more dialogue and claim they are being censored, they provide ample proof of their broad access to media and other communications platforms, or their selective use of government reporting to support their claims, while also claiming that the government cannot be trusted.

Dividing Political and Societal Spaces

While the EAPs claimed to speak for the majority of society, they also described their society as deeply split, expressed concern over the schism, and described the role they play. Several AP politicians and communicators described that their affiliation with AP parties, which they said are seen as “extreme,” has had “polarizing” effects on their families and communities. They cited examples of this in the form of intra-family strife, different groups feeling safe or unsafe in different parts of town, effects on their participation in apolitical community organizations, rejections by colleagues in mainstream parties and members of society who accost them in person and in media. They also claimed that some organizations and individuals would like to participate in their efforts but are kept from doing so due to concerns over how they will be perceived by others.

The young city-level politician described the effect and desired effect of societal polarization but also a discrepancy in his thinking:

When I see [this rift in society in terms of its effect on family], it is a shame when you can no longer be in contact with some people because you are obviously on the other side politically. But generally speaking, [in terms of its societal effects], I am not at all sad about it. I think more that it could be useful, regardless of what happens. Where a homogeneous mass is formed from it, there is also a future again, right? Where there is a heterogeneous mass, it is rather difficult to be able to describe oneself as one identity. Right now I cannot think of any place....oh yeah, I guess the Americans are a big mixed race peoples (Mischvolk). But hang on. They have created their own identity again, no? That they are proud of—and pride in their flags [...]

Relatedly, while the communicator/businessman claimed that what used to be mainstream is now viewed as “Nazi” and argued that the right-wing part of the center-right party sees issues exactly as the AP parties he supports, one of the anti-discrimination experts explained that there is a disinhibition of discourses as “xenophobia is communicated quite openly without shame, without shyness. [...] Nazi slogans are at times chanted in the streets.” And that “the silent middle” is silent until it’s too late. The counter-radicalization experts shed some light on these seemingly contradictory claims:

There are no objective criteria for extremism and the term extremism is based on a certain understanding of the middle, but it has always been like that. Of course, it has also been a term that has changed historically. [...] The fact is that the legal discourse is now in a very dynamic phase of change, that is, one could say that there is no middle of society. The extremism theory is based on the idea that there is a social center that defines the norm and around this [norm] are the radicals and the extremists. So, there is, so to say, a problem of definition today.

Just as AP's views that democracy is a problem and needs to be replaced with an authoritarian governance model, their own acknowledgements of having a hard time convincing average citizens, or even their own family and friends, to support them suggest the falsehood of EAPs claims to be representing the wishes of the majority. Furthermore, the data show that they recognize that there is a schism in society and their role in the creation of it, even in their own friendship circles and families, and view it as necessary to achieving their political and societal objectives. This also builds on evidence of them looking down upon the people they claim to represent, as they refer to themselves as role-models while stating that average individuals do not even adequately understand democratic processes or political issues and juxtaposing their own "good" children with those of government assistance program recipients. The reality is that their relatively low level of support from the population, both self-reported and as is evident in election results, suggests that they do not enjoy majority support, but that they are fringe voices.

Despite being in the minority, APs are able to affect politics and society in non-democratic ways. The high-ranking politician described how they can direct and influence the political agenda of more mainstream parties despite those having decided not to cooperate with his party, because voters say that the party cares about them and they brand themselves as the party of the middle and concerned citizens. He and other AP subjects also argue that while their party is perceived as far-right, a more accurate representation would be center-right, because the party which held that space previously moved to the political left, creating space for a new right and so-called "party of the people" ("Volkspartei") to emerge and claim to speak for the people. However, undermining their own argument, multiple of the same AP subjects acknowledged connections and overlap with the extreme and violent far-right.

The results suggest that even when in the minority, EAPs are able to influence policies by dictating the political agenda through polarizing, black-and-white problem-solution narratives. They narrow the parameters of political dialogue by eliminating the space for nuanced debate and policy solutions and dominate the focus of the political agenda by using fear-based propaganda. Complimenting the AP political arm is the militant-arm which uses acts of political violence to keep specific issues, such as immigration and other identity politics, at the forefront of the political debate. As a result, complex policy issues and solutions, such as economic reforms which would benefit non-elites, are put on the backburner in favor of elite authoritarian populists' agendas.

"Us versus them," Fear & Hate

This study's findings demonstrate the centrality of "us versus them" and victimhood grievance narratives in creating feelings of anger, outrage, and out-group hate necessary for AP ideology and support. Just as jihadist inspired extremists, APs also simplify grievances and inspire hate

toward those blamed for committing injustice and distancing from the group perceived as evil and unjust. They too engage in the demonization of the blamed group and justify violence against it.¹⁴⁸ Building on the data described in the previous chapter's discussion on "us versus them," it is important to note that the word "fear" ("Angst") appears seventy-eight (78) times in eleven of the interviews. From AP to far-left-wing, including experts, interviewees agree that "people" are afraid. Some of the examples in the dataset include: fear of violent extremist groups, the far-right, Muslim terrorists, to go downtown where immigrants go out, because one may be "sexually assaulted," of change or losing something, of World War Three, and more. The "fear" interviewees described was frequently associated with fear of violence, including crime, economic uncertainty and cultural change brought about by a group other than the one with which they identify: AP subjects are afraid of immigrants and liberals, and the leftists and those with an immigrant background are afraid of the far-right. Neither side felt completely accepted or welcomed in society, and both shared examples of violence committed against them.

However, along with fear and "us versus them" narratives, there are also examples of hatred. For example, when describing why he got involved in politics, the high-ranking politician explained what he's afraid of:

Because I see the future of our children and grandchildren threatened in Germany. Because I see that what we have achieved with the fall of the Wall, with the reunification, between East-Germany and West-Germany is absolutely being threatened. Because West-German socialization does not amount to raising a German citizen, but the West-German socialization wants to educate a multicultural world citizen. Locusts who move across the countries, today in Hong Kong, noon in London and in the evening in New York. National statehood is nothing. It is no longer anything but reprehensible. National statehood - patriotism is reprehensible in the eyes of this young generation who think they have to rule this country.

Without seeing how his comment contradicted his claims that his party represents the majority, the city-level AP politician argued that hate and fear, conflict in society, and that:

[an "enemy image is stoked by] a broad alliance of the Left Party, Greens, SPD, representatives of the CDU, the FDP, the KPD, the Communist Party, trade unions [...] Instead of looking for a conversation [...] they know that with these] prejudices you can stir up fears easier in people and thus stir up natural hatred - and that is dangerous, very dangerous, for society, and you have to draw clear lines and that comes from us.

By comparison, the left-wing extremist blamed societal division on "those who are afraid of losing something," and an anti-discrimination expert theorized that East-Germany's structure and economic sluggishness are to blame for the rise of far-right extremism in the region, because it is easier to blame immigrants for economic issues than to understanding the impact of decades of structural and economic policies.

Previous research conducted by Mitchell shows that emotions affect attitude and behavior change,¹⁴⁹ and that the most effective narratives for enabling action are those which can elicit

¹⁴⁸ Borum, 2012.

¹⁴⁹ Monique M. Mitchell, "Motivated, But Not Able? The Effects of Positive and Negative Mood on Persuasive Message Processing," *Communication Monographs*, 67 (2000): 215-225, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750009376505>.

specific emotions.¹⁵⁰ As such, one purpose of grievance narratives is to influence attitudes, behaviors, and motivation by eliciting specific emotions: “Fear, for example, narrows the perceptual field and focuses attention on the threatening stimulus.” This emotional function stems from humans’ evolutionary need to appraise information (i.e., input) and make decisions which are then translated into actions (i.e., output). As such, fear predominantly motivates avoidance and acquiescence, however under other circumstances it can summon aggression. Similarly, anger can motivate or instigate an attack of on the stimuli, including political action.¹⁵¹ More specifically looking at the relationship between anger and behavior intentions, Turner’s Anger Activism Model argues when an audience feels anger about an issue and believes that it can influence the outcome (i.e., efficacy), they are likely to engage in activities to fix the issue.¹⁵²

Emotions such as anger and fear also play an important role in driving the development of hate toward the out-group. Hate is a combination of anger, fear, and contempt, or the idea that the out-group is, at its essence, bad. These emotions are also fundamental to extremists’ core feelings of superiority, injustice, distrust, and danger of extinction.¹⁵³ Research on the processes and dynamics of online radicalization has shown that continued exposure to messages or content which induce moral outrage, such as depictions of torture or rape by the perceived enemy, can increase support for violent extremism. Coupled with an environment which facilitates disinhibition and normalizes extreme views, these can lead to people acquiring a skewed sense of reality in which extreme attitudes and violence are seen as positive and desirable.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, when moral outrage is triggered, the anger it generates provokes a strong desire to retaliate and a desire to right a wrong. Media narratives used to describe events of moral violation around the world fuel moral outrage, and radicalization can occur when those encountering these narratives come across other people who not only share this outrage, but who are also further along the path to violence or who are willing to help guide its discovery. These important connections are made in face-to-face offline networks or virtual online groups, and under the right circumstances, such as resonance with one’s experience and group amplification, this may lead to violence.¹⁵⁵

In 2017 McCauley and Moskalenko, while studying the differences between violent, non-violent, and mass radicalization research, identified a need to focus more on emotion-related aspects of radicalization of opinion and action. They pointed to a need to understand the impacts group or even mass radicalization have even when not crossing over into violent extremism, given that

¹⁵⁰ Monique M. Mitchell, “Using emotion in risk communication: The Anger Activism Model,” *Public Relations Review*, 33, 2008, 114-119, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.013>.

¹⁵¹ James Price Dillard and Kiwon Seo, 2012, 152.

¹⁵² Mitchell, 2008.

¹⁵³ Sophia Moskalenko and Clark McCauley, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:3, (2008): 427, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546550802073367>.

¹⁵⁴ Neumann, 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Sageman, 2008.

ultimately very few individuals cross over into committing terrorism.¹⁵⁶ This study's findings answers this call by showing examples of the role non-violent AP's play in mass radicalization by strategically using "us versus them" fear and outrage-inducing narratives and narratives which seek to undermine trust in democratic institutions and values. However, while non-violent radicalization is typically protected by freedom of thought and speech laws and values, authoritarian populists use these protections for anti-democratic aims by attempting to use mis- and disinformation and propaganda to influence and persuade voters and policies. If allowed to go unchecked, APs goals and tactics will have detrimental consequences on democratic values, practices, and institutions.

2. Tolerance for Violence & Radicalization

The above discussion showed some of the non-violent impacts APs have on democracy and society. The following section is dedicated to exploring their nexus with violent extremism. For framing the discussion, it is important to note that despite the emergence of several foundational and influential radicalization models, some of which will be discussed further below, researchers frequently warn that making attempts at empirical study of what is ultimately a rare phenomenon is very difficult and possibly inaccurate. Ultimately, both researchers and practitioners have come to think about radicalization as being driven by a combination of internal and external so-called "push and pull factors." For example, Hafez and Mullins' efforts to synthesize approaches to the study of radicalization and violent extremism assert that each radicalization case is not only distinct, but also made of "puzzle pieces" that are unique to each individual, rather than a linear process or mechanism. The puzzle is made up of different factors that can combine to lead to radicalism or radicalization toward violence. These factors can be "personal and collective grievances, networks and personal ties, political and religious ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures."¹⁵⁷

Ranstorp explains that radicalization can occur as a result of a set of factors which can interact to various degrees and at various speeds to push or pull individuals toward extremist violence. In a complex process, the combined interplay of some of the following, and which may differ from person to person, and may interact on different levels, can cause violent extremism: individual socio-psychological, social factors, political factors, ideological and religious dimensions, the role of culture and identity issues, trauma or trigger mechanisms, group dynamics, radicalizers or groomers, and the role of social media. According to Ranstorp:

The push-factors involve: social, political and economic grievances; a sense of injustice and discrimination; personal crisis and tragedies; frustration; alienation; a fascination with violence; searching for answers to the meaning of life; an identity crisis; social exclusion; alienation; marginalisation; disappointment with democratic processes; polarisation, etc. [And, the] pull-factors are a personal quest, a sense of belonging to a cause, ideology or social network; power and control; a sense of loyalty and commitment;

¹⁵⁶ McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38 (11) (2015), 959, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375>.

a sense of excitement and adventure; a romanticised view of ideology and cause; the possibility of heroism, personal redemption, etc.¹⁵⁸

However, these models, while offering a more holistic view of radicalization and extremism than previous models have, and acknowledging group and societal factors, focus on *individual*-level variables and on radicalization toward violence, versus for example, leadership or elite-variables, or the impact these may have on larger society or democracy, and ultimately lack predictive or preventative power. Additionally, just as much of counterterrorism research and most radicalization studies in the recent decades have been dedicated to understanding what influences jihadist-inspired individuals or small groups to commit violent extremist acts and have thus far largely neglected right-wing extremism and authoritarian populism and its impact on democratic societies. Up until this point it has been deemed essential to have clear delineation of what's illegal (e.g., an action) versus what's only radical (e.g., a thought or belief), but studying elusive individual level variables threatened to miss the larger issue of the effects of extremist ideas on society. This study's interviews show how non-violent elite APs contribute to radicalization and tolerance for violence.

While most violent extremism researchers have thus far been focusing on separating violent from non-violent extremism, Koehler's 2016 research linked right-wing violent extremist organizations and networks to far-right political parties, and international state and non-state actors.¹⁵⁹ This study builds on this by providing empirical evidence of relationships between right-wing violent extremists, far-right extremists or authoritarian populist elites and parties, international actors, and anti-immigrant mass movements. The data shows a clear overlap between different types of extreme actors, including connections between some of society's most respectable and elite professions and violent extremists. A clear example is the case of an elected official serving as a lawyer for individuals being investigated for plotting political violence, or a key elite AP influencer explaining his personal relationship and ideological exchanges with a known neo-Nazi. The data also show that these technically non-violent actors interact with and protect violent extremists.

What is more, while four of the six AP elite interviewees claimed to not support violence at some point in the interview, at another point, all six elite APs and the far-left extremists either directly expressed support for violence as a tool for societal or political change, expressed tolerance for it, attempted to justify it (such as that it is in self-defense), used euphemisms (such as "pressure creates counter-pressure"), claimed violence was committed by individuals who were not part of their organization, minimized its severity (as "bar-talk" or "written violence" on social media), or argued that they engaged with violent individuals to bring them into the political process and away from violence. The only AP interviewee who did not express direct support for violence was the sovereign citizen/conspiracy theorist.

For example, when asked about the local right-wing terrorist group, the communicator/businessman explained that one of the members had been providing security for one of the

¹⁵⁸ Magnus Ranstorp, *Ran Issue Paper: The Root Causes of Violent Extremism* (Brussel, Belgium, RAN Centre of Excellence, 2016), 4.

¹⁵⁹ Koehler, 2016, 94.

demonstrations and that the head of the local AP party is now their lawyer. The interviewee expressed irritation about their arrest and charges:

You have to imagine that—they had an air rifle—the group had some kind of intentions—that’s what they are telling us now—the process is currently underway. They had an air rifle, they did not have a Kalashnikov, no AK [47]. They don't have weapons. They had an air rifle—what little boys—and nothing more. [...] and with the air rifle it is assumed that they wanted to obtain weapons. [...] I don't know what is true at all—no idea: well, a few young people—for me, weirdos, unemployed, one a security guard. I cannot judge that. But I know you cannot make revolution with an air rifle. And you can see that in relevant legal cases [...] There was also this attack on the mosque in Dresden. [...] someone lit a Molotov cocktail—a small incendiary bomb—in front of the mosque doors. Nobody was injured. Very little damage to property. Nothing happened, but he is sentenced to 12 years because something *could* [interviewee emphasis] have happened.

When asked whether violence is sometimes justified for political or social change, this interviewee became visibly agitated and staring off into the distance responded that:

Until now I firmly believed that it wasn't justified. No. I have no idea what it will be like in the future, because if we theorize and say: in five years nothing has changed and Germany is standing at the abyss, maybe then I will have a different opinion. I do not know. When I think of [my] grandchildren and children. But at the moment it is as it is, and I hold on to it strongly. On the other hand, I know that if [my] Land is attacked, I have to defend it. [...] I don't belong to the pacifists who—the world does not work like that. If Israel were pacifist, it would have been erased from the earth long ago.

The city-level politician described “written violence” on social media, where “one crosses the line because one is just writing” and continued:

Most of it is never communicated in normal life, if one meets it on the street, but in the social media—especially if you drank three or four beers, then one writes something to feel better. I do not know. But you do have to intervene into this written call for violence. And it does not matter where it comes from; I don't care whether it comes from the right, the left or anywhere else, that's where we have to intervene, you have to intervene, because written violence can eventually lead to physical violence. For the most part the problem is when I read this on my page, which is really very rarely. I give the info to change the text, but the problem is that I can block him immediately, but then I have no communication. [...] I have to point out to the person that it is not normal communication, and that he changes what he wrote—that is supposed to make him think. If he does not do that then I have to block him, but with that, too, of course, I avoid the conversation. That is always difficult. There are some from the Linke [party] who say to me that one does not talk with the extreme right [and that they cannot be convinced of democracy]. [But,] I can, I have to, no matter how extreme they are and whether they express their opinion with the body. I have to talk to them, because only if I talk, I may be able to get them back to normal social life.

To the question whether violence is sometimes justified for political or social change, he answered that in Cuba the revolution and overthrow would never have come about without violence, but that in Germany:

[we] have possibilities through verbal communication and through democracy and things can be changed through changes in the law. It will take longer, that's clear, but [...] violence creates counter-violence [...] If I attack someone, the next time they come back

with two people, and there is a counter-violence [...] So then I just have more problems. Therefore, it's better to do it slowly but peacefully.

Similar euphemistic language of “pressure and counter-pressure” was used by several of the EAPs to justify right-wing extremists’ violence. The influential communicator for example in warning that the horrors of World War II can never happen again continued that:

[...] it only repeats itself when you sow hatred in society again—if one creates fear. Pressure is a law of physics. I haven't studied physics, but I know that pressure creates counter-pressure. If a left-green ideology has pushed forward as far as it is in Germany, there is counter pressure. That's very clear. I think common sense will win in Germany; I am convinced of that.”

Similarly, the scholar/social media manager said that he rejects violence due to Christian principles of non-violence and argued that reports and occurrences of right-wing extremist violence are exaggerated, and not reflective of the planned events. When specifically asked about the local right-wing terrorist groups and its links to the party whose social media site he manages, he minimized and justified the violence saying that it's likely “a few young people—crazy people” and that it shouldn't be trivialized and they must be punished, but continued that conservative youth are not supported by the state the way left-wing youth are (he gave an extensive example of the government giving funds for “left-wing” concerts and not doing the same for the right-wing), saying:

[...] that is how violence is created—and it creates aggression. I don't want to justify that, but that is the root cause, and they of course sometimes cross the line and try to defend themselves. Clashes (interviewee used English word). [...] I mean to say that for me it is understandable that young people then organize themselves alternatively and try to make up for their disadvantage.

He then compared the situation of right-wing German youth to the situation of Black Americans: It was also the case that pressure against racial discrimination was created among black people and that also created violence. One does not have to justify that, but you can understand why they became violent, because they were oppressed, because they couldn't express themselves. And that's how it is with the right[-wing] youth here in Germany. [...] Pressure creates counter pressure.

The young city right-wing politician described violence as a sign of a broken and corrupt system which animates people to become violent as a defense mechanism. When asked about the local terrorist group he also minimized its impact by rhetorically asking how a group with only an air rifle, no finances, or equipment is supposed to become terrorists in three weeks. When asked about whether violence is sometimes justified for social or political change, he answered:

I don't want to approve of violence, per se, but changes will probably not come for free. [...] you cannot categorically exclude everything from the start. I don't think violence is the solution. [...] I don't think violence is justified, rather I think violence happens. I don't think that someone needs or gets an authorization for violence, but the question is what created the situation where that kind of action happens: Does this happen because the state oppresses you? Does that happen because the political opponent has attacked you? Is it an attack? Is it a defense mechanism? I don't think that one should approve of violence. That is very important. But I also don't think that if you look where the situation is leading, that violence is ruled out. It's not that I practice this now, but if you look at society, violence is definitely on your schedule.

As for the high-ranking EAP, when asked about right-wing violent extremist incidents, he became visibly concerned about the interview recording device and said:

No, no, no. [...] there is no right-wing violent confrontation. There wasn't. There is not. It has never existed. [...] Everything is blatant fabrication and lies (“erstunken und erlogen”) [by] the Federal Intelligence Service and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution [...] to criminalize people, to keep the scene under their control.

In this moment, when asked about the then-recent killing of a center-right politician by an individual with neo-Nazi ties, and who had previously received death-threats due to his advocacy for refugees, the interviewee speculated that the two must have been in a “homoerotic relationship.” This, of course, is disinformation.

By comparison, the left-wing extremist described his belief that violence is sometimes justified in terms of fighting against right-wing violent extremists to keep them from attacking individuals with an immigrant background. He and the left-wing expert also included demonstrations, civil disobedience, and property destruction in their understanding of using violence for social or political change; the extremist explained:

Yes [I believe violence is sometimes justified] and also necessary. I think the GDR would not have collapsed if a certain kind of violence had not been exercised by the people of the GDR. They did not take up arms and try to shoot the police at the border, but demonstration is also a form of violence. Violence also has a lot to do with power, this exercising of power by the people themselves [...] it has to be violent, because certain structures are well established, especially capitalist structures, and also racist structures, even with the police. So, I think you have to work with violence, which does not always mean beating people, i.e., physically injure people. But violence is also, I would say, a very broad term that can also mean going out on the street [to protest], it can also mean having a beer at the end of the day with the colleague to talk about it and to say: ‘You are an asshole. You have to see it differently or think about it.’ It also means talking to your own family like [...] That is a light form of violence.

In terms of the political effects of this violence, the radicalization expert interviewees argued that current right-wing violence has effectively influenced the political discourse in Germany, evident in parties shifting their migration policies. One expert explained:

Our society does not work in such a way that violence is completely ignored by the majority society. There are reactions to violent statements, and they are capable of influencing politics without a doubt. [Violence] is a part of a social process. Sometimes there are widespread violent escalations, and then there is a democratic processing. One can say that they led a successful political campaign. Many right-wing extremist political forces have through this process influenced parts of the democratic discourse. So, violence is worthwhile, and this point cannot be ignored.

Relatedly, the immigration expert argued that generational dynamics in the city also influence right-wing violent extremism:

[There] are a lot of old people here, a lot of retirees, and I think there is not a lot of acceptance for different, for different people. [Acceptance] for young people is not there at all. [...] I think they are sometimes afraid of societal change and all the sudden [they see] that so many young people are out in the streets at night. [And while they do not commit acts of violence themselves] the pensioners support these structures by going into

to the streets [to protest]. They support the right-wing extremist structures. They may not become violent, but they tolerate it somehow.

These results show that AP elites, as non-violent extremists, engage in rhetoric and activities which at best create a permissive environment and at worst inspire and enable violent extremism through narratives and practices which tolerate far-right violence and terrorism. In addition to sowing dangerous “us versus them” narratives, the data show that EAPs do not clearly denounce violence beyond a few minimal and superficial comments. To the contrary, they make efforts to deny, explain, justify, and minimize far-right extremist violence. At best this creates an environment of tolerance for attacks against immigrants and others they see as enemies. The data also suggest that there are shared narratives between authoritarian populist political elites and violent extremists, and that, in addition to mainstreaming extremism and eroding democracy, authoritarian populist elites are enabling violent extremists by disseminating disinformation and propaganda which serves as violent extremists’ ideological justification.

Cumulatively, this study’s data show that some of these elites believe that politically motivated violence is at times necessary for achieving their goals, patterns of EAPs communicating narratives which sow hate and division by scapegoating immigrants, media, and government, and their failure to vocally reject and denounce violence. The data also provides evidence of EAPs including violent extremists in their activities and other relational and institutional overlaps between AP non-violent and violent actors. These insights help to bridge a critical research gap by providing evidence of how elite leaders at minimum create a permissive environment for political violence and can contribute to the normalizing of it. This also shows that it is not always a clear separation between AP elites and violent extremists, and that AP can play a key role in inspiring political violence through their words and actions.

Rieger and her colleagues’ empirical study on the impact of right-wing and Islamist online propaganda found that the amount of Islamist and right-wing extremist propaganda on the Internet reached an alarming potential in recent years, and audiences often fail to discern between legitimate information and extremist propaganda. The Internet “supports the entire radicalization process” and through its use extremists are achieving the “race for the hearts and minds of our people.”¹⁶⁰ And while far-right terror attacks do not appear to improve far-right parties’ election outcomes, far-right parties’ anti-immigrant and racist propaganda, coupled with their failure to condemn far-right extremists’ violence, can enable violence and terrorism.¹⁶¹ These findings are also supported by more historical research by Ferraresi, whose research on the far-right in Italy showed that violent attacks perpetrated by the far-right, promoted increased support for right-wing parties by linking the chaos and insecurity they create with increased electoral support for right-wing law and order parties.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Diana Rieger, et al., *Propaganda 2.0: Psychological Effects Of Right-Wing And Islamic Extremist Internet Videos* (Cologne, Germany, German Federal Criminal Police Office, Luchterhand, 2013), https://eucpn.org/sites/default/files/document/files/39._propaganda_2.0_-_psychological_effects_of_right-wing_and_islamistic_extremist_internet_videos.pdf.

¹⁶¹ Paul Wilkinson, “Violence and Terror and The Extreme Right,” *Terrorism and Political Violence Volume 7*, 4 (1995): 82-93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559508427319>.

¹⁶² Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy after the War* (Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A., Princeton University Press, 1996), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sspj>.

In conjunction with the findings discussed above on how the AP subjects see themselves and the ecosystem of communications, the findings outlined thus far in this chapter provide the necessary data for testing Hypothesis 4, which predicted that feelings of alienation from German society are positively related to vulnerability to persuasion via violent extremist narratives. In other words, the hypothesis predicted that as an individual feels more alienated from society, that they are also more vulnerable to being persuaded by extremist propaganda, however, this is not supported by the data. While the data show that AP subjects are persuaded by them, as we saw above, they do not feel alienated. To the contrary, they feel they are representing the mainstream. As such, the data implies an inverse relationship between feelings of alienation and persuasion by extremist narratives. This implies that as the individuals are exposed to more extremist narratives, they also believe to be representing the will of the mainstream. However, just as discussed under Hypothesis 3 testing, while they do not feel alienated and feel they are part of a specific version of German society for which there is little evidence, in reality they may be alienated by society. Additional data may show whether this is also true for non-elite APs and other forms of extremism.

Individual, Group, and Mass Radicalization

While most radicalization models were developed to predict terrorism, given the overlaps between extremism and violent extremism, and authoritarian populism and anti-immigrant and other forms of extremist violence, it is valuable to consider whether and how existing extremism and violent extremism models may apply to understanding authoritarian populism and associated radicalization. The data outlined and discussed in this chapter, along with the insights on AP grievance narratives discussed in the previous chapter, while indicating that EAPs drive radicalization and anti-democratic beliefs, can also help to evaluate the applicability and limits of several influential radicalization models to understanding the case of AP individual, group, and mass radicalization. Below three groups of radicalization models and key lines of academic inquiry are considered: the “four stages models”, psychological models, and reciprocal and cumulative radicalization.

The “four-stage models” each describe the individual transforming as they first experience grievances, next a catalyst event creates an opening to hatred of an out-group, and ultimately the individual committing violence. Chief among these models is Wiktorowicz’s Theory of Joining Extremist Groups, which posits that there are four distinct stages through which an individual travels on the path to joining an extremist group: 1) A cognitive opening is created by a crisis and the individual starts considering new radical ideas. This can occur, for example, through collective or personal trauma, such as a conflict, exclusion, or discrimination. 2) Next, the individual considers fitting ideologies, during what Wiktorowicz calls the Religious Seeking stage. 3) In the third stage, the individual aligns this ideology with their own worldview, during what’s called the Frame Alignment stage. 4) During the final stage, the individual joins a radical group and adopts the group identity, in what is called the “socialization and joining stage.”¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Joining The Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam,” *The Roots of Radical Islam* (Department of International Studies, Rhodes College, 2004), <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.689.7010&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Comparably, Borum's Four-Stage Model describes the "emergence of a terrorist mindset": grievance, injustice, target attribution, and distancing/devaluation. The individual's grievances are conflated into injustices, which inspire hate toward those blamed for committing injustice, and subsequent distancing from the group perceived as evil and unjust. This process justifies the demonization of the blamed group and violence against it.¹⁶⁴ Sageman's Four Prongs of radicalization are similar but rather than describing four distinct and linear stages occurring to an individual, he describes an interplay of the four factors occurring within a small group: 1) perceiving political events which induce a moral outrage; 2) developing or discovering a belief or ideology for framing and interpreting the world; 3) personally experiencing something which aligns with his views; and 4) mobilizing through networks which validate and confirm one's ideas and interpretations of events.¹⁶⁵ The last model for consideration in this category is Precht's "typical" radicalization pattern, which is based on jihadist inspired terrorism and also has four stages that are not necessarily linear and can interplay: 1) the existence of enabling background factors, such as personal struggles, trigger factors, and the opportunity to access radical ideas; 2) conversion and identification with a radical ideology; 3) indoctrination and increased group bonding; and 4) planned plots or actual acts of terrorism. In this model, small group dynamics and identification with a radical ideology are major considerations.¹⁶⁶

As outlined above, this study's findings demonstrate the centrality of "us versus them" and victimhood grievance narratives and justification and tolerance for violence which are necessary for creating the kinds of feelings of anger, outrage, and out-group hate necessary for extremism and violent extremism to take root. The data shows how APs simplify grievances and inspire hate and demonize the other as evil or unjust. They too engage in the demonization process of the blamed group and violence against it.¹⁶⁷ As such, while it is not difficult to see how the AP elites in this study fuel the grievances and ideology upon which violent extremism thrives, there are some deep conceptual gaps with the outlined models. These models, which were largely developed to prevent jihadist-inspired or lone-actor terrorism, focus on the individual as the center for inquiry, acknowledge the essential role political or societal grievances play in the radicalization process, but quickly move away from societal and leadership factors to the individual foot soldier's experience. Therefore, while these models offer valuable insights on the individual foot soldier's context and experiences which can lead to their mobilization to violence, none of them offer insights on the role and broad impact of political elites and communicators (i.e., leadership variables) and attempt to prevent their inspiration of violence. Ultimately, these models not only fail to have predictive power in terms of individuals, but by treating extremism and terrorism in isolation from political and societal discourses, fall short of being effective tools for understanding, predicting, or preventing authoritarian populist violent extremism.

¹⁶⁴ Borum, 2012

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Government of Denmark, Danish Ministry of Justice, "Home grown terrorism and Islamist Radicalisation in Europe," Thomas Precht, Copenhagen, 2007, https://www.justitsministeriet.dk/sites/default/files/media/Arbejdsomraader/Forskning/Forskningspuljen/2011/2007/Home_grown_terrorism_and_Islamist_radicalisation_in_Europe_-_an_assessment_of_influencing_factors__2_.pdf

¹⁶⁷ Borum, 2012.

Psychological Models

The next category of radicalization models for consideration incorporates insights obtained from the field of psychology. A frequently referenced psychological model of radicalization is Moghaddam's "Staircase to Terrorism" which proposes six stages of radicalization each driven by individuals' psychological factors: feelings of deprivation (i.e., grievances), a decision to fight deprivation, discontent channeled toward a target, moral justification of violence or terrorism and group isolation among like-minded individuals, official joining of a terrorist group, solidification of perceived legitimacy of terror, and conducting acts of terror. The theory describes a slippery slope from discontent to violence and terrorism, if these individuals do not see non-violent means to address discontentment and suggests that if possibilities to move up the social hierarchy exist to escape deprivation, people are less likely to engage in radical action. Furthermore, this theory explains that if people view decision making as fair, with opportunities to participate in the decision-making process—such as in a well-functioning democracy—people are less likely to radicalize.¹⁶⁸ However, Moghaddam also recognizes the role of leaders who encourage these individuals "to displace aggression onto out-groups" and warns that only focusing on the violent individual is shortsighted, and that the best long-term solutions are focused on prevention through nourishing contextualized democracy.¹⁶⁹

This study's data show that, in line with Moghaddam's "stairs to terrorism" theory, EAPs are leveraging and perpetuating feelings of deprivation, are promoting hate of the other, and overlap with violent extremists. However, despite there being the possibility to move up the social ladder, as EAPs indeed have and as many amongst their audiences and supporters can, there are nonetheless associated acts of violence and anti-democratic objectives. Moghaddam analyzes radicalization within a context of multiculturalism, but the model appears to be focused only on minority-driven (e.g., jihadist-inspired) violent extremism and does not appear to offer insights on its implications for when majority group members, who have access to non-violent means for social change, are promoting extremism, and are weaponizing democratic processes to advance non-democratic agendas. As such, this study's data also align with his conclusion for a need to focus on a broader audience than just violent extremists and the need for supporting democratic values, norms, and institutions.

A further influential psychological model worth mention in this discussion is Taylor and Horgan's framework for addressing the psychological process of radicalization toward terrorism which evaluates three "process variables" that relate to the development of terrorism and combine psychological with environmental or external factors: Setting Events, Personal Factors, and Social/Political/Organizational Context. Setting Events refer to the "past contextual influence" of an individual, which determine how the individual will respond to immediate influences. Personal Factors refers to the "psychological and environmental context" of the

¹⁶⁸ Fathali M. Moghaddam, "The staircase to terrorism: A psychological exploration." *American psychologist* 60, no. 2 (2005): 161–169, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161>.

Michael King and Donald Taylor, "The Radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models and Social Psychological Evidence," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 23, Issue 4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.587064>.

¹⁶⁹ Moghaddam, 2008.

individual at the time of experiencing radicalizing influences. Social/Political/Organizational Context refers to an individual's social network, political expression, ideology, etc. that ground them to the outside world and influence their choices or worldview. According to this research, particular individuals become involved in terrorism, as opposed to those who do not who share similar backgrounds and contexts, due to individual psychological and emotional contexts on which non-psychological forces exert influence. Therefore, when thinking of terrorism as a process, there is an endless combination of factors which influence individual routes. Ultimately, the researchers conclude that while these factors can contribute to individuals' behavioral choices, and may provide direction and motivation, they are not a process toward or cause of terrorism.¹⁷⁰

Just as with the previously described models, while this model incorporates the importance of the external, such as politics and ideology, it is only abstractly focused on the impact it has on the individual foot-soldier and ultimately fails to predict or prevent extremism or violence. Conversely, this study's findings suggest that elites play an outsized role in creating the environment and ideology necessary for extremism to flourish and their own motivations and objectives should therefore be investigated more closely. While they may not commit acts of violence, relegating their impact to only one variable, and instead focusing on the foot-soldier, risks losing sight of the big picture. While law-enforcement may benefit from models which predict individual threats, the broader community of practitioners would benefit from models which shed light on the roots of extremism and radicalism.

The final category of psychological models useful for evaluating the impact of AP propaganda and disinformation on extremism and violent extremism is McCauley and Moskaleiko's research which identified twelve mechanisms of political radicalization and pathways toward terrorism, including for individuals, groups, and mass radicalization. They found that fundamental to all of these types of radicalization is a core belief of being "a special or chosen group (superiority), who has been unfairly treated and betrayed (injustice), that no one else cares or will help [them] (distrust), and that the situation is dire—such as that the group and [their] cause are in danger of extinction (vulnerability)." In this case, the mechanisms for political radicalization all occur along a continuum of action and reaction and include the state and intergroup competition. Individual radicalization occurs through personal victimization, political grievance, or through personal connections with existing terrorists; an individual's entry into a terrorist group is typically slow and gradual. They describe "individual radicalization by political grievance" as typically stemming from some kind of psychological illness.¹⁷¹ Conversely, group and mass radicalization occurs when like-minded groups of strangers are brought together around shared ideas, such as political opinions, and result in increased agreement about the opinion at issue, followed by a shift in the average opinion of group members. Group radicalization can occur when 1) the group is isolated and under threat, 2) when groups are competing for the same base of supporters, 3) the group is competing against the state and the state uses disproportionate violence against them, resulting in increased sympathy and mobilization toward action; or 4) as a result of with-group competition and status seeking. Mass radicalization occurs when the group is in conflict with an outgroup and can be understood as an outgrowth of group radicalization mechanisms. The authors also note that "outgroup threat leads reliably to increased group cohesion, increased respect for ingroup leaders, increased sanctions

¹⁷⁰ Taylor and Horgan, 2006.

¹⁷¹ McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008.

for ingroup deviates, and idealization of ingroup norms.” Additional mechanisms of mass radicalization are as a result of external attack or when there is prolonged conflict with an outgroup, which at its most extreme stage leads to the dehumanization of the enemy.¹⁷²

Additionally, mass groups enable deindividuation and anonymity, and group members do not keep track of who says or does what—which makes accountability elusive and drives mass radicalization based on 1) out-group hatred, 2) hatred based in essentializing, and 3) ideas and wishes of martyrdom. In this context, there are further implications based on mass psychology research which has shown that so-called *public* opinion is not necessarily the *average* opinion, nor does it account for meta-opinion—the opinion about the opinions of others. Whereas in a small group, both public opinion and meta-opinion are likely to be similar, such as when a group of friends infers the position of those in their friend group, the actual distribution of opinion in a large and abstract group could be entirely different than what some may think. When the meta-opinion becomes known or is *believed* to be known, it could sway the personal views of others and lead to unusual political shifts. These mass psychology findings are important for understanding radicalization because perpetrators of political violence depend on much larger groups that sympathize with and support their causes of grievance.¹⁷³

The above-described radicalization models show how this study’s findings fit into the larger picture of extremism and radicalization: AP disinformation and propaganda, including beliefs of superiority, victimization, out-group hate, and claims to represent the majority, are driving group and mass radicalization, which in turn drive individuals and small groups to commit acts of violence and undermine democratic norms. Despite being a fringe movement, the true impact and capacity for damage becomes evident when these insights are coupled with the above discussed understanding that grievances can be real or imagined to contribute to the conditions that give rise to radicalization toward violence by eroding an individual’s social trust in society and institutions. Extremist individuals need not commit violence themselves to inspire others or to undermine democracy. These data show the links between grievances and extremism through persuasive narratives and rhetoric which are intended to change beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, as discussed earlier in context of Braddock’s research,¹⁷⁴ and point to the importance of holding accountable the elites who manipulate legitimate grievances for their own agenda.

Anti-immigration Mass Movements

This study’s interviews also showed the overlap between AP organized demonstrations, networks, and rhetoric and violent extremists, and that immediately following AP rallies there are attacks on immigrant held establishments. What is more the data suggest, as previous research also has, that their lack of denouncing violence and anti-immigrant propaganda and the platforms of right-wing parties are conducive to right-wing terror. The evidence of AP’s problematic rhetoric and associated violence is in line with criminologist Frank Neubacher’s

¹⁷² Ibid., 426, and John Duckitt and Kirstin Fisher, “The Impact of Social Threat on Worldview and Ideological Attitudes,” *Political Psychology* 24, no. 1 (2003): 199–222.

¹⁷³ McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Braddock, 2012.

1998 observation of “a significant rise in right-wing-motivated arson attacks following verbal shifts in the mainstream political debate toward more xenophobic language”¹⁷⁵ Similarly the data show the overlap between today’s anti-immigrant mass movements and violent extremists. Observations initially made in 2016 by Daniel Koehler, which squarely put right-wing extremism and violent extremism within the context and on the spectrum of a growing far-right political movement in Europe and the United States. Far-right parties have not only benefitted from increased migration and refugee asylum by running on anti-immigration platforms, but also contribute to racism and xenophobia. Anti-immigration mass movements and collective radicalization toward violence are connected to “widespread negative public debate about immigration,” and explains that “right-wing political parties have tried to gain support from [these] right-wing populist movements.”¹⁷⁶

Koehler further explained that “collective right-wing anti-immigration violence is akin to core terrorist tactics, although less coordinated and strategic.” And while these attacks do not fit the mold of what is commonly viewed as ‘terrorism’, the intent of the acts does: the perpetrators seek to achieve a “high media impact to convey a message against the government and a large hated group of immigrants.” However, right-wing attacks are frequently portrayed as isolated cases of hate crimes, rather than political violence, or as terrorism, as is the case with attacks by jihadist-inspired violent extremists. Koehler further explains that “[in] Germany, only about 24 percent of perpetrators actually send out any form of claim or note. One possible reason for this may be their desire to employ a “strategy of tension” in connection with their attacks, that is, to produce chaos and insecurity among the population in order to increase electoral support for (right-wing) “law and order” parties.” While scholars are debating the relationship between hate-crimes and terrorism depending on how planned, publicized, and/or coordinated attacks are, there are relationships between the two forms of violence which are relevant to this study: both create fear and hate crimes and “seem to provide a bridge and an ideological testing phase for catalyzing potential motivations for violent action (for example, hate, fear, aggression, power) with the ideological call to act.”¹⁷⁷

Koehler’s findings are based on research which indicates that though some attacks on immigrants have been carried out by organized neo-Nazis who took part in anti-immigration rallies, most of these violent acts were seemingly perpetrated by individuals with no ties to the formal extreme right-wing movement, but whose motivations mirrored those deeply embedded in right-wing anti-immigration protest movements. Just as shown in this study, it is known that in other instances militant right-wing extremists co-organized or participated in these demonstrations, thereby creating a direct, but completely noninstitutional, link between organized, militant, and experienced neo-Nazis and otherwise “normal” citizens (that is, citizens not previously known for right-wing extremist involvement) protesting primarily against immigration and refugee policies.

¹⁷⁵ Frank Neubacher, *Xenophobic Arson Attacks: A Criminological and Empirical Study of Perpetrators, Motives and Judicial Processing in Juvenile Criminal Procedures* (Godesberg, Germany, Forum, 1998): 48-49, <https://www.fachportal-paedagogik.de/literatur/vollanzeige.html?Fid=546918>.

¹⁷⁶ Koehler, 2016, 95.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 89.

Furthermore, Kohler shows that militant right-wing organizations have developed guidebooks for using social media and organizing protest movements, which use false or misleading statistics and stories about immigrant crimes: “[far-right extremist parties] such as the National Democratic Party of Germany and The Third Way have been involved in organizing protest groups online (typically via Facebook) and stirring up anti-refugee sentiments with falsified statistics of immigrants’ crimes or claims of specific events witnessed by friends and colleagues, such as incidents of rape or child abduction by refugees.” These events are co-organized by a broad range of right-wing organizations and can result in what he describes as hive terrorism: “[Terrorist] acts or violent hate crimes committed by a spontaneously formed crowd that quickly disbands after the incident [and] stir up the climate of panic, fear, hate, and urgency to act among the local population.”¹⁷⁸

Koehler deduced that a lack of denouncing violence and anti-immigrant propaganda and platforms of right-wing parties are conducive to right-wing terror, and that there is a rise in right-wing violence when “the mainstream political debate [shifts] toward more xenophobic language.” He linked right-wing violent extremist organizations and networks to far-right political parties, and international state and non-state actors and warned that “right-wing terrorism or racist political violence remains one of the most dangerous threats to Western democracies.”¹⁷⁹ In 2016 Koehler concluded that the specific relationship between right-wing terrorism and violence and far-right parties and mass movements was unclear. However, today, we have a much more nuanced understanding of these actors’ shared narratives, structures, and goals.

Reciprocal & Cumulative Radicalization

The findings outlined in this study touch on a final area of radicalization research: cumulative and reciprocal-radicalization research, such as that by Abbas,¹⁸⁰ Ebner,¹⁸¹ Eatwell,¹⁸² and Feldman,¹⁸³ consider the effects of jihadist-inspired violent extremism and cultural changes on modern-day far-right political parties and what their hate of others means for democracy. They argue that radical Islamists and far-right groups feed off each other in their use of violence as a solution for their grievances. According to Abbas while far-right groups focus on national identities and Islamists are focused on globalized Muslim identity politics, the movements share a sense of grievance that leads to hate for others. These cultural grievances, according to Abbas stem from the groups’ experience of “fragmented masculinities due to post-industrial economic displacement and the deterioration of national identities under globalization.” Both groups see

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 97-99.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 88-94.

¹⁸⁰ Tahir Abbas, *The Differences in How Islamists and The Far Right Feed Off Their 'Other'* (Online, Radicalization Research, 2018), <https://www.radicalisationresearch.org/debate/tahir-far-right-islamophobia-islamist-radicalisation/>.

¹⁸¹ Julia Ebner, *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far Right Extremism* (London, U.K.: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2018).

¹⁸² Eatwell, 2006.

¹⁸³ Mathew Feldman, "Tit-For-Tat Extremism Only Fuels More Hatred and Violence," *The Conversation*, May 24, 2013, <https://theconversation.com/tit-for-tat-extremism-only-fuels-more-hatred-and-violence-14613>.

themselves as being under the pressures of globalization and diversity and their grievances are largely based on issues of economic inequality, social immobility, structural marginalization, and labor market discrimination.¹⁸⁴ This study's findings support the notion by showing that APs and their violent extremist bedfellows use examples of jihadist-inspired violence as justification for their hate of Muslims and other immigrants, while simultaneously expressing victimhood from globalization and diversity, including fear of modern gender norms.

The data also support Ebner's assertion that globalization, and the accompanying political and cultural changes, have created a "global identity crisis," that is amplified through media and social media, and the "[resulting] grievances, uncertainty and a lack of perspective have formed a bitter cocktail of rage, which has been the elixir of life for extremists." She explains that there is a mutually reinforcing and amplifying nature of far-right and Islamist extremists: as two sides of the same coin, the two groups provoke retaliation in both narratives and attacks, and are escalating a "global cultural war," hate, and violence.¹⁸⁵ Feldman's research adds to this that social media is a powerful tool for extremists from both sides for mobilizing tit-for-tat responses to attacks from either side and that retaliation can feed the hateful rhetoric used and affect vulnerable communities. And, in the UK and across Europe these trends led to "new far-right" groups gaining support from white supremacists and so called "anti-Islam and anti-jihadist individuals."¹⁸⁶ These findings are supported with evidence of overlap between anti-immigrant mass movement, authoritarian populists, and violent extremists.

This study's results add to this body of research by showing that it is not only openly and explicitly white supremacist parties, but also authoritarian populist parties, who gain support from both white supremacists and authoritarian populists who hold broader anti-democratic values, such as anti-Muslim sentiment or anti-progressive gender norms. And, just as Briggs and Feve's,¹⁸⁷ Furlow and Goodall's,¹⁸⁸ and Abbas'¹⁸⁹ research explained, there is strong overlap between right-wing extremist narrative categories and tactics with these of Islamists or jihadists: for example, the centrality of anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ+ narratives, coupled with the permeation of these extremist narratives into the mainstream. This has important implications on research (and practice) related to the applicability of the lessons learned countering jihadist-inspired messaging to the AP threat. While there are important differences between the groups, such as these groups' civic engagement within democracies, this finding shows that counter-messaging models and lessons learned may not have to be reinvented.

¹⁸⁴ Abbas, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Ebner, 2018, 197.

¹⁸⁶ Feldman, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Briggs and Feve, 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Furlow and Goodall, 2011.

¹⁸⁹ Abbas, 2018.

IV. Countering Authoritarian Populism

To address the full range of factors driving radicalization, as part of the so-called “War on Terror,” nation-states and practitioners have been pursuing a variety of efforts and strategies at the national, community, and individual levels, under the umbrella of what has come to be known as “Counter Violent Extremism (CVE).” Countless human and financial resources have been poured into these efforts over the years and accompanying research, and the field has endured a steady flow of scrutiny and criticism, which led to valuable lessons learned. While the vast majority of these efforts focused on countering jihadist-inspired violent extremism, as the previous chapters have shown, there are signs that there are some overlaps which remain relevant for countering authoritarian populism. This chapter synthesizes CVE practice and research-driven lessons learned with the insights gained through this study and makes recommendations for countering the now most urgent form of extremism attempting to undermine democracy.

Attempted CVE solutions range broadly from customized individual-level interventions (including family-level counseling and support) and community-based awareness raising activities, to law-enforcement and military efforts. Researchers have categorized CVE efforts into three broad categories: 1) Primary Prevention efforts, which are aimed at the broadest segment of a society and include mental health services, and educational courses on civic engagement and cultural awareness; 2) Secondary Prevention efforts are focused on at-risk individuals or groups and include direct intervention and counter-messaging programs, and requires by-stander and community training and engagement; 3) Tertiary Prevention is aimed at individuals who are actively engaging in violent extremist activities. These efforts are focused on disengagement, isolation (including imprisonment), and deradicalization, and are implemented in conjunction with law enforcement.¹⁹⁰ Different nations have taken different approaches: for example, in Germany, efforts are categorized as either Preventive (before radicalization) or Distancing (after radicalization.)¹⁹¹ In contrast, the United States views CVE as a holistic enterprise, and thus rarely categorizes the myriad approaches by which it is implemented. Instead, American efforts are typically treated as parts of an integrated strategy for preventing and combating extremism within and outside its borders.¹⁹²

The results and effectiveness of these efforts at scale are thus far unclear. While practitioners and researchers have developed measures of impact for individual counter violent extremism

¹⁹⁰ Jonathan Challgren et al., "Countering Violent Extremism: Applying the Public Health Model," in Georgetown Security Studies Review, ed. Robert Morgan Byrne-Diakun (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Security Studies, National Security Critical Issues Task Force (NSCITF), 2016), <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NSCITF-Report-on-Countering-Violent-Extremism.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ Aladin El-Mafaalani et al., *Ansätze Und Erfahrungen Der Präventions- Und Deradikalisierungsarbeit*, (Frankfurt, Germany: Peace Research Institute Frankfurt HSFK, 2016), https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publicationen/report_062016.pdf.

¹⁹² Government of U.S.A., United States Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts, "A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Incorporating Violent Extremism into Violence Prevention Efforts," (Boston, MA: United States Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts, 2015), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Boston%20Framework_1.pdf.

programs, for example, surveys or interviews to measure individuals' or a population's extreme beliefs, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to measure the impact of these efforts across multiple programs, or across a country or more broadly.¹⁹³ For example, Germany has one of the world's most sophisticated counter-extremism mechanisms which reaches all strata of its society, from one-on-one interventions for violent extremist individuals to broad cultural sensitivity programs at schools. However, despite these advanced methods and many successes, Germany has not been able to stem far-right or jihadist-inspired extremism or violent extremism.¹⁹⁴

Part of the issue with and criticism of CVE lies in the debates between those studying radicalization with a focus on extremist beliefs and those who focus on extremist behavior. In the "Trouble with Radicalization," Neumann argues that it is problematic to attempt to study extremist political beliefs and violent political action separately, while those who do so argue that there are far more extremists than terrorists, that some terrorists do not hold strong political beliefs, and that it is ineffective and harmful to target ideologies. However, Neumann argues that "the role of beliefs and ideology in behavioral radicalization is obvious and well documented" and asserts that "a sophisticated approach would aim to understand why certain belief systems resonate with certain populations, and what combination of factors explains their lack of resonance and decline." Within this debate, he makes a critical observation on differences between the "Anglo-Saxon" and "European" approaches to thinking about and countering radicalization. The "Anglo-Saxon" approach aims to depoliticize the process by focusing on illegal behavior, or intention to commit illegal acts. "From this perspective, freedom of speech is near absolute, and people's political views—however extreme, anti-democratic, offensive, or divisive—are none of the government's business as long as they are expressed peacefully and do not inhibit others' right to do the same." (pg. 885) Researchers who focus on this approach, many of which are discussed above, operate under the assumption that violent extremism can be studied outside of the social and political context. However, Neumann argues that:

By focusing on terrorism, violence and law-breaking, the Anglo-Saxon approach conveys the impression that such 'lesser' forms of coercion should be of no concern. It conflates what is *legal* and what is *legitimate*, and—in doing so—fosters a civic culture in which governments and civil societies are more likely to turn a blind eye to hate speech, open expressions of racism and politically motivated intimidation, assuming that—since they are not illegal and do not involve violence—they must therefore be 'okay.'

On the other hand, the "European" approach focuses more on the cognitive but does not exclude behavioral factors. Neumann describes that Europeans regard terrorism as a symptom of a wider failure to confront extremist ideas and believe that counter-radicalization is about promoting democracy and citizenship, while challenging the ideas and political grievances that extremists are exploiting. For Neumann, the study of terrorism needs to occur within the inquiry of its connection to larger protest movements, other forms of political expression, and

¹⁹³ Michael J. Williams, John G. Horgan, William P. Evans, "Evaluation of a Multi-Faceted, U.S. Community-Based, Muslim-Led CVE Program" (Atlanta Georgia, U.S.A.: The Science of P/CVE, 2020), <https://thescienceofpcve.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Evaluation-of-a-Multi-Faceted-U.S.-Community-Based-Muslim-Led-CVE-Program.pdf>.

¹⁹⁴ Dorle Hellmuth, "Of Alienation, Association, and Adventure: Why German Fighters Join ISIL," *Journal for Deradicalization*, 6, Spring 2016, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/42/37>.

countercultures.¹⁹⁵ Neumann wrote about this in 2013; now, nearly a decade later, there is still a distinct lack of research-driven solutions for group and mass radicalization, especially related to right-wing extremism and radicalization that has not yet crossed over into violence. In terms of counter-narratives and counter-messaging, researchers cannot agree on the breadth of the audience or whether counter-messaging is effective at all. Furthermore, there is very little empirical research on the nexus of civic and engagement extremism, and it is therefore difficult to conclude definitively whether civic and community engagement indeed have an impact on extremism and under which circumstances. Research on jihadist-inspired violent extremism seems to offer some indication that giving vulnerable youth tools and avenues to affect change, such as fighting injustice through civic engagement, may stem radicalization, but there are no insights of the implications for right-wing violent extremists who are using legitimate democratic processes to advance their anti-democratic goals. The next section explores the data gathered for this study in this context and provides insights on how to counter those spreading extremism and inspiring violent extremism by weaponizing democratic institutions.

1. Civic & Community Engagement

Beyond counter-messaging, which is discussed in detail below, many primary and secondary CVE efforts are structured at least implicitly, around the assumption that support of and participation in civil society helps to counter extremism by strengthening pro-democratic norms, giving people a feeling of belonging and purpose, connecting those of differing backgrounds, or exposing at-risk individuals to positive role models. These programs focus on a broad range of participants or audiences and engagement models, such as programs for vulnerable individuals, governmental community engagement, or the creation or support of various civil society efforts. However, it is important to note in a discussion on the role of civil society in countering radicalization, that simply having a robust civil society or civic engagement does not ensure pro-democratic behavior and that in fact these organizations can be leveraged for anti-democratic goals.

As discussed above, Berman's research on civil society and the collapse of the Weimar Republic shows how, against common wisdom, high civil society participation does not necessarily lead to more democratic outcomes. Nazis were able to leverage citizens and associations who had previously formed for both political and non-political purposes to undermine the Weimar Republic. Berman argues that "strong and responsive political institutions" are necessary to prevent anti-democratic effects of civil society organizations.¹⁹⁶ However, there is a gap of understanding in how this reality intersects with much of the counterterrorism related literature, especially in relation to right-wing extremism, because democracies typically view especially apolitical civil society as an inherently positive institution which can aid in fighting extremism at the individual level. However, the data support Kriesi et al.'s research on the new societal and political "cleavage" manifesting itself as so-called culture and identity wars and shows that AP are leveraging elements of civil society for anti-democratic aims.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Neumann, 2013, 885.

¹⁹⁶ Sheri Berman, 1997, 402.

¹⁹⁷ Kriesi et al, 2008.

The recognition that radicalization can happen at the mass level has thus far not been explored deeply in the context of CVE or disinformation, because until now, civic and community engagement-related CVE programs frequently attempt to counter the push-and-pull factors terrorist recruiters exploit at the individual level, including individuals' wish for money, adventure, to belong to a group or a cause which helps fight against injustice or against a corrupt elite, or a quest for meaning or status.¹⁹⁸ A illustrative example is El-Mafaalani's argument that some radicalized individuals desperately desire justice, but feel they have no legitimate channels through which to express their grievances and affect change.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, the development non-governmental organization Mercy Corps has argued, based on their work in developing nations, that civic and community engagement initiatives and education, when attached to tangible outcomes, could have the potential to mitigate violent extremism by giving youth a channel for their grievances.²⁰⁰ They have taken an approach that pairs education with civic engagement and activism based on the finding that education alone increases support for violent extremism when it is decoupled from opportunities for action. Tesfaye and Mohamud's study assesses the effects of civic engagement as a CVE tool using a Mercy Corps Somalia-based program, which resulted in the conclusion that these kinds of initiatives must result in tangible results; without the ability to affect the desired change, consideration of violence as a legitimate tool for change may deepen, due to increased and unmet expectations.²⁰¹ A similar study of the impact of a CVE program on youth in Kandahar, Afghanistan found that while vocational training did not reduce the support for political violence, a combination of financial support and vocational training appeared to decrease support for political violence over the long term by signaling government's ability or willingness to address people's needs." However, the study wasn't able to confirm "[...] whether improvement in perceptions of government responsiveness at six to nine months can help explain the large reduction in willingness to engage in pro-[Armed Opposition Groups] actions post program."²⁰²

In a similar direction, Merriman and DuVall's research on the use of nonviolent civil resistance to fight oppression or injustice, which violent extremists and terrorists exploit to recruit supporters and members, suggests based on analysis of previous civil resistance movements, that giving people tools for addressing grievances will delegitimize violent organizations and violence as a tool for political or societal change. However, citizen groups must be able produce decisive change in a society if the support for terrorism as a tool for political should diminish. The authors explain that societies must address the oppressive conditions that terrorists exploit

¹⁹⁸ Jessica Stern, "Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence: What Have We Learned and What Can We Do about It?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668 (2016): 102–17, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26361939>.

¹⁹⁹ El-Mafaalani et al., 2016.

²⁰⁰ Keith Proctor, *Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence* (Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.: Mercy Corps, 2015), https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/MercyCorps_YouthConsequencesReport_2015.pdf.

²⁰¹ Beza Tesfaye and Abdikadir Mohamud, *Critical Choices: Assessing the Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youths' Propensity Toward Violence* (Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.: Mercy Corps, 2016), 33, https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/CRITICAL_CHOICES_REPORT_FINAL_DIGITAL.pdf.

²⁰² Jon Kurtz, Beza Tesfaye, and Rebecca Wolfe, *Can Economic Interventions Reduce Violence?* (Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.: Mercy Corps, 2018), https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/CanEconomicInterventionsReduceViolence_Afghanistan_MercyCoprps_Feb2018.pdf.

by providing realistic alternative forms of “mass struggle,” and “develop a new discourse about nonviolent power”.²⁰³ Similarly, in the context of the Syrian war and ISIS, Stephan argued that “organized civilian action” to disrupt key sources of power accompanied with counter-messaging should be used to defeat ISIS. This process would give “disempowered youth [...] alternative means to achieve social justice and political inclusion.” She also argued that it would be futile to attempt to dismantle ISIS without addressing the governance failures and corruption that fueled its creation²⁰⁴ and hypothesized that these efforts could persuade lower-ranked ISIS members to defect from the organization, but the research does not prove this point.²⁰⁵ It is within this context that this study’s third research question emerged and is explored below.

²⁰³ Hardy Merriman and Jack DuVall, "Dissolving Terrorism at Its Roots," in *Nonviolence: An Alternative for Countering Global Terror(Ism)* (Hauppauge, NY, U.S.A.: Nova Science Publishers, 2007), 2, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Dissolving-Terrorism-at-Its-Roots.pdf>.

²⁰⁴ Maria J. Stephan, "Civil Resistance vs. ISIS," *Journal of Resistance Studies* Volume 1, Number 2—2015, 127, https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/maria-j-stephan-jrs-2_15.pdf.

²⁰⁵ Maria J. Stephan, “Defeating ISIS Through Civil Resistance?,” (Washington D.C., U.S.A.: USIP, July 11, 2016), <https://www.usip.org/blog/2016/07/defeating-isis-through-civil-resistance>.

Effectiveness of Civic Engagement as a Deradicalization Tool

Research Question 3 (RQ3) was solutions focused and sought to shed light on the effectiveness of civic and community engagement as tools or resilience factors for reducing the pull factors of political extremism and radicalization toward violence among individuals vulnerable to political and violent extremism. Accompanying interview questions focused on whether and how the subjects engage civically, and whether they believe they have the agency to address their grievances and that civic engagement helps to address societal/political issues. The corresponding hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) predicted that civic engagement (e.g., protests, voting, community organization) is negatively related to perceptions of violence as a viable means of addressing societal issues—that those who engage civically are less likely to believe that violence is acceptable for addressing societal/political issues.

This study's findings suggest that civic engagement, if defined as participating in protests, running for or holding political office, voting, or community organizing, in and of itself is not a mechanism which can be used as a tool for deradicalizing extremist individuals. As outlined in earlier chapters, many of the AP's activities can be classified as civic engagement efforts, and the data show not only that these mechanisms are used to incite hate and violence, but that EAPs believe violence to be an acceptable means of bringing about change. Further, there is no evidence that additional civic engagement education or tools would moderate their views or behaviors. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, that civic engagement is negatively related to perceptions of violence as a viable means of addressing societal issues, is not supported by the results in this study. At best the results are mixed, as some APs felt that their efforts were effective at bringing about change (which, even if it curbs tendency for violent extremism in some individuals, is problematic from a societal standpoint, if those changes are anti-democratic), while others had doubts and frustrations and directly or indirectly supported violence as a means of addressing political issues.

Building on previous research, this study's findings suggest that giving civic engagement tools and resources to those with extremist views alone is not sufficient to mitigate extreme views and could even backfire by helping them to achieve their extreme goals more effectively. This finding underscores the importance of recognizing that radicalization in lead up to World War II occurred in the context of civil society engagement²⁰⁶ and that increasing expectations through civic engagement could actually exacerbate violent extremism, if individuals did not see the desired outcome of their civic or community engagement actions.²⁰⁷ It also underscores Neumann's urging to study radicalization objectively and holistically and that countering radicalization must include the promotion of democracy and civic engagement.²⁰⁸ These findings also indicate that previous research on the nexus between radicalization and civic engagement, which was largely based on jihadist violent extremism, cannot automatically serve as a foundation for understanding right-wing extremism or authoritarian populism, and the importance of studying the whole radicalization ecosystem instead of focusing on the relatively few violent individuals or the online space in isolation.

²⁰⁶ Berman, 1997.

²⁰⁷ Tesfaye and Mohamud, 2016.

²⁰⁸ Neumann, 2013.

Community Engagement

In evaluating CVE community engagement, influential counter-terrorism researcher Scott Atran suggests that youth in their teens and 20s who are seeking community and purpose are some of the most vulnerable to being recruited by European jihadis or U.S. white supremacists, and that based on lessons learned through anti-gang efforts, hands-on social engagement and community work has demonstrated significant violence reduction. This approach suggests “[bringing] youth into contact with respected community members, social services and law enforcement officials [...]” He further argues that “[community] engagement can also help counteract the alt-Right’s appeal. In Germany, the Violence Prevention Network and Exit Germany have used outreach initiatives to turn around hundreds of far-Right supporters. These initiatives focus on intimate ‘counter-engagement’ involving quality time with youth to develop a sense of worth and purpose; they build social relationships within the community and avoid mass ‘counter-narrative’ messages, which have not worked.”²⁰⁹ Similarly, Mitt’s study of over 100 U.S. governmental in-person efforts (e.g., government-community roundtables and townhall-style conversations) to engage communities vulnerable to violent extremist propaganda in the United States shows some effectiveness: her research showed a significant decline in pro-ISIS propaganda on Twitter in areas where these types of events had been held, especially if there were multiple engagement opportunities.²¹⁰

The finding that civic engagement cannot be used as direct tools for countering radicalization also has important implications for Atran’s argument that youth who are seeking community and purpose, and are therefore susceptible to joining radical groups, can be turned away from extremism through “hands-on social engagement” with respected community members, social services, and law enforcement officials.²¹¹ Care must be taken that this approach delineates the differences between civic engagement and community engagement, and that teaching civic engagement tools and approaches takes place with those from vulnerable communities, rather than those who are already radicalized, and that they include a pro-democratic values component. And, on the other hand, community engagement with those who already hold extreme views, such as racism or anti-Semitism, should focus on non-political service and engagement, so that it does not backfire. Again, these community efforts must be tailored to specific groups, context, and individuals to be effective and to avoid exacerbating radicalization and the ability of extremists to leverage community and civic organizations for their goals. Providing a “call to action”²¹² to which vulnerable audiences can respond requires careful consideration when countering far-right extremism, because these groups and individuals are already engaged for anti-democratic ends. Interestingly, this is also in line with Elizabeth Kendall’s findings that jihadist-groups outreach approach focusing on social services and charity work appeared to be more effective than calls to embrace extreme ideas alone, and her attempts

²⁰⁹ Scott Atran, *Alt-Right or Jihad?*, Aeon, November 6, 2017, <https://aeon.co/essays/radical-islam-and-the-alt-right-are-not-so-different>.

²¹⁰ Tamar Mitts, "Do Community Engagement Efforts Reduce Extremist Rhetoric on Social Media?," *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)* (2017): <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2940290>.

²¹¹ Atran, 2017.

²¹² Ritzmann, 2017.

to counter al-Qaeda's appeal through a community service and development-focused campaigns.²¹³

2. Effective Counter-Extremism Efforts

While the results do not show support for civic engagement activities as a tool for interventions into the process of radicalization or deradicalization of AP individuals or groups who are already radicalized, the data does offer some insights into where and how to use civic engagement effectively to counter AP extremism. Throughout the dataset there are substantial evidence with concrete examples of civic engagement being used to counter the effects of extremists and violent extremists on society by empowering and enabling pro-democratic actors to push back on democratic back-sliding and contest social and political spaces and institutions. The data show that civic and community engagement by those against extremism works indirectly to counter extremism and violence by contesting narratives and audience attention. In line with Mitt's findings of reduced pro-ISIS rhetoric following community roundtables and dialogues²¹⁴ the data provide anecdotal examples of effectiveness for civic and community engagement activities such as community dialogues, cultural exchanges, awareness raising, and capacity building for helping to mitigate and counter the effects of extremism on society.

All eight counter-discrimination and counter-extremism experts shared anecdotal evidence on the effectiveness of their efforts. They recounted that they are seeing changes in individuals with whom they interact, especially in face-to-face interactions which include empathy and individualized approaches. These efforts are supported by various governmental ministries and are present throughout various layers of German society. They make use of sophisticated deradicalization models and practices, and engage educators, parents, community leaders, and those wishing to leave violent extremism behind. For example, the anti-discrimination expert of Egyptian background explained how the educational program he leads works:

We [strengthen the children's] identities [...] and they learn about themselves. They look for common ground [with others], and after looking for this common ground, they find that they have a lot in common with other people, with other foreign children, and other German children. And they feel like: 'things are a little better for me [...] I understand myself now, have discovered myself and I have also discovered something about the others. [The other people] were somewhat obscure to me yesterday—the other, the strange—but what is strange is no longer as bad as it was before the project.

The left-wing anti-discrimination expert described how working with an NGO to help refugees as a youth set her on a path toward fighting for justice through her work. She also credits her mother with having introduced her to human rights. Three other anti-discrimination experts of immigrant background described their own work promoting dialogue, cultural exchanges, and training to fight discrimination and violent extremism, and examples of average citizens standing up against racism, even in public. While violent extremists aren't attending these dialogues or

²¹³ Elisabeth Kendall, *Contemporary Jihadi Militancy In Yemen How Is The Threat Evolving?* (Washington, D.C., U.S.A., The Middle East Institute, 2018), https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/MEI%20Policy%20Paper_Kendall_7.pdf.

²¹⁴ Mitts, 2017.

trainings, the efforts aim to reach the average citizen, such as teachers and students, thereby contesting the communications and cultural space by not leaving it open to right-wing communicators, their propaganda and disinformation. The extremists themselves aren't the target audience for these efforts, but rather those in the middle: educators, possible allies, and possibly the so-called silent majority.

This is in line with research which indicates that civic and community engagement programs may be especially effective for young people as they transition from youth to adulthood (late teens and 20s), which can be a critical period during which political awareness starts to emerge and youth can be channeled into violent or nonviolent political action and institutions.²¹⁵ Dinos and Jones draw on psychology and terrorism literature to explain the pre-radicalization processes and pathways to vulnerability, which they believe to begin in young adulthood as individuals attempt to understand their identity and place in society. During this period of cognitive and emotional openings extreme ideology can appear to be worthy, especially in communities with a history of civil war, political oppression, or injustice. Young people are less likely to vote or engage in political processes, may believe that established institutions are not working in their interest, or may even see them as discriminating against them and their in-group. Such individuals do not understand the benefits associated with participation in a democratic society and therefore policies to tackle injustice, inequality, and prejudice are essential to remedying extremists and violent extremists' exploitation of young people by helping them define themselves and create meaningful avenues for their contributions to society.²¹⁶

Conversely, one of the anti-discrimination experts of immigrant background shared an example of how to counter the effects of extremism by empowering adult audiences:

We want to empower the [immigrant and People of Color] community. We want to educate them about their rights. We want to raise awareness of this issue because we [see] that the first and second generation of migrants in Germany, i.e., People of Color in Germany, was absolutely uncritical of the state's action against them. That is, some were discriminated against by the immigration authorities, they were discriminated against by the job center, they were discriminated against by the employment office, by the employer, by the landlord and so on, but they thought: just do not bother, just do not criticize, just do not talk back, [...] so they won't get problems with their landlord, with their employer, with the job center, with the employment office, with the district office, and so on. And they had this mentality: 'no, I have to plug along, so they do not deport me, so that they do not do who knows what to me....[People of immigrant background] did not have this democratic upbringing, which we are now enjoying as the third, fourth generation in Germany, that we can also say no to something, that we can also defend ourselves against actions of the state, that we can sometimes demonstrate, that we can sometimes participate in politics and be a part of something.

²¹⁵ Maiah Jaskoski, Michael Wilson, and Berny Lazareno, "Approving of but Not Choosing Violence: Paths of Nonviolent Radicals," *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 32, 2020 - Issue 2 (2017): 257-274, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1364638>.

²¹⁶ Kamaldeep Bhui, Sokratis Dinos, and Edgar Jones, "Psychological Process and Pathways to Radicalization," *Journal of Bioterrorism & Biodefense* 10, Article number: 16 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1186/1741-7015-10-16>.

The data suggest that pro-democratic civic and community engagement activities create barriers between audiences and extremism by enabling pro-democratic actors by 1) advancing their political agendas, such as the institution of anti-discrimination policies, and 2) by equipping them with the means to contest the narrative space by engaging and exposing audiences in the middle of the political spectrum to pro-democratic ideas and narratives, rather than conceding the space to extremists. Similarly, while the data show that anti-discrimination organizations are not effective at deradicalizing extremist individuals, because they do not regularly or systematically engage with extremists or violent extremists, they may however offer inoculation against extremism through awareness raising and empowering pro-democratic citizens to push back against extremists.

Assimilation & Contact Theory

Given this study's discussion on the role of anti-immigrant narratives in far-right extremism, a couple of tangential areas of research deserve mention at this stage: namely, contact theory and the concepts of assimilation and acculturation, even though there is only limited research on these topics in the context of radicalization. Amid the Syrian refugee crisis and ISIS attacks, far-right politicians and supporters became increasingly focused on perceived risk of refugee radicalization and inability to assimilate as some of the key arguments for denying refuge to those fleeing violence. As we've seen throughout this study, far-right parties benefited from messaging on this topic; but research on factors of refugee radicalization, assimilation, and integration shows that these narratives in and of themselves can create the kind of environment in which minority radicalization can take place. For example, a RAND Corporation review of academic research on the threat of radicalization among refugees shows that the defining push-and-pull factors for radicalization among refugee populations are the actions taken by the receiving country and the international community. The authors found that the host country's legal and administrative policies are important factors in refugees' likelihood of radicalization and the hostility from local citizenry may create an environment for radicalization of refugees.²¹⁷ This means that there is a dual purpose and need for countering far-right extremist propaganda narratives: to help prevent majority and minority radicalization.

In this context, it is also important to discuss immigrants' assimilation and integration, the ongoing debate about the definitions of these two concepts, and some key differences between the U.S. and Europe in this regard. Researchers such as Schnuck, Schneider, and Crul explain that, linguistically, 'assimilation' usually implies the degree to which immigrants are able to adapt to a new culture and country, while 'integration' includes structural aspects such as educational and economic incorporation more explicitly. In the U.S., "assimilation" refers to the degree to which immigrants are able to assimilate to a perceived mainstream and achieve economic and social success. The American concept of the mainstream culture evolves over time and immigrants can become American while retaining and celebrating elements of their own original culture, but within an American way of aiming to become economically independent and successful. In Europe, integration implies cultural uniformity, which is frequently contrasted

²¹⁷ Barbara Sude, David Stebbins, and Sarah Weiland, *Lessening the Risk of Refugee Radicalization: Lessons for the Middle East from Past Crises* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE166.html>.

with “ethnically bound subgroups with supposedly very little connection to the wider society.”²¹⁸ An important difference is that in Europe immigrant economic success is not necessarily seen as a path to integration.²¹⁹

Adding to this, Berry’s research shows that acculturation and assimilation processes are highly individualistic, subjective, and impacted by contact with the new culture. Acculturation can manifest itself through assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization; all of these can be impacted by different national immigration and acculturation policies, ideologies, and attitudes in the dominant society, as well as available social support.²²⁰ However, an important addition to this is Taft’s Model of Assimilation, which shows that an individual’s process of adapting to a new group or culture is impacted by both one’s own willingness to be part of a new group and the new group’s acceptance of the newcomer.²²¹ In this context, it is important to note the lesser studied “majority members’ acculturation” process, which is the willingness of the host culture to accept cultural diversity into their own culture, such as in food, clothing, entertainment, friendships, etc. Research on this topic found that majority members who do not interact with immigrant culture report significantly more identity threat and perceived discrimination toward their group.²²²

These insights show the complicated dynamics of AP radicalization, disinformation, and propaganda. In the pivotal “The Nature of Prejudice,” Allport explained that favoring one’s in-group can be important for one’s survival and can lead to negative views of those who break from one own’s “habits” but repeated contact with those outside of one’s in-group can lead to more positive views of out-group members, such as those of a different sex, race, or religion. However, simply having contact with out-group members or education about the topic does not suffice, if one’s own in-group (such as family or friends) do not hold favorable views toward the out-group; therefore, in order to influence the individual, it becomes imperative to shift societal norms as a whole. Luckily, this is easier than attempting to change the mind of an individual.²²³

²¹⁸ Jens Schneider and Maurice Crul, “New Insights into Assimilation and Integration Theory” in *Theorizing Integration and Assimilation*, ed. Jens Schneider and Maurice Cru (New York, NY, U.S.A.: Francis Taylor, 2012), 2.

²¹⁹ Reinhard Schunck, “Immigration Integration,” in *Transnational Activities and Immigrant Integration in Germany* (Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, 2014) 10.1007/978-3-319-03928-2_6.

²²⁰ John W. Berry, “Immigration, Acculturation, & Adaptation,” *Applied Psychology*, 46 1, (1997): 5-68, http://www.cultureresearch.org/sites/default/files/berry_1997.pdf.

²²¹ Ronald Taft, “A Psychological Model for the Study of Social Assimilation,” *Journal of Human Relations*, 10 2, (1957): 141-156, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675701000204>.

²²² I. Haugen and Jonas Kunst, “A two-way process? A qualitative and quantitative investigation of majority members’ acculturation,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 60, 2017: 67-82, 10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.07.004.

²²³ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA, U.S.A., Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1954), https://faculty.washington.edu/caporaso/courses/203/readings/allport_Nature_of_prejudice.pdf.

This research is commonly referred to as the “Contact Theory” or “Contact Hypothesis” and studies over the years have resulted in additional confirmation and nuances.²²⁴

The findings in this study support Alport’s contact theory, and Taft’s Model of Assimilation in that it shows evidence of those with little consistent and meaningful contact with individuals who are different from themselves also being less tolerant of others. The anti-discrimination experts described that there is little to no contact between those with some of the most extreme views on immigration and those of immigrant background, making media representations of immigrants salient in the views formed. Several also noted the paradox of right-wing extremism’s higher presence in regions with fewer immigrants. Similarly, one expert described asking those afraid of “an invasion of foreigners” whether they had ever had a meal or drink with someone of an immigrant background and the answer always being no.

Several experts described what may ultimately solve the issue is that while immigrants are hesitant to move to economically disadvantaged areas with high right-wing extremism, there are pockets in East-Germany which are rapidly becoming a magnet for young people, in search of more affordable living conditions. These young people are moving to cities and are pushing back on racism and violent extremism, making the cities more accepting of multiculturalism. The migration expert confirmed this trend and explained that many young families are starting to move to East-Germany for their good childcare facilities, which has led to the revitalization of eastern cities. As such, despite having seen local PEGIDA protests, the anti-discrimination expert of Egyptian background noted that the protests petered out, and the city is seeing a revitalization of its downtown. Indeed, in an act of symbolic defiance, a newly opened progressive café proudly displayed hate mail they received from a conservative citizen, next to their menu of international beverages and food.

Similarly, the left-wing extremist/anti-discrimination expert described a thriving multi-cultural society and the emergence of pockets of “European culture.” Another anti-discrimination expert described youth of immigrant background integrating into German society, serving as leaders in their schools and communities, and bringing people together in celebration of diversity and different cultures. And yet another anti-discrimination expert described being optimistic despite attacks on immigrants because there are laws against discrimination and such violence. He described fear of foreigners as a process without which there would be no forward movement and that the debate over immigration is actually already over as Germany has already integrated many different communities, now that a quarter of all Germans have an immigrant background.

3. Actionable Insights for Practitioners

Most radicalization models acknowledge the individual’s societal ecosystem as playing a role in radicalization, yet the models are focused on attempting to predict an individuals’ behavioral outcomes in hopes of countering or preventing not radicalization or extremism itself and the anti-democratic impact these have, but extremist violence committed by a particular individual. This

²²⁴ Shelly Zhou et al., “The Extended Contact Hypothesis: A Meta-Analysis on 20 Years of Research,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 23 2 (2018): 132-160, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868318762647>.

has thus far evaded researchers and practitioners for the most part. There are, of course, exceptions when practitioners, such as law-enforcement, have been alerted about possible illegal behavior ahead of time, but this does not stem the negative impact of violent or anti-democratic ideologies. Researchers, such as Rousseau et al., questioned common radicalization models and argued that there is an urgent need to improve current radicalization models to better understand the complexity of the phenomenon, in order to inform community, institutional, and state prevention programs and policies. They conclude that a public health approach, focused on *preventing*, rather than on *countering* what is generally unpredictable violent behavior, would be helpful. A public health framework could help design and implement strategies at a population level, as previously shown to work in the contexts of street violence and bioterrorism²²⁵ and indicates the importance of creating and supporting multi-faceted ecosystems to counter the effects of extremism on society.

Similarly, Botha's case study of radicalization in Kenyans joining of al-Shabaab shows, violent extremism occurs on individuals' continuum of political socialization (vs. differentiating strictly between violent and non-violent political expression) and includes the influences from parents, friends, neighbors, religious leaders, schools, etc. which often influence the speed and degree to which an individual is radicalized. She notes that almost all affected individuals slowly "slide" into extremist organizations rather than it occurring as a result of a single catalytic event. She posits that the "interest of the collective" is the most important part of a person's identity, especially when mixed with religious themes and that therefore, governments must ensure that all citizens feel like they are part of the national group, and that mutual respect exists within the country's diversity. She warns that if this does not occur, traditional counterterrorism operations risk further alienating individuals and driving them into extremist organizations. She refers to push factors leading to violent extremism as being made up of: "Political circumstances, including poor governance, political exclusion, lack of civil liberties, and human rights abuse; economic circumstances; sociological circumstances with reference to religious and ethnic discrimination; counterterrorism and its impact; and perceived injustice and international circumstances."²²⁶ Differentiating it from the previously-described models, a public-health approach and one which puts the focus on the community, government, and the political socialization process, enables a "whole-of-ecosystem" approach to prevent and counter radicalization. It also suggests that governments, communities, and individuals play an important role in building unity where there is diversity.

Within this context, this study's interviews with counter-extremism experts provided insight into important gaps and pragmatic opportunities for countering AP. Along with sharing frustration about the relative slow speed of positive change, the experts described that while counter-extremism efforts are firmly embedded in Germany's society, through integration of anti-discrimination trainings into educational structures and through similar activities by a broad range of non-profit organizations, unlike among AP there are few international links among counter-extremism and counter-discrimination organizations. Moreover, right-wing populists are more active on social media and citizens lack media literacy and do not have the ability to effectively engage in long-term democratic processes. They described the need for structures and

²²⁵ Cecile Rousseau, Ghayda Hassan, and Youssef Oulhote, "And If There Were Another Way Out? Questioning the Prevalent Radicalization Models," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 5-6 (2017): 10.17269/cjph.108.6233.

²²⁶ Anneli Botha, "Political Socialization and Terrorist Radicalization Among Individuals Who Joined al-Shabaab in Kenya," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 37 (2014): 901.

networks among the counter extremism organizations, citizens, and other civil society entities to push back on AP. While based on experts' anecdotal (rather than empirical) evidence, when coupled with existing research insights, these findings suggests that some of the key gaps in counter extremism and counter disinformation efforts can be filled by supporting pro-democratic actors through strategic engagement and proactive- and counter-messaging which seeks to engage a broad range of pro-democratic actors. The following section outlines the necessary big picture and actor-specific steps to help mitigate the negative impact of authoritarian populism.

Acknowledge Impact, Protect Civil Liberties, and “whole-of-society” Counter Effort

Before delving into the details of countering authoritarian populism, it is important to acknowledge two important points: 1) that the right-wing is not alone in its use of identity politics for political gain and 2) that identities are not static, but malleable. Related to the first point, Mark Lilla explains that the American left is atomizing by promoting and supporting identity focused individualism, rather than pushing a vision of what binds the US as a nation and a way of life which could unify a much broader range of voters. He criticizes the American left for “increasingly narrow and exclusionary self-definitions” which have turned young people inward, away from the broader American populace and the world. For example, he notes the American Democratic Party’s website’s seventeen pages dedicated to various identity groups, such as African Americans and the LGBTQ+ community, and “empty gestures of recognition” instead of focusing on winning elections and exercising power. In the place of liberal identity politics, Lilla does not argue for class consciousness, which he says will only unite those who feel disadvantaged, but makes an appeal toward a message of standing together to make sure no one is left behind and against foreign enemies.²²⁷

On the second point, in an appeal for the invention or reinvention of more cosmopolitan and human identities, Kwame Appiah explains that the very identities, such as race, nationality, class, or gender, which unite us also divide us; yet they are all illusions and there is no identity which somehow connects the people who share the same label. Instead, humans use identities not only to define who they are and what they ought to do, but also to determine the value or status of others, and how to treat them—including what they can do to them. Nonetheless, despite some of the worst atrocities committed in the name of identity, Appiah also credits its unifying force with creating movements which demand social justice and argues that identities (who is in and who is out) are flexible and “contestable” because all there is not “some inner essence that explains why people of a certain social identity are the way they are.” As such national identities are not only invented, but can also be reinvented, and individuals needn’t succumb to the false “choice between globalism and patriotism.”²²⁸ The challenge that lies ahead for those seeking to counter the effects of identity-driven conflicts, such as authoritarian populism, are complex and require multi-sectoral courage and commitment.

²²⁷ Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal – After Identity Politics* (New York, NY, U.S.A.: HarperCollins, 2018), 9-10, 17, 123.

²²⁸ Kwame Appiah, *The Lies that Bind – Rethinking Identity* (New York, NY, U.S.A.: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2019), 29, 104.

The results of this study suggest that governmental, political, and civil society actors working to advance pro-democratic norms and to counter extremism, disinformation, and authoritarian populism need to understand and acknowledge the tactics opportunistic AP elites are using to leverage voters' concerns for anti-democratic aims, as well as their effects and long-term impact. The findings also point towards a multi-sectoral and intentionally pro-democratic approach to counter these effects and impact. Fundamentally, these efforts must also acknowledge and critically examine the role of globalization, capitalism, migration, and communicate their impact in ways that are easily understood by citizens and underscore pro-democratic values.

Critically, while the findings show that APs are taking advantage of democracies openness to leverage legitimate democratic institutions and processes for anti-democratic aims, efforts should be made not to curb legal and legitimate civic engagement or to limit free speech, as this is not only undemocratic, but also feeds into victimhood narratives. Instead, efforts to counter and contest these spaces with pro-democratic messages and efforts should be supported and democratic governmental institutions should be strengthened. This point is further expanded upon below. However, this study's findings simultaneously support recommendations, made by researchers such as Neumann²²⁹ and Ebner's,²³⁰ that governments and social media companies should make it more difficult to create and share hate in online space and empower pro-democratic voices by enabling and amplifying moderate pro-democratic voices.

Relatedly, researchers such as Stevens and Neumann developed and advocated for strategies to counter online radicalization based on the view that simply taking down extremist content is not an effective solution in and of itself and that social media is an opportunity for engagement rather than a threat. They argued that governments must make the production and access of extremist material more difficult by working with internet and social media companies, but simultaneously also less desirable by empowering online communities to self-regulate and promote positive messages. They argued that the most effective method of reducing online radicalizing material is to promote networks of self-regulation among online communities that can report content which breaks the law to the government.²³¹

Additionally, this study's findings show that efforts to counter AP narratives and impact should use a mix of mediums, including on- and off-line, in-person, hard-copy, and media. Such a "whole-of-society" approach should include online and offline messaging and in-person engagement opportunities or events to reach and the same audiences anti-democratic efforts reach or seek to reach. Each of these components requires an objective understanding of the messengers, the audiences, audience grievances, and efforts to address them (e.g., minimize pro-democratic actors' say-do gap), strategic communications efforts, combating foreign state and non-state actors' disinformation and propaganda campaigns, civic society support, media professionals' trainings, and protections of democratic rights and institutions.

²²⁹ Neumann, 2013.

²³⁰ Ebner, 2018.

²³¹ Tim Stevens and Peter R. Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action* (London, UK: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2009), <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/ICSR-Report-The-Challenge-of-Online-Radicalisation-A-Strategy-for-Action.pdf>.

Support Pro-Democratic Networks

The interview results suggest that there are few structural and international links among counter-extremism and anti-discrimination organizations, little to no strategic communications efforts. EAPs are well connected domestically and internationally, and their strategic communications amplify each other and are connected to their civic engagement efforts. On the other hand, there are fewer amplification and coordination efforts between counter-discrimination, counter-extremism, and pro-democracy actors who, while having the support of the state, spend less time and effort on building their networks and strategic communications. This is because their funding prioritizes advancing specific objectives in their communities and at the individual level, rather than organizing supporters, rallying them up for collective action, or communicating their values or successes through traditional or social media. These gaps reported by practitioners indicate support of observations made earlier by organizations such as EuroCities, which noted the effectiveness of proactive, transparent, and multi-stakeholder communications about migrants and refugees.²³² However, the findings show that it is necessary to vocalize governmental support for broader human rights and democratic values, including for women's and LGBTQ+ rights. This finding also supports the above discussed Botha's research findings on the importance of governments promoting respect and appreciation for diversity; while her research focused on counter jihadist violent extremism efforts in Africa, the data show that these lessons also apply to fighting extremism in democratic societies.²³³

Acknowledge Elites' Role & Address Vulnerable Audiences

Considering recent erosion of both the number and quality of democracies, democratic governments and pro-democratic political actors must acknowledge the role of elite authoritarian populists in weakening of democratic institutions, values, and processes and must support political, law-enforcement, and civil society strategies for mitigating these effects. This study suggests that authoritarian populists are taking identity politics to the extreme and are creating deep schisms in multicultural societies. In addition to the above discussed influence on policy for anti-democratic aims, EAPs are mainstreaming polarization and extremism which in and of itself as it has the potential to undermine trust democracy and its institutions.

Additionally, they are also creating a permissive environment for violent extremism and terrorism. Countering these effects will require carefully crafted solutions which respect democratic principles, such as free speech, and sensitivity to the complexity of the political and social dynamics in question, and different actors will have to do their respective part and come together for a "whole-of-society" approach, including responsiveness to citizens grievances instead of special interests. All actors must clearly and unequivocally denounce violence, and intentionally show respect and support for democratic values, institutions, and processes.

²³² *Social Affairs Refugee Reception and Integration in Cities* (Brussels, Belgium: EuroCities, 2016), <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/sites/futurium/files/eurocities-refugees-report.pdf>.

²³³ Botha, 2014.

Current efforts to counter extremism and disinformation rarely consider the role of elites and tend to have very narrow audiences—with a disproportionate focus on youth. Efforts should acknowledge and hold elites accountable for spreading anti-democratic sentiment and narratives by exposing them and related malicious actors as opportunists who are using deceiving and fear-inducing tactics. Simultaneously, practitioners should explore broadening their audiences to include at a minimum adult and senior men vulnerable to authoritarian populist propaganda and disinformation. Both elites and adult men are rarely the target of broad efforts to counter extremism or disinformation and funds should be allocated for research to better understand both messengers and audiences, including socio-economic variables and grievances. This point is further expanded upon below under “Audience and Messenger.”

Governmental and Political Actors

To counter AP efforts, governments must proactively and transparently communicate about institutional efforts, enforce relevant hate-crime, hate-speech, and criminal laws, and support pro-democratic actors in their efforts to counter anti-democratic speech and actions. To be able to do so, governmental institutions must adapt relevant existing tools and resources and develop new solutions to combat this relatively new priority issue in a way which reflects the gravity of democratic backsliding and intentionally protects democratic norms and institutions. Along the way, it is of critical importance that governments promote respect and appreciation for diversity and enable support for the pro-democratic ecosystem by allocating funding for appropriate civil society sectors. Furthermore, governmental efforts should include communications which proactively explain how and why democratic governments and other actors conduct their activities, highlight their successes and benefits to the audience, and explain pro-democratic values. This will require additional effort and funding, as governmental organizations do not typically have sufficiently robust public affairs capacity, but it is key that citizens understand the benefits of democratic governance.

Relevant governmental practitioners should evaluate how the lessons learned from countering jihadist violent extremism apply, such as that different actors have different roles to play and while there are key functions for governments, such as law enforcement and issuing funding for civil society-driven efforts. Many other functions are best left entirely to civil society, including the private sector, but governments must ensure that there is adequate funding and support for a wide range of civil society-driven counter extremism and pro-democratic efforts, which includes NGOs, media, corporations, educators, religious leaders, etc. Other functions require multi-sectoral collaboration, such as those to combat foreign state and non-state actor’s disinformation and malicious influence.

Pro-democratic governmental and elected officials should be aware of the role and impact of the say-do gap in combating disinformation and extremism, and not only address issues underlying economic grievances, but proactively communicate about efforts and successes. Simultaneously, these communication efforts must include messenger and audience-appropriate pro-democratic and anti-racism and anti-sexism messages delivered tailored to the target audience; for governmental officials this may mean taking a less direct approach. These efforts should help to permeate all of society, instead of just focusing on online or media, and should include in-person engagement opportunities in traditionally apolitical spaces, because the findings show that the online and off-line interact in important ways to radicalize traditionally centrist audiences and

evolving international links and networks. The German government’s counter-radicalization efforts recognize this and have physical locations dedicated to their efforts—whereas U.S. domestic and international efforts should enhance their off-line presence.

Governments must also acknowledge and inform citizens that foreign state and non-state actors actively lead disinformation and propaganda campaigns to undermine democratic nations. Governments must hold these actors accountable and counter these efforts through a broad range of actions which include offensive and defensive tactics and tools in a “whole-of-society” approach. Efforts should include relevant strategic communications, efforts to increase audience and institutional resilience to disinformation, efforts to disrupt adversarial influence operations, and regulations of relevant technologies, and law enforcement.²³⁴ Domestic actors working with adversaries to undermine democracy must be fully held accountable. Diplomatic efforts should underscore all of these efforts and use all available diplomatic tools to hold malicious actors accountable and to promote pro-democratic values and institutions.

Additionally, pro-democratic actors and governments must acknowledge the persistence of “us versus them” narratives and counter them proactively. A core narrative to address is that immigrants (or other minorities) receive support from the state, which could/should be going to native-born citizens (or otherwise majoritarian groups). Governments and other strategic communicators must not only acknowledge the moral and legal obligations for taking in refugees, but also economic benefits and other reasons why the country is taking in refugees/immigrants. However, while it appears that Germany attempted to do this, the discourse was allowed to shift into the “cultural concerns” realm. It is therefore important to also include pro-democratic norms and anti-racism objectives into these communications.

Similarly, pro-democratic political actors, including candidates, parties, and campaign officials, must conduct more strategic outreach to audiences vulnerable to authoritarian populism, understand how their economic grievances, such as related to childcare and education, are weaponized through identity politics, and develop strategies to address these heads on in ways which will resonate with the target audience. These actors must acknowledge and address APs false claim to speak for the majority of citizens, while also avoiding exacerbating identity politics, and minimizing or closing their own say-do gaps. Even if it is not politically expedient, their strategic political communications and outreach must take AP narratives and tactics into account and adapt accordingly to reach voters who may be persuaded by APs.

Similarly, once elected, mainstream politicians must be aware of APs’ tactics and cooperate to counterbalance them. APs, even when in the minority, are able to influence policies by dictating the political agenda through polarizing, black-and-white problem-solution narratives. Additionally, just as outlined above, mainstream political actors must support strong governmental institutions which can be resilient to extremists’ attacks, and jointly be responsive to citizens grievances and interests, engage with citizens, and mitigate or prevent globalization and capitalism’s worst outcomes. This also requires allocating adequate governmental funding for these and civil society-driven pro-democracy efforts.

²³⁴ JD Maddox, Casi Gentzel, and Adela Levis, “Toward A Whole-Of-Society Framework for Countering Disinformation,” Modern War Institute, West Point, 2021, <https://mwi.usma.edu/toward-a-whole-of-society-framework-for-countering-disinformation/>.

Law Enforcement and Judicial Professionals

A critical confluence takes place at the law enforcement and judicial levels, and it is imperative that laws are applied justly and consistently, in accordance with democratic rules and norms, including protecting free speech and civic engagement. This includes holding accountable those who inspire or instigate violence. Naturally, this must include protecting possible victims, their neighborhoods, and establishments, especially during times of heightened tension, such as after demonstrations or inflammatory political rhetoric. Simultaneously, law-enforcement public affairs should signal respect for democratic norms and valuing of diversity, while efforts must be taken to avoid politicizing these institutions. It is critical to acknowledge and resolve existing problems within those structures if necessary. As such, law-enforcement should be aware how APs target law-enforcement for recruitment and support and their role in protecting democratic institutions and values. Finally, as has been said several times, law-enforcement and the judicial system, just as governmental and political actors, must be mindful not only not to infringe on civil rights, but also to prevent perceptions of the government doing so, as this can backfire or have unintended consequences. It is therefore critical that public affairs communications are conducted by communications professionals.

Civil society and the Private Sector

International, national, and community organizations, the private sector, the media, and their leaders, play a critical role in combating democratic-backsliding, extremism, and violent extremism due to their outsized ability to connect with a broad range of individuals and groups. Each needs to play a different role depending on their focus, but it is imperative that each sector acknowledge the impact that extremism has not only on their goals or bottom line, but also on our democratic way of life. These actors should commit to being a part of the solution by intentionally protecting democratic values, institutions, and processes, and rejecting divisive actors and rhetoric. The exact approach to the problem and solution will depend on the actor, but at the core are institutional awareness and using one's platform to reach audiences with messages which reject violence and promote unity, appreciation, and respect for differences. More specific strategic messaging and civic engagement implications are discussed below.

Media Professionals

It is vitally important that media professionals and journalists receive training on how APs manipulate media for their political gain and how to cover news stories without amplifying extremists' narratives. While AP narratives can offer salacious content with which to draw in audiences, media companies have to be intentional not to share disinformation and to cover sensitive topics in ways that are not playing into AP's hands; this will require broad corporate buy-in which includes a critical evaluation of current practices and business models. Additionally, given the important role media plays in how broad audiences perceive extremists through the choices of words they use when covering these groups, it is important that journalists and media professionals are aware of the key victimhood and censorship narratives and ways to avoid amplifying or feeding into them.

For example, when the moderator cuts off the elite communicator/businessman during his off-topic grandstanding at the moment the latter is attempting to communicate just how few Nazis there are in their audience, the moderator is unintentionally reinforcing the censorship narrative, instead of allowing him to finish his sentence. In fact, perhaps the audience would even have noticed mention that there are indeed Nazis in the speakers' group of supporters. A possible way to manage such encounters is to make communicators and event planners aware of these actors' narratives, tactics, and goals, giving them a chance to prepare, such as by issuing a prior statement about how much time speakers will have and then giving speakers a sign when this time has run out. Similarly, media professionals should be made aware of how to cover crimes in a way which does not exacerbate racism, and mis- and disinformation. In addition to raising media professionals' awareness of extremists' disinformation techniques, ensuring they have resources for fact-checking would also be a pragmatic way to counter the authoritarian populist victimhood narratives.

Civic Engagement, Counter-Disinformation, and Counter-Extremism Practitioners

This section outlines the practical implications of findings related to civic engagement and counter-messaging for those working with extremists, vulnerable groups, pro-democratic actors, governments and in communications. Cumulatively on this topic the study shows that practitioners considering the use of civic engagement as a tool for countering radicalization or disinformation must differentiate between individuals who already hold anti-democratic views, those who are in a group vulnerable to radicalization, and those who hold pro-democratic views, and incorporate a holistic understanding of the individual and community's context into program planning. Additionally, the data suggests that efforts which leverage civic engagement as a tool for pro-democratic goals must be tailored to specific groups, context, and individuals to be effective, to avoid exacerbating radicalization, or the ability of anti-democratic actors to leverage community and civic organizations for anti-democratic goals.

Pertaining to those who already hold anti-democratic views, the data does not show support for the effectiveness of civic engagement as a tool to mitigate anti-democratic views and shows support for the idea that it may instead exacerbate extremism if individuals do not achieve desired outcomes by increasing their expectations. Those who hold anti-democratic views benefit from deradicalization programs which are tailored to the individual and as audiences for broad pro-democracy messaging and counter-messaging efforts. For example, if an individual holds racist views they should not be given training and support on how to run for elected office or how to organize support at the grass roots. Instead, they should be exposed to pro-democratic messages which aim to dissuade them from discriminating or committing violence against minorities, and in the case of violent extremists, tailored in-person interventions. These individuals may also benefit from carefully planned programs which use contact theory and conflict resolution approaches learned based on research on Competing Victimhood.

The findings related to perceived censorship and victimhood also indicate that it is imperative to protect free-speech and political participation as part of counter-extremism efforts, and governments, extremism researchers, and practitioners must further investigate how to ensure this in the context of authoritarian populists' anti-democratic goals and impact. However, the data do not support Bartlett and Miller's findings, which were based on jihadist-inspired violent extremism, that non-violent radicals or extremists can be powerful allies against violent

extremism. They argued that jihadist violent extremists often refused to engage in political processes or non-violent protests, many jihadist-inspired radicals did²³⁵, and that they could be engaged to combat violent extremism. Yet, in the case of APs, while they are technically engaged in non-violent activities, they are doing so for anti-democratic aims, are mainstreaming anti-democratic ideas, and there is an overlap with violent extremists. This indicates that the approach to combating this form of extremism has to be adapted to its distinct manifestations in democratic institutions and processes.

On the other hand, the data shows support for the effectiveness of civic engagement coupled with a pro-democratic message for building resilience to extremism and disinformation amongst vulnerable individuals and groups. Therefore, civic engagement tools and programs aimed at those who do not hold anti-democratic views but may be members of vulnerable populations should also include a strong pro-democratic norms and values message. For these individuals the effectiveness of being taught civic and community engagement along with pro-democratic values can boost their resilience to anti-democratic or violent extremist messages. As such, the theory of change suggested by the data is that if vulnerable—but not radicalized—individuals are taught pro-democratic values and civic and community engagement processes, they will not be as vulnerable to anti-democratic messages. However, this alone cannot address all pull factors and additional customized efforts must accompany civic and community engagement in vulnerable communities. Such efforts can include awareness raising efforts, community dialogues, and cultural exchanges.

Additionally, there is substantial evidence for the utility of empowering and giving civic, community, and media engagement training and support to those who already hold pro-democratic views. Doing so has the ability to counterbalance and contest the information space, to counter the impact of anti-democratic rhetoric and efforts, and to create barriers between citizens and anti-democratic messages. These kinds of efforts can reverse democratic backsliding by building or rebuilding institutions, trust, and resilience in social and political spaces. Such efforts can include tools and trainings to advance political goals, equipping and training pro-democratic actors to conduct strategic communications, network building, and international exchanges.

For those focused on preventing discrimination, the impact of disinformation and extremism communications should include raising awareness and providing pro-active counter-narratives to inoculate audiences vulnerable to extremists' propaganda and recruitment efforts, including audiences beyond the standard focus on youth. The data showed the importance of communicating those things to broad audiences for whose attention they are competing with anti-democratic actors. The data also points to a need to expand anti-racism activists' access to media and provide strategic communications training to them.

Strategic Communications and Counter-Narratives

This study's results indicate that APs leverage the traditional and social media space, whereas counter-discrimination, counter-extremism, and related pro-democratic actors do not have a sufficiently broad or organized strategic communications effort. While the two represent different, albeit overlapping, categories of actors, the findings shows that the communications

²³⁵ Bartlett and Miller, 2012.

space is largely uncontested and there are little to no proactive and strategic pro-democratic communications or efforts to counter far right or authoritarian populist disinformation beyond technology-enabled content moderation. The data show some positive effects of governmental and civil society anti-discrimination and counter-extremism efforts and that they use a similar range of structures to engage civically, but the effect is not on AP supporters, but rather youth and those wishing to leave extremist organizations. As such, these effects aren't broad enough to mitigate the negative effects of AP disinformation and propaganda on broader segments of society. Therefore, while the results show that anti-discrimination activists are active and pushing back, there is a need for increased strategic communications and international cooperation.

While most research on the role of strategic communications and counter-narratives in countering extremism and violent extremism has largely focused countering jihadist-inspired violent extremism, there are important insights and lessons learned that are also applicable to countering AP disinformation and propaganda.²³⁶ Chief amongst this body of research are Horgan and Braddock's insights on persuasion and influence in communications and psychology used to develop a guide for developing and distributing counternarratives to reduce support for violent extremism. They show how to systematically analyze terrorist narratives for key themes, and then construct and disseminate effective counternarratives. They underscore the importance of adapting the message to specific vulnerable audiences depending on threat actor, history, language, location, etc.²³⁷ In the same vein, Ingram and Reed's research adds that counter-terrorism strategic communications campaigns are more likely to be successful if they take into consideration the micro and macro context of the communications and include a fact-based and multidimensional messaging strategy. In their analysis on the history of propaganda during conflict, they show that minimizing one's own say-do gap and using messaging which shows incongruity between the threat actor's words and actions are an effective tool for undermining the credibility of adversarial propaganda.²³⁸ However, governments must also simultaneously take care to close their own say-do gaps, as Reed and Piercey have found that extremist groups exploit government failures to deliver on promises by using these gaps to undermine trust in the government and present themselves as credible alternatives.²³⁹

Audience & Messenger

²³⁶ Ritzmann, 2017

²³⁷ Kurt Braddock and John Horgan, "Toward a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 39:5 (2016): 381-404, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2015.1116277

²³⁸ Haroro J. Ingram and Alastair Reed, *Lessons from History for Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications* (The Hague, Netherlands: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016), <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep17480>.

²³⁹ Alastair Reed and Michele Piercey, "Opinion: Closing the 'Rhetoric to Reality' Gap - Preventing Violent Extremism in Post-Siege Recovery, Devex, March 15, 2018, <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-closing-the-rhetoric-to-reality-gap-preventing-violent-extremism-in-post-siege-recovery-91246>.

Research on counter-extremism and counter-radicalization audiences and messengers was also largely conducted in the context of countering jihadism, but offers some valuable lessons learned, and coupled with this study's insights, some points of possible deviation. Researchers agree that the credibility of the messenger is key in influencing extremists' beliefs, and that counter-narratives must be adapted to specific sub-audiences, by country, group, culture, etc. However, there is less clarity about the breadth of the target audience or the nature of the message itself. Archetti's research suggests that messaging intended to counter violent extremism should not target the extremists directly, but rather persons who are viewed as credible by the extremists, such as family members or community leaders; by influencing individuals surrounding extremists, it may be possible to influence the extremist's identity.²⁴⁰

Similarly, authors such as Ritzmann, argue that counter-narratives "[...] need to be directed at a narrowly-targeted audience that is either already curious about extremist content or in doubt of the currently adopted extremist world view [...]." Based on Ashour's findings, he warns that broader messaging may unintentionally arouse interest in the issue.²⁴¹ But there is a lack of clarity on the exact nature of the message itself. For example, Ritzmann suggests that counter-narratives should cover relevant political, historical, socio-psychological, theological, etc. elements of the extremist ideology.²⁴² Others argue that the main focus should be on narratives which have a very clear link to violence and not worry about those that lead to non-violent radical ideas,²⁴³ and advise that "successful counter-narratives should focus on rolling back and containing jihadist narratives whilst simultaneously highlighting the values and attitudes of democratic, free societies [...]." ²⁴⁴ Ritzmann adds that "[rather] than telling people what not to do, campaigns should offer a "call to action," a set of alternative things one can do to help those who want to become involved."²⁴⁵

In the context of counting authoritarian populism, as briefly touched upon earlier, current efforts miss a broad segment of the population who are being targeted by APs through their appeals to the "average" citizen. There is some indication in the dataset that in nations with AP movement especially white, conservative Christian, adult, and older male citizens fall into this gap. While these and other relevant audiences may be reached by some pro-democratic political actors or organizations other than those interviewed, there is little to suggest that this is happening in a "whole-of-ecosystem" and strategic approach. As such, while counter-messaging experts have typically advocated for a narrowly defined audience, based on lessons learned while countering

²⁴⁰ Cristina Archetti, "Terrorism, Communication and New Media: Explaining Radicalization in the Digital Age," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9(1), 49-59 (2015): 49-59, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297326>.

²⁴¹ Ritzmann, 2017.

²⁴² Omar Ashour, "Online De-Radicalization? Countering Violent Extremist Narratives: Message, Messenger and Media Strategy," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4, no. 6 (2010), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26298491>.

²⁴³ Christian Leuprecht et al., "Winning the Battle but Losing the War? Narrative and Counter-Narratives Strategy," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3, no. 2 (2009): 25-35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26298404>.

²⁴⁴ Dina Al Raffie, "Whose Hearts and Minds? Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Salafi Jihadism," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 3, no. 2 (2012): <http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.304>.

²⁴⁵ Ritzmann, 2017.

jihadist messaging, in efforts to counter the effects of AP disinformation, the findings point to the utility of a broader audience for countering AP disinformation.

What is certain is that when conducting strategic communications and counter-messaging, each societal sector and messenger will have credibility with different audience categories, on different platforms, and must adapt their communications efforts accordingly. It is vitally important that AP narratives are challenged in traditional and social media, and in-person spaces, and that the messenger, message, and medium are customized depending on the audience and topic. Efforts should be made to humanize different groups, through virtual and in-person communications vehicles, which could include public service announcements, storytelling, in-person exchanges, and pro-democratic norms messages. These efforts would benefit from insights learned through research on Competitive Victimhood (CV), such as techniques for reconciliation.

Proactive Messaging

In research on inoculation theory, Braddock's shows that proactive communications which "vaccinate" individuals against the effects of disinformation and propaganda can promote audience resistance to persuasive left- or right-wing extremist propaganda before they are radicalized.²⁴⁶ Similarly, to break the cycle of reciprocal radicalization, Ebner advocates for a mobilization and solidarity of the middle, where moderate voices, values, and stories are amplified, and education and critical thinking skills take center stage. And, in the context of reciprocal and cumulative radicalization, for Abbas potential solutions include promoting critical thinking and preventing the dehumanization of the 'other'.²⁴⁷

Meanwhile, governmental practitioners have also learned that counterterrorism and counter violent extremism policies and efforts can be viewed as undermining civil liberties and may unintentionally have led to consequences which may exacerbate radicalization and extremism. This has led researchers such as Mucha to point to the need for a depolarization of the public debate on these topics.²⁴⁸ Along with providing integration support for immigrants, to assuage "concerns about rising tensions among the local population toward refugees, and issues of public order caused mainly by far right-wing protests", some European cities have begun to proactively communicate with the majority population about the refugees coming to their communities. Their experience has been that "transparent communication has also proved to be crucial to defuse tensions", and that "[information] sessions appear to be most successful when the relevant politicians, NGOs, social workers, health professionals, and the police work together to dismiss fears and debunk [rumors], like those in Leipzig and Utrecht."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Kurt Braddock, "Vaccinating Against Hate: Using Attitudinal Inoculation to Confer Resistance to Persuasion by Extremist Propaganda," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34:2, 240-262, 2022: 10.1080/09546553.2019.1693370.

²⁴⁷ Abbas, 2018.

²⁴⁸ Mucha, 2017.

²⁴⁹ *Social Affairs Refugee Reception and Integration in Cities* (Brussels, Belgium: EuroCities, 2016), 9, <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/sites/futurium/files/eurocities-refugees-report.pdf>.

AP's Say-Do Gaps & Hypocrisy

Those engaged in efforts to directly counter authoritarian populist disinformation and propaganda can use the insights obtained in this study to expose AP's say-do gap, hypocrisy, and disinformation, and undermine their credibility as messengers. Simultaneously, these actors should be held accountable in the public eye for sowing division and anti-democratic sentiment and goals. Throughout the dataset there are examples of the AP subjects' hypocrisy and inconsistency in agenda and ideology. They frequently claimed to represent average citizens but exposed themselves to be elites who have a disdain for the working class, minimized the violence committed by sympathetic actors, and showed anti-democratic values and practices. They saw and described themselves as the leaders of the masses and as role models, rather than as being one of the masses, and made derogatory comments about economically disadvantaged citizens and those they perceived as not understanding the issues. They bragged about their wealth and influence they have, while claiming to speak for the disadvantaged and complaining about non-white children taking up too much space. They claimed to speak for the middle and majority but acknowledged connections with the extreme and violent far-right, bragged about benefiting from derogatory labels, and acknowledged a deep societal schism and their role in its creation.

Additionally, the data show that APs frequently argued simultaneously two directly opposing points. For example, they bragged about extensive access to media, as they also claimed to be censored, and made claims about governmental institutions conspiring against them, while being part of government or using governmental data to make their points. The conspiracy theorist explained at the same time grand multi-sectoral conspiracies against them, as he explained that all the information can be readily found online, versus having to go through hidden or forbidden information gathering channels. They simultaneously complained about the low birthrate of Germans based on being concerned about the economic impact, as they described a high birth rate among immigrants as problematic. AP subjects criticized Islam for its conservative treatment of women, yet simultaneously criticized progressive gender norms and policies; they criticized immigrant women for staying at home with their children, while arguing for more conservative gender roles in general.

These results show that EAPs exploit grievances and information vacuums through mis-, disinformation and propaganda narratives for strategic communications and mobilization and that there is a gap in proactive and strategic communications to counter these narratives. This indicates that democratic governments and actors must ensure that their say-do gap is narrow to avoid giving APs openings, that they have an imperative to increase their own transparency and communications, and that there are opportunities to use APs' say-do gaps, hypocrisies, and inconsistencies to undermine their recruitment messages. To underscore, although counter-messaging experts have typically advocated for a narrowly defined audience, based on lessons learned while countering jihadist messaging, in efforts to counter the effects of AP disinformation, the findings point to the utility of a broader audience, because APs claim to be representing the majority and are reaching significant portions of society with their messages. Additionally, the data points to the utility of communicating with older audiences, not only youth.

The results provide examples of the kinds of say-do gaps, hypocrisies, and inconsistencies Horgan, Braddock, Ingram, Reed, and Piercey's research describe, and which pro-democratic communicators can use to undermine AP's messaging. AP elites can be held accountable for their 1) excusing, condoning, and justifying of violence; 2) anti-democratic practices and values, including claims to represent the majority while actually being elitists; 3) exploitation of legitimate grievances for the sole purposes of advancing their own power ambitions and the status of other elites; 4) selective and hypocritical criticisms of media and false claims of censorship; and 4) use of fabricated or exaggerated statistics and other nonexistent facts. The data also suggest that extremists' distrust in each other can be exploited for more offensive counter violent extremism measures by enhancing existing schisms among violent extremists to undermine their efforts.

The findings also suggest that communications efforts to counter authoritarian populism should: 1) come through messengers deemed credible in the eyes of target audiences; 2) include awareness raising and counter-disinformation and counter-extremism communication trainings for political communicators, including elite political communicators and leaders, and media professionals; 3) include domestic and international exchanges and cultural events focused on fostering empathy; 4) continued individualized counter violent extremism programs; 5) include efforts to address legitimate grievances; 6) include concrete examples of the benefits of democratic institutions and values; 6) expose Russia and other malicious actors supporting anti-democratic goals; 7) include in-person engagement efforts; and 8) concrete examples of how to stand up against racism in daily life. In sum, the data indicates that to combat authoritarian populism a multi-sectoral and multi-faceted approach is needed.

4. Implications for Researchers, Limitations, and Opportunities

As compared to research on jihadist-inspired extremism, and outside of limited circles, there has been a lack of radicalization-related research on the effects of modern-day authoritarian populism on democracy and society, and how AP elites are using legitimate democratic processes and institutions to advance their anti-democratic goals. Similarly, identity politics, nationalism, and populism literature, while explicating broadly on the role and impact of figureheads, offered few insights on the role of non-figurehead elite communicators in advancing authoritarian populism and largely described populist movements as being anti-elitist and anti-establishment, leaving off the hook the elites who promote anti-democratic norms for their own benefit. This study contributes to research on identity politics, populism, and counter violent extremism and helps to bridge between relevant aspects by shedding light on the role of non-figurehead authoritarian populist elites, their messaging and mobilization techniques, connections to mass movements and violent extremists, their impact, and tools for countering their anti-democratic aims. Simultaneously, this research challenges existing identity politics and populism research, which largely places the responsibility and origin of the phenomenon on non-elite classes, by showing that despite claiming to be anti-elitist, authoritarian populism is nonetheless run by some of society's most elite professions, who not only brag about being financially well off, but look down upon those they claim to represent and democracy itself. It similarly challenges mainstream violent extremism research, which also places the focus on the individual who eventually commits the crime, and largely treats elite actors as outside inquiry permitters. Methodologically, the study brings in primary empirical data from authoritarian populists, leftists, and practitioner experts, which contrasts with the more common focus on

social media data, theoretical, and desk-study approaches across these topics. This adds a “whole-of-ecosystem” overview from which the aperture can be opened for a broad range of future studies.

This research also builds on the dearth of research on elite APs’ techniques and tactics, which includes weaponizing legitimate economic grievances into racist and sexist narratives and attempting to mirror and leverage legitimate political processes and institutions for anti-democratic aims. On one side, this is in contrast with researchers studying populism focused on figureheads and broad movement variables, and on the other side, violent extremism researchers focused on differentiating between “extremism” and “violent extremism,” specific individuals who commit violence, and jihadist-inspired violent extremism. This has led to a gap in understanding the modern-day effects of authoritarian populism, elite-level civic and community engagement techniques for mobilizing support for anti-democratic aims, and their overlap with violent extremism. This includes new understanding of the role authoritarian populist elite communicators play in inspiring and coordinating anti-democratic populist movements, including insights on the processes and techniques through which they leverage mass protests for their benefit.

Furthermore, this study helps to add to the thus far limited discussion about the implications of decades of research findings on jihadist violent extremism on authoritarian populism by showing that elite APs are connected to more extreme factions. This builds on existing counter violent extremism research, which has thus far focused on jihadist-inspired violent individuals and groups, and largely in isolation from non-violent elite political actors and the mainstream. This challenges the dominant research focus on a strict differentiation between violent and non-violent actors and focus on preventing acts of violence. It makes the case that the anti-democratic impact is part of an ecosystem which includes violent and non-violent actors. It also builds on current radicalization models, which are largely based on violent individuals and aim to prevent violence, by providing clear evidence of authoritarian elites as anti-democratic actors who are attempting to undermine trust among individuals living in democracies, in democratic institutions, such as government and media, and even enabling and excusing extremist violence. As such, this study simultaneously builds a bridge between populism literature and violent extremism and radicalization literature taking each out of its academic silo to adapt it to a critical phenomenon in modern democracies.

This research suggests that previous findings on the centrality of non-economic grievances and “us versus them” narratives playing a more important role in radicalization than socioeconomics, which were based on research on jihadist-inspired violent extremism, are also applicable to authoritarian populists in multi-cultural democracies. However, it also critically shows that Muslim and non-white immigrants, women, and the LGBTQ+ community are on the front lines of victimization by authoritarian populists’ anti-democratic efforts. This adds a more nuanced understanding of the AP’s political and social aims, as they seek to restrict democratic freedoms for those groups. This is also part of this study’s value related to research on efforts to counter these effects.

This study also helps to build on Counter Violent Extremism strategic communications literature, which has thus far offered little insight on messengers and audiences for countering authoritarian populism and mass radicalization. It helps to show the anti-democratic effects of authoritarian populist narratives and argues that this impact in and of itself requires a strong counter effort.

Furthermore, it shines the light not only on the importance of heretofore largely ignored elite messengers, who must be held accountable, but also on the critical need to create a “whole-of-society” online and offline approach to combating the impact of anti-democratic actors. This research challenges previous research on target audiences for counter and preventative messaging by arguing for a broader counter-authoritarian populism audience than just those who are thinking about committing violence or are already sympathetic to violent extremists.

Similarly, this study helps to expand research on the effectiveness of civic and community engagement as a tool for countering and preventing violent extremism. While it suggests it has little effectiveness on mitigating extremists’ views, which is counter to some previous claims, the study adds nuance in terms of other possible audiences for such efforts, namely those who are not extreme but are in vulnerable populations, and for those who hold pro-democratic views to help contest the space. Previous research on this topic did not offer such target audience nuance. Additionally, and critically, this study considers how to counter anti-democratic efforts which are using legitimate civic and community engagement processes and structures without limiting non-violent actors’ democratic rights and feeding into APs’ victimhood narratives. As such, this study also helps to tie in Competitive Victimhood (CV) literature into radicalization and authoritarian populism research by showing the centrality of victimhood narratives in AP’s ideology.

Limitations

This study and findings have some important limitations and shortcomings including *limited data and methodological constraints* due to time and budget considerations which reduce the generalizability of the findings, and which may impact their validity. Key amongst them are the limited size of the dataset and complexity inherent in working with strictly qualitative data. This research is a limited case study, conducted with minimal funding, and with a relatively small sample size, therefore, before the applicability of specific findings can be ascertained, it should be repeated with other AP subjects, a larger number of participants, a control group, and in other locations. A larger set of subjects, including a control group, and an experimental or survey-based study design would provide a chance for comparison, generalizability, and could help statistically validate types of relationships between key variables. Additional sources of data focused on representing a holistic picture of the whole ecosystem would also further validate the findings. A mixed methods approach could help include additional data sources, such as relevant demographic or opinion polling data, for the purpose of ascertaining the validity of findings across larger groups. Similarly, an accompanying survey or an experimental research design could help quantitatively evaluate relationships between certain variables.

There are specific limitations pertaining to the falsehood of the elites’ claims to represent the majority of the population and the specific narratives and tactics used by them: as it stands, the relatively small size of study participants, compared to the actual number of AP elites, organizers, supporters, and voters, reduces the generalizability and makes it impossible to conclusively confirm or refute the elites’ claim to represent average or disadvantaged citizens within this dataset alone. A much larger dataset and mixed-methods approach, which includes additional APs and their and their voters or audiences’ socio-economic and grievances data, could help with this limitation and also reinforce or disprove the findings related to EAP’s

weaponizing of cultural and economic concerns and grievances by allowing for analysis of types of concerns by socio-economic background.

Relatedly, using only this study's original data, it is difficult to scientifically validate the argument that elites are the central force organizing and driving the movement (vs. non-elites) and their actual impact on supporters. Additional data on AP narratives, their policy positions, and gains could also help solidify their stated versus actual impact on supporters and the nation, and provide a comparison of policy aims and goals, party platforms and narratives, and their supporters' needs. Additional quantitative data (e.g., from surveys, opinion polls, demographic information, etc.) focused on APs influencers, organizers, and supporters' priorities and socio-economic backgrounds, and including a control group, the data would allow for a comparison of the individuals' socio-economic status, beliefs about social and political priorities, and issues affecting them personally. This should include the profiles of additional key authoritarian populist influencers to confirm or refute the centrality of elites in the movements and who is driving AP communications and organizing.

Similarly, a further limitation is the inability to show which key variables preceded others. The dataset and methodology did not have the ability to provide the origin of grievance narratives, which, while beyond the parameters of this study, would have provided important data for testing several of the hypotheses. While the dataset suggests that EAPs do not share economic interests with the people they claim to represent and shows the ecosystem of techniques and structures EAPs use as a means of engaging and mobilizing sympathetic audiences and voters, it is not able to point to whether anti-democratic narratives originate with the population or political elites. Narrative analysis across time and mediums could help identify the origination point of specific grievance narratives. While it would be tremendously difficult to identify where modern-day grievance narratives originate, especially since many go back many decades, this could be done with additional data which also allows for a comparison of AP influencers' socio-economic backgrounds, and the relative importance of each grievance category between them and their constituents. For additional solutions-oriented insights, this research should also compare those grievances' perceived versus actual impact on constituents.

Additionally, while the data suggest that EAPs' use of "us versus them" narratives can induce outrage and anger, enable extremism and violent extremism, and have a negative impact on democratic norms and values, this study is unable to show causation. To resolve this limitation, a longitudinal or experimental research design would have been necessary. One or multiple studies would have to collect relevant audience segments' opinion and behavioral data as well as APs' policy gains and their outcomes.

Additional data could also help confirm or refute three tactics-related results: First, whether running for office knowing that one will not win is a common tactic to flood the information space. Second, the findings imply that EAPs are using social media to push traditional media into covering specific stories. However, the data is not able to confirm this and analysis of when and how news stories are breaking could help to provide further evidence of this tactic and its impact or help disprove it. And third, to which extent APs are able to influence policies and political agendas. Data and information on the laws and policies resulting out of AP efforts could help shed light on their relative legislative impact. This research should also overlap the categories of laws APs focus on and implement and their impacts on supporters and the concerns they voice.

Separately, additional content collection and analysis of AP narratives, across the whole ecosystem, and the policies they support, could help mitigate three limitations related to specific AP narratives: First, related to the centrality of gender-issues in reported grievances, the fact that the researcher is a woman may have played a role the emphasis on those narratives. Second, additional content analysis could also prove the extent of overlap between violent extremists and AP's content and narratives. Third, it was beyond the parameters of this study to confirm whether there are overlaps between the rhetorical arguments employed by today's authoritarian populists and the theses Hirschman outlined, additional AP content could examine whether they also fall into the three categories of reactionary arguments.

The study also has several limitations pertaining to the counter violent extremism-related results: while the data show support for the effectiveness of counter-speech and civic and community engagement for contesting the narrative space, these findings are based on anecdotal rather than experimental or empirical data. As such the study is unable to confirm the findings in ways a study which tests the effectiveness of each of these approaches would be able to. Relatedly, this study is unable to resolve the debate between the American and British/Anglo-Saxon versus Western European approach to countering hate and extremist speech. The data does not show which is more effective: an approach focused on criminal behavior and intent, while protecting free speech at all costs, government-enforced censorship, or exposing malign communicators and holding them accountable. To investigate this point scientifically, it would be necessary, amongst other things, to measure the impact of law enforcement action, censorship and messenger exposure on extremists and their audiences' beliefs and actions, focusing on non-violent extremism which uses democratic institutions for anti-democratic goals. Similarly, the study cannot resolve debates over ideal target audience breadth, or whether online or off-line messaging approaches are most important. A controlled environment wherein different types of audiences for civic engagement and pro-democracy efforts are surveyed pre- and post-intervention to measure shifts in their attitudes and intentions would allow for more definitive comparison.

Relatedly, the data on the limits of AP values, such as admitting that they have lost the immigration fight or why the people APs claim support them are not voting for them, and their likelihood to prioritize immigration as a core issue, is extremely incomplete, as it was outside of the parameters of the study. However, future research could explore whether previous anti-democratic movements have been mitigated through democratic means, and if so, which factors contributed to it, including whether generational shifts have in the past correlated with the rise and ebbing of AP values and political support. A possible hypothesis that generational and cultural shifts have in the past correlated with the waning of AP beliefs. Historical data on the waxing and waning of such movements along with demographic and cultural shifts and public opinion insights may allow for additional insights. A predictive study could also compare existing data on AP supporters to projected demographic and environmental shifts.

A final limitation of this study, which deserves mention, is that due to budget constraints, only the author of this study conducted all interviews, and coded and analyzed all data, rather than distributing the task to multiple individuals to minimize confirmation bias and to mitigate the impact the researchers' sex may have had on the subjects' focus on issues such as women's rights and family. The researcher's sex was regularly evoked in AP interviews, perhaps as a means of gathering support for specific narratives, such as around women's roles, rights, and sexual violence. While great care was taken to limit researcher bias or influence on subjects'

responses, the presence of the researcher may have influenced the focus on certain topics over others.

The inclusion of additional data sources (such as quantitative data) and additional coders/researchers could help control for researcher bias in coding overlapping categories, which could have impacted the number of cultural narratives versus economic grievance narratives, because the two are sometimes closely linked. For example, while cultural grievances are more frequently present in the dataset than economic ones, the two are sometimes so linked that it is difficult to differentiate. Child-care or family politics can be interpreted as either economic or gender-norms issues depending on focus; similarly, some narratives of victimhood can also be interpreted as economic issues if seen through a lens of relative deprivation. A multi-variable understanding of cultural or economic concerns would help limit bias and allow for more nuanced and generalizable analysis and effective counter-extremism and pro-democratic efforts. However, regardless of the comparative size of each category, the findings show that the umbrella narrative is “us versus them.”

Future research opportunities

In addition to using additional data sources and mixed methods research design for mitigating the above-described limitations and to validate (or refute) the findings based on this study’s original data, follow-on research should continue to holistically look at the ecosystem of authoritarian populists’ and other anti-democratic actors and extremists use of legitimate institutions and processes to undermine democratic values, processes, institutions, and governments. This research should be aimed at solutions which simultaneously protect civil rights, while holding accountable those who erode others’ liberties, and with an eye toward developing more nuanced counter-extremism, pro-democratic, and governmental and political actor accountability. Overall, in addition to seeking insights on whether EAPs in fact represent their audiences’ and voters’ interests, additional research on this topic should aim to better understand authoritarian populists’ target audiences. The foci should include research which investigates the relationship of AP voters’ real financial strains and legitimate grievances over social benefits, the role of globalization and capitalism, and their relationship to “us versus them” narratives, research on AP elite communicators and their tactics, including their say-do gaps and overlap with violent extremism, and specific communications-related studies, such as focusing on anti-democratic actors’ use of media, running for office, and overlap with historical reactionary rhetoric. Future research should also include a systematic review of which lessons learned from countering violent extremism practice and research are applicable to combating disinformation and authoritarian populism.

Populism and extremism researchers agree that extremist actors are leveraging people’s anger, but also need to study broader societal conditions which give birth to the phenomena, such as how real financial strains affect voters. Such future research should not only seek understanding of the relationship between cultural and economic disinformation narratives and voters’ priorities and attitudes but should also engage in deep investigation of how and why cultural issues resonate despite not having a direct impact on voters, including how voters experience the relative importance and impact of each. Critically, it should also research what happens when voters are made aware of the relative impact of each issue on their lives. As discussed in the context of this study’s limitations, this research could include existing datasets, such as opinion

polls on related topics, and demographic and socio-economic data, to compare the social and economic similarities and differences between EAPs, AP politicians, their audiences, those who eventually come to support their candidates, and average citizens. However, additional nuanced data will also be necessary to test individuals' reactions to becoming aware of the relative impact differences. This would be especially conducive to an experimental research design study.

Tactics

Research should also further investigate anti-democratic elites and influencers, whose interests they represent, their tactics, and goals. These studies should include delving deeper into questions on how authoritarian populist elites' interests, objectives, and policies overlap with the interests of those they claim to represent, their say-do gaps, and how pro-democratic communicators and actors can hold anti-democratic elites accountable without feeding into their victimhood and censorship narratives, which can include testing the impact of censorship on anti-democratic beliefs and actions, and their relationships with violent extremists. Additionally, researchers should investigate whether running for office knowing that one will not win is a common tactic to flood the information space.

Other communications- or narratives-focused studies could also investigate the tactics AP and other anti-democratic elites employ. For example, media-focused studies should investigate how anti-democratic actors are leveraging traditional media to reach broad audiences with specific narratives, including the use of social media to push traditional media into covering specific stories.

Narratives

Communications-focused studies could also include research on whether there is a categorical overlap between the rhetorical arguments employed by today's right-wing extremists and the reactionary arguments Hirschman outlined. Similarly, research could investigate the origins of specific narratives and their evolution in the communications space. Such studies could aid in understanding of how previous anti-democratic movements and narratives have been mitigated, including whether generational and cultural shifts, similar those we are experiencing now, have correlated with the rise and fall of AP values and political support. This may aid in better understanding of the future of these movements and priorities for combating their impacts.

Location

The additional research should be conducted in the United States given political developments in recent years and their global impact on other authoritarian populists. However, Germany, Hungary, Poland, or Serbia would also be appropriate locations, because additional studies could be conducted in any country with a significant presence of authoritarian populists in local or national governmental positions or with a significant AP movement. Additional research conducted in Germany should be conducted with a critical consideration of why Germany, despite its sophisticated efforts, has failed to curb the appeal of authoritarian populism and far-right extremism. Researchers in the U.S. and Germany should collaborate on these studies not

only because authoritarian populists across these two nations do so, but because each of these two countries brings to the table a supporting set of assumptions, experiences, data, and approaches, which when combined have the potential for a more holistic understanding of the global threat stemming from anti-democratic actors and the most effective means for countering it.

V. Key Takeaways

As argued throughout the preceding chapters, despite decades of research on jihadist-inspired violent extremism, academic research on extremism, radicalization, and counter violent extremism offered few insights on authoritarian populist extremism and its impact on radicalization and democracies. Nor was there much more general discussion about what the implications of decades of this research and practice are on right-wing extremism. Meanwhile, populism and nationalism research offered insights on key figureheads and broad organizational characterizes and tactics, but also didn't offer much insight on the role and impact of the networks of authoritarian populist elites on radicalization and democracies, or actionable insights for countering this form of extremism. More systematically, researchers had not adequately explored the role and impact of authoritarian populist elite communicators and in which ways they seek to mirror and leverage legitimate democratic processes and institutions. Nor was there an understanding of how they are connected to more extreme factions of these movements and mass protest movements, and how they leverage grievance narratives, especially against out-groups, and their impact on democracy. A strict focus on differentiating between 'extremism' and 'violent extremism', the individual-level of inquiry, the message and audience (versus the messenger), and jihadist-inspired violent extremism led to a lack of understanding of the right-wing radicalization process, and the relationships between far-right parties, mass protest movements, populist movements, and right-wing violence. In solutions-focused research there is uncertainty about the effectiveness of civic and community engagement as tools for countering extremism, solutions for group and mass radicalization, and the implications for right-wing extremists and authoritarian populists who are using legitimate democratic processes for anti-democratic aims. Finally, few extremism researchers use primary research data obtained in the physical (vs. online) world or explore off-line communications channels and tools for radicalization.

To fill some of these knowledge gaps, this study aimed to identify insights on how grievance narratives are used in authoritarian populists' mis- and disinformation and propaganda, what impact these narratives have, and whether civic and community engagement can be used as tools to prevent extremism. The research problem was divided into three research questions: 1) What is the role of cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and radicalization?; 2) What is the impact of anti-refugee/immigrant narratives on political radicalization and radicalization toward violence?; and 3) Among those vulnerable to political and violent extremism, are civic and community engagement effective tools or resilience factors for reducing the pull factors of political extremism and radicalization toward violence?

The ensuing study was built on existing literature and original data collected during the 2019 summer, in the German cities of Chemnitz, Leipzig, Erfurt, Berlin, and Saarbrücken. The dataset, which is in German, was comprised of insights from sixteen individuals: seven authoritarian populists, a far-left extremist, and eight anti-discrimination or counter-radicalization experts. Once analyzed, this data showed examples of 1) how authoritarian populists and extremists see themselves, their role in society, and their cultural environment; 2) their grievance narratives, including pertaining to culture, economics, immigration, and their perception of being victims of crime and injustice, censorship, conspiracies, both today and historically; 3) authoritarian populists and extremists views on the effectiveness of civic engagement, their civic and community engagement structures and relationships, including international links, demonstrations, and apolitical spaces; 4) their communications vehicles, including media, social media, in-person, and hard-copy content; 5) authoritarian populists effect on mainstream society, including anti-democracy sentiment, claims to speak for the majority, distrust in institutions, on political and societal spaces, fear & hate, radicalization, tolerance for violence; and 6) effective efforts to counter extremism, including as pertaining to contact theory and youth engagement, the effectiveness of such efforts, gaps and opportunities, counter-messaging opportunities, and the limits of authoritarian populist ideas.

Once these findings were contextualized within the broad body of relevant research, the following key findings emerged: related to Research Question 1, on the role of cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and radicalization, the following finding arose: elite authoritarian populists falsely claim to represent average citizens, and weaponize and leverage working- and middle-class legitimate economic concerns through fear, hate, and outrage inducing mis- and disinformation and propaganda; cultural and economic grievances are packaged into “us versus them” and victimhood master narratives, which serve as a bridge issues between EAPs and audiences, because they do not share the same economic concerns as the classes for which they claim to speak; and AP elites use civic and community engagement, in-person, and traditional and social media strategic communications to mobilize support for themselves. This finding is supported by evidence which shows a pattern of elite authoritarian populist communicators claiming to speak for non-elites, turning complex economic policy issues into anti-democratic disinformation and propaganda narratives against democracy, government, women, media, immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, and others. Furthermore, the finding is supported by observations of the ecosystem of techniques and structures these actors use, which includes online and offline networks and engagement used by EAPs to leverage voters, extremists, and violent extremists to mobilize support for their own power-aspirations and political agendas.

Related to Research Question 2, on the impact of anti-refugee/immigrant narratives on political radicalization and radicalization toward violence, the following finding emerged: anti-immigrant narratives are a part elite authoritarian populists’ broader set of “us versus them” narratives, representing fear about cultural and economic changes and security concerns; these narratives bring anti-democratic norms and values into the mainstream and can enable extremism and violent extremism. This finding is supported by evidence showing that elite authoritarian populists are anti-democratic actors who mainstream polarizing and extremist narratives which weaken democracy by undermining trust in democratic institutions, such as government or media and fuel societal polarization, and create a permissive environment for violent extremism.

Related to Research Question 3, on whether civic and community engagement are effective tools or resilience factors for reducing the pull factors of political extremism and radicalization among those vulnerable to extremism or violent extremism, the following finding surfaced: civic engagement does not appear to be an effective tool for countering AP and extremists' views and behaviors in those individuals or groups, because they are already civically engaged, and additional civic and community engagement education or tools would not moderate their views or behaviors; however, civic engagement by those against extremism works indirectly to counter extremism and violence by contesting political, societal, and information spaces; increased support for pro-democratic actors and proactive pro-democratic communications and counter-messaging and "inoculation" activities can help counter anti-democratic extremism and disinformation. Separately, but related, there is also partial evidence that authoritarian populist values and ideology may begin to wane soon through increased multiculturalism, movement fragmentation, governmental accountability, and emerging multi-sectoral pro-democracy efforts. This argument is made based on evidence of authoritarian populists engaging civically and in their communities for anti-democratic aims; evidence of civic and community engagement utility for inoculating vulnerable individuals and groups, and its utility for countering the effects of extremism.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate how grievances impact political radicalization in the context of rising anti-pluralist and anti-democratic sentiments and ideologies, such as authoritarian populism, related misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda, and how civic engagement can help mitigate the problem. The results indicate that democratic governments and pro-democratic actors should be much more alert about the role of intolerant actors who are using legitimate processes and freedoms to undermine trust in democratic institutions, values, and processes to gain power for themselves. Their instrumentalization of fear and some of humanity's darkest tendencies, such as division and hate, threatens to erode hard-earned democratic freedoms, such as tolerance for diversity, including in lifestyles and beliefs, and the relative stability democracies have enjoyed for many decades. The centrality of their anti-minority, anti-woman, and anti-LGBTQ+ narratives suggest that these groups are first in line for bearing a negative impact, and that conservative, white, heterosexual men may be the most credible voices for countering authoritarian populist narratives to those who are vulnerable to it.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the common resignation that authoritarian populists target the "disadvantaged," the "angry," and those "left behind," are only one side of the coin and neglects the opportunity to hold accountable the elites who fan fear and anger and promote an accompanying anti-democratic ideology to empower themselves. The results suggest that voters have legitimate economic grievances, and natural fears about the unknown, which authoritarian populist elites are hijacking by blaming changing cultural norms and that what is visibly different from their version of the norm but does not actually impact voters in tangible ways. In their narratives, they do not blame the powers from which they have benefitted—globalization and capitalism—nor do they use nuanced fiscal policy debates to improve social policy; these abstract and complex topics do not induce the outrage necessary to mobilize support for candidates who would fall short if elections depended on robust experience in democratic consensus building and governance. Democracies and pro-democratic actors must acknowledge that globalization and capitalism have not elevated everyone the same way and growing wealth,

health, and life expectancy gaps must be acknowledged and tackled. The say-do-gaps between what democratic governments promise and deliver must be decreased.

The results also indicate that authoritarian populism is not just a matter of actors who do not know how democracy or civic engagement works, but that these actors are proactively leveraging the openness of democratic systems for anti-democratic goals. Nonetheless, it is imperative that these actors' civil rights are protected; instead of limiting authoritarian populists' speech or political participation, pro-democratic actors must empower and support a multi-sectoral, "whole-of-society", pro-democratic response to democratic decline, and implement and enforce laws to protect the rights of those targeted by authoritarian populist hate speech and violence.

While the study neither aimed to nor actually resolved the debate between whether it is more effective to censor certain problematic speech or to drown it out with positive alternatives, the data indicates that it is imperative to increase support for the latter through a broad range of mechanisms. Such efforts should aim to close existing gaps, such as lack of formal networks and structures among pro-democratic actors (including internationally), increase pro-democratic communications (including governmental), and undermine authoritarian populists' message by holding their elites accountable for sharing mis- and disinformation and propaganda, their hypocrisies, and say-do gaps.

The findings suggest that elite authoritarian populists are part of networks which include violent extremism and their communications at a minimum create a permissive environment for violent extremism. Furthermore, while the data do not say that elite authoritarian populists want violence to occur or that they actively leverage it, it does show that they fail to reject it, while they justify and minimize it, and some feel that violence may be necessary to change the democratic system if it does not give way to their demands. This indicates that democratic governments must adapt their tools and resources to mitigate the impact of such actors.

This suggests that pro-democratic actor across government and civil society (including business, media, education, religious leaders, etc.) need to recognize the dangers of authoritarian populism and its effects on democracy, not only in terms of chipping away trust in democratic governmental and societal institutions, such as media and science, and taking away rights from certain groups, but their aims to undermine democracy itself. Elite and foreign malicious actors' attempts to undermine democratic values, norms, processes, or institutions should be acknowledged and actors must be held accountable by exposing them as opportunists who are using deceiving and fear-inducing tactics. Efforts to counter this impact must be multi-sectoral and multi-faceted and must include addressing voters' legitimate economic concerns and counter the ever persistent "us versus them" disinformation and propaganda narratives. These efforts must take place online and offline, include those targeted by authoritarian populists, and critically examine the role of globalization and capitalism. Depending on the sector, efforts can and should cover approaches which include humanizing different groups, virtual and in-person communications vehicles, public service announcements, storytelling, in-person exchanges, media and internet literacy initiatives, and anti-racism and pro-democratic norms messages or objectives. Critically, all sectors must clearly and unequivocally renounce and reject violence and EAP's propaganda and disinformation, whether online or in person.

Governmental (including law enforcement) and pro-democratic political actors must protectively protect democratic rights and institutions, minimize their say-do gap, cooperate with each other (including internationally), engage in strategic communications efforts about their activities, highlight their successes and benefits to the country, explain pro-democratic values, combat foreign state and non-state actors' disinformation and propaganda campaigns, connect with audiences vulnerable to authoritarian populism, and strengthen governmental and democratic institutions resilience to anti-democratic attacks. Governments should support a multi-sectoral effort, while being aware of the limits of their reach and credibility and provide funding for civil society-driven efforts. Governmental and political actors' communication efforts must include pro-democratic and anti-racism and anti-sexism messages delivered in the best way understood by the target audience. In all these efforts, governments and political actors must take care not to undermine civil rights, or feed into AP's victimhood or censorship narratives, while simultaneously holding accountable those who seek to undermine democracy, including the rights of those living in democracies, through word or deed.

Germany and the U.S. specifically, have a lot to learn from each other's efforts and governments should facilitate exchanges, network building, and resource sharing for governmental and civil society actors. For example, Germany's counter-radicalization experiences and infrastructures are robust where the U.S. is lagging. On the other hand, U.S. civil society has a lot of valuable experience and structures relevant to diversity and inclusion. Both countries need to support pro-democratic actors' access to media and enable strategic communications training for them. On the international stage, it is imperative that these nations stand with each other and other like-minded nations to promote respect for diversity and protect democratic rights.

Governments and the private sector should support and fund further research on these topics, much the same way counter-jihadist-inspired terrorism research received support and funding. This research should be used to better understand messengers, audiences, socio-economic variables, and grievances and to help mitigate vulnerabilities. U.S. and international researchers should be enabled to work together to help provide access to relevant data and advanced techniques, and to promote network building. Researchers should leverage multi-disciplinary approaches and build multi-sectoral stakeholder teams to promote actionable research design.

Media professionals play a critical role in reaching extremely broad audiences; therefore, they need to be aware of how APs manipulate media for their political gain and receive training on how to avoid amplifying divisive narratives. Media professionals need to be aware of AP's victimhood, censorship, and crime-related disinformation and propaganda narratives and techniques and ways to avoid amplifying or feeding into them. Media companies should evaluate their corporate social responsibilities as relevant to protection of democratic rights and consider how their reporting exacerbates or assuages division among people.

Those specifically working on countering extremism and disinformation must expand their efforts and consider the role and impact of influential elites and the broad audiences they are reaching. Currently these efforts have very narrow audiences—typically youth and educators—whereas this study's findings suggest that a much broader audience is being reached and influenced by AP narratives. Just as previous studies have, this study's data show that while there are key differences, there are also overlaps between authoritarian populists' narratives and techniques and those of jihadist-inspired extremists: implying that practices and research protocols will not have to be revamped entirely and many of the learned-learned can help to

counter the AP threat. Such efforts should explore using conservative, white, heterosexual men as credible messengers for reaching targeted audiences which expose AP's say-do gap, hypocrisy, and disinformation, and undermine their credibility as messengers. Simultaneously, these actors should be held accountable in the public eye for sowing division and anti-democratic sentiment and goals. Efforts should explore the utility of contact theory and lessons learned from Competitive Victimhood (CV) literature.

Additionally, practitioners using civic and community engagement as a tool must develop and implement programs which avoid giving tools, access, and training to those who already hold anti-democratic views, that those vulnerable to radicalization are exposed to narratives which helps to build their resilience to anti-democratic ideologies, and that those who hold pro-democratic views are supported. The results show that different segments of those vulnerable to anti-democratic ideologies require different approaches, some of which include increased civic and community engagement. Although there is much debate about the most effective audience breadth for effective counter-messaging against extremism and violent extremism, which cannot be resolved here, the data shows that APs are targeting the majority and average citizens. Therefore, cumulatively, all pro-democratic practitioners must understand that customized "whole-of-ecosystem" approaches are necessary and that the most credible messengers must be sought out and engaged.

Reasons for Optimism

In conclusion, it may be encouraging to note that throughout this study there was also limited, but nonetheless heartening, evidence that authoritarian populist values and ideology only have narrow influence, which may wane in the near future. Central amongst these are examples of EAPs acknowledging that globalization and multiculturalism are not reversible. A few of the them admitted they may have lost that fight against diversity—some consciously and others subconsciously: as he sits on his deathbed, the influential AP communicator, who earlier described that he's [finally gotten through to his leftist grand-daughter], ended the interview with a description of how he made sure there was a non-pork dish served when his twenty-seven year old grandson, who had studied in Shanghai, brought his Afghan refugee, Muslim girlfriend over for dinner. Similarly, the findings also showed that AP elites understand that immigration is a lost battle, and that immigrants are not the source of the issues about which they claim to feel so passionately.

The AP subjects also provide evidence that the movement is rickety, as AP individuals do not appear to trust each other. They described the movement as fragmented into countless competing sub-groups. In addition to describing in-fighting within and between AP groups, the AP politician described that he is only greeted by four of his 700 co-workers (i.e., other elected representatives). Similarly, there is robust evidence that law enforcement and political actors are holding extremist and violent extremists accountable for their words and actions. Meanwhile, another AP interviewee noted that many young Germans are becoming economic migrants themselves as they leave his region for West-German cities and other countries for better opportunities. And other interviewees described that the places left behind are filled by newcomers who through the very act of moving, be they ethnic Germans or immigrants, bring with themselves new customs and more tolerance for outsiders. Other examples of this phenomenon are the new restaurants and cafes which open in East-Germany cities, some with

international foods enjoyed by the very silent majority and average citizens the AP would like to win over.

Additionally, throughout the dataset there is also evidence of emerging multi-sectoral pro-democracy efforts to limit the effects and reach of authoritarian populism. A counter-discrimination expert of immigrant background, described his thinking of societies as functioning like cars, meaning that societies without friction cannot move forward. He argued that Germany has long overcome the process of integration in Germany now that there are more than 20 million people with an immigrant background in Germany. He added that the “democratic middle” has also started to track and counter disinformation online and ongoing trainings for journalists. Simultaneously, as evident in the example of one of the AP subjects being continuously kicked off social media and having to recreate his profiles under different names, social media companies are beginning efforts to mitigate the spread of hate on their platforms.

This study shows that authoritarian populist communicators are elites who do not face the same economic concerns as the people they claim to represent. Instead, they take identity politics to the extreme by turning grievances about legitimate economic issues into outrage and fear-inducing “us versus them” narratives for the purpose of motivating and engaging supporters to help amass power and influence for themselves. The study also shows that these actors exhibit further persistent anti-democratic sentiment and engage in communications and civic and communication engagement activities which erode democracy by promoting fear, hate, violence, mistrust in democracy, society, and governmental institutions. These actors are leveraging democratic institutions for anti-democratic aims.

To counter the influence of authoritarian populism, governmental and civil society actors must acknowledge the nature of the issue and gravity of their impact, as well as adapt and augment relevant existing counter violent extremism lessons learned, tools, and resources. Where necessary pro-democratic actors must develop new channels for enabling a multi-medium and “whole-of-society” approach. In such an approach, each actor must not only recognize their responsibilities, but also the limits of their reach and credibility, and empower and support those best suited for each line of effort. Actors must protect civil liberties and be responsive to voters’ legitimate grievances while also being intolerant of intolerance and violence.

Paraphrasing one of the study’s counter-discrimination subjects: fear is a natural phenomenon and society must acknowledge this and propel itself forward. In countering jihadist-inspired violent extremism, practitioners learned that certain religious leaders knew exactly how far to walk the line so that they would continue to be protected by democratic laws; similar patterns exist among authoritarian populist elites, but they are also leveraging democratic institutions and processes, making it one of the most dangerous threats to democracies. Primo Levi explained what society must now do in his observation that: “Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”

Appendices

Hypotheses, Accompanying Working Research Questions, and Interview Questions

SECTION 1

H1: Civic engagement (e.g., protests, voting, community organization) is negatively related to perceptions of violence as a viable means of addressing societal issues.

(Simple language: Those who engage civically are less likely to believe that violence is to address societal/political issues.)

Do Interviewees engage civically? Why or why not?

Do they believe that civic engagement helps to address societal/political issues?

Do they feel a sense of community when they participate civically?

Do they feel a sense of political agency to address their grievances?

What makes Interviewees feel connected to their community/country?

Q0: Tell me a little about yourself/ Erzaehl mir ein bisschen ueber Dich.

Q1a: Do you politically or socially engage in your community? If so, how? / Angagierst Du Dich politisch oder gesellschaftlich in Deiner Gemeinde? Wenn ja, wie?

Q1b: Do you find that your activism is effective in bringing about change? / Findest Du dass Dein Aktivismus wirksam ist, und Veraenderungen herbeifuehrt?

Q1c: How do you feel when you are engaging politically or socially in your community? / Wie fuehlst Du Dich wenn Du in Deiner Gemeinde aktiv bist?

SECTION 2

H2a: Identity uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society.

H2b: Economic uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society.

(Simple language: Interviewees have grievances against German society, related to anti-immigrant narratives in media, politics, and/or society/community.

Interviewees who are exposed to anti-immigrant narratives develop “grievance narratives” against their society, because it makes them feel as if their identity/culture (identity uncertainty) or economic situation is under threat.)

Do Interviewees have grievances about their life, and if so, what is the nature of these grievances?

Do they attribute these issues as being related to immigration/migrants (vs. being related to e.g. their economic class, gender, location, etc.)?

How do Interviewees feel about their social and cultural identity?

How do Interviewees feel about their economic situation?

Are Interviewees exposed to anti-immigrant narratives?

If so, where? Who/what do they think the source of these narrative is?

How do anti-immigrant narratives make Interviewees feel?

Q2a: What concerns do you have about life in Germany? / Welche Sorgen machst Du Dir ueber das Leben in Deutschland?

Q2b: Do you feel as a victim, for example of corrupt elite, the EU, globalization or something else?/ Fühlen Sie sich als Opfer , z.B. von Korruption, EU, Globalisierung oder etwas anderem?

Q2c: How do you feel about your economic future?/ Wie beurteilst Du Deine wirtschaftliche Zukunft?

NOTE: Differentiate between "types of pasts": "near past" time frame during which participants might think there have been political missteps, that you use that time frame. If it is ten years, then ask about political missteps in the last ten years. If another time frame that, use that time frame.

Q2d: How do you feel about the future of your culture?/ Wie beurteilst Du die Zukunft deiner Kultur?

Q2e: Do you blame anyone for these concerns? If so, why?/ Wessen Schuld ist es? Wenn ja, warum?

Q2f: Have you heard anything about immigrants causing problems in Germany? / Hast Du je gehoert dass Einwanderer Probleme in Deutschland machen?

Q2f: Where do these stories about immigrants come from? / Woher kommen diese Diskurse über Einwanderer?

Q2g: How do you feel when you hear those stories?/ Wie fuehlst Du Dich wenn Du solche Diskurse hoerst?

SECTION 3

H3: Grievance against German society is positively related to feelings of alienation from German society.

(For Interviews: Anti-immigrant narratives (in media, politics, and/or society/community), by leading to grievances, alienate Interviewees from German society/country/culture.)

How do Interviewees feel about their role in German society?

Do they feel as though they are part of a larger German or European community?

Are some exposed anti-immigrant narratives, but not concerned about their identity/culture/economic status? If so, what's different about them?

Q3a: What do you see as your role in Germany society and how do you feel about it? If none, why not?/ Was siehst Du als Deine Rolle in der Deutschen Gesellschaft und wie fuehlst Du dich darueber? Falls keine, warum?

Q3b: Do you feel like you are a part of a larger German or European community? / Fuehlst Du Dich als Teil einer groesseren Deutschen oder Europaeischen Gemeinde?

SECTION 4

H4: Feelings of alienation from German society are positively related to vulnerability to persuasion via violent extremist narratives.

(For Interviews: Interviewees who are exposed to anti-immigrant narratives, and feel alienated from their society, are more vulnerable to violent extremist narratives.)

Do Interviewees encounter violent extremist ideology?

If yes, where and how does it affect them? Who do they believe is the source of those narratives?

Do Interviewees exposed to extremist ideology believe what they hear/trust extremist leaders/ideology?

Do Interviewees believe that sometimes violence is justified to address societal/political issues?

What do they believe influences political change?

What do they believe and about those of non-immigrant/immigrant background?

Q4a: Do you ever notice anything from groups who advocate for violence as a tool for political or social change? / Merkst Du manchmal etwas von Gruppen die Gewalt fuer politischen oder sozialen Waldel einsetzeh?

Q4b: Where do you notice these things and when you notice these things, how do they affect you? Wo merkst Du diese Sachen, und wenn Du sie merkst welchen Einfluss haben sie auf Dich?

Q4c: Do you trust the leaders of these groups to tell the truth? Vertraust Du den Führern dieser Gruppen die Wahrheit zu sagen?

Q4d: Do you feel that violence is sometimes justified for political or social change? Glaubst Du dass Gewalt manchmal für politische oder soziale Veränderungen berechtigt ist?

SECTION 5

Q5: What do you think about Immigrants/Germans of non-immigrant background? Was Denkst Du ueber Einwanderer/Deutsche ohne Migrationshintergrund?

Interview Questions for Practitioners

SECTION 1

Q0: What are the common characteristics of the individuals participating in your program?/ Was sind die gemeinsamen Merkmale der Personen, die an Ihrem Programm teilnehmen?

Q1a: Do the individuals engage politically or socially engage in their community in productive ways or through extreme and/or violent groups? If so, how? / Engagieren sich die Individuen politisch oder sozial auf produktive Weise in ihrer Gemeinschaft oder durch extreme und / oder gewalttätige Gruppen? Wenn das so ist, wie?

Q1b: Do the individuals believe that these activities are effective in bringing about change? / Glauben die Einzelpersonen, dass diese Aktivitäten Veränderungen bewirken?

Q1c: Which needs does participating in these activities/groups fill for these individuals? / Welche Bedürfnisse erfüllt die Teilnahme an diesen Aktivitäten/Gruppen für diese Personen?

SECTION 2

Q2a: What concerns do the individuals have about life in Germany? / Welche Sorgen haben diese Personen über das Leben in Deutschland?

Q2b: Do they feel as victims of a) corrupt elites b) huge anonymous processes such as globalization or someone else?/ Fühlen sie sich als Opfer von a) korrupten Eliten b) riesigen anonymen Prozessen wie Globalisierung oder jemand anderes?

Q2c: What concerns do the individuals have about their economic future? / Welche Sorgen haben diese Personen über ihre wirtschaftliche Zukunft?

Q2d: What concerns do the individuals have about the future of their culture? / Welche Bedenken haben die Personen ueber die Zukunft ihrer Kultur?

Q2e: Who do they blame for these issues? / Wen beschuldigen sie für diese Probleme?

Q2f: Do the individuals hear/read narratives about immigrants being problematic? / Hören/ lesen die Personen Diskurse über problematische Einwanderer?

Q2g: Where do these narratives about immigrants come from? / Woher kommen diese Erzählungen über Einwanderer?

Q2h: How do these narratives affect them? / Wie wirken sich diese Erzählungen auf sie aus?

SECTION 3

Q3a: Do they see a role for themselves in Germany? / Sehen sie eine Rolle für sich in Deutschland?

Q3b: Do they feel that they are part of a larger German or European community? / Haben sie das Gefühl, Teil einer größeren deutschen oder europäischen Gemeinschaft zu sein?

SECTION 4

Q4a: Do they come in contact with narratives from groups who advocate for violence as a tool for political or social change? / Kommen sie mit Diskursen von Gruppen in Kontakt, die sich für Gewalt als Instrument für politischen oder sozialen Wandel einsetzen?

Q4b: Where do they come in contact with these narratives and when they notice these things, how do they affect them? / Wo kommen sie mit diesen Diskursen in Kontakt und wie wirken sie sich auf sie aus, wenn sie diese Dinge bemerken?

Q4c: Do they trust the leaders of the groups who spread these narratives to tell the truth? / Vertrauen sie den Führern der Gruppen, die diese Diskurse verbreiten die Wahrheit zu sagen?

Q4d: Do they feel that violence is sometimes justified for political or social change? / Sind sie der Meinung, dass Gewalt manchmal für politische oder soziale Veränderungen gerechtfertigt ist?

SECTION 5

Q5: What do they believe about immigrants/Germans of non-immigrant background? / Was glauben sie Menschen/Deutsche mit/ohne Einwanderungshintergrund?

SECTION 6

Q6: I'm hearing that Russia is supporting right-wing Groups in Germany—is this true? If so, how? / Ich höre, dass Russland rechts Gruppen in Deutschland unterstützt - stimmt das? Wenn ja, wie?

Hypotheses Results Summary

Research Hypothesis 1 which predicted that civic engagement is negatively related to perceptions of violence as a viable means of addressing societal issues, is not adequately supported by the results outlined under Civic Engagement and Radicalization and Tolerance for Violence. The data shows clear examples of individuals who are engaging in their society who nonetheless perceive violence as an acceptable means of addressing societal or political issues. At best the results are mixed, as some AP subjects and the far-left extremist felt that their efforts were effective at bringing about the desired change, while others described doubts and frustrations and directly or indirectly supported violence as a means of addressing political issues. There is no evidence that additional civic engagement or related activities or training would change the subjects' perception of violence as an acceptable form of political expression. Related, however, there is evidence that civic engagement by those against extremism works indirectly to counter extremism and violence by contesting the space.

The results described above under The Subjects and How They See Themselves and Grievance Narratives provide data for testing Hypothesis 2 which predicted that identity uncertainty (2a) or economic uncertainty (2b) mediate the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society. The hypothesis expected that subjects who feel that their identity/culture or economic situation is under threat, when exposed to anti-immigration narratives, develop grievances against German society. While the data show support for this hypothesis, it is neither definitive nor is it able to show causation, because the data does not show whether exposure to anti-immigrant narratives, identity uncertainty, or grievances come first. Nonetheless, the data show that the EAP subjects are indeed exposed to anti-immigrant narratives and relatedly feel that their cultural identity is under threat.

On the other hand, the data do not provide support for Hypothesis 2b, which predicted that economic uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society. While EAP subjects have grievances related to immigration, the data show that they are not economically disadvantaged. Even though they claim economic uncertainty or concerns about the future on behalf of others, the data show that they are not concerned about their own economic standing and that cultural concerns are much more central to their grievances.

The same set of data also provides insights for testing Hypothesis 3, which predicted that anti-immigrant grievance is positively related to feelings of alienation from German society. This hypothesis is not adequately supported by the data, because AP or extremist subjects do not feel alienated (i.e., separate) from German society. The data show that they are active within society and see themselves as an integral part of it and even believe themselves to be representing the majority or mainstream. Related interview questions explored whether the AP or extremist subjects feel as part of a European community. This set of data shows that AP subjects feel alienated from the European community, however, the data is unable to show this variable's relationship with anti-immigrant grievances.

Finally, the insights organized under Grievance Narratives, Communications Vehicles, and Effects on Mainstream provide data for testing Hypothesis 4, which predicted that feelings of alienation from German society are positively related to vulnerability to persuasion via violent extremist narratives. This hypothesis is not adequately supported by the data. The hypothesis

predicted a positive relationship between feelings of alienation and vulnerability to persuasion, meaning that as an individual feels more alienated, they are also more vulnerable to being persuaded by extremist propaganda. The results show AP subjects communicating and believing extremist narratives, which means that they are persuaded by them and therefore vulnerable to persuasion. However, the data shows that the subjects do not feel alienated and feel they are representing the mainstream. Therefore, the data show an inverse relationship between feelings of alienation and vulnerability to persuasion: as the individuals are exposed to more extremist narratives, they believe to be representing the will of the very specific version of German society they wish for.

Research Results Summary

The following represents the key findings as they pertain to this study's research questions, aims and objectives, and other key findings:

Pertaining to **Research Question One** on the role of cultural and economic grievance narratives in political communications and extremism, there is extensive evidence of EAPs using grievance narratives to mobilize votes and support for themselves. The data gathering process did not result in capturing data from those vulnerable to extremism (i.e., those not yet holding extreme views, but being exposed to extremist narratives or being in an environment permissive to extremism), but it did result in insights based on those already holding extreme AP views and those of a left-wing extremist. The AP subject expressed fear and outrage-inducing culture- and victimhood-related grievance narratives, central among them issues pertaining to gender roles, non-white immigrants or refugees, crime and justice, and censorship in online, in-person, and hard-copy communications in support of EAP's political aspirations and goals.

These findings provided the insights for testing and disproving **Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4**. The first of which predicted that anti-immigrant grievance is positively related to feelings of alienation from German society. The data showed that while AP subjects held anti-immigrant beliefs, rather than feeling alienated, they used these beliefs as a source for civic engagement and believe that they represent the rest of society. Similarly, the findings also did not support Hypothesis 4, which predicted that feelings of alienation from German society are positively related to vulnerability to persuasion via violent extremist narratives. Instead, the data shows an inverse relationship between feelings of alienation and vulnerability to persuasion: as the individuals are exposed to more extremist narratives, they believe themselves to be representing the collective will of most of German society.

The data indicate that cultural narratives are more ubiquitous and potent when compared to economic grievances. Economic grievances were most frequently centered around the impact of immigration on social benefits; the negative impacts of moderate parties, globalization, and capitalism are also present although much less frequent and less virulent language is used to describe them. These findings provided some support for **Hypothesis 2a**, which predicted that identity uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society, as it showed a relationship between perception of threat on culture and values (i.e., identity), anti-immigrant, and anti-governmental grievances. However, the data does not show the direction of the variables' relationship. Related, the data do not provide support for **Hypothesis 2b**, which predicted that economic uncertainty mediates the relationship between exposure to anti-immigrant narratives and grievances against German society, because the data show that the AP and extremist subjects are not economically disadvantaged. Instead, the data points to elite authoritarian populists having benefited from globalization and capitalism and therefore do not in their personal lives share the same economic experiences or grievances as their declared target audiences. Cumulatively, this provides evidence of cultural, anti-immigrant, and victimhood grievance narratives being used as a bridge between elite political and cultural aspirations and working- and middle-class economic grievances.

The use of culture and values-related grievance narratives as a bridge between EAPs and lower and middle-class votes also ties into the **Research Question Two** on the impact of rhetoric and

narratives against refugees/immigrants in political radicalization and radicalization toward violence and its aim to investigate the impact of anti-diversity disinformation and propaganda narratives. APs use “us versus them” narratives, central among them those against non-white and non-Christian immigrants or refugees, to mobilize support for themselves and their cultural values by inducing fear and outrage. Again, findings show that they have benefited personally from globalization and capitalism, and when probed they blame mainstream parties and institutions for economic issues, rather than immigrants or refugees directly. This evidence points to anti-immigrant narratives as a vehicle for combining culture-, economic-, crime- and justice-related grievances into a simple and potent narrative. The emphasis on “economic migrants” versus “legitimate refugees” further cements this nexus narrative.

There was copious evidence of APs undermining democratic values, such as equality, pluralistic representation, freedom of religion, and minority rights. This was evident in the examples of narratives and actions against immigrants and other minority groups they provided, coupled with examples of claiming (falsely, as the data shows) to be censored and to speak for the majority or middle and narratives undermining trust in democratic governmental institutions and media. In the dataset there is ample evidence of EAPs claiming to represent average people, the middle of the political spectrum, those disadvantaged, or the so-called silent majority yet, unexpectedly, none of them were of those populations, nor did they face continued personal economic difficulties. In fact, they bragged about being financially well off and socially influential and viewed themselves as role models. Furthermore, there is some evidence of their dismissal of those they claim to represent, such as claims that average citizens do not understand the issues and disdain for economically disadvantaged groups. The falsehood of their claim to represent the average citizen is evident in the subjects’ own accounts of their inability to motivate people to vote for them en masse, and even familial rejection. Furthermore, there is extensive evidence of their condoning, minimizing, or justifying violence creating a permissive environment for intolerance, extremism, and violent extremism.

Findings pertaining to **Research Question Three**—whether civic and community engagement and civic engagement education are effective tools or resilience factors for reducing the pull factors of political extremism and radicalization—did not provide evidence of civic and community engagement being effective tools for deradicalizing those already radicalized. Correspondingly, **Research Hypothesis 1**, that civic engagement is negatively related to perceptions of violence as a viable means of addressing societal issues, is not adequately supported by the data. Contrarily, there is ample evidence of civically and community engaged EAPs condoning violence, using civic and community engagement as a vehicle to undermine democratic values and institutions and advance anti-democratic goals. Relatedly, the data points to the need for individual face-to-face interactions and an approach which is customized for the individual to counter radicalization. However, the data do provide some evidence of civic and community engagement as effective tools for countering extremists’ effects in society and for inoculating non-extremists. The data are not clear on whether those who are not yet extremists, but are in highly conducive environments, could be inoculated using civic and community engagement.

Finally, there is noteworthy evidence of the limits of authoritarian populist ideology, and some anecdotal evidence supports that contact between individuals who are different from each other has the ability to mitigate and minimizes the impact of extremism.

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