

A network diagram background consisting of a complex web of grey nodes connected by thin lines. Some nodes are highlighted in red. The diagram is partially obscured by a large red circle and a red bar at the bottom.

REPORT

Antisemitism online

April 2019

Right-wing extremists and Islamist groups are actively engaged in antisemitic online propaganda with antisemitism being an essence of their worldview. Antisemitic conspiracy theories, denial and relativization of the Holocaust, positive reference to Nazi politics of extermination as well as open calls for violence against Jews. Accordingly, propaganda can take different forms: serious offences as well as subtle messages quickly spread widely across social media platforms. This is how young users can easily be confronted with antisemitic agitation in internet services specifically popular among young people.

Antisemitism online: Interface between extremist propaganda

Right-wing extremist as well as Islamist groups have antisemitism as a central topic. There is a lot of content on the internet reproducing derogatory remarks and prejudices towards Jews, denying or glorifying the Holocaust and saying that the State of Israel was a terror state. Especially in periods of open conflict between Israel and the Palestinians antisemitic hate speech online increases. However, even away from such incidents antisemitism is an ideological constant in the propaganda strategy of extremist groups.

Creating the picture of the 'Jew' inside an antisemitic world view as an ultimately evil group, hostile to all other 'people and nations' only safeguarding their own interests and accumulating power and influence is a key element of right-wing extremist as well as Islamist online propaganda. However, different priorities resp. shifts as well as multiple forms of expression can be identified – sometimes open and direct, sometimes using ciphers and codes.

Drastic calls for violence: Antisemitic fantasies of extermination

Both in the right-wing extremist as well as in the Islamist spectrum references to the Holocaust are very common, e.g. by portraying it as historically justified and appropriate. The positive reference to the Holocaust serves a cruel worldview and specifically antisemitic fantasies of violence and extermination.

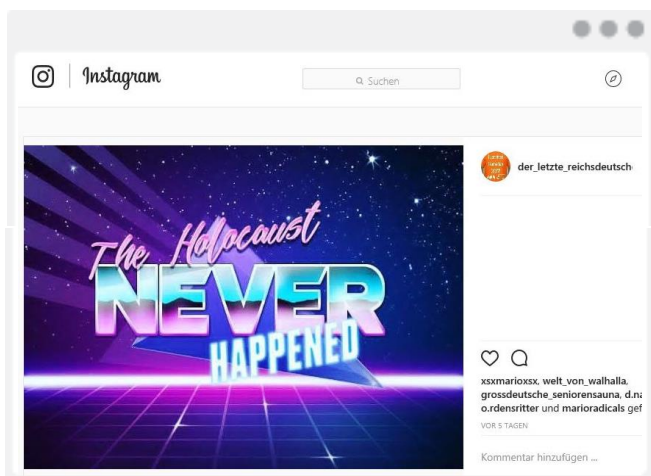


Easy to find and free on the internet: Calls for violence towards Jews.
(Source: vk.com, individual user profile)

There is a vast amount of content openly calling for violence against Jews: e.g. right-wing extremist rock songs freely accessible on the Russian platform VK blatantly spreading calls for death and disguised to specifically attract young people. Islamist propaganda of the so-called Islamic State, for instance, stages depictions of violence in a modern way and glorifies the killing of Jewish people.

Widespread: Holocaust denial and Holocaust relativization

Next to referring to the Holocaust in a positive way there is also right-wing extremist as well as Islamist online propaganda aiming at depicting the Holocaust as a 'fabrication'. Here, they often use manipulated facts or historical documents and records quoted out of context as alleged evidence, but direct relativizations also fit into this category.



Staged in a modern way content denying the Holocaust is disseminated on platforms specifically attractive to young people.
(Source: Instagram)

Direct and repeated questioning of historical facts is a popular propaganda strategy. Allusions and allegedly logical lines of argumentation shall put the NS regime's policy of extermination into perspective. For instance, the loaded question of how Anne Frank could write her diary with a ballpoint pen, which was first invented in the 1950s, is widespread; or the use of pseudoscience to question the extermination policy's technical potential so as to also raise doubts about the Holocaust itself.

Right-wing extremists are then motivated by a perceived need to take action against the German laws banning Holocaust denial. Accordingly, Holocaust deniers are considered 'living martyrs' who stand up against 'the cult of guilt'. Far-right actors fueled by conspiracy theories claim that the official Holocaust story was only an instrument to 'keep the German nation small'. Islamist groups use the denial or relativization of the Holocaust first and foremost to discredit Jews and attack their alleged 'victimhood' in order to depict them as aggressors.

Data collection

This report is based on jugendschutz.net's continuous monitoring of right-wing extremist and Islamist content on the internet. Additionally, jugendschutz.net recorded antisemitic content within the hotline work and when processing complaints via the online reporting form.

'Explanations of the world': Antisemitism and conspiracy theories

Antisemitic narratives can often be connected to conspiracy theories. Furthermore, there is a multitude of conspiracy theories, which in turn have an antisemitic worldview. They aim at portraying 'Jews' – or persons they construe as such – as rich, powerful and scheming. They were the ones who recklessly subjugate and redesign the world following their own interests.

Such clearly antisemitic narratives depict Jews as those allegedly responsible for causing suffering and incite hatred towards them.



Israel as the 'mastermind' of Islamist terror? Antisemitic conspiracy masked as a loaded question. (Source: FB, Freiheit für Palästina i.e. freedom for Palestine)

Emotionalizing language and images, willful reinterpretations and subtle manipulation shall lure young people into believing in antisemitic conspiracy theories. Specifically the apparently easy explanations for complex phenomena create a momentum of attraction. Jewish families are blamed for negatively perceived global developments and crises. Their names are often used synonymously with the alleged 'Jewish world conspiracy'. Memes, posts and videos with these names make insiders believe this and connect the dots. At the same time, this shall 'avoid' open antisemitism widely considered a taboo.

Israel related antisemitism: 'Anti-Zionism' as an online strategy

Also on the internet, antisemitic statements and narratives often also refer to Israel. Here, in a one-sided and undifferentiated way, the state of Israel is portrayed as an aggressor and labeled as a terror state.

It is widely observed that antisemitic stereotypes are projected onto the state as a whole or onto politicians and that the defamations follow certain well-known patterns. Specifically in times when the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians escalates there is an increasing amount of antisemitic content referring to Israel, even in right-wing extremist social media services.

It is often observed that Islamist groups behind pro-Palestine content on social media platforms exploit these to reach young users, increase the rejection of Israel and incite hatred towards Jews. To achieve this they also use images of graphic violence depicting severely injured people or mutilated bodies and fill these into a laid down 'friend-enemy scheme'. This is how Israel is depicted as the ultimate evil and put on a level with the inhuman NS regime.

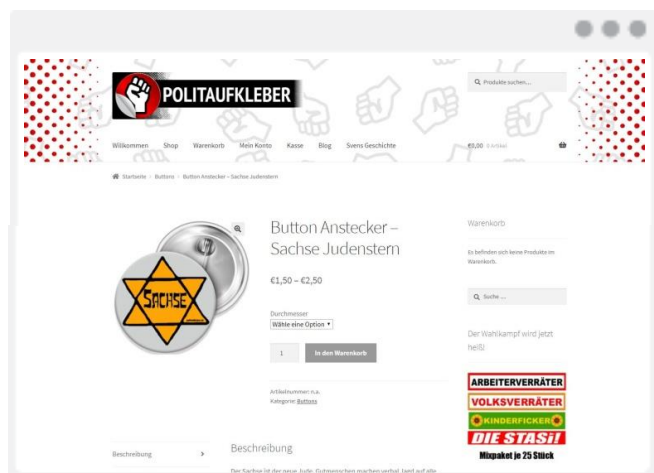


Child with smashed skull: Search terms like 'freedom for Palestine' or 'child murderer Israel' reveal graphic images on Instagram. (Source: Instagram; original not pixelated)

'The new Jews': Perpetrator-victim role reversal and victim narrative

In the context of the autumn 2018 events in Chemnitz, a German city in the state of Saxony, with violent right-wing protests, part of the right-wing extremist scene staged themselves as victims of political persecution. An online shop, for instance, offers items bearing the Star of David and the word 'Saxon': "The Saxon is the new Jew. 'Concerned citizens' use words to go after the people of Chemnitz and other Saxons [...]"

This aims at discrediting legitimate criticism of racist attitudes and inhuman violence as undemocratic in order to expand the realm of the sayable. Additionally, this kind of perpetrator-victim role reversal goes along with trivializing National Socialist (Nazi) persecution.



Right-wing extremists stage themselves as victims and do not hesitate to reverse the roles of victims and perpetrators. (Source: politaufkleber.de)

Islamist groups such as 'Generation Islam' or 'Realität Islam' i.e 'Reality Islam' use a similar strategy. In terms of their ideology, they are close to Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), an Islamist political organization which has been banned in Germany, inter alia for reasons of their call for fighting and destroying Israel.

The groups put the political and legal treatment of Muslims on a level with anti-Jewish Nazi politics. These argumentation schemes are specifically common when it comes to resurging debates on the ban of headscarves. This is how, on the one hand, they try to build on young people's realistic perception of discrimination and stigmatization experiences. On the other hand, however, they also want to stage themselves as fighters against injustice and thus upgrade themselves.

Infringements: Mostly incitement of the people and Holocaust denial



In 2018, jugendschutz.net recorded 89 cases of in Germany illegal antisemitic content. Here, incitement of the people (22), Holocaust denial (13) and using symbols of unconstitutional organizations (57) were predominant.

Most cases with illegal content could be found on YouTube (25), Facebook (23) and VK.com (21). All other cases were scattered over 13 other platforms resp. websites.

In 15 cases, jugendschutz.net could identify a German person responsible for the content. 5 cases have already been forwarded to the Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media (KJM) for further supervisory proceedings, all other cases are currently under way.

In 58 cases, jugendschutz.net achieved quick removal of illegal content or blocking for users in Germany.

YouTube removed 100 %, Facebook 83 % and VK.com only removed 14 % of the content reported. In total, 19 cases are still currently under way. jugendschutz.net forwarded 2 cases to the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA). In the remaining 5 cases there is no further need for action.



Antisemitism as a challenge to the protection of young people in the media

Antisemitism is widely prevalent and easy to find on the internet. The content ranges from drastic offences to subtle propaganda. Here, the focus is particularly on young users in a number of ways: With a modern twist and on platforms specifically popular among young users, antisemitic content is also directly expressed to young people. In a complex world, antisemitic conspiracy theories can seem to be a simple explanatory model and thus link up with young people's quest to find themselves.

In combination with calls for violence and depictions of graphic violence this may not only lead to children and young people adopting this attitude, but also to developing their own violent fantasies towards Jews or even turning these into reality. Such content frequently coming up in services popular among young people is more likely to have a greater impact especially if there is little or no counter-speech.

Based on the results gathered from continuous monitoring and the daily work, jugendschutz.net will conduct systematic research in 2019 focusing on this phenomenon in popular services like YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. This shall lead to an extensive assessment and evaluation of the dimensions and potential needs for action. Here, the focus is on content relating to political extremism.

Further information



www.bpb.de/extremismus



www.hass-im-netz.info

What can you do?



www.hass-im-netz.info/was-tun/user

Report to



www.hass-im-netz.info/hass-im-netz-melden

Enable children and young people to explore the digital world free of troubles

jugendschutz.net is the German center at federal and state level concerning the protection of minors on the internet.



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