Module 7: Right-Wing Extremism, Hate Speech, Fake News & Conspiracy Theories

CLIO

Challenging Hostile Views and Fostering Civic Competences

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Project information

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THE CLIO PROJECT

Clio is a project for the prevention and coping with right-wing extremism at vocational schools. Teachers and headmasters should be enabled to recognize and understand the corresponding positions among their students and to stand up for democratic values without fear. For this purpose, interdisciplinary experts from Austria, Poland, Croatia and Germany are developing various materials for vocational school teachers in close cooperation with the target group, such as an app, a blended learning training and a podcast. The main focus of this project is to build synergetic networks with other stakeholders in the individual countries in order to strengthen the schools and provide them with knowledge and professionally created material.

www.clio-project.eu

1. OVERVIEW

In this module you will learn…

- *… about online strategies of right-wing extremists and basic tools to spot them.*
- *… basic definitions of hate speech, fake news and conspiracy theories*
- *… why fake news and conspiracy myths are so popular amongst right-wing extremist groups*
  … popular right-wing extremist conspiracy theories
  … simple tricks to spot fake news and conspiracy myths online
  … why hate speech, fake news and conspiracy theories are dangerous for democracies
  … exercises you can use while teaching about hate speech, fake news and conspiracy myths
  … where to turn to if you need more information or help.

At the end of the text, you will find exercises you can use while teaching about right-wing extremism. The Module also provides useful resources for further information or help in concrete situations, as well as "further reading", if you would like to learn more.

Self-assessment questions

Answer the following questions to yourself:

- Try to draft short definitions for hate speech, fake news and conspiracy theories. Write them on a sheet of paper and compare them with the definitions given below after reading the first section.
- Do you know any conspiracy theories? Where do you come across these narratives and myths?
- Why do you think are conspiracy theories a problem for democracies?

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2. HATE SPEECH, FAKE NEWS, AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES – DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

Hate speech, fake news and conspiracy theories are three different things. However, they do often coincide.

Hate speech is illegal in the European Union. It is defined in EU law "as the public incitement to violence or hatred on the basis of certain characteristics, including race, colour, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin."[1] While the underlying EU framework decision only covers racist hate speech and hate

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[1] Jourová, Věra (2016): Code of Conduct – Illegal online hate speech. Questions and answers. Fact Sheet by the European Commission, p. 1. (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code_of_conduct_hate_speech_en.pdf). Accessed: 14 September 2020.

speech on the grounds of religion (see Module 3), the majority of the EU member states also included other grounds like sexual orientation, gender identity (see Module 5) and disability.

Hate speech can take place online and offline, publicly, e.g., posts, comments on social media platforms and privately, e.g., messages[2]. Recent legislations have taken into account that the same rules should apply for the offline and online world. Content that is criminal offline should not be able to be legally expressed online. Problems regarding the criminalisation of online hate speech are among other things, the traceability and the identification of illegal hate speech as the classification of what is illegal and what is still legal can be difficult. Furthermore, the responsibility to trace and assess hate speech lies with the IT companies like Facebook and Twitter. Another issue concerning the criminalisation of online hate speech is the fact that statements online are not always traceable and authorship is not always provable, since people are sometimes either using fake accounts or writing things anonymously.

In public debates, it is often argued that the criminalisation of hate speech interferes with the general principle of freedom of expression. The decision if a content falls under the criminal offence of illegal hate speech has to be assessed case by case, while also considering factors like the purpose and the context of the statement.[3]

Hate speech is often directed against minorities like Muslims, Jewish people, refugees or LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersex people, as well those with other gender expression or sexual orientation, see Module 5). It can be directed against individuals or the whole group. Hate speech frequently encourages others to commit hate crimes. Hate crimes, also known as bias-motivated crimes, are criminal offences that are motivated by bias or prejudice towards socially deprived groups. Hate crimes can consist of a variety of offences, e.g., threats, property, damage, assault, murder, and are not only targeted towards the ones directly affected of the crime but towards their whole social group. Because of this also people or property associated with (or even only perceived as) belonging to the respective group, e.g., human rights defenders, community centres, places of worship, can become targets of hate crimes.[4] Although hate crimes are criminal acts, the legal situation differs from one country to another. In some countries, hate crimes are explicitly listed as an offence in the criminal law and in some countries such as Germany and Austria hate crimes are criminalised through the initial offence (*Indexdelikt*). e.g., threats, property damage, murder, and constitute a so-called aggravating circumstance regarding sentencing. The legal framework influences how hate crimes are recorded and thereby also how they can be confronted.

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[2] Cf. Galop – LGBT+ anti-violence charity (not dated): What is online anti-LGBT+ hate speech? (http://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/What-is-online-hate-speech-and-hate-crime.pdf). Accessed: 14 September 2020.
[3] Cf. Jourová (2016), p. 2/3.
[4] Cf. OSCE (not dated): What is hate crime? (https://hatecrime.osce.org/what-hate-crime). Accessed: 14 September 2020.

Legal framework in Germany:

In the German Criminal Code (StGB), many aspects of hate speech such as insult (§185), defamation (§186), but also trivialisation or glorification of acts of violence (§131) and incitement to hatred (§130) are punishable. To improve enforcement, the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) passed in 2017, which obliges network providers such as Facebook to remove illegal content transparently and store it for possible prosecution, should be made stricter. Among other things, network providers should be obligated to report possible illegal content and to hand over account names and passwords to investigators if ordered to do so by a judge. However, this enhancement has still not been passed due to constitutional concerns and was most recently rejected by the Bundesrat in February 2021.

Legal framework in Austria:

In Austria, hate speech is considered to be a criminal offense according to §283 StGB. It includes the explicit agitation against someone in public due to their belonging to a certain group as well as insulting them in a way that violates human dignity, with up to two years in prison. §283 in its currently valid form has only been in force since the beginning of the year, the amendment brought the inclusion of disability, age, sexuality and gender, as well as the incitement of individuals.

Section 283 of the Criminal Code is preceded by its specialty, Section 3h, VerbotsG, which denies, belittles, justifies and approves Nazi crimes with punishment.[5]

Croatian legal framework:

Key documents include Criminal Code (the term Hate Crime introduced in 2006), the Law on Misdemeanours against Public Order and Peace, the Law on the Suppression of Discrimination, and the Protocol on the Procedure in Hate Crimes (2011). The Office for Human Rights of the Government of the Republic of Croatia coordinates the work of the Working Group for Monitoring Hate Crimes, which collects and consolidates data from the police, the State Attorney's Office and criminal and misdemeanour courts on hate crimes. The members of the Working Group are representatives of Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Attorney's Office, the High Misdemeanour Court of the Republic of Croatia, the Municipal Criminal Court in Zagreb, Police Academy, Faculty of Law in Zagreb, People's Office ombudswoman, the Council for the Development of Civil Society, a representative of a civil society organisation. The working group analyses and monitors the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation in relation to hate crime, coordinates the process of collecting data on hate crimes and working on prevention. Meetings are held several times a year.

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[5] Cf. Klagsverband.at (no date): Hate Speech. (https://www.klagsverband.at/info/hate-speech). Accessed: 26.03.2021.

Exercise: Hate Speech

Go online and conduct research on the EU-project called "HATENOMORE"

English: https://victimsupport.org.mt/portfolio_page/project-hate-no-more/

German: https://www.bmi.gv.at/magazinfiles/2019/11_12/hasskriminalitaet.pdf

Summarise the key points of what hate crime is as defined in the project materials and create a poster (on your computer or on paper) on hate crime in your country.

Regarding the phenomenon of false or manipulated content (online and offline) a lot of different terms are used, for example fake news, misinformation, disinformation, or conspiracy theory. In the following, definitions will be given to better understand the distinctive meaning of these terms.

The term **fake news** is widely used since the US election in 2016 and has different meanings, which it is why it is a difficult concept. On the one hand, it is used as a pejorative term to depreciate media and journalism, like the example of the former US president Donald Trump convincingly shows. He constantly called critical journalists or media outlets "fake news" and refused speak to them. On the other hand, the term fake news is used as an umbrella term for different forms of false, misleading and fabricated information.[6]

The expert on fake news and social media, Claire Wardle, for example distinguishes between *mis*information and *dis*information, whereby misinformation is described as wrong information that is created by mistake and disinformation as "false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm. Producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological or social motivations".[7] Wardle therefore distinguishes false information by the level of intent regarding its creation and dissemination. Accordingly, she describes several types of mis- and disinformation ranging from bad journalism to information that is deliberately created with the harmful intention deceive.[8] Therefore, to determine the type of mis- and disinformation, it is necessary to question the intention of the content creators:

"For instance, was this article written to inform me about contemporary events, yet failed to get all the facts straight (poor journalism)? Was this video manipulated to make me laugh (parody)? Was this comment written to provoke (provocation)? Was this video produced to create profit (profit)? Was

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[6] Quandt, Thorsten/ Frischlich, Lena/Boberg, Svenja/Schatto-Eckrodt, Tim (2019): Fake News. In: Folker Hanusch/Tim P. Vos (eds.): The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332749986_Fake_News). Accessed: 24 January 2021.

[7] Wardle, Claire (2018): Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary. In: First Draft News. (https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/infoDisorder_glossary.pdf). Accessed: 24 January 2021.

[8] Wardle, Claire (2017): Fake News – It´s complicated. In: First Draft (04 June 2017). (https://firstdraftnews.org/fake-news-complicated/). Accessed: 24 January 2021.

this graph manipulated to increase political influence (power)? Was this entire article fabricated to make me question democracy and stir-up hate against marginalised groups (propaganda)?"[9]

Exercise: Fake news

The Austrian journalist and publicist Ingrid Brodnig further argues to use the term "fake news" in order to ensure that the field and the sovereignty of interpretation of terms is not left to populists.[10] What is your opinion on this? Which term do you prefer when it comes to false information?

Because **conspiracy theories** often incite people to commit hate speech and spread fake news, these phenomena are closely linked. The German psychologist and expert on the subject Roland Imhoff defines conspiracy theories as "the assumption that an event of some magnitude is causally linked to the secret plan of a few individuals who seek to benefit at the expense of the public"[11]. Pia Lamberty and Katherina Nocun, as other experts in the field, share a similar understanding of conspiracy theories whereby pleading for the use of the term "conspiracy narrative" instead of "theory" as the latter suggests scientificity which automatically results in a higher valuation of the conspiratorial story[12]. Following this logic and to reflect the scholarly discussion, this module also uses the term "conspiracy narrative" although the term "conspiracy theory" is mostly used in English-speaking research.

The Australian psychologist Stephan Lewandowsky identifies four factors that may contribute to the psychological susceptibility to believe in conspiracy narratives and to share them:

1. Scientific evaluations have shown that especially people who feel powerless are more likely to spread conspiracy narratives.
2. Conspiracy narratives allow coping with threats as they blame only some conspirators for "big and threatening events", e.g., a "Jewish elite" for the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, people also rather endorse "big" explanations for "big" events, such as conspiracy narratives about the death of Princess Diana or Elvis. This also explains the increased emergence of (often anti-Semitic) conspiracy narratives in situations of social crisis.
3. Conspiracy narratives may help people to deal with uncertainty as they provide clear answers and allow to have the powerful feeling of knowing "the truth". Again, this is why they act as a coping mechanism.

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[9] DETECT-Consortium (not dated): Of Trolls & Bots. The Basics of Manipulation in Social Networks (within the Erasmus+ project DETECT), p. 10. (https://www.detect-erasmus.eu/fileadmin/detect/Results/ENG_Detect_Compendium_final.pdf). Accessed: 29 January 2021.

[10] Cf. Brodnig, Ingrid (2017): Lügen im Netz. Wie Fake News, Populisten und unkontrollierte Technik uns manipulieren. Wien: Brandstätter, p. 30.

[11] Vergin, Julia (2020): Coronavirus: How do I recognize a conspiracy theory? In: Deutschlandwelle (19 May 2020). (https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-how-do-i-recognize-a-conspiracy-theory/a-53492563). Accessed: 24 January 2021.

[12] Cf. Lamberty, Pia/Nocun, Katharina (2020): Fake Facts. Wie Verschwörungstheorien unser Denken bestimmen. Köln: Quadriga, pp. 18-21.

4. Conspiracy narratives are very well suited to dispute mainstream politics. This allows initiators of conspiracy narratives to claim minority positions and a highly effective anti-establishment status.[13]

Closely linked with this factor is another explanation why people believe in conspiracy narratives. Scholars have found out that the belief in conspiracy narratives satisfies the desire of some people to feel "special" and that the belief in conspiracy narratives is therefore determined by the need of the person to be different, unique and the desire to stand out from the crowd.[14] As seen in the description of target groups of right-wing extremist groups (see Module 1) conspiracy theories can also create a sense of social belonging to a group for people who feel excluded from their social groups and search for inclusion in other groups they can share same beliefs with.

In conclusion, it can be stated that there are two main reasons why people believe in conspiracy narratives: the compensation of an experience of loss of control (personal like losing a job and societal like a political crisis) and the satisfaction of a personal need to feel special and unique.[15]

Exercise: Conspiracy narratives

•   If you know any conspiracy narratives, think about why they might be so popular considering the information given above.

•   Go online and search for popular conspiracy theories. What are the craziest ones you came across?

•   Now that you know what conspiracy theories are, how they are created and what people might be targeted with these narratives, make up your own conspiracy theory and share with other students/your family and find out whether they would believe it.

People who disseminate disinformation and conspiracy narratives can be grouped into four categories. Pranksters who spread disinformation and conspiracy narratives because they often seem absurd and therefore almost funny. People who are insecure and thoughtlessly share false content especially via social media. Others who deeply believe in the conspiracy narratives and share them by conviction. The last group consists of people who profit from the dissemination of disinformation and conspiracy narratives – either financially or politically.[16]

However, for the algorithm-based system of social media platforms, it does not make a difference for what reasons people disseminate false information and conspiracy narratives. This operating principle

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[13] Cf. Lewandowsky, Stephan/Cook, John (2020): The Conspiracy Theory Handbook, p. 4. (http://sks.to/conspiracy). Accessed: 29 January 2021.
[14] Cf. Lamberty/Nocun (2020), pp. 29-31.
[15] Cf. Lamberty/Nocun (2020), p. 31.
[16] Cf. Der Standard (2020): Podcast. Wie Verschwörungstheoretiker von Corona profitieren. In: Der Standard (30 April 2020). (https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000117220057/podcast-wie-verschwoerungstheoretiker-von-der-krise-profitieren-wollen). Accessed: 08 February 2021.

has the effect that popular content is displayed more often what leads to some kind of chain reaction regarding the dissemination. This is based on the interests of tech companies that can increase their profit when users stay longer on certain sites and thereby consume more advertisement. Thus, content becomes more and more individualised what leads to the so-called "filter bubbles". The term was coined by internet activist Eli Pariser in 2011 and describes the situation when internet users only come across content that confirms their own beliefs.[17]

3. WHY ARE FAKE NEWS AND CONSPIRACY NARRATIVES SO POPULAR AMONG RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST GROUPS

It can be observed that especially right-wing populist and extremist groups disseminate fake news respectively disinformation and conspiracy narratives. Although, it is important to understand that conspiracy narratives are not a mere phenomenon of the extreme right and that some are deeply rooted in the societies we live in, e.g., anti-Semitic conspiracy narratives.

According to the classification of people who disseminate false information, right-wing populist and extremist groups can be classified in the fourth group, as people who profit politically from the dissemination of disinformation and conspiracy narratives. But why are conspiracy narratives so popular among right-wing populist and extremist groups?

On the one hand, conspiracy narratives are an essential constant in right-wing extremist ideology (see section below from p. 7 onwards). On the other hand, conspiracy narratives transport a clear and simple worldview that is divided in good and bad people.[18] This does not mean that conspiracy narratives are simple. Lamberty and Nocun rather point out that many conspiracy narratives are highly complex, which makes it so difficult to argue with people who believe in them as these people often know a lot of "facts".[19]

Because conspiracy narratives transport this clear worldview, and further a stereotyped construction of "the" enemy, such as Jewish people, Muslims, feminists, and thereby the possibility to strengthen the sense of togetherness of the ingroup (see Module 1) by stirring up hatred against the outgroup, conspiracy narratives offer many connecting factors to right-wing extremist thinking. Also, conspiracy narratives generally fuel feelings of doubt and uncertainty and thereby destabilise the democratic system by undermining the trust in democratic processes, which too overlaps with the agenda of right-wing extremism. Furthermore, conspiracy narratives inherently transport an anti-establishment discourse which also coincides with right-wing extremist ideology (see Module 1).

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[17] Cf. Smarzoch, Raphael (2018): Filterblasen, Echokammern & Co. Filtern als Kulturtechnik. In: Deutschlandfunk Kultur (15 November 2018). (https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/filterblasen-echokammern-co-filtern-als-kulturtechnik.976.de.html?dram:article_id=433306). Accessed: 29 January 2021.

[18] Cf. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2015): Verschwörungstheorien. Dossier Rechtsextremismus. Ein Erklärfilm zum Thema (rechte) Verschwörungstheorien von Tobias Büchner & FLMH. (https://www.bpb.de/mediathek/212137/verschwoerungstheorien). Accessed: 05 February 2021.

[19] Cf. Lamberty/Nocun (2020), p. 36.

Interestingly, not all right-wing populist and extremist politicians explicitly disseminate conspiracy narratives. Some rather skilfully give hints in public speeches that may be trivial for non-believers, but which are clearly interpretable for people who believe in conspiracy narratives. This can be observed especially when it comes to anti-Semitic conspiracy narratives. Anti-Semitism is often expressed with codes and ciphers,[20] which will become more evident in the next section.

4. POPULAR RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST CONSPIRACY NARRATIVES

The belief in conspiracy narratives is in fact a widespread phenomenon in many countries. A representative survey, conducted in Germany in 2020, revealed that 30% of the German population tend towards the belief in conspiracy narratives and that 11% are convinced conspiracy theorists.[21] A current study for Austria regarding conspiracy narratives on one specific issue, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, showed similar numbers. The survey found that 32% of Austrians are open to conspiracy narratives about the pandemic, believing the pandemic is only a scheme or plot to mess with certain groups of people.[22]

In the following, the most popular right-wing extremist conspiracy narratives will be presented:

The myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy

The "Jewish world conspiracy" is a superordinate narration that is deeply rooted in our societies. Because of this, the already mentioned experts on conspiracy narratives Lamberty and Nocun, plead for using the term conspiracy myth as superordinate category for conspiracy narratives.[23] Subordinate conspiracy narratives are for example the narratives of the "Zionist occupied government" (ZOG) or the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion".

The narrative of the "Zionist occupied government" claims that a "Jewish elite" secretly controls international banks and thereby the governments of Western states. The acronym ZOG is used as a code by white supremacist, right-wing extremist, nationalist and also Islamist groups and was coined in the United States.[24]

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[20] Cf. Gessler, Philipp (2006): Antisemitismus heute. (https://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/antisemitismus/37974/antisemitismus-heute). Accessed: 05 February 2021.

[21] Cf. Roose, Jochen (2020): Sie sind überall. Eine repräsentative Umfrage zu Verschwörungstheorien, p. 4. (https://www.kas.de/documents/252038/7995358/Eine+repr%C3%A4sentative+Umfrage+zu+Verschw%C3%B6rungstheorien.pdf/0f422364-9ff1-b058-9b02-617e15f8bbd8?version=1.0&t=1599144843148). Accessed: 05 February 2021.

[22] Cf. Al-Youssef, Muzayen; Sulzbacher, Markus (2020): Verschwörungstheorien: Im Netz verirrt. (https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000119506599/im-netz-verirrt). Accessed: 14 March 2021.

[23] Cf. Lamberty/Nocun (2020), p. 22/23.

[24] Cf. Redaktion Belltower News (2017): ZOG. (https://www.belltower.news/zog-51576/). Accessed: 05 February 2021.

Closely linked with this narrative are the so-called "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", which are one of the most important documents of modern anti-Semitism and which considerably influenced 20th century's world affairs. The "Protocols" pretend to be records of secret meetings of "influential Jews", where the world Jewry plans to take over the world. Already in the 1920s however, research revealed that the "Protocols" are fake and also plagiarised because older and fictional texts have been combined. They were probably created in France in 1898 at the instigation of Russia. The "Protocols" promoted the rapid rise of anti-Semitic movements since the 1880s and were distributed worldwide after the appointment of Hitler as Reich Chancellor in 1933 and served as a legitimation of the Holocaust. The "Protocols" serve right-wing extremists as evidence for the alleged Jewish world conspiracy until today.[25]

The conspiracy narrative of the Great Replacement (see Module 4)

The Great Replacement is a far-right or right-wing extremist conspiracy narrative, which states that the European "white and Christian" population, which is considered to be "native" and homogenous, is being progressively replaced with Muslim populations from Africa and the Middle East through mass migration, demographic growth and low birth rates of "Europeans".[26] This conspiracy narrative combines elements of anti-feminism (see Module 5), Anti-Semitism (see Module 2) and anti-Muslim racism (see Module 4). Muslims are depicted as hostile invaders and the discourse on migration is dominated by terms like "flood" and "wave" that are associated with natural disasters. What makes the use of this kind of disastrous language problematic is that it dramatises even reports or texts that seem to be neutral, and in turn legitimises (violent) defensive reactions.

Responsible for this replacement are either "Jewish elites", "the Muslims" themselves, "left" politicians or feminists who encourage women to have less children or all of the mentioned. This conspiracy theory is said to be originated by French writer Renaud Camus. In 2011, he published a book called "Le grand replacement" ("The Great Replacement") which problematises the presence of Muslims in France as a potential threat and danger to the French culture. Far-right and right-wing extremists like the Identitarians (see Module 1) refer to this conspiracy narrative.[27] Also, right-wing extremist shooters legitimise their killings with the alleged danger of Muslim replacement like the El Paso shooter and the

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[25] Cf. Ayyadi, Kira (2017): Protokolle der Weisen von Zion. In: Belltower News (30 August 2017). (https://www.belltower.news/protokolle-der-weisen-von-zion-2-51574/). Accessed: 05 January 2021.
[26] Cf. Bracke, Sarah/Hernández Aguilar, Luis Manuel (2020): "They love death as we love life": The "Muslim Question" and the biopolitics of replacement. In: British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 71, No. 4, pp. 680-701. (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7540673/). Accessed: 02 January 2021.
[27] Cf. Davey, Jacob/Ebner, Julia (2019): "The Great Replacement": The violent consequences of mainstreamed extremism. (https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf), p. 4. Accessed: 09 January 2021.

Christchurch shooter in 2019.[28] [29] Scholars however also point out that this conspiracy narrative is the core of a modern racist ideology and has its roots in the National Socialist *"Rassenlehre"* ("racial doctrines") and was therefore only adopted by Camus.[30]

Austria: Exercise: The conspiracy narrative of the Great Replacement

• Go to the Website of the Group "Die Identitäre Bewegung Österreich"

• How is the narrative of the Great Replacement pictured and why it is made out to be a threat

• What measurements/defensive actions are proposed to stop the "Great Replacement"

Germany: Exercise: The conspiracy narrative of the Great Replacement

• Go to the Website of the Group "Die Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland"

• How is the narrative of the Great Replacement pictured and why it is made out to be a threat

• What measurements/defensive actions are proposed to stop the "Great Replacement"

Connection of right-wing extremist conspiracy narratives to anti-feminist agendas

Many right-wing extremist conspiracy narratives offer connections to anti-feminist agendas. It can be observed that anti-Semitic, racist and anti-feminist conspiracy narratives are linked. The best example for this is the conspiracy narrative according to which "Jewish elites" invented feminism in order to instigate women to bear less children to destroy the "white race" and to plan the "genocide of whites".[31] Investigations of right-wing extremist shootings reveal that anti-feminism often constitutes a motive for the crime alongside with racist and anti-Semitic beliefs. The right-wing extremist shooters of Christchurch (2019) and Halle (2019), or Anders Breivik who killed 77 people on the island of Utøya and in Oslo in 2011, all had deeply anti-feminist endeavours as the analyses of their "manifestos" clearly show. Anti-feminism may act as a catalysator of right-wing extremist

> **Incels**
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> The term is a self-designation of heterosexual men that are "involuntary celibate" for which they generally blame women. The "movement" arose from an internet subculture and is deeply misogynist.

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[28] Cf. Charlton, Lauretta (2019): What is the Great Replacement? In: The New York Times (06 August 2019). (https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/us/politics/grand-replacement-explainer.html). Accessed: 02 January 2021.

[29] Cf. Schwartzburg, Rosa (2019): The 'white replacement theory' motivates alt-right killers the world over. In: The Guardian (05 August 2019). (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/05/great-replacement-theory-alt-right-killers-el-paso). Accessed: 02 January 2021.

[30] Cf. Quent, Matthias (2019): Globale Rechte formiert sich. Die Eiskälte der völkischen Ideologie. In: Der Tagesspiegel (24 March 2019). (https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/globale-rechte-formiert-sich-die-eiskaelte-der-voelkischen-ideologie/24139158.html). Accessed: 22 January 2021.

[31] Cf. Frauensicht. Das führende Portal für engagierte Männer und Frauen (2020): Deshalb terrorisieren Rechtsextreme Frauen, Juden und Muslime. (http://www.frauensicht.ch/Lobbys/Deshalb-terrorisieren-Rechtsextreme-Frauen-Juden-und-Muslime). Accessed: 05 February 2021.

radicalisation. The process of radicalisation may be initiated by the frustration of not having a girlfriend or wife. This experienced personal frustration may lead to a general anger towards women and feminist endeavours (see box on "incels"). When confronted with the conspiracy narrative according to which „the Jews" invented feminism, a process of radicalisation can be started. According to the political scientist Judith Götz, anti-feminism offers a bridging function to the middle of society where many people perceive the increasing disintegration of traditional gender roles as threatening. Also, being anti-feminist is generally more accepted than being publicly racist.[32]

Other right-wing extremist conspiracy narratives focus for example on the denial of the Holocaust, the death of NSDAP politician Rudolf Heß or the September 11 attacks.[33] Even if these conspiracy narratives are deliberately fabricated to incite hate against minorities and to destabilise the democratic system, real conspiracies do exist. The whistle-blower Edward Snowden for example, proved that large parts of online communication were under surveillance by the NSA. Other examples are the Watergate scandal or the Volkswagen emission scandal. Indeed, history is full of real plots and conspiracies. In contrast to the described conspiracy narratives, real conspiracies pursue smaller targets and are often not successful or not revealed.[34] Scrutinising and disclosing scandals and conspiracies is part of a vivid political discussion and can certainly have positive effects, for example the demands for more transparency in the automobile industry or intelligence services. The belief in the conspiracy narratives described above, however, is more than just the reasonable doubting of democratic processes and global events. Lamberty and Nocun describe the belief in these narratives as an ideology that leads to a distrust so deep it cannot be reversed – not even with scientific facts.[35]

The belief in conspiracy narratives also seems to have grown with the rise of the internet and the increasing influence of social media. Experts, however, argue that the internet and social media may facilitate the dissemination of conspiracy narratives, but that also traditional media have always spread disinformation and conspiracy narratives and that the belief in conspiracy narratives is a phenomenon that is much older than the internet. The belief in anti-Semitic conspiracy narratives, for example, ultimately led to the Holocaust and is still a widespread phenomenon in Germany until today.[36] The Australian psychologist and expert on the subject Stephan Lewandowsky therefore reasons that social media amplifies conspiracy theorizing.[37]

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[32] Cf. Frauensicht. Das führende Portal für engagierte Männer und Frauen (2020).

[33] Cf. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2015).

[34] Cf. Paál, Gábor (2020): Woran erkennt man eine echte Verschwörung? In: SWR Wissen (15 May 2020). (https://www.swr.de/wissen/1000-antworten/woran-erkennt-man-eine-echte-verschwoerung-100.html). Accessed: 08 February 2021.

[35] Cf. Lamberty/Nocun (2020), pp. 43-45.

[36] Cf. Lamberty/Nocun (2020): pp. 37/38.

[37] Cf. Lewandowsky/Cook (2020), p. 4.

5. SIMPLE TRICKS TO SPOT FAKE NEWS AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES ONLINE

Understanding how fake news and conspiracy narratives work and why there are so popular (especially among right-wing extremist groups) might not be enough to spot them when coming across them online. The following tricks provide a check list on how to handle content online.[38]

1. **Read more than just the headline**
   Before sharing content online, read more than just the headline of an article to make sure not to share disinformation unintentionally.

2. **Verify the source**
   Take a closer look what source produced the content. What other content does this source produce? Does it have a conspicuous URL or domain? You can use fact-checking blogs like mimikama in Austria (https://www.mimikama.at/) or Correctiv in Germany (https://correctiv.org/) that can help you to better assess a certain source.

3. **Check the imprint**
   Credible and trustworthy creators of media disclose the owners of the media outlet, its editors and journalists. Untrustworthy content creators often disguise this information and post anonymously or with fake names.

4. **Verify the date and time the content was published**
   Disinformation is often created by "recycling" old news and images and presenting them as breaking news.

5. **Look up the author**
   By analysing content by the same author, you can assess his or her style of reporting and often thereby evaluate the credibility of the content.

6. **Verify the indicated sources and links**
   Both too many and too little sources and links can be fishy. Verify if other more trustworthy media has covered the news because proficient journalists would have made the back-checking.

7. **Trace back dubious quotes and images**
   Often false quotes and images are used to support the disinformation. You can easily back-check quotes and also images by using tools like TinEye or Google's reverse image search to get information about the original image.

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[38] Cf. DETECT-Consortium (not dated): Detect: Enhancing Digital Citizenship. Method Manual for Pupils (within the Erasmus+ project DETECT), pp. 9/10. (https://www.detect-erasmus.eu/fileadmin/detect/Finale_Outputs/EN_Detect_Student_Manual_final.pdf). Accessed: 06 February 2021.

8. **Be conscious about your own biases**
   The psychological principle called "confirmation bias" describes the phenomenon that we tend to look for information that proves the beliefs and opinions we already have. Because of that, disinformation creators fabricate highly emotional contents to trick you into sharing them.

9. **Review other sources**
   If no other media covered the content, it is highly unlikely that you came across disinformation.

10. **Consider well before sharing content online**
   Keep in mind that the spreading of harmful disinformation and conspiracy narratives starts with the thoughtless sharing of content. Always reflect before pressing the share button.

6. WHY ARE HATE SPEECH, FAKE NEWS AND CONSPIRACY NARRATIVES DANGEROUS FOR DEMOCRACIES?

As pointed out in this module, hate speech, fake news and conspiracy narratives are three different phenomena that often do coincide and are also deliberately employed by right-wing extremist and populist groups to further their agenda.

Even if the prosecution is often hard, **hate speech** is a criminal offence in many countries and is introduced more and more into legal frameworks. Hate speech is dangerous for democracies because as a result of it hatred against minorities is stirred-up. On the one hand this leads to the so-called silencing of affected people because they are too scared to speak up. On the other hand, words do turn into deeds and hate speech leads to actual physical attacks and crimes. The democracies we live in are based on the principle of equality, granting the same rights and therefore the same protection for all its citizens. By accepting the silencing of people and by not resolutely countering hate crimes, democracies do not fulfil their purpose and mission.

Disinformation and conspiracy narratives are none the less dangerous for democracies. They lead to the division of societies and make it impossible to sustain a public political discourse that is so vital for vivid democracies. The dissemination of disinformation and conspiracy narratives inevitably results in the formation of parallel universes where different "truths" are acknowledged. Also, disinformation and conspiracy narratives accelerate processes of radicalisation and may influence people to commit hideous crimes and attacks.[39]

Therefore, it is important to be aware of the effects of hate speech, disinformation and conspiracy narratives as well as the underlying agenda right-wing extremist groups pursue. You can support people affected by hate speech online by showing solidarity or sending a personal message. Also double-check content before sharing it. It can make all the difference.

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[39] Cf. Lamberty Pia/Leiser, David (2019): Sometimes you just have to go in - Conspiracy beliefs lower democratic participation and lead to political violence, p. 2. (https://psyarxiv.com/bdrxc/). Accessed: 06 February 2021.

7. EXERCISES YOU CAN USE WHEN TEACHING ABOUT HATE SPEECH, FAKE NEWS AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES

1.) Visit the homepage https://no-hate-speech.de/de/kontern/fuer-gegen-alle-hate-speech/ and discuss the memes created by No Hate Speech Movement regarding hate speech. Encourage your students to create memes themselves.

2.) Watch the video "Hate is random – No Hate Speech" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaxK6KR-w4Y&feature=emb_imp_woyt) by No Hate Speech Committee Austria in class. Discuss the effects of hate speech with your students and make sure to create a safe space by acknowledging the fact that some students might feel uncomfortable because they are affected by hate speech themselves.

3.) For exercises regarding the subjects of disinformation and conspiracy narratives check the outputs of the Erasmus+ project DETECT – Enhancing digital citizenship (https://www.detect-erasmus.eu/de/resultate/)

8. WHERE TO TURN TO? NGOS & NETWORKS THAT CAN HELP YOU LEARN MORE

- Erasmus+ project DETECT – Enhancing digital citizenship (https://www.detect-erasmus.eu/de/)

Austria:

- Mimikama – Association for the disclosure of misuse of the internet (https://www.mimikama.at/)
- No Hate Speech Committee Austria (https://www.nohatespeech.at/)
- saferinternet.at (https://www.saferinternet.at/)
- Demokratiezentrum Wien (http://www.demokratiezentrum.org)
- Meldestelle des Innenministeriums gegen radikal islamistische Videos (stopextremists@bmi.gv.at)
- Stopline – Meldestelle gegen Kinderpornografie und Nationalsozialismus im Internet (https://www.stopline.at/de/home)
- 147 Rat auf Draht (https://www.rataufdraht.at)

Germany

- No Hate Speech Movement (https://no-hate-speech.de/de/)
- Fact checking by Correctiv.org (https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/)
- BILDblog (https://bildblog.de/)

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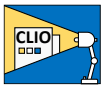
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