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On: 17 November 2014, At: 01:09

Publisher: Routledge

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International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcac20>

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Manuela Caiani^a & Patricia Kroel^a

^a Department of Political Science, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Vienna, Austria

Published online: 07 Nov 2014.

To cite this article: Manuela Caiani & Patricia Kroel (2014): The transnationalization of the extreme right and the use of the Internet, International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice, DOI: [10.1080/01924036.2014.973050](https://doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2014.973050)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2014.973050>

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The transnationalization of the extreme right and the use of the Internet

Manuela Caiani* and Patricia Kroel

Department of Political Science, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Vienna, Austria

Like many other political actors, the extreme right is currently expanding beyond national borders, and, as with any civil society organization, the Internet is assuming a growing role in achieving this goal. To date, however, this topic is understudied. In this article, aiming to empirically fill this gap, we shall explore the new tactics of the extreme right in Europe and the USA in the context of transnational politics. Namely, we investigate the degree and forms of extreme right transnationalization (in terms of mobilization, issues, targets, action strategies, and organizational contacts) and the potential role of the Internet in these developments. The analysis combines qualitative and quantitative data derived from 54 interviews with representatives of extreme right organizations in six European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Spain) and the USA with a formalized Web content analysis of 336 right-wing websites. We will compare different types of right-wing groups which compose the radical right family (from political parties to associations), underlining the main differences and similarities across groups and across countries.

Keywords: radical right/extreme right; transnationalization; social movement approach; American and European comparative politics; Internet politics; Web content analysis

Introduction

Internationalization processes are indicated by several scholars as one of the main causes of the recent mobilization of right-wing extremism in many Western democracies, as a reaction against structural and economic changes by which modernity is characterized (Hermet, 2001; Mény & Surel, 2002), and anti-Europeanism and nationalism are considered two crucial elements of the new right-wing “populism” (Mudde, 2007). In Europe, the dynamics of globalization and economic expansion have led to a growth of unemployment and anti-immigration sentiment as well as “an increase in the number of racial-nationalist parties and organizations and a rise in anti-Semitism” (Wright, 2009, p. 189). As noted, “racial-nationalist leaders in both North America and Europe are able to exploit the new political conditions and widespread fears to their advantage (...). Advocating white-European privilege and heritage, racial-nationalists can effectively formulate a troubling but potent transnational message” (Wright, 2009, p. 190).

However, the relationship between extremist right-wing groups and transnational politics is ambiguous. Despite opposing a supranational system, many extreme right movements consider it necessary to engage in politics on a transnational level. Indeed radical right organizations, as any other kind of political organization, do not exist in a

*Corresponding author. Email: caiani@ihs.ac.at

This article is part of a broader comparative project on “Right-Wing Political Mobilization Using the Internet,” coordinated by Manuela Caiani at the IHS (Vienna).

vacuum, but instead are embedded in a larger context of multilevel governance. In Europe, as for the electoral arena, there have been many attempts by radical right parties of the creation of a “European” right-wing group within the European Parliament (e.g., the “Independence/Democracy” group during the 2004–2009 legislature; Conti, 2011). In addition, outside the institutional arena, in recent years an extreme right network has recently emerged that extends beyond national borders made up of “close contacts throughout the EU” and supported by the participation of “like-minded nationals from all around the states at right-wing events, such as White Power Music concerts” (Europol, 2011, p. 29). Indeed, it has been argued that “transnational processes of exchange and learning play an important role in the success of right-wing extremism and right-wing populism in Europe” (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011, p. 22). Confronted with the “global challenges” in the twenty-first century, right-wing extremists seek to create a transnational network based on a “global white identity” (Daniels, 2009).

In this regard, we cannot neglect the key role played by the Web in the internationalization of the extreme right. As recent studies highlight, both European and American far-right organizations are relying increasingly on the Internet for their activities, in order to avoid national laws and police investigation (Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler, 2011; Caiani & Wagemann, 2009; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; Ramalingam, 2012; Tateo, 2005; Whine, 2012). The new virtual means of communication offered by the Internet are considered to favor transnational solidarity (Chase-Dunn & Boswell, 2004; Whine, 2012). As observed, “the development of information and communication technologies” and the “easing of Europe’s border” are the “new enablers allowing white supremacists and neo-Nazis to connect and cooperate” (Whine, 2012, p. 317). Also, studies on terrorism and political violence stress that isolated individual “consumers” can find a common identity through extreme right websites, convincing themselves that they are not alone, but instead part of a community, albeit a “virtual” one (Adams & Roscigno, 2005; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; Weinberg, 1998). Furthermore, as social movements scholars underline, the Internet can play an important role in helping the processes of mobilization by reducing the cost of communication between a large number of individuals (Della Porta & Mosca, 2006; Whine, 2000), solving the problem of leadership and networking, and allowing the organization of transnational and even global events (Petit, 2004). In addition, in a fashion similar to cybercriminals, right-wing extremists can also use the Internet for illegal or borderline legal activities, such as hacking, exchange of hidden instructions, mass threat emails, and fraud (Perry & Olsson, 2009; Petit, 2004; Whine, 2004).¹ Finally, the Internet can prove to be an effective means of realizing the concept of “leaderless resistance” based on a network of “phantom cells” that some American radical right activists promoted (Levin, 2002).

Although the expansion of the extreme right beyond national borders, including the use of the Internet for achieving this goal, is a scientific and relevant social issue, to date, there are few empirical analyses on the topic. Existing research on the transnationalization of social movements and the role played therein by the Internet focuses primarily on left-wing and/or religious Islamic organizations (ADL, 2002; Bunts, 2003; Della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Pianta & Silva, 2003; Qin, Zhou, Reid, Lai, & Chen, 2007; Whine, 1999). The few studies on the extreme right and Internet politics concentrate usually on specific country or organization case studies, lacking comparative and transnational dimensions (see e.g., Atton, 2006; Tateo, 2005). Other works addressing the issue of the transnationalization of the extreme right focus on either the offline transnationalization of these actors (mainly political parties during electoral campaigns, e.g., Minkenberg & Perrineau, 2007; Mudde, 2007; Vasilopoulou, 2011) or the online transnational links of extreme right

groups, missing the bridge between the two (online–offline) spheres. For example, Burris, Smith, and Strahm (2000), through a social network analysis of websites of 80 white supremacist organizations, showed that more than two-thirds provided links to like-minded organizations in foreign countries. In another study, Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang (2003) found that 51% of the 157 surveyed right-wing extremist websites included links to organizations from other countries and around 26% offered non-English content.

In this article, aiming to empirically filling this gap, we shall explore the new developments of the extreme right in Europe and the USA in the context of transnational politics, namely its actual degree and forms of “transnationalization” (in terms of political mobilization and communication, issues, targets, action strategies, and organizational contacts) and the potential role of the Internet in this process. This also attempts to bridge the two spheres (online–offline) of the current extreme right mobilization.

The analysis combines qualitative and quantitative data derived from 54 interviews with representatives of the main extreme right organizations² in six European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Spain) and the USA with a formalized Web content analysis of 336 right-wing websites. We will compare different types of right-wing groups that compose the radical right family (from political parties to associations), underlining the main differences and similarities across groups and across countries.

Data and methods

In our study, we approached the extreme right transnationalization and the Internet with research techniques mainly derived from social movement studies. First, we conducted a systematic *content analysis* of extreme right websites in our seven selected countries (for a total of 336 websites analyzed). In order to identify all extreme right organizations with a presence online, we applied a snowball procedure. On the basis of sources of various kinds (official reports, secondary literature, and watchdog organizations), we first identified the most notorious extreme right organizations in each country (e.g., political parties), and then, following their hyperlinks to “friends” organizations, we discovered the websites of minor and less known groups³ (totaling 100–150 right groups websites for each country, 900 in the USA). We then classified the extreme right organizations found into broader categories⁴ (from extreme right political parties to subcultural skinheads) and codified the content of their websites on a reduced sample for each country (50% of the websites for each category of extreme right organization). We used a formalized codebook to record data (with quantitative and qualitative variables) on specific features of the use of Internet by these groups related to their political communication and mobilization (e.g., propaganda, identity formation).⁵ For more details on the coding categories, see [Table A1](#) in Appendix.

The Web content was integrated, by means of a common research design, with (54) *interviews with leaders of extreme right organizations* (chosen in each country as the most representative from our lists of websites). In terms of sampling the potential interview partners, in order to offer a representative description of the entire right-wing sector, we identified three/four organizations in each of the three main categories of extreme right groups (political parties, political movements,⁶ and subcultural youth groups⁷), for a total of 9/12 ideal interviews per country. The interviews, conducted by telephone, were held between 2010 and 2011. Establishing contacts and obtaining a positive response from these organizations were particularly complex and time-consuming. Our response rate was

less than 40%. In addition, many interview partners requested anonymity (see the list of organizations interviewed in the Appendix).

The semistructured questionnaire, containing both closed and open questions, focused on the transnationalization of communication and mobilization strategies of extreme right organizations (their actions, targets, national and cross-national contacts), including their judgment of the impact of the Internet on them,⁸ as well as the general position of extreme right groups toward the processes of globalization/European integration.

In the following, we shall therefore investigate the new tactics of the extreme right vis-à-vis a global world, illustrating (the degree and forms of) its transnationalization in terms of: the scope of mobilization and communication (next section); issues (third section); targets, organizational contacts, and action strategies (fourth section) as well as reflections on the potential impact of Internet usage thereupon.

Transnational mobilization (and communication) and the Internet

An important indicator of the transnationalization of right-wing extremism today concerns the scope of its mobilization, that is, the territorial dimension of extreme right's activity (which can vary from the local level to the international level). According to our interviews,⁹ in all countries, extreme right organizations appear mainly focused on the national (in 73% of cases) and local levels (in 52% of cases and even in 14% of cases at the district or street level) in their mobilization events. Still, the degree of internationalization of the European and US extreme right is relevant (30% of them declare to be active also at the international level)¹⁰ and higher than what emerged from previous research on left-wing social movements.¹¹

Despite this general trend, some national particularities emerge. The most internationalized extreme right groups are in the USA, where 71% of the organizations are active beyond the country. In this respect, it is worth noting that many US organizations are wholly Internet based, which in their view "helps a lot" to reach a global audience (ID. 21). This is the case, for example, with the White Voice group, whose spokesperson explains that they are "based on the internet and have a strong following around the world" (ID. 21). Also the chairman of the Vanguard News Network (VNN) stresses that they are "not a true 'organization', in formal legal terms" instead they are "websites and forums that do projects and [offline] rallies from time to time" and that they are active "supranationally, since anyone from any country can join [the] forum and post" (ID. 17). Similarly, the representative of the White Revolution highlights that his organization has for several years had an "internet outreach through online activism throughout North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa" and that "in order to access people from different countries educational material was formatted to suit the specific speech laws of different contexts, as well as in several different languages" (ID. 18).

The Austrian and British extreme right organizations follow, with half of them being active internationally. German organizations are next, active beyond the nation in 29% of cases. Finally, the "Mediterranean" extreme right is, according to our interview data, the least internationalized, with Italian and French organizations only rarely organizing their mobilization transnationally (in 12% and 11% of cases, respectively) and Spanish groups being completely inactive abroad. These types of transnational right-wing mobilizations are various and they include cultural events, such as concerts or cultural gatherings,¹² political meetings and congresses (such as the conference "Our Europe: Peoples and Tradition against Banks and Usury" organized in March 2009 in Milan by the British

National Party, the French National Front, and the German Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) with the aim of bringing together representatives of the main extreme right parties in Europe),¹³ as well as participation in the European elections (ID. 02).¹⁴ Our analysis shows that there were no significant differences among the different types of organizations in the scope of their activity,¹⁵ the only exception being subcultural groups and political movements, which are more likely to mobilize at the very local and even district level (in around one-fourth of both cases).

Most interestingly, many right-wing organizations stress that the Internet has become an essential tool for their international activities, in terms of both enabling their action and facilitating communication between organizations and individuals. In fact, 81% of the interviewed organizations (with no significant differences across countries and types of groups) emphasize that the Internet “helped a lot”¹⁶ in this regard. The effectiveness and “security” of cyberspace in facilitating various supranational activities are particularly stressed. For instance, the speaker for the Insurgent group declares that his network does not “operate as an organization, but as lone wolf in small cells (...) with the aim of avoiding prosecution by the state” and that “the internet works quite well in this sense (...). Reaching out to like-minded people it avoids our group to organize physical meetings, which government agencies and other entities can infiltrate” (ID. 19).

However, as our Web content analysis shows, the advantages offered by the Internet to extreme right groups go beyond the organization of their actual activity at international level. Indeed, the Web is exploited by these organizations for several functions potentially related to their transnationalization, such as recruiting new members, raising funds, propagating the organizations’ ideology, and publicizing political campaigns (Figure 1).¹⁷

In particular, the Internet is relied upon heavily as an instrument for *communication and information* toward actual or potential members. Over one-third (37.5%) of extreme right websites investigated have a “search engine,” and 4.8% offer a “help function,” with the aim presumably of increasing the usability of their websites. More than half of the analyzed websites contain information about the offline “reachability” (56%) of the

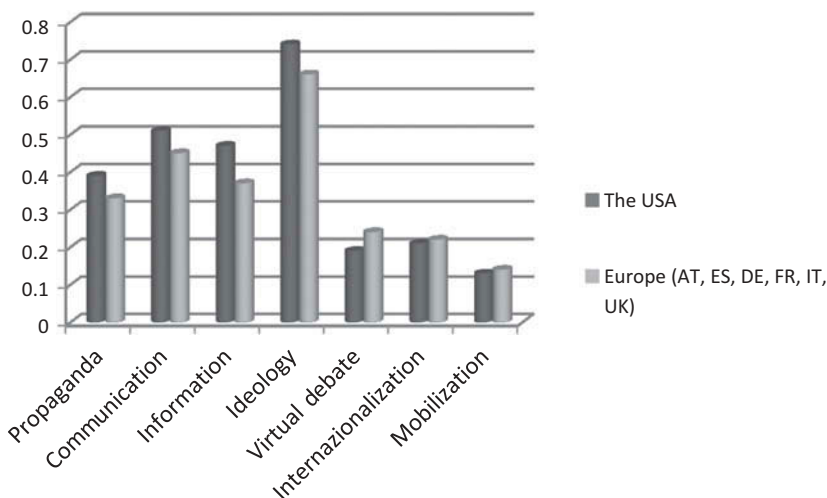


Figure 1. Forms of extreme right online political activism, by countries (indexes, mean values). Note: $N = 336$.

Source: Data from our Web content analysis.

organization, such as a street address or a phone and fax number, and almost all groups (83.3%) provide an email address.¹⁸ Furthermore, extreme right organizations appear oriented to demonstrate their popularity to the users: 23.5% of them have a hit counter, which keeps track of the number of visitors. With respect to communication, more than half (57.7%) of the extremist right-wing organizations publish “articles, papers and dossiers” on their websites for the political education of the people, and 50.6% have a “news section” where they refer to direct media coverage or provide their own news coverage, pulling information from other newspapers or TV programs.¹⁹ Finally, over one-third (36.6%) offer bibliographical references to various texts of classical “right-wing” literature.²⁰

Extreme right groups also appear to skillfully employ the multimedia opportunities provided by the Internet to diffuse their *ideology* through video, music, images, and banners and to make *propaganda* through their websites. More than one-third of the analyzed websites (33.0%) contain “hate symbols” such as swastikas or burning crosses, eagles, fasci littori, and gladio (the traditional fascist symbols),²¹ photos of Mussolini and Hitler, images related to the German Reich, Stems, and flags from the fascist-Nazi past. Over a quarter (26.5%) of them contain banners depicting representative figures and graphic symbols or seals, inciting hatred toward social and/or political adversaries.

In fact, many of the extreme right organizations interviewed report the crucial role of the Internet for their ability to reach a great mass of people in a short amount of time at minimal expense (e.g., ID. 02, 04, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 23) and to potentially recruit them as new affiliates. As the representative of the VNN organization points out, “the internet allows you to find whatever political material you’re interested in. You can find others interested in the same things. So it facilitates education and networking worldwide” (ID. 17). Multimedia materials, especially indicated as aiming to recruit young people (Bartlett et al., 2011, p. 19), are present on half of our right-wing websites (e.g., video and music containing political content, fascist and Nazi songs as well as songs from far-right bands, sermons and speeches by leaders of the Fascist/Nazi regimes). Extreme right organizations also attempt to promote *virtual debates* among members and sympathizers on their websites, through forums, mailing lists (present in 24.4% of cases), or chat lines (in 8.0% of cases).²² Furthermore, they endeavor to construct their group *identity*, through sections on their websites providing basic information regarding the group (e.g., “about us” and “who we are,” in 74.0% of cases) and the group’s goals and mission (in 60.1% of cases). Indeed, many right-wing extremist organizations stress that they are more likely to become known by people due to the Internet, since “google and other web robots pick up the website and forum headlines which bring browsers from around the world” (e.g., ID. 20).

Finally our data show that extreme right organizations use (albeit to a lesser extent) the Internet for mobilizing people²³ and, most interestingly, for building a *transnational online community*. In particular, nearly one-third (32.7%) of right-wing organizations have cross-national and/or international links to extreme right organizations in other countries (for an amount, on average, of 15 transnational ties each organization). They also try to appeal to an international audience by offering website content in languages other than the language of their own country (11.0% of cases).

Nevertheless, as we see from [Figure 1](#), there are differences between the countries. American extreme right organizations are more active in the use of the Internet than their European counterparts with regard to most of the functions analyzed (showing the first or second highest values on almost all the indexes, namely communication, information, propaganda/ideology, and debate).²⁴ Among the European cases, the Italian context seems

particularly conducive to an active use of the Internet by extreme right organizations for political purposes.²⁵ The Spanish case appears the least favorable concerning the online political activism of these radical groups,²⁶ and the German, Austrian, UK, and French contexts occupy an intermediate position. In particular, Germany has a high score in communication (0.50) and mobilization (0.23), and France has a high score in information (0.49). Austria has the highest score in communication (0.51) and internationalization (0.38), and the United Kingdom has medium scores in all functions.

Extreme right (new) issues: transnational politics as “the danger from above”

An additional indicator of the transnationalization of the extreme right to be considered is the scope of the issues they mobilize around namely as to how much extreme right groups are involved in transnational politics? Although still an understudied aspect of right-wing extremism, existing literature (mostly focusing on political parties, e.g., Bar-On, 2011; Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002) agrees that the opposition to transnational politics (e.g., to European integration as a regional form of transnationalization) is a common trait of these formations. Our European groups confirm the existence of a remarkable interest in transnational politics among extreme right organizations, taking the form of Euro-sceptic sentiments.²⁷ Many of these organizations talk about and organize events on European/global politics and have a clear position on these topics. Specifically, 53% of organizations declare to be strongly against the European Union, and another 23% rather against, for a total of three-fourths of organizations expressing criticism toward European politics. Only 9% of the interviewed organizations are strongly in favor of the EU (15% rather in favor). For example, the representative of the Spanish far-right union, Unión Nacional de Trabajadores, stresses that his organization is “against European integration primarily when it comes to political and especially economic integration” (ID. 33), and the Jungen Nationaldemokraten (JN), the youth organization of the German NPD, especially disapproves the “abolishment of national sovereignties” (ID. 10). The Schengen Agreement, which calls for “open borders,” is identified by a German regional youth movement as another negative factor, as it enables according to them “black Africans to enter on Lampedusa” and to get a residence permit for all EU states (ID. 12).

This trend is common to all different types of extreme right organizations interviewed.²⁸ A cross-national comparison, however, highlights some national differences.²⁹ When asked about their position toward European integration, the totality of the Spanish, German, British, and Austrian extreme right organizations stresses that they are (“rather” or “strongly”) against it. The European Union in its current form is referred to as “European misfortune” (ID. 03) or “European nonsense” (ID. 01) by these groups. For example, the representative of the German media network MUPINFO considers that “the EU Parliament in Brussels today takes more or less the same position as the Kremlin for the whole Eastern bloc in the Cold War time” (ID. 13). Many groups (German and Austrian particularly) explain that they would prefer a “Europe of the Fatherlands” (ID. 05, 06, 08, and 09) with “strong individual states” (ID. 02), to the current form of the European Union “which interferes with national laws and budgets” (ID. 12).

On the contrary, many Italian and French right-wing organizations consider the European integration as a positive development and claim to be “rather” or “strongly” in favor of the process (60% the former groups, 44% the latter ones). For example, the leader of the movement *Gioventù Italiana* complains about the lack of “a true European people, at the social and cultural level” (ID. 25). In fact, when asked about the impact of

the European integration on the situation of their organizations, some extreme right groups admit that not everything stemming from the EU is harmful to them and that the EU can also be perceived as an opportunity vis-à-vis the nation-state. For example, according to the spokesperson of the German regional media MUPINFO “the European legislation is in some areas less repressive than the German one” (ID. 13). Other organizations, referring to the attempt of the German government to ban the NPD party, consider the EU institutions more open to them than the national contexts (“if banned, the NPD can go to the European Court of Justice, where the chances of winning are probably much higher,” ID. 14). Similarly, the chairman of Austrian political party Die Buntgenossen points out that “one has the possibility to appeal the European Court of Justice and sometimes the Austrian state is forced by the EU to be more flexible” (ID.01). However, most of the organizations believe that the negative effects of the EU outweigh the positive effects. For instance, the spokesperson of the English Democrats who asserts that “the EU costs money and is a negative consequence for all tax payers in his country” (ID. 16).

Most interestingly, again the Internet is indicated by extreme right organizations as a useful tool for translating these positions against transnational politics in actual political actions. This is the case, for example, of the campaigns to boycott Chinese and American products, against the accession of Turkey to the European Union, against the Euro, against immigrants and multicultural society, against American imperialism and to protect “white” people, with regards to globalization and economic crisis, and the European integration. Other examples of transnational right-wing action launched and sustained through the Web are the Spanish online forum [Europeans.org](#), where Nazi and xenophobic ideas are discussed³⁰ or the anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist campaign launched by the French movement Bloc Identitaire from its website.³¹ The concretization of transnational actions through the virtual arena of the Web is also linked to the fact that more than one-third (37.5%) of extreme right organizations use the Internet to do e-commerce (selling merchandise, such as militaria, for fund-raising for the group), and over half (54.0%) provide the possibility to give online donations (Web content data).

The US extreme right's stand on globalization

White supremacist movement entrepreneurs in North America demonstrate striking ideological convergence with racial nationalist actors and parties in Europe for what concern transnational politics and in particular globalization. Indeed, as our interviews show, regardless of the organizational type, American extreme right groups strongly oppose globalization, which is perceived as a threat to national economy, identity, and the unique white European heritage. They criticize the idea of globalization which first and foremost is defined as “economic globalization and supra-national corporations” (ID. 23). According to the representative of the US party American Third Position, for example, “globalism has brought tremendous harm, not just to the European and white-Americans, but to all people worldwide” (ID. 22). Indeed, “globalization has in many respects hurt people, especially in terms of personal economic circumstances” because it “created ethnic resource competition” and, as a result, one US ethno-political advocacy organization explains that its group has gained more members (ID. 23). Similarly, it is commonly spread among right-wing groups that “multinational corporations ship many jobs and production facilities to third world countries, while at the same time importing third world immigrants to take more jobs from Whites” (ID. 18).

The US extremist right-wing organizations also sharply oppose “political globalization,” which in their view find its actualization in the supranational institutions. In this

respect, some groups criticize the NATO in its past war against Serbia (ID. 20). Accordingly, the US extreme right actors reject other international organizations, such as the WTO, NAFTA, GATT, UN, and the NATO, “which enter into US affairs.” They rather favor “decentralized politics” (ID. 17) in the form of “smaller governments, smaller entities of people and small nations” (ID. 19). Finally, some groups underline the negative consequences of “cultural globalization,” stressing that “the White percentage of the US population decreases every year” and that this “has produced a backlash in the White population that has helped to bring America to the brink of disintegration” (ID. 19). However, other aspects of globalization, such as the increasing interconnection of communication worldwide (i.e., technological globalization), are considered an advantage by extreme right organizations, as the Internet “makes it easier to get reports from different places around the world” (ID. 17). Most extreme white actors appreciate that a global exchange of information and opinions has become possible through the use of new communication technologies, and as their European counterparts, they often rely on the Internet to organize (or participate in) events against international global political institutions, such as demonstrations, petitions, and letters to newspapers (ID. 18, 19, and 23).

However, in a cross-regions comparison, one significant distinction between the European and US extreme right appears. While the European extreme right organizations are concerned about the sovereignty of their national community, which is endangered by the European Union, capitalism, and the international finance system, the US extreme right organizations fight mainly for the survival of the White ethnic group, which is related to their American–European ancestry.

Organizing for targeting the transnational level

While clearly opposing transnational politics itself, many extreme right organizations are organizing themselves on a transnational level.

We asked our interviewees about the political level they try to address (from local to supranational).³² Our analysis shows that, although national (and especially subnational) political institutions and actors are still the main target of right-wing organizations (59% national targets vs. 82% local and 71% regional), European and supranational actors and institutions play a role. In fact, almost half (45%) of the organizations (also) declare they have tried to influence politicians operating at the supranational level.

Yet here, too, there are significant differences between the countries. The British, French, and Austrian right-wing organizations emerge as those most likely to target supranational politicians and institutions (in, respectively, 100, 67, and 58% of cases). For instance, the president of the French organization Bloc Identitaire explains that his group has contacts with some members of the European Parliament, among which is the Italian deputy Borghezio, from the Northern League (ID. 37). Similarly, the spokesperson for the British Freedom Party declares that his party speaks with “politicians from the local council level all the way up to MEPs from Britain and other European countries” (ID. 15). The representative of an Austrian political party confirms that he is in touch with “members of the European Parliament and representatives of other parties” (ID. 02). Conversely, extreme right organizations from Germany and Spain least frequently address supranational institutions (in, respectively, 14% and 20% of cases). Our data do not show any significant differences among different types of extreme right organizations in this respect.

Beyond institutional contacts with politicians, the interviews also reveal that extreme right groups are characterized by frequent transnational contacts among them: 71% of the

organizations declare to have contacts with right-wing groups in other countries or at the international level (i.e., with umbrella “federations”³³). For instance, the spokesperson of the English Democrats stresses that they “have been approached by several foreign organizations such as the Vlaams Belang (the Flemish Nationalist Party) and the Austrian Freedom Party” (ID. 16). Similarly, the German movement Junge Nationaldemokraten (JN) is in touch with a variety of youth right-wing organizations in Europe, one being the Nordisk Ungdom (ID. 10) and the NPD partners with other European extreme right parties, such as the Falange Española de las JONS from Spain, the British National Party from the UK, and Dělnická Strana from the Czech Republic (ID. 09). Also the representative of the American Third Position explains that his group has recently had “transoceanic” contacts with the French Front National (ID. 22), and other American organizations have had contacts with Imperium Europe or the British National Party (e.g., ID. 23).

This high degree of “transnational embeddedness” may be related to the weak institutionalization of supranational right-wing actors, which pushes national movement organizations to be involved directly in multilevel pressures. Specifically, we observe a higher degree of supranational embeddedness among American, English, French, and Austrian extreme right organizations and a lower level for the Italian organizations, with Spanish and German organizations falling in between³⁴ (Figure 2).

From a cross-organizational type perspective, transnational contacts seem typical for the most institutionalized and resourceful organizations (43% for subcultural groups vs. 75–78% for political parties and movements).

Also in this case, the Internet seems to play a role in the transnational networking of right-wing organizations: 78% of them consider it a “very useful” tool for this function.³⁵ Indeed, as confirmed by the spokesperson of the VNN “the Internet helps you find people who think the same way, regardless of where they reside” (ID. 17). Many extreme right organizations interviewed explain that “via the Internet, like-minded organizations can be searched, as many of the organizations are represented by their own homepage” (ID. 06) and that “networking can be done between rank and file members, and by people who otherwise would never meet or communicate. This exponentially increases and speeds up the dissemination of ideas and activism globally” (ID. 18). In particular, almost all of the

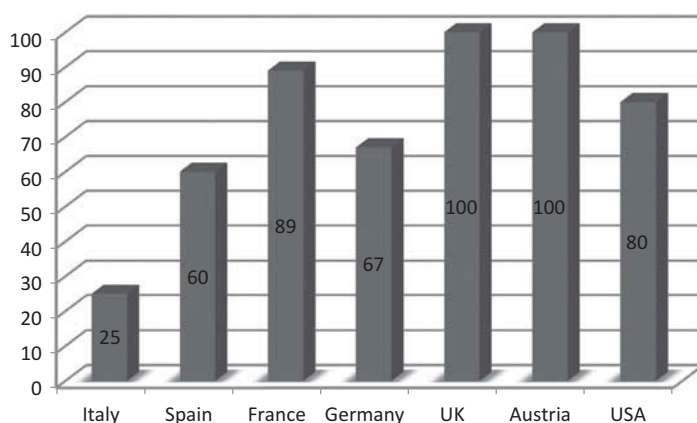


Figure 2. Extreme right international and cross-national contacts, by country (%).

Note: $N = 45$.

Source: Data from our interviews.

organizations interviewed stress the importance of email, Skype, and social networks in getting in touch with “like-minded” foreign groups (ID. 02, 07, 10, 14, 15, 19, 22, and 23). In this sense, due to the Internet, “there is some kind of exchange with organizations from other countries as they follow one another’s reports and sometimes use articles and documents taken from the respective websites” (ID. 05). An example of this is the recent birth of the European movement/website “Stop Islamification of Europe,” founded in 2007 in the UK, against the expansion of Islam in Europe, which is now, thanks to the Web, active in several European countries. Other examples are the famous international neo-Nazi organization Blood & Honour, active in both Europe and the United States with many affiliated groups, and the extreme right neo-Nazi network Stormfront. The “ideal” for these groups, as emerged from our data, is to create a transnational right-wing community or “Pan-Aryanism,” which is “a broad idea of supporting White people all over the world” (ID. 19). They are aware that the difficulty threshold to make contacts with a like-minded organizations is much lower with the Internet (“one is only a mouse-click away from communicating with each other,” says the spokesperson of the organization JN, ID. 10). Websites also have, according to them, a sort of “reputational” effect: “if one has their own page on the web and a certain status within the movement, then it’s also easier to get in touch with the others” (ID. 12).

But what action strategies do extreme right groups adopt when acting at the supranational level? Table 1 shows the intensity and forms of actions used by extreme right organizations at the national as well as at the supranational level.³⁶ According to our interviews, the majority of right-wing organizations (79%, without any significant differences between countries and types of organizations) have undertaken some kind of actions at the supranational level in the past 5 years. However, if we observe a quite rich and expansive repertoire of action at the national level, the same cannot be said with respect to supranational level. Overall, all right-wing organizations tend to employ “conventional political” (especially the French, German, English, and Austria groups) and “media-related” strategies (especially the German, English, and Austria groups) when they act

Table 1. Extreme right strategies (action forms) in addressing the transnational level.

Countries	Action forms									
	Publicizing activities		Conventional political actions		Court action		Mobilization/Protest		Confrontational mobilization	
	NAT	EU	NAT	EU	NAT	EU	NAT	EU	NAT	EU
Austria	0.6	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.9	0.1	0.4	0.09	0.03	0.03
France	0.6	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.6	0	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.07
Germany	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.2	0
Italy	0.7	0.01	0.5	0.04	0.9	0	0.8	0	0.3	0
Spain	0.7	0	0.2	0	0.8	0	0.6	0	0.04	0
Great Britain	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.5	0	0.7	0.05	0	0
USA	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.04	0.6	0	0.5	0.1	0.4	0
ORG type										
Political party	0.7	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.6	0.06	0.6	0.1	0.09	0
Political movement	0.6	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.7	0.06	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.05
Subcultural group	0.6	0.02	0.7	0.07	0.7	0	0.6	0	0.2	0
All actors	0.7	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.7	0.05	0.5	0.09	0.2	0.02

Note: $N = 45$.

Source: Data from our interviews.

at the European level. Examples of these actions are: taking part in the European elections (as in the cases of the French parties Parti de la France, Mouvement National Republicain, the English Democrats, and an Austrian political party, ID. 39, 43, 16, and 02), or lobbying members of the European Parliament (e.g., ID. 44). Action strategies at the transnational level may, however, also include more informal and expressive cultural initiatives, such as “commemoration marches” and “public assemblies” organized at the EU level (ID. 07 and 09). Finally, although at a lesser extent, we also find transnational protest actions, such as the case of the “campaigns against the Euro” organized by the Spanish phalangist Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (ID. 33), the NPD (ID. 09), and other German organizations (ID. 14); the “petitions” calling for referendums on the EU, organized by the British Freedom Party (ID. 15); and various demonstrations against the EU in general (ID. 08), including boycotts (ID. 20). Protest actions (but also confrontational and violent strategies) are much more frequent, however, when extreme right organizations mobilize at the national level. We also find cross-country differences in the action repertoire of the extreme right, with the French, German, and American extreme right organizations more active at the supranational level (through conventional actions) and, in a comparison between the different organizational variants, subcultural youth groups less active, overall, at the supranational level.

Again, as observed for other characteristics of right-wing mobilization, transnational extreme right actions seem to be supported by the Internet. Indeed, as explained by the leader of the Insurgent group, “almost everything we do has something to do with the Internet. We deal constantly with public information and propaganda, and of course the Internet is a great place for that” (ID. 19). Several neo-Nazi organizations in Germany used to “meet” on a blog in order to celebrate the international commemoration of an old German Nazi leader.³⁷ For example, an Italian neo-Nazi group used Internet blogs to exchange Nazi material with other groups and to set up a cell of Hitler’s Youth *Naturnser Hitlerjugend*, taking inspiration from the analogous German organization that was banned in the country.³⁸ The Internet’s important role, as stressed by these groups, might be related to the fact that the extreme right organizations are often physically located in countries where they are constrained by laws and so are at risk of being banned (e.g., in Germany), especially when their actions border on being illegal and violent.

Conclusion: between real and virtual, the extreme right and transnational politics

In this article, we started from the observation that an important aspect to be explored is whether we are witnessing an internationalization of the extreme right, which, as considered by social movement scholars, might be enhanced by the use of new technologies. We therefore investigated the intensity and trends of extreme right “transnationalization” (in terms of scope of mobilization, issues, targets, actions, and organizational contacts) in seven selected countries, and related them, beyond the country’s contexts and the group nature, to the online activism of these groups. Indeed, while some scholars may consider the cyber world to be limited and without connection to the “real” world, we do not agree, arguing that this is not the case for radical right organizations, “who contribute regularly and with purpose within the online communities they have helped to create and forge within cyberspace” (Bowman-Grieve, 2009, p. 1005).

First, our study points out that all right-wing extremist organizations, regardless of their prevalent nature and country are adapting to transnational politics, in terms of either political communication or mobilization. Although in all countries extreme right actions take place mainly at a local level (especially in the case of the more informal groups of the

extreme right sector, namely the subcultural youth groups and political movements), the transnational arena is increasingly assuming a role. As we have seen from our data, one out of three organizations mobilizes beyond the national level, almost half of them have target transnational institutions and politicians, and half of them have cross-national contacts with similar organizations in other countries. This suggests that American and European extreme right organizations are acquiring a strong “international approach” (Gerstenfeld et al., 2003, p. 37). Furthermore, as shown by our Web content data as well as the interviews, transnational issues, such as the topics of EU integration and globalization, are increasingly mobilized by extreme right groups in Europe and the USA, although with some country idiosyncrasies. In all countries, the various aspects of Europeanization and globalization are addressed (and opposed). Yet the focus of opposition is largely on the loss of national sovereignty in Europe and on the racial threats coming from globalizations in the USA. In sum, even though extreme right groups are strongly opposing political globalization and European integration, they become entrepreneurs of a sort of transnationalization of the right-wing movement itself. As noted “the stances of most of the extreme right-wing political parties within the European Union have become identical: support for pan European unity, and rejection of the contemporary ‘technocratic’ EU” (Bar-On, 2011, p. 208). Paradoxically, the unifying feature of this global identity is the common enemy, namely globalization. The new transnational right-wing extremists can be thus described as “globalized anti-globalists” (Grumke, 2013).

Second, our research indicates that the Internet seems to be a useful tool for this “transnational” activation of the extreme right, in terms of both increasing its supranational targets, the opportunity to stage supranational mobilization, and giving birth to supranational organizations. As we have seen, extreme right groups use the Internet to attract new members, with appealing websites and interactive elements (such as surveys, chats, forums), propagate their ideals among like-minded people, and connect individuals and organizations, by creating right-wing cyber communities that transcend national borders (for further details, see Caiani & Parenti, 2013). One note of optimism for policy-makers is that supranational strategies used by right-wing groups seem less confrontational (and violent) than those used in the domestic sphere.

In sum, denied by most mainstream mass media outlets, evidently information and communication technologies (ICTs) enable right-wing extremists to reach their target audience and attract a wider audience beyond their borders. Building on this result, we can also note that ICTs may act as “force multiplier” for these types of groups, by enhancing the power of right-wing extremists and allowing them “to push above their weight” (Whine, 2000).

Finally, our analysis does not offer any definitive answer, solution, or strategy for dealing with the assumption that the Internet can increase the transnational mobilization capacity of extreme right organizations. However, our data highlight some common characteristics in the offline and online mobilization of right-wing groups that are worth underlining. Our research suggests that, although the transnationalization of extreme right tactics is a widespread phenomenon in all the countries analyzed, this is especially true in the United States (concerning all aspects explored, i.e., scope of mobilization, target, activities, and contacts). At the same time, the USA has also emerged as the country characterized by the highest levels of extreme right activism on the Web (on most of the functions analyzed, for a synthetic overview, see [Figure A1](#) in Appendix). In addition, the transnationalization of (offline) tactics includes the capacity of the extreme right groups to be internationally embedded in a dense net of cross-national and international contacts with similar groups in other countries. This feature appears particularly prominent in Great

Britain and France, where a special commitment on the part of right-wing groups to internationalization through the Web was demonstrated. Evidently, these efforts on the Internet are able to exit the virtual sphere and reach the real world. Finally, the German extreme right that appeared as the most active in using the Internet for the function of mobilization also emerged as the most active outside the Web (together with the USA and partly France) in staging transnational activities.

While research on the extreme right has usually focused either on electoral behavior or on violent actions (Della Porta, 2012), future studies are needed that integrate aspects of online activism and tactics with the theoretical models for understanding extreme right political participation (and changes) in the era of the Internet.

Acknowledgments

We are particularly grateful to the anonymous referees for the useful suggestions which contributed to improve the article. We also thank Rossella Borri for conducting the interviews and Samuel Arenberg for editing. The authors contributed to writing of the article 50% each.

Funding

This project was sponsored by the Austrian National Bank [Jubiläumsfondsprojekt ONB, Nr. 14035].

Notes

1. Cyberhate can be seen as an aspect of cybercrime: “It has not only started to transform the legal landscape and jurisdiction but it has also addressed the problem of online security” (Perry & Olsson, 2009, p. 197).
2. Despite the still open debate on conceptual definition and terminology (which is beyond the scope of this article to address), we use, interchangeably, the term extreme/radical right to refer to those groups that exhibit in their common ideological core the characteristics of nationalism, xenophobia (ethno-nationalist xenophobia), anti-establishment critiques, and sociocultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (Mudde, 2007). It goes without saying that in the empirical reality many of these groups are not easily placed according to traditional political categories, often combining elements of leftwing and rightwing philosophy, mixed with populist language and rhetoric.
3. On the “reputational” approach (see Scott, 2000). For the inclusion of an organization in our sample of “radical right-wing organizations/websites,” we relied on the self-definition of the group and the predominant nature of the message transmitted through its website.
4. For the classification of the organizations, we have relied on the most common typologies that have been proposed for the study of the extreme right (e.g., Burris et al., 2000; Tateo, 2005).
5. The Web content analysis, conducted for the seven countries between August 2009 and January 2011, has been done by coders (country language speakers) trained in the sampling selection and coding procedure. For details on the codebook and its measurements, see also Caiani and Parenti (2013).
6. In this class, there are those groups defining themselves as political parties and movements and that openly partake in political activities (political debates, policy issues, see Tateo, 2005). The main differences between the former and latter ones are in the degree of institutionalization and participation in the elections. Political movement’s category also includes youth organizations related to parties, political journals, magazines, and reviews.
7. These groups are characterized by music (which they define as “antagonistic”) and cultural activities as their main interests. Their sites often include fascist or Nazi symbols or symbols taken from Celtic mythology.
8. Most of the interviewees were either leaders or spokespersons of the respective organizations, or in charge of drawing up the general communication and mobilization strategies. More specifically, with regard to political parties, they were party leaders (presidents or general secretaries) and senior/leading members of the party (e.g., members of the executive boards,

spokesmen, or regional party leaders). In the political movements, they were presidents, general delegates or secretaries, or website chief editors in the case of online groups. In the case of subcultural youth groups, we relied on group leaders (in two cases even the founder) and people responsible for the Web communications.

9. The interview question, asking which level the association/group is active, allowed more than one choice (5-point scale: from district to the European/transnational level).
10. Sixty-eight percent of groups mobilize also at the regional level. In a recent study on the characteristics of offline mobilization of the extreme right in the same countries (from 2005 to 2009) based on protests reported in the press, the authors found that transnational right-wing initiatives were well below the 10% of cases (see Caiani & Parenti, 2013, ch. 5).
11. Research on protest events collected from newspaper sources and focused on left-wing movements stresses the paucity of protests directly targeting supranational European institutions (e.g., Della Porta & Caiani, 2009; Imig & Tarrow, 2001).
12. Such as the international neo-Nazi gathering, organized by some French skinhead groups, involving 300–400 participants from different countries (*Le Monde*, 24 January 2005) or the music festival Hammerfest organized in the United States in 2005, involving extreme right bands from all over the United States and Europe (*The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 1 October 2005).
13. *La Repubblica*, “Naziskin d’Europa in arrivo a Milano” (“European Naziskin Coming to Milan”), 25 March 2009; see also *Le Monde*, 13 January 2007.
14. An example is the foundation in October 2009 of the far-right alliance “European National movements,” a network of various right-wing parties in several European countries, aiming to become a political group within the European Parliament.
15. As confirmed by a not significant Cramer’s V coefficient for the correlation between the type of extreme right organization and the level of its activity.
16. The question on the questionnaire was: “Does the Internet help you to be active beyond the national boundaries?” (4-point scale from “a lot” to “not at all”).
17. Figure 1 shows the intensity of the use of the Internet by right-wing groups for different political functions related to the transnationalization of their action (e.g., information, communication, propaganda). These six additional indexes of the forms of Internet usage are derived from the sum of the lower lever indicators used to empirically investigate each dimension (each lower level feature is recorded as a dummy variable, attributing a value 1 if a given feature is present and 0 if it is not found on the website). The indexes have been then normalized and standardized to the range 0 to 1 by dividing the resulting score by the maximum possible value (for details, see Caiani & Parenti, 2013).
18. In all countries, political parties are the most likely to provide tools for communication with the public than political movements and right-wing subcultural groups (e.g., 77.3% for the reachability of the organization and 84.1% provide an email address).
19. In addition, 14.3% of the analyzed right-wing websites also have an archive of the group’s press releases, keeping track of the historical “memory” of the group.
20. For some examples of this informative material, see the websites of the Italian *Il Duce* (<http://www.ilduce.altervista.org/home.htm>), *Aryan Unity* (<http://www.aryanunity.com/page1.html>), the Austrian subcultural group *Der Funke* (<http://www.der-funke.info>), the French Party *Alsace d’Abord* (www.alsacedabord.org), and American Nazi group *National Socialist Movement* (<http://www.nsm88.org/>).
21. See for example the website *Brigata Nera* (<http://it.geocities.com/brigatanera88/>).
22. 10.4% of the right-wing websites analyzed also contain “online surveys” and “questionnaires” to test and solicit the opinion of their members.
23. More than one quarter (26.8%) of right-wing organization websites have a “newsletter” (to which it is possible to subscribe), providing information about the possibilities for participation in upcoming offline events organized by the group. Another 25.6% of them offer an “event calendar/agenda” on their website.
24. They are the following values for the US case: propaganda (0.39), communication (0.51), information (0.47), ideology (0.74), debate/virtual community (0.19), and mobilization (0.13). With respect to the index of transnationalization through the website, the USA (0.21) is overcome by Austria (0.38) and Italy (0.28).

25. Showing the first or second highest value on five out of seven indexes, for the Italian case they are the following values: propaganda (0.48), communication (0.40), information (0.43), ideology (0.75) debate/virtual community (0.23), internationalization (0.28), and mobilization (0.13).
26. Showing the lowest scores on almost all indexes, for the Spanish case they are the following values: propaganda (0.30), communication (0.36), information (0.35), ideology (0.53), debate/virtual community (0.14), internationalization (0.20), and mobilization (0.09).
27. The interview question was: "Is your organization in favor or against European integration and the EU?" (4-point scale, from 0 "strongly against" to 3 "strongly in favor").
28. As confirmed by a not significant Cramer's V coefficient, there are no relevant differences in the attitudes toward European integration between the three organizational types.
29. The existence of a positive relationship between the organizations' attitudes toward European integration and the country is confirmed by a strong and significant Cramer's V (0.51*).
30. *El Pais*, 9 May 2005.
31. *Le Monde*, 15 November 2009.
32. The interview question was: "During the last year, which level of political decision making did your organization try to influence?" (6-point scale: local, regional, national own country, national other countries, EU, supranational; multiple choice possible).
33. The interview question was: "During the last year, did your association/group have regular contacts with similar associations/groups in your country?"
34. As indicated by the Cramer's V coefficient, the correlation between the number of international contacts of right-wing groups and the country is strong and significant (0.58*).
35. The question on the questionnaire was: "Does the Internet help you to create cross-national and supranational contacts with similar organizations in other countries?" (4-point scale from "a lot" to "not at all").
36. We developed five detailed indicators in the interview questionnaire: (1) "publicizing activities," which included strategies aimed at informing the public or getting informed about the preferences of the public, for example, via opinion polls; as well as the media-related repertoire including activities such as distributing press releases or giving interviews to the media; (2) "conventional political actions," including actions addressing the political-institutional sphere such as contributing to specific political campaigns or establishing/maintaining contacts with members of the parliament or government; (3) "court action," including filing suit or engaging in some sort of litigation; (4) "mobilization" activities (including petitions, protesting, organizing boycotts, striking); (5) "confrontational or violent actions" (including actions such as taking part in illegal demonstrations, clashes with the police or with political adversaries). The additive indexes in Table 1 show the frequency of the use of the corresponding strategies at the national and at the European level, by different types of organizations and countries. They have been standardized to the range 0 to 1 by dividing the resulting score by the maximum possible value, in order to allow comparability.
37. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 October 2008.
38. *La Repubblica*, 12 November 2009.

Notes on contributors

Manuela Caiani is Assistant Professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) of Wien. After completing her PhD in Political Science, she has worked on several comparative projects on collective action and Europeanization and on right wing extremism in Europe and the USA. She wrote articles on several international journals among which are *Mobilization*, *Acta Politica*, *European Union Politics*, *South European Society and Politics*. Among her recent publications are: *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy, and the United States* (with della Porta, Donatella and Claudius Wagemann), Oxford University press, 2012; *European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet* (with Linda Parenti), Ashgate 2013; *Il Web Nero*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2013.

Patricia Kröll received her Master in Political Science at the University of Vienna and is currently pursuing an MSc Degree in the International Development and Humanitarian Emergencies at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). She has worked as collaborator on the research project "The Dark Side of the Web: Right-Wing Political Mobilization Using the Internet", coordinated by Manuela Caiani at the Institute of Advanced Studies (IHS) in Vienna and she

previously contributed to the publication *Asylpolitik in Österreich. Unterbringung im Fokus*, Wien, Facultas Universitätsverlag, 2011 (edited by Sieglinde Rosenberger).

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Appendix

Quoted interviews with right-wing organizations

- ID. 01 Political party “Die Bunten”. Austria, 7 October 2011.
 ID. 02 Political party. Austria, 9 November 2011.
 ID. 03 Organization. “AFP-Kommentare”. Austria, 10 November 2011.
 ID. 04 Political party “Heimatpartei Österreich (HPÖ)”. Austria, 25 November 2011.
 ID. 05 Media organization. Austria, 28 November 2011.
 ID. 06 Organization. Austria, 2 December 2012.
 ID. 07 Political movement. Austria, 2 December 2012.
 ID. 08 Political party “Bund für Gesamtdeutschland (BGD)”. Germany, 28 October 2011.
 ID. 09 Political party “Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD)”. Germany, 4 November 2011.
 ID. 10 Political movement “Junge Nationaldemokraten (JN)”. Germany, 9 January 2012.
 ID. 12 Regional youth organization. Germany, 5 February 2012.
 ID. 13 Regional media network “MUPINFO”. Germany, 3 March 2012.
 ID. 14, Single activist “Christian Worch”. Germany. 16 March 2012.
 ID. 15 Political party “British Freedom Party (BFP)”. United Kingdom, 19 February 2012.
 ID. 16 Political party “The English Democrats”. United Kingdom, 29 March 2012.
 ID. 17 Media network “Vanguard News Network (VNN)”. USA, 10 January 2012.
 ID. 18 Political movement “White Revolution”. USA, 10 January 2012.
 ID. 19 Organization “The Insurgent.” USA, 19 January 2012.
 ID. 20 White nationalist network. USA, 4 February 2012.
 ID. 21 Organization “White Voice”. USA, 17 February 2012.
 ID. 22 Political party “American Third Position (A3P)”. USA, 22 February 2012.
 ID. 23 Ethno-political advocacy organization. USA, 11 May 2012.
 ID. 25 Youth Group “Gioventù Italiana”. Italy, 16 January 2012.
 ID. 29 Political Movement “Fronte Sociale Nazionale”. Italy, 13 February 2012.
 ID. 30 Political Party “La Destra”. Italy, 13 February 2012.
 ID. 31 Organization “Casapound.” Italy, 6 March 2012.
 ID. 33 Political Movement “Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT)”. Spain, 2 February 2012.
 ID. 34 Political party “Falange de Las JONS”. Spain, 16 February 2012.
 ID. 36 Political party “Falange Autentica”. Spain, 11 April 2012.
 ID. 37 Organization “Bloc Identitaire”. France, 31 January 2012.
 ID. 39 Political Party “Parti de la France”. France, 18 February 2012.
 ID. 43 Political Party “Mouvement National Republicain (MNR)”. France, 8 March 2012.
 ID. 44 Political Movement “Nouvelle Droite Populaire (NDP)”. France, 8 March 2012.

Table A1. Coding scheme for the content analysis of extreme right websites.

Attributes	Description (task supported by websites)	Indicators codified
Communication	Composing, sending, and receiving messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information about the reachability of the organization (address, email, telephone number, etc.) ● Feedback form
Fundraising	Publicizing need for funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● E-commerce ● Payment instruction and facility
Ideology	Diffusing basic information on identity and mission of the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “About us” ● Goal of the organization ● Doctrine/belief of the group

(Continued)

Table A1. (Continued).

Attributes	Description (task supported by websites)	Indicators codified
Propaganda (insiders)	Diffusing propaganda toward members and sympathizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slogan ● Hate symbols ● Logos ● Narrative about operations and activities of the groups ● Name of group leader or main representatives
Propaganda (outsiders)	Providing materials for the “political education”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● News section ● Internal search engine ● Content management (e.g., claims not to be racist) ● Documentation and material (e.g., articles, papers, dossier, references to bibliographical sources) ● counter
Identity	Promoting virtual community of debate. Internet as an arena of debate and discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Newsletter, forum, chat ● Archive of previous activities of the organizations (e.g., chronology of the organization, archive of assemblies,) ● Multimedia materials (e.g., video, audio, images)
Mobilization and recruitment	Internet as a tool for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Membership form ● Event calendar of the organization ● Information about ongoing campaigns ● Concrete information for off-line and online actions ● Meeting, “headquarter” or “operation” location
Cross-National/International contacts and content	Building organizational contacts, virtual community transcending national boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The presence of cross-national and/or international external links ● The presence of content translated in other languages

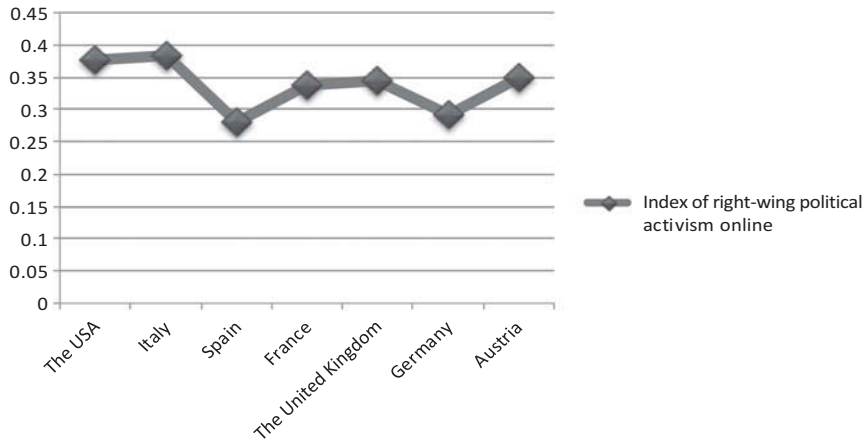


Figure A1. General index of extreme right political activism online, by country.