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Recent Developments of Anti-Government Threats: Online Activities and Transnational Connections

Kacper Rekawek, Thomas Renard, Julian Lanchès, Maria Zotova, Menso Hartgers, Morgan Finnsjö, Alessandro Bolpagni, Marco Lombardi, Silvano Rizieri Lucini, Jacob Ware

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Introduction

by Thomas Renard, Kacper Rekawek and Thomas Renard

Introducing AGE

This report explores recent evolutions of anti-government extremism (AGE), particularly in Europe, with a focus on their online activities and transnational connections. It builds on the findings from our previous report *Anti-Government Threats and their Transnational Connections*,¹ published in March 2024.

Anti-government extremism is a contested concept. Whereas security services have been monitoring this phenomenon for several years, there is still fairly little academic work – and even less consensus – on what anti-government extremism actually is.² However, two recent pieces of scholarly work have emerged as central to our understanding of this phenomenon.

According to Tore Bjørgo and Kurt Braddock, anti-government extremism would constitute a broad category of threats and violence against politicians and government representatives, and could in practice take four different forms.³ First, it includes “movements, networks and individuals that reject the legitimacy of the government (...) and refuse to obey or submit to any authorities and regulations”. Under this form, the authors include anarchist terrorism, far-right “patriotic” militias, or sovereign citizens. A second form refers to “the spreading of conspiracy theories that undermine the legitimacy of governments, institutions, policies, and political opponents”, such as antisemitic conspiracy theories. Third, the authors consider “issue-oriented demonstrations and opposition to specific policies”, which in some cases can take a violent turn. Fourth, the authors refer to “violent attacks, plots, threats, and harassment against politicians and governmental representatives”, including political assassinations.

Whereas this categorisation is a helpful effort to conceptualise different manifestations of extremist violence against government representatives, and above all illustrates the diversity of forms this violence can take, it offers no clear definition or boundaries for what anti-government extremism actually is or isn't. As a matter of fact, the authors brush through the history of modern terrorism, across most ideologies. To some extent, they do not manage to go beyond a certain form of tautology, given that violent extremism is, almost by *definition*, anti-government or at least anti-authority.

In another attempt at defining anti-government extremism, Sam Jackson distinguishes “ideological anti-government extremism” from “issue-driven anti-government extremism”.⁴ The former includes actors that oppose the government, as a whole and its representatives, which are perceived as evil. In contrast, the latter includes actors that oppose a government's specific actions or priorities. Jackson recognises that the lines between the two forms are often blurred, but his distinction is nonetheless helpful to break down the phenomenon through its different manifestations. Furthermore, Jackson recognises that terrorism is by definition anti-government,

1 B. Molas et al., *Anti-Government Threats and their Transnational Connections, the Hague: ICCT, March 2024*, https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2024-06/FFO-Public%20Report%20English_Final%201.pdf.

2 For a critical perspective, see notably: C. Kehlet Ebbrecht, L. van Wieringen, “Critical Perspectives on Anti-Government Extremism,” *Perspectives on Terrorism, Volume XVIII, Issue 4, December 2024*, <https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2024-12/Ebbrecht%20and%20van%20Wieringen%20Critical%20Perspectives%20on%20Anti-Government%20Extremism.pdf>.

3 See : T. Bjørgo, K. Braddock, “Anti-Government Extremism: A New Threat?,” *Perspectives on Terrorism, Volume 16, Issue 6, December 2022*, https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-06/Article%201_1.pdf.

4 Sam Jackson, What Is Anti-Government Extremism?, “,” *Perspectives on Terrorism, Volume 16, Issue 6, December 2022*, <https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-06/pot-xvi-6-a2-jackson.pdf>.

and therefore suggests that this concept should be restrained to actors or movements that “*primarily or consistently* focus on government as a source or cause of perceived crises, [and] where that focus on government is central to the worldviews of the actors in question” (italics are from the original text). Finally, the author insists that the concept of anti-government extremism co-exists and overlaps with other types of extremism, in a non-exclusive manner.

This report defines AGE as the “movements, networks and individuals who reject the legitimacy of the government” and “condone or show willingness to undermine the democratic legal order,”⁵ in line with the EU’s understanding.⁶ The basis for this rejection comes from the fact that in the view of AGE, each country is effectively run by a “deep state,” made of a corrupted elite with the support of the complicit “mainstream media”. Conspiracy thinking is deeply rooted in AGE milieus and, in response, AGE sympathisers often promote alternative thinking and lifestyle. Far-right narratives are increasingly permeating AGE, notably through conspiracy thinking. However, beyond these basic elements, the milieu largely lacks homogeneity of structure and ideology.

Focus and Methodology

This report takes stock of anti-government extremist milieus after mid-2024, covering the period from June 2024 to November 2025, with a particular focus on the two following points:

1. How has the milieu evolved, in the post-COVID-19 era (given that the movement was largely boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic)?
2. How do these movements react and adjust to the election of political figures (or their electoral success) that have openly embraced some of their key narratives?

This report covers four countries: Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Each country chapter is authored by specialised experts, on the basis of desk-based research. Since AGE is largely an online phenomenon, country experts analysed carefully the online presence, narratives, and connections of AGE Telegram channels - the platform of choice for the milieu. As an initial step, the research team compiled a seed list of *Telegram* channels, drawing on the previous ICCT report, which was subsequently expanded following a snowball sampling approach.

To gain a deeper qualitative understanding of domestic AGE ecosystems, country experts conducted ethnographic monitoring of a subset of high-relevance accounts. Selection was guided by three criteria: (1) follower count, (2) frequency of posts forwarding by other channels, and (3) relevance within specific ideological sub-milieus (for example, QAnon⁷ or esotericism). This monitoring was conducted over multiple weeks between September and November 2025. In parallel, we employed the social-listening platform *TGStat* to analyse long-term engagement trends, focusing on follower growth and post viewership from 2020 onwards or, for more recent channels, from their creation date. Researchers have passively observed online channels/accounts but have not interacted with their members or content providers.

Based on the expanded list of seed accounts identified by the research team, a specialised group of researchers conducted a social network analysis (SNA), mapping online connections

⁵ See: note 1, p. 5.

⁶ The milieu is described using a variety of terms such as “heterodox” in Austria; “anti-establishment” in Belgium; “anti-system” in Czech Republic; “anti-authority” or “sovereign” in Denmark; “self-governing”, *Reich* citizens or “anti-constitutional delegitimization of the state” in Germany; “anti-institutional” or “sovereign” in the Netherlands; “anti-system” in Spain.

⁷ The QAnon conspiracy theory claims a so-called Deep State of satanic paedophile elites controls global power, maintaining it through child abuse and the alleged extraction of adrenochrome, a substance said to grant eternal life. It builds on the earlier Pizzagate theory and on medieval antisemitic “blood libel” myths. QAnon first appeared on 4chan, where an individual or group called “Q”, referencing the highest US security clearance, posted cryptic messages for followers to interpret. Believers see most mainstream politicians as Deep State members, while portraying Donald Trump as the key figure fighting to destroy it.

between AGE accounts and Telegram channels looking notably at reposting behaviour. To uncover the specific characteristics of the AGE network through the SNA, three distinct levels of analysis were adopted: (1) the whole network analysis, (2) the subgroup analysis, and (3) the node analysis. This analysis allowed us to identify the overall structure of the AGE milieu, notably in terms of dominant themes and patterns, and to highlight key influencers and transnational connections.

Finally, it is worth noting here that while recognising the centrality of the online ecosystem, this report aimed to look beyond it. Country experts were therefore also asked to pay special attention to significant offline activities of AGE actors, particularly with regard to protests and violent acts (or calls thereof).

Evolution of AGE

ICCT's previous report made some important observations about anti-government extremism.⁸ First, the authors noted the “upsurge” of this phenomenon since the early 2020s, with a clear spike of anti-government sentiments during the COVID-19 crisis. This was also confirmed by several other pieces of research.⁹ Second, the report noted that anti-government extremist milieus are “multifaceted and heterogeneous”, in terms of ideology, narratives as well as modes of action. With regard to ideology, the authors noted the clear presence of far-right narratives in online communities, but also of far-left ones. Third, the report emphasised that most adherents to anti-government narratives are non-violent. However, it noted the “violent potential” of the movement, particularly against state representatives and the so-called “elites”. The authors observed different forms through which this potential manifested: harassment, threats and incitement to violence, lone actors violent acts, and the creation of parallel societies which may normalise certain types of violence. Finally, the report highlighted some international aspects of anti-government extremism, as the phenomenon is indeed global rather than geographically contained. Analysing a number of social media channels, the authors observed some transnational connections. For example, some narratives were seen to travel across borders, although they were eventually adjusted to fit local realities.

Based on these previous findings, what changes can be identified in AGE since 2024? To some extent, not so much – as it appears from this report. This would suggest a phenomenon that is persistent over time, in spite of the fading COVID-19 pandemic that largely boosted it. This is, in itself, an interesting finding. As we dig further, however, some interesting trends are nonetheless appearing. We are highlighting hereafter a few observations, which will be explored more in depth in the report.

The first of these observations relates to the milieu's offline (violent) activism. From our research, it appears that AGE is less active offline, compared to previous years, with most recorded activities concentrated online. This limited offline activism does not prevent AGE to remain considered as a potential threat. The potential for violence is real, as illustrated by the first terrorism-related convictions of AGE individuals in the Netherlands, linked to the sovereign movement (see Dutch chapter below). In France, the first ever terrorist investigation was opened against a couple of sovereign citizens arrested in 2025, suspected of planning a terrorist act.¹⁰ In Australia, another

⁸ See: note 1.

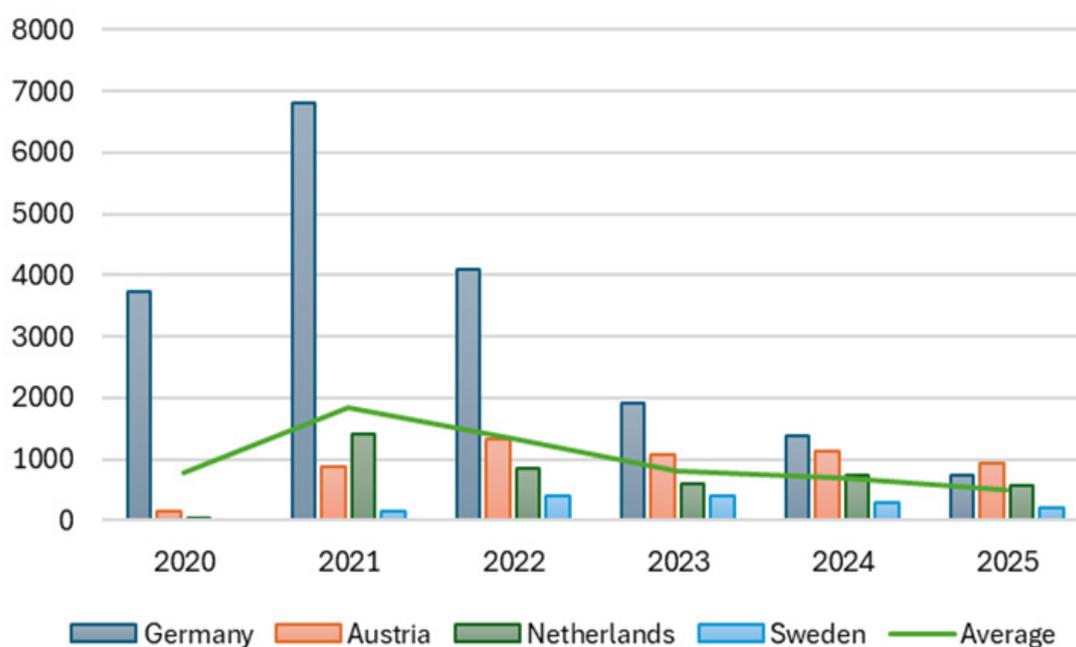
⁹ L. Tihon, F. Glowacz, “La crise sanitaire comme moment décisif contestataire ? Analyse du discours des regroupements de désobéissance civile lors de la COVID-19 [The health crisis as a decisive moment of protest? Analysis of the discourse of civil disobedience groups during COVID-19], *Criminologie*, 57(2), 321–349.

¹⁰ Y. Quemener, “Armes et explosifs découverts dans sa voiture, un homme placé en détention provisoire dans une enquête terroriste,” [Weapons and explosives discovered in his car, a man placed in pre-trial detention in a terrorist investigation], *franceinfo*, 13 January 2025, <https://france3-regions.franceinfo.fr/grand-est/vosges/epinal/armes-et-explosifs-decouverts-dans-sa-voiture-un-homme-place-en-detention->

sovereign citizens killed two police officers in August 2025, which was followed by a month-long manhunt.¹¹ More broadly, eight EU Member States mention AGE milieu in their national threat assessments, although acknowledging it is clearly secondary to more traditional forms of violent extremism, such as far-right or jihadi.¹²

A second significant evolution concerns the importance but also the waning of the COVID-19 narratives as a key mobiliser/galvaniser for AGE. AGE had been boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic,¹³ and the milieu's adjustments to the declining importance of the pandemic are interesting to monitor. Figure 1 below depicts the evolution of references to COVID-19 amongst the main Telegram channels in Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Sweden, and the US. It clearly indicates a declining obsession with the pandemic, which created opportunities for new narratives to emerge as mobilising forces.

Figure 1: Mentions of Covid-Related Terms



provisoire-dans-une-enquete-terroriste-3090709.html

11 O. Mitchell, T. Turnbull, "Police killed in Australia shooting named as manhunt continues," *BBC News*, 27 August 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g6w1xd5kko>.

12 See: Laura Winkelmuller-Real, Kacper Rekawek, Thomas Renard, *In Their Eyes: How European Security Services Look at Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism*, the Hague: ICCT, May 2025, https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2025-05/Winkelmuller%20Real%2C%20Rekawek%20and%20Renard_In%20Their%20Eyes%20How%20European%20Security%20Services%20Look%20at%20Terrorism.pdf

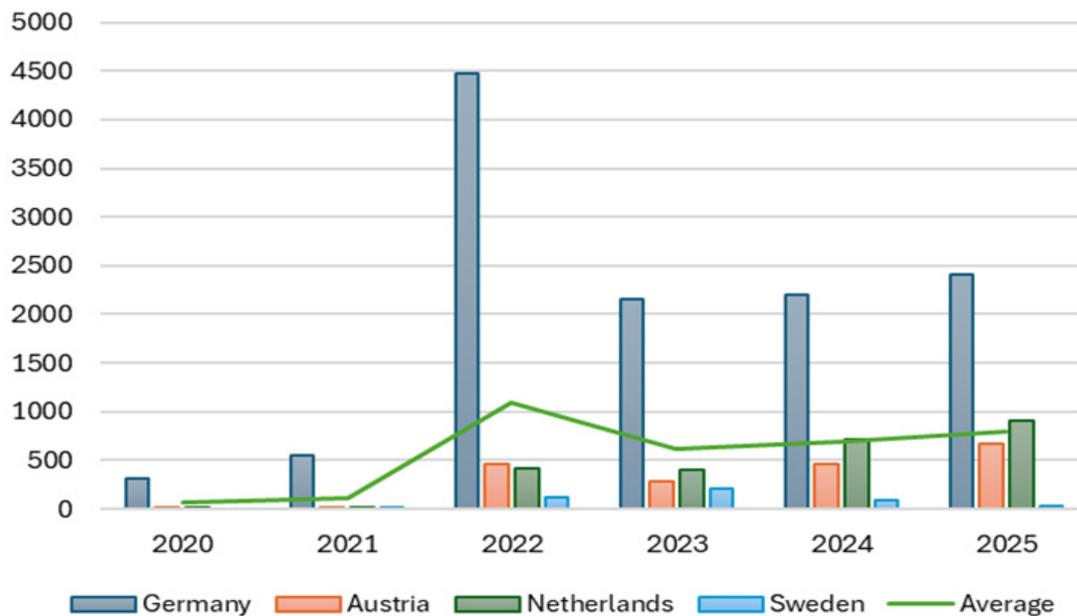
13 In order to best showcase the changing nature of the AGE milieu, and some of the overarching global trends within it which concern each of its "national" clusters (be it Austrian, Dutch, German, or Swedish), the research team conducted a time-frequency analysis focusing on the 2020-2025 period for five most relevant (read: with highest number of followers and most frequently forwarded) *Telegram* channels in each country. As the AGE phenomenon largely exists online and, as this report will demonstrate, has been focusing more of its attention on online education (or enlightenment) than direct action or mobilisation, such an online snapshot enables the researchers to draw viable conclusion from its findings.

To demonstrate the state of the AGE milieu and its change (or lack of) throughout the years, the research team, utilising the means of thematic analysis, identified five thematic areas of interest of key importance to the studied phenomenon, namely: COVID-19, right-wing extremism, radical-right political parties, Russia and the war in Ukraine. For each theme, we developed a corresponding keyword group. These groups included, for example, terms such as "remigration", "Islamisation", or "Great Replacement" within the right-wing extremism category. Using the *Teleton* library in Python, we then queried the Telegram API to systematically scrape all messages posted in the aforementioned channels between 2020 and 2025. Subsequently, we conducted a time-series frequency analysis to measure the prominence of these keyword groups across all channels for each year in the 2020–2025 period. This analysis was implemented in Python and relied on regular-expression matching to capture both exact keywords and all variations of their word-stem (e.g. prefixes and suffixes).

The subsequent part of this chapter discusses the results of our queries. It showcases the proverbial what is hot and what is not in the milieu while also demonstrating how it has been re-programming itself to meet the challenges of post-COVID-19 world – a booster for the AGE activists and followers.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, which arrived shortly after the pandemic's end, offered a new opportunity to galvanise AGE milieus online. Throughout 2022 and 2023 the topic established itself as a key issue, if not the second most important issue among the AGE followers. In their view, the conflict is yet another disruption of the world by the evil elite, although largely holding more positive views on Russia and favourably sharing pro-Russian content. The Figure 2 below shows this evolution among the main AGE Telegram channels in Germany, Austria, Netherlands, and Sweden.

Figure 2: Mentions of Russia/Ukraine-Related Terms



Next to the growing pro-Russian content, the AGE milieu developed a new fascination for far-right related themes. Since 2023, mentions of immigration, replacement, or re-immigration surged in the online ecosystems of the European AGE, whereas they had hardly been present before.¹⁴ Simultaneously, the AGE milieu registered a growing interest for Europe's radical right parties, which are the most vocal on these issues and seems to be their preferred political representatives. Consider, for example, Figure 3 and Figure 4 below which clearly demonstrate this dynamic in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and, to a lesser extent, in Sweden. The first shows the growing frequency of mentions of national radical-right parties among AGE channels: Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) in Germany, The Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ) in Austria, Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD) in Sweden, The Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) and Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*, FvD) in the Netherlands. The second showcases the growing trend of leading AGE channels adopting terms and language from the far-right playbook by, for example, focusing on (illegal) immigration.¹⁵

14 For another take on the convergence between AGE and far-right extremism, see: Koehler, D. (2025) Siren calls of anti-government extremism: Far-right influences on the German anti-vax ('Querdenken') protest milieu through music, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 17:3, 352-373.

15 The keywords for this search were as follows: Germany: ["Islam", "Muslim", "Migration", "Migrant", "Asyl", "Flüchtling", "Einwander", "Bevölkerungsaustausch", "Umvolkung"]; Austria: ["Islam", "Muslim", "Migration", "Migrant", "Asyl", "Flüchtling", "Einwander", "Bevölkerungsaustausch", "Umvolkung"]; Netherlands: ["Islam", "Moslim", "Migrati", "Migrant", "Asiel", "Vluchteling", "Omvolkung", "Grote Vervanging", "Nexit", "Replacing", "Allochtoon"]; Sweden: ["Islam", "Muslim", "Invandrare", "Migrant", "Flykting", "Asyl", "Folkutbyte", "Återvandring", "Kulturberikare", "Invaderare", "Globalist", "Folkförrädare", "Finspång", "Rasfrämling"].

Figure 3: Mentions of Radical-Right Parties

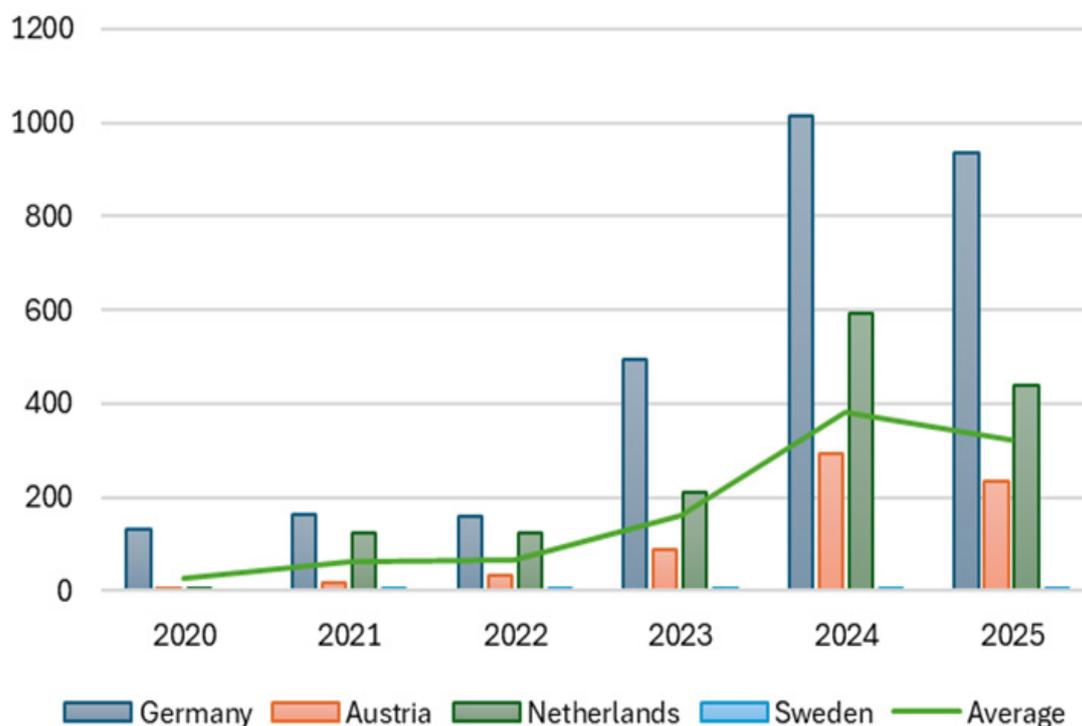
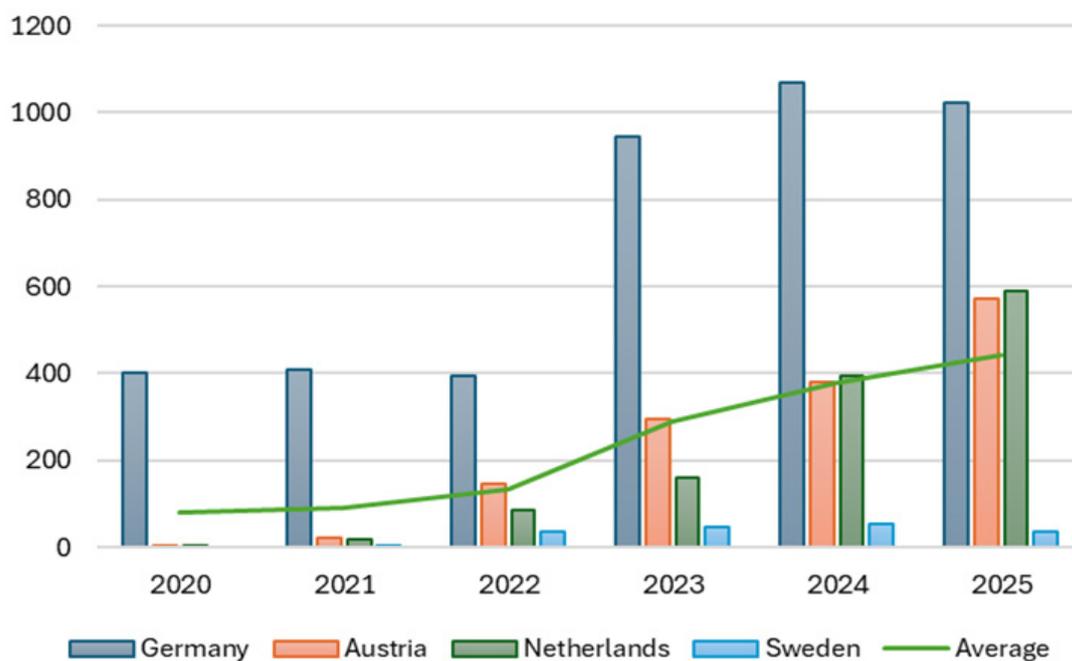


Figure 4: Mentions of Far-Right-Related Terms



The next chapters discuss these trends in more detail and provide country-specific insights related to AGE national hubs. Chapter 6 and the Annex offer more insights into transnational connections, based notably on a social network analysis.

Austria

by Julian Lanchès

Introduction

The Austrian so-called “state deniers” community (Staatsverweigerer), is one of the largest communities of sovereign citizens in Europe,¹⁶ active from the 1970s onwards. As such, the local AGE community predates the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁷ but it was only in the 2010s that the milieu became known to a broader public.¹⁸

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic gave the Austrian AGE milieu new momentum. State deniers were among the first to join the emerging protests against governmental public health measures in April 2020. They were soon joined by a wide array of groups, including anti-vaccination activists, conspiracy theorists, individuals from the esoteric scene, fundamentalist Christians, violent hooligan groups, as well as large parts of the Austrian right-wing extremist milieu.¹⁹ Together, these actors formed a highly heterogeneous protest movement. From the outset, the movement was marked by an intensely conspiratorial worldview.²⁰ At its peak, in late 2021, this re-shaped AGE milieu succeeded in mobilising demonstrations of up to 40,000 participants in Vienna.²¹ In parallel, a sizeable online ecosystem emerged, primarily on Telegram, consisting of channels and chat groups that functioned as a counter-public sphere. Within this space, COVID-19-sceptical content, disinformation, and conspiracy theories were circulated, debated, and amplified.

With the gradual end of the pandemic in 2022, the movement’s mobilising power declined. Its core unifying narrative, resistance to COVID-19 measures, had lost relevance, and the broad coalition that had formed under its umbrella began to fragment. Nonetheless, the re-shaped AGE milieu managed to establish lasting structures, especially online, and retained a stable followership. Furthermore, as parts of the original movement fell away, the remaining right-wing extremist milieu has been able to exert increasing influence over the AGE environment. This is evident both in terms of the ideological themes prioritised within the milieu and in growing personnel overlaps. As a result, the boundaries between state deniers, broader conspiracist actors, and the far-right extremist scene in Austria have continued to blur.²²

16 Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023*. (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2023-te-sat>.

17 Heute Redaktion, “Österreich - ‘Ich Traf Einen Staatsverweigerer’” [Austria – ‘I met a state denier’], *Heute*, 13 September 2021, <https://www.heute.at/s/staatsverweigerer-osterreich-anklage-wegen-hochverrats-das-sind-ihre-ideen-58346864>.

18 Jakob Winter, “Gegen Die Republik: Was Die Staatsleugner in Österreich Gefährlich Macht” [Against the Republic: What makes those who deny the state in Austria dangerous], *Profil*, 4 April 2017, <https://www.profil.at/oesterreich/gegen-republik-staatsleugner-oesterreich-7923911>. Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2023*, (Vienna: Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2024), https://www.bmi.gv.at/magazin/2024_07_08/02_Verfassungsschutzbericht_2023.aspx.

19 Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, *Ende der Maßnahmen – Ende des Protests? Das Telegram-Netzwerk der österreichischen COVID-19-Protestbewegung und die Verbreitung von Verschwörungstheorien* [End of measures – end of protest? The Telegram network of the Austrian COVID-19 protest movement and the spread of conspiracy theories], (Vienna: Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, 2024), https://bundesstelle-sektenfragen.at/wp-content/uploads/Online-MonitoringEINS_WEB.pdf.

20 Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, *Das Phänomen Verschwörungstheorien in Zeiten der COVID-19-Pandemie* [The phenomenon of conspiracy theories in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic], (Vienna: Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, 2021), <https://bundesstelle-sektenfragen.at/wp-content/uploads/Das-Phaenomen-Verschwoerungstheorien-in-Zeiten-der-COVID-19-Pandemie.pdf>.

21 “Chronik: 44.000 Bei Demo Gegen CoV-Maßnahmen” [Chronicle: 44,000 at demonstration against COVID measures], *ORF*, December 11, 2021, <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3133905/>.

22 Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, *Ende der Maßnahmen – Ende des Protests?*, 2024.

Narratives

The Austrian AGE milieu is grounded in the belief that a malicious and nebulous elite is pursuing an all-encompassing plan to establish a new totalitarian surveillance system designed to control and suppress the population in order to secure its power in the long term. According to this worldview, major events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, are deliberately orchestrated or exploited as pretexts for implementing this alleged agenda. The Austrian government and all opposition parties, with the exception of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ), are regarded as either direct participants in this elite conspiracy or as its willing instruments. Likewise, key civil-society actors such as established media outlets, scientists, and academic institutions are portrayed as part of the malign network or as subservient enablers.

As such, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to serve as a recurring reference point within the Austrian AGE online environment. Many channels still demand investigations into what they describe as crimes committed during the pandemic and reference dubious studies which allegedly link the vaccination to all sorts of illnesses, such as for instance causing cancer or excess mortality among babies, wherefore the vaccination is repeatedly labelled as “poison syringe.” At the same time, given the general societal decline in interest in the pandemic, most channels have transitioned to other themes, according to a reasoning that can be described as *event-hopping*. In this pattern, any current event or day-to-day political development are interpreted through a conspiratorial lens and integrated into the overarching narrative of the elite’s alleged master plan. This is for instance the case regarding recent plans by the European Commission to require major messaging services to automatically scan chats for child sexual abuse material (CSAM), or to introduce a digital version of the Euro currency. Such developments are commonly portrayed and denounced as precursors to a comprehensive surveillance regime, echoing narratives from the COVID-19 period.

To some extent, the Russian war against Ukraine has superseded COVID-19 as a prominent topic. Most Austrian AGE channels adopt a distinctly pro-Russian stance and place blame for the conflict not on Russia but on the European Union, NATO, and the United States. A central narrative concerns Austria’s neutrality, which is repeatedly depicted as endangered by what channels describe as the *warmongering* or *war hysteria* of the Austrian and other European governments. At the same time, Ukraine and its leadership are repeatedly portrayed as corrupt: a particularly salient example across channels is the Russian disinformation narrative targeting President Zelensky, commonly derided as the “snow king,” depicting him as a cocaine addict. The war is also incorporated into the broader conspiratorial worldview. It is portrayed as an orchestrated crisis intended to sow instability and unrest, thereby facilitating the later implementation of a totalitarian order by the alleged elite. Austrian intelligence services have, therefore, assessed several Austrian alternative media outlets as functioning as extensions of the Russian state, serving as gateways or amplifiers for Russian foreign information manipulation and interference campaigns.²³

Nevertheless, neither Russia nor the war in Ukraine have produced mobilisation dynamics comparable to those triggered by COVID-19. A keyword search across a number of selected channels shows that Covid-related terms still feature more prominently than those related to Russia or the war in Ukraine, although their frequency has declined over time. By 2025, the thematic focus had instead become increasingly fragmented. As noted earlier, the Austrian right-wing extremist milieu has gained increasing influence within the AGE environment. As a result, discourse on many channels is now dominated by more traditional right-wing extremist themes,

²³ Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*, (Vienna: Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2025), https://www.bmi.gv.at/magazin/2025_07_08/03_Verfassungsschutzbericht_2024.aspx.

directed against what is perceived as a left-leaning, green, or woke agenda. Xenophobia and Islamophobia are particularly salient. Narratives of self-victimisation are widespread, with channels repeatedly claiming that any dissenting opinion is dismissed as right-wing extremism, while alleged left-wing extremist organisations and Antifa are said to be permitted to pursue an openly radical agenda. Immigration, especially from Muslim-majority countries, is routinely portrayed as an existential threat to the Austrian population. Several channels exclusively amplify isolated cases of criminal offences committed by immigrants across Europe, including cases of assault, rape, or terrorism. For instance, heightened security measures around Christmas markets, introduced in response to previous vehicle-ramming attacks, are directly attributed to immigration, which is consequently framed as a threat. In parallel, multiple channels disseminate the far-right Great Replacement conspiracy theory and not only endorse but frequently demand implementation of radical so-called “re-migration policies”. The LGBTQI+ community has also emerged as an existential threat. Numerous channels depict homosexuality and transgender identities as a perverse ideology from which children must be protected and often draw explicit parallels with paedophilia.

Beyond these narratives, the general conspiratorial nature of the Austrian AGE milieu is supplemented by a range of other well-known conspiracy theories, including the Great Reset and the New World Order. Explicitly dedicated QAnon channels are less directly prominent compared to during the pandemic, although QAnon narratives remain visible, especially when channels refer to a cabal-like elite or discuss the supposed need to liberate children from shadowy networks. This could be explained by the fact that the German AGE milieu still features a high number of QAnon channels/accounts that are also followed and read in Austria (see German chapter).

Esotericism and spiritualism likewise play a significant role within the Austrian AGE online landscape. Many channels reject conventional medicine, in particular the pharmaceutical industry, and instead promote alternative products as cure-alls for diseases ranging from cancer to measles. Other channels emphasise supposed “supra-national energetic oscillations” believed to influence human health and daily well-being. Some focus almost exclusively on weather observation and allegations of human-made geoengineering, while others promote elements of Nordic mythology. A number of smaller channels are heavily oriented towards self-promotion, frequently advertising associated coaching or lifestyle products.

Structure

Offline Activism

A number of offline collectives and initiatives that emerged during the pandemic remain active. Foremost among these is the minor political party Human, Freedom, Fundamental Rights (*Mensch Freiheit Grundrechte*, MFG), which was founded as an explicitly anti-vaccination formation and, although not represented at national level, succeeded in securing seats in one Austrian state parliament. Other initiatives persist as well, including those associated with the influential AGE activist Martin Rutter, such as Direct democracy – Association for Vaccine Victims (*Direktdemokratisch – Verein für Impfpfer*), and legal activist networks such as Alliance of Lawyers for Enlightenment (*Bündnis Anwälte für Aufklärung*). Over the past five years, several new groups adhering to traditional sovereign citizen ideology have also formed, including, for example, Federal State Prussia (*Bundesstaat Preußen*).

Although they have declined, politically motivated calls for action have not disappeared. Many channels still regularly call for participation in ideologically aligned events and demonstrations. Some channels are dedicated almost exclusively to promoting such events and explicitly label

themselves as such. The strong ties to the German AGE milieu are visible in the frequent promotion of events such as demonstrations or ideological workshops and lectures not only in Austria but also in Germany. The calls to vote for the FPÖ and, to a lesser extent, for MFG surged particularly during 2024. Other political calls for action include appeals to join organisations or to sign petitions. Explicit calls for offline violence are rare and largely absent from the most influential channels. Likewise, overtly hateful or indictable statements such as Holocaust denial are largely absent from these larger accounts. Nevertheless, most channels consistently delegitimise one or more outgroups, most notably immigrants, while advancing narratives that portray the government as unable or unwilling to protect the Austrian population. Previous research has shown that such threat framing has the potential to induce real world violence, even without explicit incitement.²⁴

A small number of channels, especially sovereign citizen-oriented groups, exhibit a more hostile and violent rhetorical style. For example, in 2024 authorities arrested a sovereign citizen activist who had used her Telegram channel with around 1,500 followers to reject the legitimacy of the Austrian legal system and to deny the existence of gas chambers during the World War II.²⁵ Although she expressed remorse in court, the research team was able to identify a Telegram account likely associated with her that remained active in corresponding sovereign citizen groups.

In 2024, AGE actors organised 112 demonstrations of which 109 were still related to COVID-19, while three had an explicit sovereign citizen character.²⁶ In addition to overlaps in content, the growing personal overlap between the AGE milieu and the right-wing extremist scene, including the activism of AGE influencer Martin Rutter and conspiratorial meetings between leading and influential figures from both milieus, should be regarded as a security concern.²⁷ In 2024, Austrian intelligence linked 64 offences to the milieu, the vast majority related to the founding of or membership in an anti-state association or movement, and to a lesser extent to extortion and coercion. This represents almost a bisection compared to 2023, when 117 offences were recorded. However, the number of assaults increased slightly compared with 2023.²⁸

Since 2021, other forms of subversive activism, foremost so-called ‘paper terrorism’ by more traditional sovereign citizen groups, have increased again.²⁹ Members of the milieu have repeatedly engaged in doxing of officials or public figures, sometimes accompanied by calls for their arrest or even execution, though no such cases were identified in the immediate period under observation.³⁰ Individuals linked to the milieu have also repeatedly threatened public figures or judges.³¹ The potential for actual offline violence or even terrorism currently appears limited. Following a foiled attack in 2021 by individuals radicalised through COVID-19 narratives in which weapons and ammunition were seized, there have been no major incidents.³² Nonetheless, similar to the German milieu, the strong affinity for weapons among segments

24 Holger Marcks and Janina Pawelz, “From Myths of Victimhood to Fantasies of Violence: How Far-Right Narratives of Imperilment Work,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 7 (July 24, 2020): 1415–1432, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1788544>.

25 Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*, 2025.

26 Ibid.

27 Landesregierung Oberösterreichisch, *Oberösterreichischer Aktionsplan gegen Extremismus* [Upper Austrian Action Plan against Extremism], (Linz: June 2023), https://www.land-oberoesterreich.gv.at/Mediendateien/LK/Ooe_Aktionsplan_Extremismus_oeffentlich.pdf.

28 Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*, 2025.

29 Jan Michael Marchart and Luca Arzmann, “Staatsverweigerer Wollten Behörden Mit ‘Papierterrorismus’ Lahmlegen” [Anti-government activists wanted to paralyse authorities with “paper terrorism”], *Der Standard*, 26 July 2023, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000180621/staatsverweigerer-wollten-behoerden-mit-papierterrorismus-lahmlegen>.

30 Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2023*, 2024.

31 “Mutmaßlicher Staatsfeind in Kärnten Festgenommen” [Suspected public enemy arrested in Carinthia], *Der Standard*, 15 April 2025, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000265910/mutma223licher-staatsfeind-in-k228rnten-festgenommen>.

32 “Politik: Waffen und Munition Bei CoV-Leugnern Gefunden” [Politics: Weapons and ammunition found in possession of CoV deniers], *ORF*, May 20, 2021, <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3104729/>.

of the Austrian AGE community constitutes a persistent underlying risk. This was illustrated, for example, by the discovery of nearly fifty assault rifles during an intercepted shooting training of alleged AGE adherents at a remote range in October 2025.³³

Online Activism: Education and Monetisation

AGE activism in Austria manifests primarily online, concentrated in the ecosystem of Telegram channels and chat groups. While precise quantification remains difficult, the ethnographic monitoring indicates that the vast majority of posts in this ecosystem are focused on information or opinion-shaping rather than mobilising calls or calls for violence. This is complemented by a smaller number of groups that facilitate more regular exchanges among seemingly more ideologically hardened rank-and-file adherents.

Nevertheless, calls for action continue to appear repeatedly. According to a recent study by the Austrian Federal Office for Sect Issues, their current volume is comparable to that observed at the peak of mobilisation in late 2021.³⁴ However, the composition has shifted significantly. By the end of 2024, the majority of calls for action were monetary in nature, whereas in 2021 most were political.³⁵ Across all major accounts, a strong shift towards professionalised monetisation is observable. Donation appeals constitute by far the most common calls for action, both among monetary and overall action requests.³⁶ Accounts often share standardised payment messages including IBAN, BIC and, at times, additional payment providers such as PayPal, along with a suggested reference for the transaction. These appeals are frequently framed as contributions to the account holder's struggle against the state.

Beyond donations, product advertising has recently taken on an even more prominent role. Many channels regularly promote products that can be purchased through linked websites. Three online shops stand out in particular: the in-house shop of AUF1 (a far-right channel broadcasting from Austria), the shop of the German publishing house Kopp Verlag which has become a major hub for far-right, conspiracist, and esoteric literature, and Heilnatura, a platform selling a wide range of alternative medicine products. These products often have an ideological dimension, especially drawing on the widespread esotericism in the milieu. The most frequently advertised items are alternative medicinal or supplementary concoctions that purport to have scientifically proven effects. Other advertised items include survivalist equipment, which links to recurrent "day X" narratives, ideological literature, and registrations for paid self-improvement or spiritual coaching courses.

Sub-Milieus of Austrian AGE

Several identifiable ideological sub-milieus exist within the broader AGE sphere. These include the original activists mobilised against government COVID-19 measures, explicitly conspiratorial channels, channels dedicated to esotericism and spiritualism, groups promoting conventional sovereign citizen ideology, alternative media outlets, political parties, and actors embedded in the Austrian right wing extremist milieu. Nevertheless, a small number of channels command influence across all of these sub-milieus and broadly fall into two categories: alternative media and individual influencers.

³³ Martin Tschiderer, "'Waffenübungen' in Vorchdorf: Zahlreiche Verbindungen Zur FPÖ" [Weapons training in Vorchdorf: numerous links to the FPÖ], *Der Standard*, 16 October 2025, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000292373/waffeneubungen-in-vorchdorf-zahlreiche-verbindungen-zur-fpo>.

³⁴ Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, *Das Geschäft mit der Angst: Telegram als Plattform für verschwörungstheoretische Monetarisierung und Mobilisierung in Österreich* [The business with the fear Telegram as a platform for conspiracy theory monetisation and mobilisation in Austria], (Vienna: Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, 2025), https://bundesstelle-sektenfragen.at/wp-content/uploads/Forschungsbericht_250703.pdf.

³⁵ Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, *Das Geschäft mit der Angst*, 2025.

³⁶ Ibid.

Alternative media outlets attempt to mimic the appearance of reputable journalistic platforms but in practice disseminate highly selective, poorly researched, and ideologically slanted content aligned with AGE and right-wing extremist narratives. Over recent years, such outlets have undergone a degree of professionalisation, including the establishment of maintained websites offering various formats, the creation of small editorial teams, rented offices, and in one case even a temporarily broadcast television programme. The Telegram channel of AUF1, which was originally founded during the pandemic as a COVID-19-sceptical channel, has nearly 300,000 followers,³⁷ making it the single largest German-language AGE channel in the German-speaking community. The channel of AUF1's founder and editor-in-chief, Stefan Magnet, with over 71,000 followers, also ranks among the largest in Austria. The outlet has not restricted its activities to Austria but has increasingly attempted to gain a foothold in Germany, producing Germany-specific content, frequently sympathetic to the AfD, and opening an office in Berlin in 2022. In 2024, German intelligence services classified AUF1 as a suspected right-wing extremist organisation and placed it under formal observation.³⁸ Other notable alternative-media channels in the Austrian AGE milieu include Report24, with more than 52,000 followers, and RTV, with over 6,000 followers.

Individual influencers constitute the other major category of influential channels. Some operate under their real names, such as the anti-vaccination activist Martin Rutter, while others use pseudonyms, such as the operator of the channel Wetteradler, which is the only influencer channel with a larger following than Rutter, with more than 127,000 followers. Rutter's channel plays a key role at the intersection of the online and offline spheres of the Austrian AGE milieu, having been among the most active platforms for promoting demonstrations.

As noted, the majority of channels in the Austrian AGE online ecosystem were created during the peak of protests against government COVID-19 measures between 2020 and 2021. The fading of the pandemic reduced the prominence of these channels. However, despite a decline from a peak of nine million daily views in January 2022, Austrian AGE channels still registered around four million daily views thereafter. Moreover, unlike their German counterparts, most Austrian channels have retained the majority of their followers over the past three years, with some, such as AUF1, even more than doubling their audience.

Overall, the Austrian AGE milieu is closely intertwined with its German counterpart. Several German channels rank among the most forwarded within the Austrian online ecosystem, and group chats are frequented by both Austrian and German users. Conversely, Austrian alternative media routinely report on developments in Germany, arguably in an effort to expand their reach and influence within the German AGE scene. Cross-border ties are not confined to the online sphere. Notably, two of the most influential sovereign citizen groups in Austria, Staatenbund Österreich and Bundesstaat Preussen, involved individuals associated with the German Reichsbürger movement.³⁹ Similarly, the two thwarted Reichsbürger terrorist plots uncovered in Germany in 2022, namely those of United Patriots (*Vereinte Patrioten*) and Patriotic Union (*Patriotische Union*), also led to the arrest of residents in Austria affiliated with these German Reichsbürger terrorist groups.⁴⁰

37 Such a following dwarfs the size of the activist element of the Austrian AGE milieu but potentially, given the AUF's popularity, many of these followers are non-Austrians, either German or Swiss as well as German-speaking Europeans from other countries

38 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*. (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, 2025), <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2025-06-10-verfassungsschutzbericht-2024.html>.

39 Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2023, 2024*.

40 "Umsturzpläne in Deutschland: Festnahme auch in Oberösterreich" [Plans for an uprising in Germany: Arrest also in Upper Austria], *Der Standard*, 4 April, 2025, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000264336/umsturzpl228ne-in-deutschland-offenbar-festnahme-auch-in-214sterreich>; "Auslieferungsverfahren für in Tirol festgenommenen Reichsbürger" [Extradition proceedings for Reich citizen arrested in Tyrol], *Der Standard*, December 9, 2022, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000141658711/auslieferungsverfahren-fuer-in-tirol-festgenommenen-reichsbuerger>.

Convergence with the Far-Right

Across the Austrian AGE milieu, both the far-right FPÖ, currently the largest opposition party and leading national polls by a substantial margin, and, to a lesser extent, the MFG, are almost uniformly regarded in positive terms and broadly supported (see below for concrete examples). By contrast, all other major Austrian parliamentary parties are routinely accused of incompetence, corruption, and collusion. Despite their often considerable ideological differences, they are depicted as indistinguishable components of the same global, malign elite allegedly seeking to subjugate ordinary people.

This alignment between the AGE milieu and the FPÖ is not surprising. Since Herbert Kickl assumed the party leadership in 2021, the FPÖ has adopted an increasingly radical anti-establishment course. Under Kickl, the FPÖ has repeatedly echoed common conspiracy theories, including the Great Reset and the Great Replacement, that enjoy substantial traction within the AGE ecosystem.⁴¹ From the earliest phase of the newly transformed AGE milieu during the pandemic, the FPÖ sought to position itself as the parliamentary spearhead of the movement. It organised and registered demonstrations, submitted parliamentary enquiries aligned with AGE grievances, and offered legal assistance to activists.⁴² Kickl and other senior FPÖ figures repeatedly shared stages with leading AGE actors, such as the group *Fairdenken*, the Austrian offshoot of the German Querdenker movement.⁴³ The FPÖ also promoted vaccine-sceptical positions, recommended unproven medical products, such as a deworming agent, as alternatives to vaccination, and, during the period of mandatory vaccination introduced in 2021, warned of the emergence of a “dictatorship” or “vaccine apartheid.”⁴⁴ Conversely, prominent AGE activists, including the aforementioned Martin Rutter, frequently appeared as speakers at FPÖ events across the country.⁴⁵

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that the Austrian AGE milieu online overwhelmingly endorses the FPÖ. Current national polling leads are widely celebrated online, and both official and user-generated FPÖ and MFG content circulate broadly. The Telegram account of Herbert Kickl is among the frequently forwarded within the Austrian AGE network. Conversely, AGE accounts also adopt rhetoric from the FPÖ. For example, they refer to Herbert Kickl as the next “People’s Chancellor” (Volkskanzler), a term originally coined by the Nazi regime to describe Adolf Hitler and one that Kickl has repeatedly employed as part of his political self-staging since 2021.⁴⁶ More broadly, the AGE milieu appears to have become an important mobilisation base for the FPÖ, and, to a lesser extent, for the MFG. During Austria’s election year in 2024, which included both the European and federal elections, many channels exhibited a marked increase

41 Patrick Moreau, “The FPÖ and the challenge of Europe: Ideological radicalism and electoral constraints in Austria” (Paris: The Fondation pour l’innovation politique, October 2024), <https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/the-FPÖ-and-the-challenge-of-europe-ideological-radicalism-and-electoral-constraints-in-austria/>.

42 Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, “Rechtsextremismus in Österreich 2023: Unter Berücksichtigung der Jahre 2020 bis 2022” [Right-wing extremism in Austria in 2023: Taking into account the years 2020 to 2022], (Vienna: Bundesministeriums für Inneres and Bundesministeriums für Justiz, 2025), <https://www.parlament.gv.at/gegenstand/XXVIII/III/126>.

43 Vanessa Gaigg and Gabriele Scherndl, “Die FPÖ Verbrüdet Sich Offiziell Mit Den Corona-Querdenkern” [The FPÖ officially fraternises with the coronavirus sceptics], *Der Standard*, 12 December 2021, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000131845237/die-FPÖe-verbruedert-sich-offiziell-mit-den-corona-querdenkern>.

44 Lara Hagen, Pia Kruckenhauser, and Gabriele Scherndl, “Impfzwang, Wurmmittel, Todesfälle: Kickls Corona-Aussagen Im Faktencheck” [Compulsory vaccination, worming medication, deaths: Kickl’s statements on coronavirus fact-checked], *Der Standard*, 5 November 2021, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000130925748/impfzwang-wurmmittel-todesfaelle-kickls-corona-aussagen-im-faktencheck>; Roland Schlager, “Kickl Kritisiert ‘Brandmarkung Für Ungeimpfte’” [Kickl criticises “branding” of unvaccinated people], *Die Presse*, 8 September 2021, <https://www.diepresse.com/6031091/kickl-kritisiert-brandmarkung-fuer-ungeimpfte>.

45 Nina Horaczek, “Blauland: Der Corona-Verschwörer Und Der Blaue Von Der Teststraße” [Blauland: The Corona Conspirator and the Blue Man from the Test Road], *FALTER*, 6 November 2025, <https://www.falter.at/blauland/20251106/der-corona-verschworer-und-der-blaue-von-der-impfstrasse>.

46 Markus Sulzbacher, “Die Geschichte Des Begriffs ‘Volkskanzler’: Von Hitler Bis Kickl” [The History of the Term ‘People’s Chancellor’: From Hitler to Kickl], *Der Standard*, 30 November 2023, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000197679/die-geschichte-des-begriffs-volkskanzler-von-hitler-bis-kickl>.

in calls to vote for the FPÖ.⁴⁷ The relationship between key alternative media outlets such as AUF1 and the Freedom Party appears distinctly symbiotic.

Within the Austrian AGE ecosystem, support for anti-establishment figures is primarily focused on domestic politics. Highly conspiratorial accounts display a sweeping distrust of the political system and view the overthrow of the existing order as the only viable solution. From this perspective, support for political parties like the FPÖ or AfD is seen merely as delaying the inevitable collapse of a doomed system. By contrast, more moderate accounts consider their conspiratorial worldview sufficiently addressed through aligning with such political actors. Outside the Austrian context, political sympathies are largely confined to the German-speaking sphere, particularly Germany and the AfD. German politics is discussed in similar terms to Austrian politics, and AfD accounts, such as that of Björn Höcke, arguably the party's most radical ideologue, are likewise frequently shared.

⁴⁷ Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen, *Das Geschäft mit der Angst*, 2025.

Germany

by Julian Lanchès

Introductory Observations

As was demonstrated in a previous ICCT report, “AGE in Germany is older than the Federal Republic itself, [although] this form of extremism became particularly visible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁴⁸ According to the most recent figures cited in the annual report of the German domestic intelligence agency, the German AGE milieu comprises around 26,000 adherents of traditional sovereign citizen ideology and an additional 1,500 radicalised conspiracists, of whom approximately 2,600 and 250 respectively are assessed as violent, making it the largest AGE milieu in Europe.⁴⁹

Drawing on an ethnographic monitoring approach of the most influential accounts, this chapter presents a taxonomy of the German AGE milieu on Telegram. For this purpose, first a sample of larger accounts with a follower count of at least 10,000 were chosen using the database of ICCT’s previous report on transnational AGE structures, as well as a selected search of pertinent keywords. From there onwards, snowball sampling was conducted to identify further channels and groups deemed relevant either because of their follower count or because they represent a significant specific ideological sub-milieu.

Overall, the German AGE is underpinned by a general conspiratorial notion in which the current government and all established parties, with the notable exception of the AfD, are perceived as part of a corrupt elite conspiring against ordinary citizens to maintain power through a system of totalitarian control. This purported elite is believed to include not only political institutions but also the judiciary, media, civil society organisations, and scientific authorities. The COVID-19 pandemic is interpreted as a blueprint for establishing such a surveillance state. With the waning of the pandemic, the mobilising power of this master narrative has diminished. Mentions of COVID-19 and vaccination have gradually declined, although occasional references persist mainly through claims of widespread vaccine-related harms and demands for a COVID-19 “investigation committee.”

Replacement of the Master Narrative?

At least for a while, Russia’s war in Ukraine and the Western response to the full-scale invasion have partly supplanted COVID-19 as one of AGE’s central theme. In some parts of the milieu, this has prompted a rebranding as a so-called ‘peace movement’, demanding peace in Ukraine along the lines favoured by the Kremlin. This rebranding follows on a previous attempt, after Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, to use the memory of, for example, pre-1989 “peace” initiatives for political ends by a motley crew of conspiracy theorists, right-wing extremists, individuals who considered themselves left-leaning, as well as figures who later became influential during the COVID-19 protests. At their so-called Monday Vigils for Peace (*Montagsmahnwachen für den Frieden*),⁵⁰ they laid the ground for future anti-COVID-19 measures protests and simultaneously,

48 Bärbara Molas, Anne Craanen, Sabrina Tripodi, Kacper Rekawek, and Thomas Renard, *Anti-Government Threats and their Transnational Connections*. (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2024), <https://icct.nl/publication/anti-government-threats-and-their-transnational-connections>.

49 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*. (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, 2025), <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2025-06-10-verfassungsschutzbericht-2024.html>; Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023*. (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2023-te-sat>.

50 Jan Rathje, “Verschwörungsideologische Positionierungen zum russischen Angriffskrieg gegen die Ukraine,” [Conspiracy-ideological positions

prepared the nascent milieu for its future embrace of pro-Russia rhetoric. Our Telegram data shows that while the term *peace movement* appeared only in isolated instances in 2020, it was only in 2021 that primarily Austrian AGE chat groups began using the term as a form of self-labelling for their activism. However, it was only after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 that the term gained significant traction. Mentions of the terms peace movement and peace in combination with Russia and/or Ukraine surged in 2023 across most German monitored channels.

From 2022/2023 onwards, numerous channels began promoting demonstrations explicitly labelled as *peace demonstrations* instead of COVID-19-related protests. Corresponding promotional materials shared online frequently incorporated symbols associated with the historical peace movement, such as the peace dove. More recent demonstrations in 2024 and 2025 organised under the Querdenken label attracted a mixture of pro-Russian activists, conspiracy theorists, sovereign citizens, and right-wing extremists.⁵¹ Speakers at these events have, for instance, praised the German-born activist Alina Lipp.⁵² After moving to Crimea in 2019, she launched several German-language Telegram channels, which have since emerged as some of the most influential pro-Russian propaganda hubs in the German-speaking information space.⁵³ Alongside Thomas Röper, who likewise operates multiple German-language pro-Russian channels with significant reach across different social media platforms, she was recently sanctioned under the European Union's RUSDA regime, which targets individuals involved in Russia's destabilising hybrid activities.⁵⁴ All of this contributes to the AGE milieu's firm pro-Russian stance which portrays Ukraine and the broader West as the aggressors in the current war and any reports to the contrary, such as the recent Russian hybrid operations in Europe,⁵⁵ are dismissed as fake news or false flag operations.

In addition to this, the milieu seems to be focusing more on topics originally associated with the far-right and focuses on the likes of the Great Replacement and increasing hostility towards the Muslim immigrants in Germany, or stigmatises the LGBTQI+ community and equates them with paedophilia. This combined with outspoken support for the far-right Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) and a fascination with the political developments in the US (eight of the 20 most shared Telegram AGE accounts in Germany are QAnon-linked and widely cover the events in the US) underscores a shift in attitudes among AGE proponents. Taken together, the data indicate a striking realignment, with channels that previously disseminated QAnon conspiracy narratives and COVID-19-sceptical content now predominantly promoting pro-AfD and pro-Russian narratives.

Within a specific sub-set of the ecosystem, sovereigntist narratives continue to be of paramount importance. Although they also discuss COVID-19, Russia, and day-to-day events, these topics play a secondary role. According to Reichsbürger logic, Germany is not considered a

on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine], *Center Für Monitoring, Analyse Und Strategie*, March 2022. <https://cemas.io/blog/positionen-ukraine/>.

51 Franziska Apfel and Dominik Lenze, "Querdenker-Demonstration in Berlin: Russland-Fans, Verschwörungsideen und „Döp-Dödö-Döp“" [Literal-thinker demonstration in Berlin: Russia fans, conspiracy theories and 'Döp-Dödö-Döp'], *Tagesspiegel*, 3 August 2024, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/querdenker-demonstration-in-berlin-russland-fans-verschwörungsideen-und-dop-dodo-dop-12138386.html>.

52 Dominik Lenze, "850 statt 10.000 Teilnehmer: Querdenken-Demo in Berlin-Mitte deutlich kleiner als erwartet" [850 instead of 10,000 participants: Querdenken demonstration in Berlin-Mitte significantly smaller than expected], *Tagesspiegel*, 24 May 2025, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/querdenken-aufzug-lauft-durch-berlin-mitte-tausende-teilnehmer-zu-querdenken-demonstration-erwartet--650-kommen-13747960.html>.

53 Oliver Moody, "German Social Media Influencer Parrots pro-Russian Propaganda," *The Times*, 10 January 2023, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/article/german-social-media-influencer-parrots-pro-russian-propaganda-m39xxhfl>.

54 Council of the European Union, "Russian hybrid threats: EU lists further 21 individuals and 6 entities and introduces sectoral measures in response to destabilising activities against the EU, its member states and international partners," Press Release, 20 May 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/05/20/russian-hybrid-threats-eu-lists-further-21-individuals-and-6-entities-and-introduces-sectoral-measures-in-response-to-destabilising-activities-against-the-eu-its-member-states-and-international-partners/>.

55 Kacper Rekawek, Julian Lanchès, and Maria Zotova, *Russia's Crime-Terror Nexus: Criminality as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare*. (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2024), <https://icct.nl/publication/russias-crime-terror-nexus-criminality-tool-hybrid-warfare>.

sovereign state since World War II, arguing that no peace treaty was signed with the Allied powers. Consequently, the current constitution and legal system are deemed invalid, with the German Empire of 1871 considered still in effect, including its borders and monarchical structures. Some proponents also assert that Germany remains occupied by the United States and call on citizens to resist state authority, often supported by lengthy pseudo-legal arguments and historical documents. These narratives frequently intersect with admiration for President Putin who is viewed as potential liberator. Notably, the channel of conspiracist Veikko Stölzer, with over 71,000 followers, stands out by blending traditional sovereigntist narratives with general conspiracism, COVID-19 scepticism, and far-right populism, thereby arguably “mainstreaming” traditional sovereign citizen-style ideas within the broader AGE milieu.

Offline Presence, Mobilisation, and Monetisation

The COVID-19-related AGE milieu features groups which succeeded in establishing limited offline structures. This includes Querdenken (Lateral Thinking), which spearheaded the COVID-19 protest movement and which is still able to mobilise several thousand participants for isolated demonstrations, despite an overall decline. Other examples include small parties such as The Basis (*Die Basis*) and Free Saxons (*Freie Sachsen*), as well as alternative media outlets such as AUF1. Likewise, several individuals who gained prominence during this period managed to build small followings around themselves and to establish semi-professional structures through which they organise smaller events, often in cooperation with other figures from the milieu. Furthermore, the milieu has also forged links with organisations that pre-dated COVID-19, most notably the publishing house Kopp Verlag, which over the years has developed into a major hub for the distribution of right-wing extremist, and more recently also conspiratorial and esoteric, literature. Nevertheless, the AGE milieu that emerged during the pandemic manifests predominantly online. Over the past years, in two significant cases, individuals who first encountered each other within this online AGE ecosystem went on to form offline terrorist cells, although both plots were subsequently foiled.⁵⁶

To better understand the threat landscape and the potential for real-world mobilisation, the research team examined the monitored channels for explicit calls to action. Overall, the findings indicate that the AGE online ecosystem functions primarily as a space for passive information consumption rather than systematic offline mobilisation. Correspondingly, the vast majority of shared content aims to inform or interpret rather than instruct followers to engage in offline activity. Direct calls for real-world action are comparatively rare. Where calls for action do appear, they often reflect financial rather than political motives. A notable trend is the growing monetisation of larger AGE channels, including an increasing affinity for cryptocurrencies.⁵⁷ A common pattern involves channels promoting cryptocurrency investment as a quick route to profit, followed by referrals to purported investment experts for personalised advice. Similarly commercial are the frequent promotions of products via links to online shops, ranging from ideological literature and everyday items such as cooking pots to survival goods and alternative medical products marketed as panaceas. A recurring example is chlorine dioxide solution, which was promoted during the COVID-19 pandemic as an alternative to vaccination despite its well-documented harmful side effects and the fact that many marketed preparations exceed safe concentration levels.⁵⁸ As in the Austrian milieu, the online shop of the Kopp Verlag, offering

⁵⁶ Peter Hille, “German Far-right Group on Trial Over Coup Plans,” *Deutsche Welle*, 17 May 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-far-right-group-stands-trial/a-65647852>.

⁵⁷ Forschungsstelle BAG »Gegen Hass im Netz« feat. Pablo Jost, “Jeder wirbt für sich allein? Wie auf Telegram der Aufruhr zum Geschäft wird” [Everyone promoting themselves? How turmoil on Telegram is turning into business], *Machine Against the Rage*, Nr. 3 (Summer 2023), <https://machine-vs-rage.net/ausgabe-3/jeder-wirbt-fuer-sich-allein/>

⁵⁸ Reuters Fact Check, “Fact Check: Post falsely claims bleach can help dozens of health conditions,” *Reuters*, 15 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/post-falsely-claims-bleach-can-help-dozens-health-conditions-2024-02-15/>.

not only ideological literature but also alternative medicine and survival products, was, together with the online shop of AUF1, not only among the most frequently linked online shops but in fact among the most common out-links overall.

Mobilisation for demonstrations, a central dynamic of the AGE online milieu during the pandemic, has declined markedly. Many channels have ceased mobilisation entirely. Nevertheless, the milieu remains capable of attracting a notable number of participants to isolated events. In 2024, for instance, the Querdenken movement mobilised more than 12,000 participants for a demonstration in Berlin commemorating the first major pandemic-era protest.⁵⁹ By contrast, a similar demonstration in Berlin in 2025, attended by neo-Nazis and other right-wing extremist organisations such as Compact Magazin, a far-right political magazine which was briefly banned in 2024, and representatives of the AfD, drew only around 850 participants.⁶⁰ The only larger channel that continues to mobilise regularly for demonstrations is operated by the aforementioned small party Free Saxons. In 2025, the party organised demonstrations with several hundred participants.⁶¹ However, given the party's close overlap with the neo-Nazi and broader right-wing extremist milieu since its inception, it is difficult to assess whether such mobilisation should be attributed primarily to AGE dynamics or to the organised far-right, although Free Saxons continues to reference sovereigntist and pandemic-related themes.

A number of smaller coordination channels continue to promote demonstrations and other offline events. Many such gatherings are framed as so-called *Spaziergänge*, a term popularised during the pandemic to describe informal walks or promenades when formal demonstrations were temporarily restricted for public health reasons. Available footage and reports suggest that these events usually attract only a few dozen participants at most. A number of established sovereigntist Reichsbürger groups also mobilise for demonstrations, lectures, and recurring in-person meetings. Events organised by these groups often require advance registration and a modest fee, with details such as the venue disclosed only to confirmed participants.

Overall, overtly violent rhetoric or explicit calls for illegal activity are less frequent in larger channels. In many large chat groups, administrators appear conscious of legal boundaries and enforce “house rules” urging followers not to incriminate themselves. Whether this reflects genuine moderation within the milieu or a deterrent effect resulting from the prospect of criminal prosecution remains unclear. By contrast, a subset of smaller channels and private groups, often with sovereigntist Reichsbürger or openly extremist backgrounds, display markedly more hostile rhetoric. Politicians are frequently labelled criminals, barbarians, or murderers. Non-white ethnic groups are disparaged, and immigrants, particularly Muslims, are portrayed as an invading threat. These channels regularly disseminate extreme antisemitic content, including Holocaust denial and conspiratorial claims that Jews orchestrated World War II to suppress the German people. Within this subset, there is notable support for individuals affiliated with United Patriots (*Vereinte Patrioten*), a group inspired by QAnon and Reichsbürger ideology that plotted a violent coup attempt, whose arrested members are now portrayed as political prisoners.⁶²

59 Sebastian Leber, “Verschwörungsgläubige feiern in Brandenburg: Das „Friedensfest“ der Putinfreunde” [Conspiracy theorists celebrate in Brandenburg: the ‘peace festival’ of Putin’s friends], *Tagesspiegel*, 1 June 2025, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/verschwörungsglaubige-feiern-in-brandenburg-das-friedensfest-der-putinfreunde-13784488.html>.

60 Dominik Lenze, “850 statt 10.000 Teilnehmer,” *Tagesspiegel*, 24 May 2025, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/querdenker-aufzug-lauft-durch-berlin-mitte-tausende-teilnehmer-zu-querdenken-demonstration-erwartet-650-kommen-13747960.html>.

61 MDR Sachsen, “Rechte Demo Der ‘Freien Sachsen’ Stößt Auf Protest” [After racist advertisement in Sebnitz official gazette: Solidarity demonstration by ‘Free Saxons’], *Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk*, April 29 2025, <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen/dresden/dippoldiswalde-sebnitz/demo-rechte-linke-amtsblatt-rassistisch-100.html>.

62 Bärbara Molas, Anne Craanen, Sabrina Tripodi, Kacper Rekawek, and Thomas Renard, *Anti-Government Threats and their Transnational Connections*. (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2024), <https://icct.nl/publication/anti-government-threats-and-their-transnational-connections>.

Some sovereigntist groups engage in real-world activism that does not necessarily involve physical confrontation. They openly promote paper-based obstruction tactics, often described as “paper terrorism,” by sharing legal templates and guidance for mass submissions to authorities and courts. A recurring theme in these channels is the rejection of German law, leading adherents to advocate withholding taxes or fines and resisting official measures such as police checks. Historically, violent incidents within the Reichsbürger spectrum have often occurred during confrontations with police, most notably during house searches and traffic stops.

Yet the relative absence of explicit incitement to violence in larger channels should not be interpreted as an all-clear regarding offline threats. Despite an action plan for their systematic disarmament, a significant number of sovereigntists still legally possess weapons.⁶³ The infiltration of security authorities by members of the AGE milieu is also alarming. In 2024, intelligence assessments identified 50 individuals linked to the milieu working within German security agencies.⁶⁴ Moreover, as outlined earlier, Germany has witnessed two terrorist plots linked to the milieu. In both cases, the operational planning occurred in smaller private groups.⁶⁵ For example, while it remains unknown whether Telegram played a role in his radicalisation, an adherent of AGE ideas was arrested in November 2025 for running a dark-web platform that sought donations to finance murder-for-hire plots against German politicians.⁶⁶ Given the strict non-interaction rule adhered to in this research for ethical reasons, the continued existence of comparable groups cannot be determined with certainty.

Online Presence

In contrast to the limited offline mobilisation, the German AGE milieu manifests primarily online, especially on Telegram. Based on ethnographic monitoring of 100 channels deemed among the most influential within the milieu, the following section outlines the structure of this ecosystem. According to an analysis using the social listening tool TGStat, most accounts created during the pandemic in 2020 or 2021, or in a few cases slightly earlier, experienced exponential follower growth during that period. The follower numbers of most channels peaked in the summer of 2022, regardless of their exact size. Since then, most accounts have lost between one third and one quarter of their followers. Average views have fallen even more significantly. Most channels now register between 10,000 and 20,000 post views per month, whereas some larger accounts peaked at well over 100,000 monthly views. Despite this decline, a robust online ecosystem persists. The largest channels still exceed 100,000 followers, with the previously mentioned Austrian alternative media outlet AUF1 currently the largest. It is followed by the accounts of former Russia correspondent Boris Reitschuster and former television presenter Eva Herman with 226,000 and 196,000 followers, respectively. Around a dozen additional channels have more than 100,000 followers, and several dozen more have follower counts in the tens of thousands, including many with well over 50,000.

Overall, the German AGE ecosystem on Telegram is characterised by a high degree of interconnection. Most accounts, regardless of type, frequently forward content from other AGE-aligned channels. Some accounts exist primarily to distribute forwarded posts or screenshots.

63 “Innere Sicherheit: Fast 1.500 Rechtsextreme Und Reichsbürger Dürfen Waffen Besitzen” [Internal security: Almost 1,500 right-wing extremists and Reich citizens are permitted to possess weapons], *Die Zeit*, 20 February 2025, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2025-02/reichsbuerger-rechtsextremisten-waffenbesitz-kleine-anfrage>.

64 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Lagebericht Rechtsextremisten in Sicherheitsbehörden* [Status report on right-wing extremists in security agencies], (Cologne: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, November 2025), <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/rechtsextremismus/2025-11-lagebericht-rechtsextremisten-in-sicherheitsbehoerden.html>.

65 Ronny Junghans, “„Vereinte Patrioten“: Vom Protest zum Terror – Die Radikalisierung von Thomas O.” [United Patriots: From Protest to Terror – The Radicalisation of Thomas O.], *Belltower News*, 2022, <https://www.belltower.news/vereinte-patrioten-vom-protest-zum-terror-die-radikalisierung-von-thomas-o-130453/>.

66 Timothy Jones, “Germany: Man Arrested for Darknet Site Targeting Politicians,” *Deutsche Welle*, 11 November 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-man-arrested-for-darknet-site-targeting-politicians/a-74696784>.

Ethnographic observations show that several larger alternative media and influencer accounts are particularly influential, as their posts are frequently redistributed by smaller channels. Despite this, the nature and purpose of the accounts differ considerably. Six types can be broadly distinguished, namely: (1) professional alternative media, (2) individual influencers, (3) general news accounts, (4) single-issue accounts, (5) coordination accounts, and (6) chat groups. The first five types are predominantly intended for passive information consumption whereas group chats serve as forums for active exchange among adherents of AGE narratives.

Professional alternative media play a central role within the German AGE ecosystem. These channels seek to emulate established media outlets by maintaining editorial structures and offering a wide range of content, including news, opinion pieces, and interviews in written and audio-visual formats. In practice, however, their publications lack journalistic standards, display a strong ideological bias, and often include disinformation aimed at shaping public opinion rather than enabling a neutral, fact-based assessment. According to our social network analysis, professional alternative media are among the most frequently shared accounts within the German AGE environment. By far the largest outlet is AUF1. Although originally based in Austria, AUF1 has increasingly tailored its reporting to Germany, frequently covering German politics, particularly the AfD, alongside Austrian topics, and has opened a second office in Berlin. The prominent role of AUF1 in the milieu is further underlined by the fact that the German intelligence service announced in its 2024 report that it has begun monitoring the outlet as a domestic extremist threat within the category of right-wing extremism.⁶⁷ Another frequently mentioned alternative media outlet is Compact Magazin, which publishes a monthly magazine and runs multiple social media accounts, including on Telegram. Its content leans strongly towards the far-right, indicating an overlap between parts of the AGE milieu and the broader right-wing extremist landscape. Other outlets, including NIUS and Junge Freiheit, adopt a far-right-populist tone without necessarily crossing into extremism. Their content often highlights cases of migrant violence, Islamist terrorism, or alleged economic decline, reinforcing xenophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-government sentiments.

Individual influencers constitute another major category and rank among the most forwarded accounts in our analysis. The most prominent are the aforementioned Boris Reitschuster and Eva Herman. Many others have follower counts in the tens of thousands or over 100,000. Having gained prominence during the pandemic, these influencers initially focused on conspiratorial and disinformation-driven COVID-19 content and have since shifted towards increasingly pro-Russian and far-right populist narratives. Some are highly active, posting or forwarding hundreds of messages daily. As their popularity has grown, numerous accounts have professionalised by launching dedicated websites, expanding across multiple social media and streaming platforms, offering diverse content formats such as live streams and podcasts, and, in some cases, employing small support teams. Many are well connected, regularly cross-promoting each other and forming key nodes of the former Querdenken movement. Most operate under their real names, though some use aliases including terms such as *news* or *TV* to imply media authority. Monetisation is widespread, including through advertising dubious investment schemes, selling products, or soliciting donations.

Wannabe news accounts and single-issue accounts are less prominent in terms of forwarded content but feature regularly in our network analysis. News accounts frame daily events through an AGE lens, presenting issues such as climate change as yet another fabricated conspiracy akin to COVID-19, allegedly designed to impose global surveillance, or claiming the war in Gaza is a false-flag operation. Such accounts attempt to present themselves as larger alternative

⁶⁷ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024*. (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, 2025), <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2025-06-10-verfassungsschutzbericht-2024.html>

media outlets by adopting professional-sounding names or logos. However, since they typically lack a professional online presence in the form of a website and largely confine themselves to forwarding content from more established channels, these accounts appear to be one-person operations aspiring to greater prominence. Nevertheless, they still attract tens of thousands of followers.

Single-issue channels are predominantly focused on QAnon-related content, though many have broadened their scope to include general far-right populist themes. A few channels continue to focus solely on anti-vaccination narratives or esoteric and spiritual content; however, the latter appear only loosely connected to the wider AGE ecosystem. Unlike influencers or alternative media outlets, the administrators behind these channels usually remain anonymous.

Coordination accounts were initially created during the pandemic to organise and promote demonstrations against governmental COVID-19 measures. Now, they also advertise lectures, workshops, and offline events with ideological relevance to AGE, including pseudo-historical presentations supporting sovereigntist claims or esoteric self-improvement workshops.

Finally, a small number of actual chat groups exist within the ecosystem. In contrast to other channel types, chat groups serve as interactive hubs for adherents. The rhetoric is markedly more hostile and often more overtly violent, aligning with the findings from previously foiled Reichsbürger plots, such as those involving the groups United Patriots and Patriotic Union, where radicalisation took place largely within Telegram group interactions. Access is generally by private invitation, meaning this study may not fully capture their current dynamics.

Russian and Extreme-Right Connections/Leanings

The German AGE ecosystem online also exhibits connections to other milieus, most notably the German right-wing extremist scene and firmly pro-Russian networks. However, this relationship is not reciprocal: while AGE channels occasionally forward content from these actors or otherwise express support for them, there is no observable evidence that the reverse occurs.

Pro-Russian sentiment within the German AGE milieu is evident not only in discourse but also in the close ties to explicitly pro-Kremlin and official Russian accounts. German-language outlets of Russian state-media Sputnik and RT DE are widely shared, often via forwarded posts, links or screenshots due to EU geo-blocking. The account of the Russian Embassy in Berlin is likewise among the most frequently forwarded sources. Individual pro-Kremlin influencers, such as of the aforementioned Alina Lipp and Thomas Röper, also have substantial reach, with 174,000 and 127,000 followers respectively, and several channels exceeding 100,000 followers. Occasionally, AGE channels even share content from Russian *Z-bloggers* (individuals who promote pro-war stances in Russia, mostly active on Telegram).

With regard to the broad far-right, AfD-related accounts are among the most frequently forwarded, although the far-right milieu does not engage in reciprocal sharing. Nonetheless, some channels combine both AGE and explicitly extremist content, illustrating the fluid and permeable boundaries between the two. A notable example is the channel of the small party Freie Sachsen, active primarily in Saxony, which was founded during the pandemic by a coalition of local COVID-19 sceptics, neo-Nazi figures, and far-right activists. From the outset, it has propagated both AGE and extremist narratives. Similarly, the account of Kopp Verlag, which emerged as a major distributor of conspiratorial, esoteric, and extremist literature during the pandemic, serves as a bridging actor between these milieus. The German AGE online ecosystem is not limited to

Telegram; other platforms also play a significant role. Most larger AGE channels on Telegram, whether operated by individuals or collectives, also maintain a presence on X (formerly Twitter). Follower counts on X are generally lower than on Telegram, but given that X's overall user base is substantially larger, reportedly two to three times that of Telegram, exposure to AGE content on X may ultimately be greater.⁶⁸ On X, German AGE accounts frequently follow broader far-right populist politicians, media outlets, and influencers. As such, X may function as a gateway platform: users who first encounter AGE content there, particularly those already receptive to far-right populist narratives, may then migrate into the more closed ecosystem of Telegram.

During the ethnographic monitoring of Telegram, the research account also repeatedly encountered links to TikTok posts. Compared with Telegram and X, TikTok accounts appear less professional and are predominantly rank-and-file, producing amateurish user-generated content that often intermingles with private material, and functions primarily as a promotional tool.

Fascination With the Far-Right

In contrast to the widespread perception within the AGE milieu that German politicians and parties across the political spectrum are at best incompetent and at worst corrupt or malicious, there is near-unanimous support for the AfD across most AGE channels and groups on Telegram. The party adopted COVID-19-sceptical and anti-vaccination positions, with some party members actively spreading conspiracy theories about the virus.⁶⁹ Over the past years, the AfD has also repeatedly taken a pro-Russian stance, criticising sanctions against Russia and rejecting arms deliveries to Ukraine.⁷⁰ Furthermore, AfD politicians have drawn attention on multiple occasions for promoting well-known (far-right) conspiracy theories, including the Great Replacement and the Great Reset.⁷¹

Within the AGE milieu, the AfD is widely regarded as the sole political vehicle for change, and official party content is frequently circulated. The channel of Björn Höcke, one of the AfD's chief ideologues and arguably its most radical figure, was among the most frequently shared. In the run-up to the federal election in February 2025, numerous channels, except for a few firmly sovereigntist ones that reject elections altogether as illegitimate, framed the vote as a "fateful election" and the last chance to avert disaster, urging their followers to vote for the AfD. At the same time, many channels promoted self-victimising narratives, alleging that the AfD was being disadvantaged by other political actors, spreading claims of electoral fraud, and portraying public debates about a potential party ban as an attempt to suppress the will of the people.

At the international level, the monitored channels display similar enthusiasm for Donald Trump. He is celebrated for his alleged struggle against the Deep State, frequently labelled the *President of Peace*, and portrayed as the *liberator of Europe* who deserves a "monument" for fighting an allegedly oppressive left-wing elite on the continent. Screenshots of his posts on Truth Social circulate widely, and his governing style is applauded as a defence of freedom, contrasted with what is portrayed as a leftist, "woke" dictatorship ruling Europe. US designation of Antifa as a terrorist organisation are often praised as blueprints for Germany. More recently, however,

68 For X see Nathalie Roehl, "Social Media Statistiken Für Deutschland (Update 2025)" [Social Media Statistics for Germany (Update 2025)], *Meltwater*, 11 September 2025, <https://www.meltwater.com/de/blog/social-media-marketing-statistiken/>; For Telegram see Sina Koch, "Social Media im Jahr 2025: Aktuelle Nutzerzahlen" [Social media in 2025: Current user figures], *KONTOR4 Agentur Für Neue Medien*, December 2, 2025, <https://www.kontor4.de/social-media-agentur/aktuelle-social-media-nutzerzahlen/>.

69 Patrick Gensing, "Corona-Pandemie: Wie Die AfD Angst Vor Impfungen Schürt" [Coronavirus pandemic: How the AfD is fuelling fear of vaccinations], *tagesschau.de*, 13 October 2021, <https://www.tagesschau.de/faktenfinder/afd-angst-impfungen-101.html>.

70 Julian Lanchès, "From Radicalisation to Designation: The AfD's Extremist Turn," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 13 June 2025, <https://icct.nl/publication/radicalisation-designation-afds-extremist-turn>.

71 Pia Lamberty and Josef Holnburger, "Verschwörungserzählungen und die AfD," [Conspiracy narratives and the AfD], *Center Für Monitoring, Analyse Und Strategie*, March 2022. <https://cemas.io/blog/verschoerungserzaehlungen-und-die-afd/>.

a few channels have begun to express mild criticism of the US, particularly in response to their involvement in Iran and the US capture of President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, which seemingly contradict the America-first agenda of the new administration.

The Netherlands

by Maria Zotova and Menso Hartgers

General overview

Previous ICCT work indicated that the so-called anti-institutional extremism in the Netherlands (as AGE is referred by national security agencies) is a heterogenous phenomenon consisting of two major elements, namely: general anti-institutionalists, largely non-violent, and sovereign citizens, aiming to organise parallel communities/societies.⁷² From 2024 onwards some members of the latter category have been charged with terrorism for the first time, emphasising the violent threat that can derive from this community. This concerned ten suspects arrested at different times in 2024, eight of which were self-proclaimed sovereign citizens.⁷³ Those individuals urged for the establishment of autonomous societies with parallel systems of ‘sheriffs’. The suspected members possessed firearms and stood accused of preparing a terrorist plot.⁷⁴ In November 2024, the court ruled the group criminal rather than terrorist, and the accused were sentenced for up to 2 years in prison.⁷⁵ In June 2025, another eight sovereign citizens were arrested on charges of preparing a bomb attack against the mayor of Leeuwarden.⁷⁶

The General Intelligence and Security Service (*Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst*, AIVD), the Dutch Intelligence service, together with the police and the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (*Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid*, NCTV), estimated in 2024 that the number of sovereigns is in the “tens of thousands”,⁷⁷ warranting concern and a need for continued attention to the group.

For the purpose of this report, 31 Dutch-language Telegram channels and chats were studied with qualitative ethnographic monitoring, supplemented by the broader social network analysis, and qualitative observations of connections of these chats with parts of the movement on YouTube, X, or websites. While the majority of the observed Telegram channels function as online platforms for sharing information and discussion, others nonetheless spill-over into the offline realm of kinetic action. These range from admins of accounts performing ‘political actions’ such as trying to climb the roof of public broadcasting organisation,⁷⁸ to urging the members to vote a certain way or attend a demonstration. Many of the identified channels also feature advertisement or direct forms of monetisation (asking for donations, selling webinars, and even direct products like homemade herbal medicines).

At the centre of the AGE network are online channels that focus on reposting and news-spreading information from various parts of the network, attempting to bring the narratives together. Namely, by far the most connected channels are two broad news-sharing channels titled around

72 https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2024-06/FFO-Public%20Report%20English_Final%201.pdf, p. 15.

73 Openbaar Ministerie, “Tiende verdachte radicale soevereinen aangehouden” [Tenth suspected radical sovereign arrested], December 10, 2024, <https://www.om.nl/organisatie/landelijk-parket/nieuws/2024/12/10/tiende-verdachte-radicale-soevereinen-aangehouden>.

74 General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), *AIVD Annual Report 2024 (Den Haag: AIVD, 2025)*, <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2025/07/04/annual-report-2024>.

75 NOS Nieuws, “Celstraffen voor radicale soevereinen, groep als crimineel bestempeld [Prison sentences for radical sovereigns, group declared criminal]”, *NOS.nl*, November 28, 2025.

76 Nos Nieuws, “Soevereinen spraken over aanslag met autobom op woning burgemeester Buma” [Sovereigns spoke about the car bomb attack on Mayor Buma’s home], *NOS*, September 9, 2025, <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2581807-soevereinen-spraken-over-aanslag-met-autobom-op-woning-burgemeester-buma>.

77 NOS Nieuws, “AIVD: tienduizenden ‘soevereinen’, sommigen inmiddels ook bereid tot geweld” [AIVD: tens of thousands of ‘sovereigns’, some now also prepared to use violence], *NOS*, April 9, 2024, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2516120-aivd-tienduizenden-soevereinen-sommigen-inmiddels-ook-bereid-tot-geweld>.

78 Marit Nube, “Politie verhindert ‘fakkeldrager’ Max om NOS-gebouw te bezetten” [Police prevent ‘torchbearer’ Max from occupying NOS building], *Nieuw Rechts*, October 3, 2025, <https://nieuwrechts.nl/106796-politie-verhindert-fakkeldrager-max-van-den-berg-om-nos-gebouw-te-bezetten>.

resistance. It is through those two central nodes that other communities and discourses connect to the Dutch landscape. One of these channels is even considered a *super-spreader* through the SNA analysis (see Annex), i.e. one of the most active and connected channels in Europe observed by this report, spreading the content of other channels from all over the European and American AGE milieus rather than producing their own content. Channels with a more explicit conspiratorial mindset, particularly beliefs in a “paedo-sadistic satanic elite” form their own interconnected sub-part of the landscape. The majority of channels are oriented towards forwarding news pieces and commentary from different channels or platforms: X is often used, but also Rumble, YouTube, or alternative media. The following sections will proceed by focusing on several qualitatively significant points examining narratives, structures, and offline manifestations of the network.

Narratives

Since the anti-institutional landscape blossomed during the COVID-19 pandemic as a force of opposition to the public health, most of the milieu continues to reference both COVID-19 and other issues of health and wellness in 2025. Additionally, many of the posts contain views characterised by antisemitism and anti-Israel attitude; nationalism; spirituality and religious undertones; radical right-wing opinions but opposition to mainstream right wing parties; and also anti-Palestinian and anti-liberal opinions. This anti-everything attitude and heterogeneity of discussed conspiracies⁷⁹ make AGE attractive to a variety of people but also lead to a striking incoherence in views and a lack of a united position on political issues. The conspiracy beliefs range from chemtrails theories to AI-cell biohacking to the alleged hand of Satan or antichrist behind events.⁸⁰

Spirituality, Religion, and Symbolism

Religious undertones form one of the elements which attempt to hold together the heterogeneous ‘anti-everything’ milieu together. In the Netherlands, some even refer to these tendencies as “conspirituality”.⁸¹ There are two primary axes: a more esoteric New-Age spirituality, which combines loosely elements of different religions and practices (Hinduism, Buddhism, Paganism, Western psychotherapy, Tarot, etc.); and Christianity in which literal reading of religious texts can provide support for believers’ anti-elite conspiratorial narratives.⁸²

One defining characteristic of New-Age spirituality is its emphasis on self-spirituality, tapping in and growing the divine within one authentic self through demolishing the social ego. This directly collides with the “real” world whereby societal structures and institutions are inherently seen as fake, superfluous, and evil.⁸³ Such thinking appears significant particularly in the Dutch context where, according to some data, up to 29 percent of Dutch citizens are estimated to share some

79 Isabelle Frens, Jelle van Buuren, and Edwin Bakker, “Rallying Around Empty Signifiers: Understanding and Defining Anti-Government Protest in the Netherlands”, *Perspective on Terrorism* 17, no.2 (2023): 6-74, <https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-06/PT%20-%20Vol%20XVII%2C%20Issue%20II%20-%20June%202023%20A3.pdf>.

80 Chemtrails: condensed water vapor, contrails, believed by some to be visible traces of chemical weapons released for purposes of mind control; AI-cell biohacking: an idea that using AI technologies human cells can be manipulated in beneficial or malicious purposes, for example, to radically prolong life expectancy; satanism and antichrist: usually refers to a belief in a powerful secret group or society that practice satanic rituals or run cults to control world events and preparing a return of the ‘Antichrist’, a personification of evil in Christianity aiming to destroy the world.

81 Charlotte Ward, and David Voas, “The Emergence of Conspirituality.” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26, no. 1 (2011): 103–21. doi:10.1080/13537903.2011.539846.

82 Pieter Nanninga, and Fleur Valk, *Anti-institutionele Tendensen in Nederland [Anti-institutional tendencies in the Netherlands]* (Groningen: University of Groningen, 2024), <https://www.kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/documenten/2025/04/24/anti-institutionele-tendensen-in-nederland>; Walker, Brooklyn, and Abigail Vegter. “Christ, Country, and Conspiracies? Christian Nationalism, Biblical Literalism, and Belief in Conspiracy Theories.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 62, no. 2 (May 2023): 278–292. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12836>.

83 Stef Aupers, and Dick Houtman, “Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality.” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21, no. 2 (2006): 201–22. doi:10.1080/13537900600655894.

of these ideas.⁸⁴ In the AGE milieu, it is illustrated notably through events featuring meditation, shamans, gurus, reposted quotes of wisdom from Buddhist monks and Native Americans,⁸⁵ but also through an emphasis on “authentic folk traditions” like the “volk Germaniten,” a Germanic nativist anti-institutional group.⁸⁶

In comparison to ICCT’s previous report,⁸⁷ the theme of Christianity has gained prominence, at times completely overshadowing the spiritual origins of the communities. Seemingly, only one of the observed channels explicitly positioned themselves as Christian Evangelist. Several others reposted pro-Christianity positions on occasion, especially to contrast it with Judaism in more antisemitic posts. However, the central channel in the social network analysis of the Dutch milieu eagerly spreads Christian materials. This underscores the point that Christian symbolism – presenting the political struggle as the struggle of divine versus devilish, talks of Apocalypse or Divine battle, and discussions of satanic elite – has been present in the movement especially during COVID-19, when existential anxieties were high, and was since adopted to discussions of other issues.⁸⁸ The increasing Evangelisation of the US AGE milieu⁸⁹ could also possibly play a role, by ricochet, in the process of growing prominence of Christian themes in the Dutch AGE milieu.

Party Alignment and Convergence with the Far-Right

In the lead-up to the Dutch general elections at the end of October 2025, there was not a clear position with regard to political parties amongst the Dutch AGE. There are highly diverse views, dominated by a rejection of mainstream parties with a minority rejecting all parties, although the milieu leans overall towards far-right parties and ideas, namely the radical right Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) and the radical populist party Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*, FvD).⁹⁰

FvD’s members share many anti-institutional narratives, notably conspiracy thinking. For instance, in 2022 the party’s then-leader stated that the country is governed by “lizards”, a popular conspiracy online.⁹¹ This strategy yielded support from the milieu throughout the years, as FvD became generally described by most of the channels as the only party that is “tough enough”, while PVV’s leader Geert Wilders was perceived as an agent of Israel and a participant of “satanic ritual abuse”. Similarly, when the PVV’s cabinet fell in June 2025, there was no great sadness among the members of observed Telegram channels, just caustic remarks on the PVV’s failure and the party becoming the latest pawn in the alleged “puppet show” of the hated system.

84 Frank Jespers, “From New Age to New Spiritualities: Secular Sacralizations on the Borders of Religion” in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* edited by Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus (London: Routledge, 2013): 197- 202.

85 Pieter Nanninga, and Fleur Valk, *Anti-institutionele*

Tendensen in Nederland [Anti-institutional tendencies in the Netherlands] (Groningen: University of Groningen, 2024), <https://www.kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/documenten/2025/04/24/anti-institutionele-tendensen-in-nederland>.

86 Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. „Reichsbürger“ und „Selbstverwalter“ – Staatsfeinde, Geschäftemacher, Verschwörungstheoretiker [“Reich Citizens” and ‘Self-Administrators’ – Enemies of the State, Profiteers, Conspiracy Theorists”]. June 2023, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/reichsbuerger-und-selbstverwalter/2023-06-reichsbuerger-und-selbstverwalter-staatsfeinde-geschaeftemacher-verschwoerungstheoretiker.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=20.

87 Molas, Bàrbara, Anne Craanen, Sabrina Tripodi, Kacper Rękawek, and Thomas Renard. *Anti-Government Threats and their Transnational Connections. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (Den Haag: ICCT, 2024)*, <https://icct.nl/publication/anti-government-threats-and-their-transnational-connections>.

88 Pieter Nanninga, and Fleur Valk, *Anti-institutionele Tendensen in Nederland [Anti-institutional tendencies in the Netherlands]* (Groningen: University of Groningen, 2024), <https://www.kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/documenten/2025/04/24/anti-institutionele-tendensen-in-nederland>.

89 Peter Smith, “Trump energizes conservative Christians with religious policies and assaults on cultural targets”, PBS, August 7, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-energizes-conservative-christians-with-religious-policies-and-assaults-on-cultural-targets>.

90 Simon Otjes, “The fight on the right: What drives voting for the Dutch Freedom Party and for the Forum for Democracy?”, *Acta Politica* 56, no.1 (2021), 130-162. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-020-00150-y>. See also: PVV – Party for Freedom (Dutch: *Partij voor de Vrijheid*); FvD – Forum for Democracy (Dutch: *Forum voor Democratie*)

91 Bibi van Ginkel, Fulco van Deventer, “Responding to Anti-Institutionalism in the Netherlands: Challenges and Opportunities for (Local) Policymakers”, *ICCT (2024): p.22*, <https://icct.nl/publication/responding-anti-institutionalism-netherlands-challenges-and-opportunities-local>.

The idea of a new “truly right” (*echt rechts*) government after the 2025 Dutch general elections was supported by multiple channels – sometimes supporting PVV as a strategic vote. Others criticised both FvD and PVV for their representatives’ alleged leniency towards “Muslims and paedophiles”, and called PVV a Zionist entity. Others urged to refrain from voting altogether. Even within the same channel, authored by one person, it appeared that political preference could change rapidly. Following the electoral victory of the liberal-centrist party D66 (Democrats 66), online comments were heavily negative. In spite of the relatively decent results of the PVV (second largest party) and FvD (rising from three to seven seats out of the 150 seats available), posts critical of the country’s future overflowed the channels, some urging on the overhaul of the electoral system, some distrustful of results’ fairness, and others claiming it does not matter who wins, since “World Economic Forum puppets will comply in any case”, and that those who voted have “relinquished their independency and power”.

Similarities between the far-right and the anti-institutional extremists had been observed before,⁹² but the recent years saw an increasing convergence between the two. Particularly, the issue of immigration has become more central to anti-government extremists, as COVID-19-related worries began to subside.

The original AGE movement had been more open-minded under the influence of New Age spirituality, inviting non-Dutch ‘gurus’ for events and sympathising with alternative ways of living. As pointed out by the AIVD, anti-institutionalists have a more inclusive conception of the in-group community compared to the far-right, referring to “the people” overall instead of one’s own race or ethnicity.⁹³ Yet, traditional Christian and European ways of living have become more and more central to discussions in the anti-institutional channels too. Words like *migration* and *refugee* started to appear systematically in the channels only in 2023 and 2024, their prevalence growing significantly in the last two years. In several channels, there was no mention of these issues prior to 2024 at all.

In the majority of the online channels observed, we could identify some elements of the far-right ideology and a relative increase in significance of anti-immigration and nativist stances. The political position on issues outside of the Netherlands is similarly incoherent. While there is an agreement on anti-elite and anti-EU sentiments, views on US President Trump are ambivalent. Meanwhile, the assassination of US conservative influencer Charlie Kirk has been met with unifying sadness, and conspiracies on his death instantly emerged. For example, some claimed that Israel, US spies, or Satanists and Masons were behind the shooting – all offering speculative proof beyond the “media lies”. At the same time, the channel that blamed Trump’s spies for assassinating Kirk, has also posted that Kirk was himself an agent of Israel. Following the events, his death is now listed alongside other classic conspiracies like those about 9/11, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, or Martin Luther King. One post in particular blamed “the Jews” for LGBTQI+ rights, deaths in Russia, Kirk’s assassination, Zionism, Satanism, atheism, climate change scam, installing communism in Russia and China, etc. This quick absorption of a new event shows the malleability of discourse, and how easy it seems to find a uniting thread between all perceived conspiracies – since the truth is allegedly hidden by the same institutions and media in each case.

92 General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), “Anti-institutioneel extremisme” [Anti-Institutional extremism], AIVD, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/extremisme/anti-institutioneel-extremisme>.

93 General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), “Anti-institutioneel extremisme,” AIVD, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/extremisme/anti-institutioneel-extremisme>.

Offline Manifestations

Outside of observed online communities, some AGE are active in the offline domain for community building and protest – overwhelmingly non-violently.⁹⁴ From the time of COVID-19 lockdown measures, small groups congregated at a central Museum square in Amsterdam every Sunday for “coffee drinking” – a core group of 10-15 people continue to meet up at the same place since then – with the same anti-COVID-19 stickers on their bicycles.⁹⁵ When one of the movement’s original leaders and anti-COVID-19 protest organisers, Michel Reijnga, passed away during summer of 2025, the online channels urged people to congregate for “coffee drinking” in his commemoration. It directed the followers to the same place and, this time, around 400 people attended.⁹⁶

Additionally, some of the channels urged people to join anti-immigration protests in The Hague in September 2025, which escalated to vandalism – particularly against the central-liberal D66’s party office – and violence against the police.⁹⁷ The AGE online channels, however, did not seem to support this violence and blamed a small group of provocateurs, police, and Antifa for it. Simultaneously, all other protests were seen as useless or harmful. Red line protests, which gathered hundreds of thousands people across the Netherlands throughout 2025 urging the Dutch government to support Palestine, are criticised as “Jew hate” (although some disagree with how bad is “Jew hate” in the comments) and as “woke agenda” of GL/PVDA (Groen Links/Partij van de Arbeid – a united Green-Labour party).⁹⁸ Even farmer protests, one of the original sources for the rise of AGE in the Netherlands, are criticised as “unhelpful as all others.”

In August 2025, 500 people protested in Vught, where the high security prison is located, against the arrest of a former lawyer Arno van Kessel. He is a sovereign citizen who was a board member of an organisation sceptical about the COVID-19 pandemic, Doctors for Truth, and a lawyer in a controversial group Recht Oprecht, which was suing the Dutch state, Bill Gates, Mark Rutte, Pfizer CEO, and others over alleged harm from COVID-19 vaccines.⁹⁹

Channels connected to a local geography – for example referencing in their name specifically northern provinces of Groningen and Drenthe – are smaller but organise meetings in bars, during dinners, as well as workshops, lectures, and garage sales. There exists a website with events all over the country with a Telegram channel accompanying each province (including Belgian Flanders),¹⁰⁰ but not all of them post regularly about new meetings. The themes of workshops include, for example, how to avoid paying taxes, or harass local councils. Already by the end of 2023, there was at least a hundred published court cases started by sovereign or anti-institutional citizens trying to either avoid paying taxes and debts, escape prosecution or harass and obstruct

94 General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), “Anti-institutioneel extremisme,” *AIVD*, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/extremisme/anti-institutioneel-extremisme>.

95 “Honderden mensen op Museumplein om Michel Reijnga te herdenken” [Hundreds of people at Museumplein to commemorate Michel Reijnga], *Hart van Nederland*, 27 July, 2025, <https://www.hartvannederland.nl/entertainment/bnrs/artikelen/noord-holland-amsterdam-mensen-museumplein-michel-reijnga-herdenken>.

96 Honderden mensen op Museumplein om Michel Reijnga te herdenken” [Hundreds of people at Museumplein to commemorate Michel Reijnga], *Hart van Nederland*, 27 July, 2025, <https://www.hartvannederland.nl/entertainment/bnrs/artikelen/noord-holland-amsterdam-mensen-museumplein-michel-reijnga-herdenken>; Door Frankema, “Koffie drinken op het Museumplein ter nagedachtenis aan Michel Reijnga,” *Stichting Vaccin Vrij*, July 25, 2025, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://stichtingvaccinvrij.nl/koffie-drinken-op-het-museumplein-ter-nagedachtenis-aan-michel-reijnga/>.

97 Nos Nieuws, “Minstens 30 aanhoudingen en twee gewonde agenten bij ‘ongekend geweld’ in Den Haag” [At least 30 arrests and two injured police officers in ‘unprecedented violence’ in The Hague], *NOS*, September 20, 2025, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2583352-minstens-30-aanhoudingen-en-twee-gewonde-agenten-bij-ongekend-geweld-in-den-haag>.

98 GroenLinks-PvdA, “Home,” *GroenLinks-PvdA*, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://groenlinkspvda.nl/>.

99 Ista van Galen, and Noël van Hooft, “Honderden mensen eisen bij gevangenis vrijlating van voormalig advocaat” [Hundreds of people by the prison demand release of former lawyer], *Omroep Brabant*, August 10, 2025, <https://www.omroepbrabant.nl/nieuws/4733332/honderden-mensen-eisen-bij-gevangenis-vrijlating-van-voormalig-advocaat>.

100 <https://www.wakkere-events.nl/>

governmental officials.¹⁰¹ One example was the case of a citizen who refused to pay a traffic fine, arguing he was exempted as a member of an indigenous Frisian Germanic tribe – Germaniten.¹⁰²

One channel, of relatively small audience, is engaged systematically in offline manifestations: for example, climbing the roof of state broadcast organisation blamed for upholding the paedosatanic elite, as well as joining anti-EU protests in Brussels.¹⁰³

In October 2025, a country-wide action was advertised across several channels. People were offered to meet up each in their province and meditate together at the same time in order to “manifest”, “shift their mind to a higher frequency” and “elevate their energy”. According to the organisers’ website, there were 5000 pre-registered participants. The website itself belongs to a capital-growing business registered in Bulgaria, that claims “our system is rotten” and offers paid trainings on how to earn more money in the world controlled by invisible Mason bankers.¹⁰⁴ Overall, most of the offline manifestations of the Dutch AGE milieu amount to public nuisance and bureaucratic burden on the state, since some members enter lengthy correspondence to argument why they have rights but no obligations to the state.

Transnational Connections

International narratives’ adoption is facilitated in the Dutch AGE milieu through forwarding of information from the US and Germany, relying on the multilingualism of the audience. In practice, foreign channels are connected to the Dutch network through central news-sharing and reposting channels.

Outgoing connections mostly tie the Netherlands with Belgium – specifically the Belgian QAnon Telegram group. Some parts of anti-institutional milieus are connected with Germany through the idea of being *volk Germaniten*, a nation with Germanic roots – communities that unite people in western Germany and northeastern Netherlands, sometimes with separatist beliefs.¹⁰⁵ At least four events were organised in the Netherlands with invited German speakers on the topic of Germaniten as belonging to an indigenous tribe. Some Dutch activists regularly travel to Brussels to take part in anti-EU actions like burning the EU flag. Another initiative offered to establish an off-grid community in Hungary, whose government is respected by the milieu for its opposition to Brussels.

One significant additional foreign influence is the Russian dis- and misinformation which resonates with anti-institutional movements in the Netherlands and Belgium. Channels such as *Intel Slava* are used as a source for world news from Gaza to Serbia, or for occasionally elevating the image of Russian military strength. The NCTV states that the Netherlands is not the primary aim of Russia and its proxies, but due to the free flow of information and interconnections between different national communities, the Netherlands suffers indirect damage stemming from Russian propaganda.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Luuk de Boer, “Soevereinen en autonomen in recht en rechtspraak” [Sovereign and Autonomous citizens in Law and Jurisprudence], *Nederlands Juristenblad* 5 (2024), https://www.njb.nl/media/nt4lduit/njb05_soevereinen-en-autonomen-in-recht-en-rechtspraak.pdf.

¹⁰² Court of Appeal Arnhem-Leeuwarden, ECLI:NL:GHARL:2023:6265, July 24, 2023, Rechtspraak.nl, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/details?id=ECLI:NL:GHARL:2023:6265>.

¹⁰³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdF9L_1ChP8

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.safecapital.eu/bewustzijnsvervel/>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.indigenesvolkgermaniten.org/nl/startseite-nederlands/>

¹⁰⁶ Nationaal Coördinator Terrorisbestrijding en Veiligheid (NCTV), “Themahoofdstuk: Toenemende Russische statelijke dreiging in Nederland” [Special Theme: Increasing Russian State Threat in the Netherlands], NCTV, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.nctv.nl/onderwerpen/d/dtn/themahoofdstuk-toenemende-russische-statelijke-dreiging-in-nederland>.

However, the reality on the ground could be slightly different: there exists a 4,000-subscribers channel focused on Russia and the war in Ukraine, authored by a Dutch national who moved to Donbass. With posts exclusively in Dutch, it is clearly aimed at a Dutch-speaking audience. He holds pro-Russian narratives, such as that “Russia holds its word and rebuilds Donbass”, but also participated in a conference “Our strength lies in Unity” organised by the Russian Trade Union Federation and the National Center for Public Diplomacy, together with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the occupied Crimea. He has expressed sceptical views on COVID-19 vaccines and supported conspiracy theories like the Great Reset. Moreover, sixteen of the observed 31 channels have reposted more than once from his channel since 2022, suggesting that the pro-Russian narratives resonate and disseminate effectively within Dutch AGE milieus.

Beyond Telegram

Some influential channels in the network are closed, and therefore not publicly accessible, though their content is consistently reposted by a plethora of other channels. This is something to consider in future research as there is a high chance that some important part of the network is not public. For example, the lawyer Youri Plate, banned from professional practice in 2023, still has a private channel from which materials are occasionally reposted. Others, following legal proceedings – such as aforementioned sovereigns¹⁰⁷ – have likely taken similar precautions. If there is a violent potential in the network, it could be potentially brewing in the closed part of the online ecosystem.

The landscape of anti-institutionalist thought and discussion in the Netherlands is not, however, confined to Telegram. There are also sizeable communities on X, Rumble, and YouTube (especially with podcasts and interviews), links to which are posted frequently on Telegram for discussion. Telegram channels thus have a unique function as an entry-point to outlets on other platforms. Curiously, there is even an instance of a LinkedIn blog with 60,000 subscribers, run by a man who was on trial in connection with allegedly harassing and doxing seven youth protection employees, which he believed to have been paedophiles.¹⁰⁸ One Dutch YouTube channel counting 120,000 subscribers – far more than any individual Telegram channel in the Netherlands – interviews ‘critical thinkers’ about their experiences of mystical occurrences, high frequencies, Epstein files, and COVID-19 vaccines. Moreover, it also features an interview the Russian Ambassador to the Netherlands. This serves as a demonstration of the range of the topics of interest in the milieu, as well as the attractiveness of such content, adjacent to the AGE beliefs.

¹⁰⁷ “Dutch prosecutors seek up to 7 years for “sovereigns” planning violent confrontation,” *NL Times*, October 27, 2025, <https://nltimes.nl/2025/10/27/dutch-prosecutors-seek-7-years-sovereigns-planning-violent-confrontation>.

¹⁰⁸ Tubantia, “Niels H. (36) uit Goor maakte niet alleen het leven van zijn ex-vrouw en kinderen tot een hel: ‘Ik leg ze allemaal om’” [Niels H. (36) from Goor not only made the lives of his ex-wife and children a living hell: ‘I’ll kill them all’], *Tubantia*, June 5, 2025, <https://www.tubantia.nl/hof-van-twente/niels-h-36-uit-goor-maakte-niet-alleen-het-leven-van-zijn-ex-vrouw-en-kinderen-tot-een-hel-ik-leg-ze-allemaal-om~a2d194b8/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>; and doxing charges: “I was exposing paedo’s and paedo’s are protected in the Netherlands.”

Sweden

by Morgan Finnsiö

Narrative Themes

The most important themes in AGE community discourse in Sweden include anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and promotion of alternative health; hostility towards so-called globalists at home and abroad in the form of the omnipresent Deep State; hatred of traditional media and, in particular, the public broadcasters; and support for President Vladimir Putin.

The Deep State at Home and Abroad, and the Globalist Cabal

An important belief of the AGE community is the existence of a Deep State – a semi-secret network of officials and their allies calling the shots, pursuing their own agenda, throttling the will of the people, and standing in the way of true democracy. For the Swedish AGE community, this is a concept directly derived from the US-based Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement, and is understood in very similar terms. A notable particularity is that in Sweden, the Deep State is thought to be virtually synonymous with the Social Democrats, here conceived not merely as a political party, but as a vast, shadowy apparatus of civil servants and officials loyal only to the party and not to the people or their elected representatives.¹⁰⁹

The idea that the Deep State in Sweden should be identified with the Social Democrats has gained currency not least because it has been repeatedly suggested by leading representatives of the influential Sweden Democrats (SD) party. SD have painted the Social Democrats as playing such a role in Swedish politics long before the emergence of the Deep State concept. After the 2022 elections in Sweden and subsequent formation of a right-wing coalition that for the first time gave the Sweden Democrats a role in government, the influential SD politician Kent Ekeröth used his powerful set of media platforms to urge the new government to purge the civil service. In particular, he focused on the heads of government agencies, claiming that “unless this ‘deep state’ is dealt with, it will obstruct the necessary work that must be done”. A year earlier, Ekeröth made unsupported claims to a far-right media outlet that Sweden’s Civil Contingencies Agency was spying on him, and upon being asked whether he had already had “the insight” that there exists a Deep State, Ekeröth answered: “That there exists a Deep State – this had already been understood since long ago. With all the civil servants, in all agencies, and all universities, and which is permeated by Social Democracy, which occupies every position /.../ I am convinced of that.”¹¹⁰

The Deep State concept has two different iterations or levels, however. While some are more concerned with the Social Democratic Deep State in Sweden, others go further and claim the Deep State in Sweden is merely one branch of a global, New World Order-type conspiracy, which is also referred to as the Deep State but here described as a worldwide, and explicitly *globalist*, entity. In this entity, the Swedish government would be merely one node or tributary.¹¹¹ In the discourse that sees the Deep State as a global entity, the United Nations is the Deep State’s outward edifice, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – usually referred to as Agenda 2030 – is considered to be the current operative strategy of these globalist forces, whose ultimate aim is the enslavement or even the extermination of most of humanity.

109 Siri Christiansen, “Deep state dupe: How Swedish fringe-fluencers copied the U.S. conspiracy theory”, *Logically Facts*, 28 March 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241104010732/https://www.logicallyfacts.com/en/analysis/deep-state-dupe-how-swedish-fringe-fluencers-copied-the-u.s.-conspiracy-theory> [Archived 2024-11-04; accessed 2025-11-24]

110 Morgan Finnsiö, “Myten om den djupa staten”, [The Myth of the Deep State], *Expo*, 29 June 2023, <https://expo.se/fordjupning/myten-om-den-djupa-staten/> [Accessed 2025-11-24]

111 *Ibid.*

The modern-day conspiracy theory of the Deep State is effectively the latest version of the old conspiracist fear of Illuminati, Freemasons and a New World Order – a shadowy cabal or secret society of elites ruling the world from behind the scenes. It also has strong similarities with the neo-Nazi belief in ZOG or *Zionist Occupied Government* – the Jewish world conspiracy – similarly conceived of as a global regime, but here governed by and serving the interests of “the Jews”. It should be noted that the implicit (and sometimes explicit) antisemitism of this narrative does not preclude support for Israel, which is sometimes expressed on AGE community platforms.

The Media as the Enemy

The AGE community considers the media, more specifically mainstream media or legacy media, and especially state media (the public broadcasters – Swedish Television, SVT and Swedish Radio, SR) to be little more than the propaganda arm of the Deep State, fully integrated into the establishment and the elite. Given that the AGE community depicts itself as fighting for the truth in a life-and-death informational war, it naturally considers the media to be their chief adversary.

The main charge repeated against media and those who work in it is that they are engaged in a deliberate and systematic cover-up of the truth about such things as the vaccines and the consequences of mass migration – as well as the systematic suppression of the voices of the AGE community, referring to an absence of such voices in established media. AGE actors have held several angry rallies outside the offices of the Swedish public broadcasting operators, and these anti-media protests have notably been some of the most successful in terms of mobilising sympathisers to physically participate.¹¹² The rhetoric of the community’s anti-media agitation, as heard in speeches and slogans and seen on protest placards, includes statements like “The media is the virus!” and that every single employee of SVT must face trial and be “severely punished” for “delivering coverups, polarisation and lies”.¹¹³ Prior to one anti-SVT rally, after previously having given a speech at one of them, the leader of the AGE micro-party *Knapptryckarna* (The Button Pushers), Ulf Bejerstrand, said in a public livestream on YouTube that he had met with persons from Hungary who said they had participated in a storming of that country’s public broadcaster. Bejerstrand said the same thing might happen in Sweden if SVT continues to “pump out lies”: “First it was nice, then it got violent and it ended with people beating down the doors, rushing inside and throwing everyone out and taking over TV and radio. I am not urging this, but it might very well end up that way.”¹¹⁴

Pro-Kremlin and Pro-MAGA Discourse

Pro-Kremlin talking points, arguments and disinformation thrive in the Swedish AGE community in part because of the latter’s structural opposition to the positions held by Sweden’s establishment, which have been strongly pro-Ukraine and anti-Russia since 2022. One of the prominent AGE platforms in Sweden, SwebbTV, has on at least four occasions throughout 2025 published uncritical interviews with Russia’s ambassador to Sweden, apparently recorded in SwebbTV’s studio, enabling him to spread the Kremlin’s latest propaganda lines.¹¹⁵ Other AGE actors, like the media outlet NewsVoice and the Button Pushers party, have themselves publicised meetings with the Russian Ambassador at the Russian embassy in Stockholm.¹¹⁶ Whereas the Swedish far-right appreciates the Putin regime out of the belief that it has turned Russia into a “bulwark against the

112 Anders Dalsbro, “Här är aktörerna bakom 'kärleksmanifestationen'”, [Here are the actors behind the ‘love demonstration’], *Expo*, 12 December 2024, <https://expo.se/nyhet/har-ar-aktorererna-bakom-karleksmanifestationen/> [Accessed 2025-11-26]

113 Anders Dalsbro & Morgan Finnsjö, “Högerextrema protester mot SVT”, [Far-right protests against SVT], *Expo*, 13 April 2024, <https://expo.se/nyhet/hogerextrema-protester-mot-svt/> [Accessed 2025-11-26]

114 Daniel Poohl (Ed.), *Svensk rasideologisk miljö 2023. En ny våldsamt generation högerextremism i tider av kris*, [Swedish racial-ideological environment 2023. A new violent generation of right-wing extremism in times of crisis], Stiftelsen Expo, 14 March 2023, <https://expo.se/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Svensk-rasideologisk-miljo-2023.pdf> [Accessed 2025-11-26], p. 72

115 Documented by the Expo Foundation. The interviews are published on SwebbTV’s website, <https://swebbtv.se>.

116 Documented by the Expo Foundation.

West” and a traditionalist and anti-liberal force on the world stage, the AGE community seems to be more concerned about the war in Ukraine and the belief that the global Deep State is supporting Ukraine as part of its own evil agenda, an effort which should therefore be opposed.¹¹⁷

The Swedish AGE crowd has a tendency to praise US President Donald Trump and sees him as a welcome disruptor of the global Deep State. The appointment of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Health Secretary, in particular, especially in the face of mass criticism from the public health experts, has caused excitement in parts of the Swedish AGE community since this is viewed as an attack on the so-called evil forces that are said to dominate the medical establishment.

Anti-Vaccine and Alternative Health

Hostility towards measures developed to counter the spread of COVID-19 has survived the pandemic and have morphed into more general hostility not just to the pharmaceutical industry (Big Pharma) but to modern healthcare in general. Ironically, at the beginning of the pandemic, anti-vaccine beliefs were an impediment to the growth of the Swedish AGE community – because the far-right, who would go on to form a major section of the AGE milieu, initially found such beliefs ludicrous. As time went on and as some far-right actors became more exposed to conspiracy theories – and witnessed the enviably mobilising potential of such stances – the far-right became more receptive to anti-vaccine propaganda and eventually embraced it, enabling its alliance with the conspiracy theorists and vaccine opponents, and the formation of the Swedish AGE community as it currently exists.

Structure, Types, Platforms

The Swedish AGE community can be thought of as consisting of individuals who range from sympathisers and passive consumers of propaganda, to more active content creators and leading figures. The latter category consists of a smaller number of influential individuals who are the most relevant from a P/CVE perspective and who will be the focus of this section.

Leading individuals can be categorised as one of either two types (which, however, sometimes overlap): influencers (such as the conspiracist podcaster and self-described life coach Aida Reva, or the far-right journalist Per Shapiro) and organisers (such as the founder of the conspiracist Button Pushers party, Ulf Bejerstrand, or the leader of the right-wing extremist group The Network, Tor Änglasjö). The former typically make their mark on the community through individual activity or temporary collaborations, are more associated with their own individual “brand” than with any group, and seek to build up their own personal platform over the long term. The organisers, on the other hand, are typically individuals who, being founders or representatives of organisations of several individuals who act collectively, are more engaged in the politics of the community, and in building power and influence.

A number of political parties have emerged within the community. Some are more recent, while some were formed in the days of the pandemic; some merged, others vanished. The most durable of these micro-parties are *Knapptryckarna* (KT; The Button Pushers) and *Mänskliga rättigheter och Demokrati* (MOD; Human Rights and Democracy), who were also the only ones from this community able to get more than 0.01 percent of the votes in general elections.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Morgan Finnsjö, “Sweden: Of Politicians and Militants”, in Kacper Rekawek, Thomas Renard & Barbara Molas (Eds.), *Russia and the Far Right: Insights From Ten European Countries*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) Press, 2024, pp. 267–303

¹¹⁸ Anders Dalsbro, “Svagt stöd för partier som växte fram ur coronaprotesterna”, [Weak support for parties that emerged from the coronavirus protests], *Expo*, 20 September 2022, <https://expo.se/nyhet/svagt-stod-for-partier-som-vaxte-fram-ur-coronaprotesterna/> [Accessed 2025-11-26]

All the leading actors in the community are engaged in media production, or, more specifically, in the creation and dissemination of propaganda. All of them also carry out commercial activities to some degree. Such an approach is similar to the activities of the Austrian or the German AGE milieus, also discussed in this report, which prioritise education over the less successful mobilisation.

Movement and Counterculture: Forms of Activity

Whether involved in activism, media production or commercial activity, the community can also be considered in terms of a social movement – part protest, part counterculture. The activity of this movement can be thought of as taking three main forms: *mobilisation*, *enlightenment* and *alternative lifestyles*.

Mobilisation refers to any significant instance of political activism or extremist activity on the basis of AGE convictions which can then manifest themselves via e.g. a peaceful street protest, an unlawful assembly outside a public institution (such as the anti-media rallies held outside the premises of SVT, mentioned earlier), or a wave of harassment or threats directed at public officials. It is typically the result of agitation carried out by leading actors, usually of the organiser type, but sometimes also by influencers, riling up their followers with some specific AGE-themed narrative. Mobilisation is facilitated by dramatic world events or societal crises that AGE actors can embrace through narrative, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine. When such issues are less salient and Swedish society is more focused on everyday issues, the AGE community finds it more challenging to mobilise people.

Enlightenment refers to the premise, implicit or explicit, for the media activity of AGE actors when they are not directly engaged in mobilisation. This can be to “reveal the hidden truth” to their followers by continuously “educating” them through the refutation of commonly accepted beliefs and notions, or the sharing of conspiracy theories concerning the national and global institutions. Such theories can include cases of explicit Holocaust denial (a crime under Swedish law), such as the Button Pusher activist Håkan Bergmark discussing Zionist control over the United States and mentioning “the so-called Holocaust, which didn’t really happen”, in a stream on his YouTube channel “Håkan Bergmark TV” with his party colleagues. Much like other kinds of extremist propaganda, this type of discourse tends to draw a sharp line of distinction between the audience and the so-called corrupted or deceived rest of society, serving to alienate the consumer from and making them hostile towards societal institutions.

Alternative lifestyles refers to how some in the AGE community practice its beliefs in everyday life, expressing a kind of counterculture which is dominated by the idea that mainstream society is corrupted and benighted and must, in ways big or small, be withdrawn from. Such practice can include trading in cryptocurrency; purchasing alternative health products and other goods and merchandise (e.g. media subscriptions, clothes, utensils, arts and crafts) from like-minded vendors, typically online; watching and listening to AGE-themed media, and taking part in online discussions on AGE community platforms; studying esoteric or pseudo-esoteric texts or films and engaging in related “magical” practices; eating food that is prepared according to alternative health teachings or fads; attending conferences or events organised by AGE actors; or socialising and bonding with others in the community.

AGE as a Security Threat and Lone-Actor Violence

The AGE community has not yet proven the same kind of overall public security threat in Sweden as right-wing extremism or radical Islamist extremism. The Swedish Security Service has in the past few years begun to mention anti-state actors in their annual reports – considered a source for concern – but devotes relatively little attention to them and does not discuss them in the same detail as, for comparison, the Danish security service does in its reports.¹¹⁹ The Swedish Defence Research Agency has persuasively argued for the inherent danger in a political community so strongly focused on violent discourse, however.¹²⁰ Leading AGE voices have in livestreamed discussions been arguing that Swedish parliamentarians and government officials should be locked up, killed, shot or blown up, with one leading member of the Knappttryckarna party saying of politicians: “They are vile, they are psychopaths, they are deranged. They should really all be executed. I like to say: Bring back the gallows in Old Town [in Stockholm] so we can have this blood bath”.¹²¹ There is scattered evidence in recent years that public officials are increasingly the target of violent threats that emanate from the AGE community and which are deemed serious enough to become a matter for law enforcement.¹²² At least one lone-acting terrorist – Theodor Engström, who shocked Sweden by assassinating a civil servant in 2022 – was motivated by beliefs corresponding to those circulating in the AGE community. He made it repeatedly clear in police custody and in court that he sought to strike against the Deep State and the evil power-elite in the form of three high-ranking officials, including one politician. It is impossible to disentangle the terrorist’s neo-Nazi convictions from his esoteric beliefs and his apparent mental health problems¹²³ – but this mixture of far-right, esoteric, and conspiracist beliefs, as well as mental difficulties is what seems to have made him into a case of a AGE-motivated extremist.¹²⁴ Moreover, 2024 saw the conviction of an individual suffering from mental health issues on two counts of attempted murder. He had a history in conspiracist spaces and had shown an interest in chemtrails theory, magic, and anti-vaccine activism.¹²⁵

Internal Cohesion and Political “Success”

The struggle against the corrupt global elite, waged by the “enlightened,” fosters a strong sense of solidarity in the AGE ranks and to an extent explains the low number of defections. Nonetheless, disagreements, especially centred on being too specific about a given conspiracy, do occur within the community and can quickly turn into a vicious trading of online insults and accusations where an opponent is branded as “controlled opposition,” wittingly or unwittingly leading parts of the AGE community astray and serving the ends of the tyrannical elites. Such accusations tend to leave little room for reconciliation between actors that come into conflict and can lead to lasting rifts within the community, with at least one leading Swedish AGE actor demonising and harassing his real or imagined opponents even after they have left the milieu.

119 E. g. Säkerhetspolisen 2025, *op. cit.*

120 Hannah Pollack Sarnecki et al., *op. cit.*

121 Erik Glaad, “De vill döda svenska politiker och säger det helt öppet”, [They want to kill Swedish politicians and say it completely openly], *Expo*, 31 January 2024, <https://expo.se/kommentar/de-vill-doda-svenska-politiker-och-sager-det-helt-oppet/> [Accessed 2025-11-26]

122 TT, “Efter dödshoten – flera på FHM får polis skydd”, [After the death threats – several at the FHM receive police protection], *Expressen*, 18 February 2021, <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/coronaviruset/efter-dodshoten-flera-pa-fhm-far-polisskydd/> [Accessed 2025-11-02]; See also: Valentina Xhaferi Leander, “Hotade djurskyddsinspektörer flera gånger: ‘Ska skjuta knäskålar av dem’”, [Threatened animal welfare inspectors several times: ‘Will shoot their kneecaps off’], *SVT Nyheter Halland*, 31 January 2024, <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/halland/hotade-djurskyddsinspektorer-flera-ganger-ska-skjuta-knaskalarna-av-dem> [Accessed 2025-11-02]

123 Studio Expo, “30. I huvudet på Visbyterroristen”, [30. Inside the Head of the Visby Terrorist], *Expo*, 29 June 2023, <https://expo.se/podcasts/i-huvudet-pa-visbyterroristen/> [Accessed: 2025-11-24]

124 Daniel Poohl, “Låt mordet i Almedalen bli en väckarklocka”, [Let the murder in Almedalen be a wake-up call], *Expo*, 29 June 2023, <https://expo.se/kommentar/lat-mordet-i-almedalen-bli-en-vackarklocka/> [Accessed 2025-11-03]

125 Axel Ellung & Tea Oscarsson, “Misstänkte svärdsmanens historik: Tidigare dom, svart magi och häxor”, [Suspected swordsman’s history: Previous conviction, black magic, and witches], *TV4 Nyheterna*, 8 January 2024, <https://www.tv4.se/artikel/7fxrOBbu7Tys7Xl6bzCJNP/misstaeante-svaerdsmanen-tidigare-doemd-foer-vald-mot-tjaensteman> [Accessed 2025-11-03]

Furthermore, important groups in the Swedish AGE community, like the far-right The Network or the conspiracist SwebbTV, are organised hierarchically by charismatic leaders with assertive personalities and an aggressive style of communication. When such individuals fall out with each other it can have far-reaching consequences for relations among swathes of the milieu. An example is when an open and acrimonious conflict broke out in 2025 between the heads of the two aforementioned groups, because one married the other's daughter against the other's vehement opposition. This has led to a bitter schism between the two groups, who were previously allied and had in recent years jointly organised several successful rallies something now unlikely to be repeated.

The Swedish AGE community seemingly had a shot at influencing high level politics with the 2022 election of Elsa Widding, a prominent vaccine conspiracy theorist, as an MP for the far-right Sweden Democrats.¹²⁶ However, she left the party after the Expo Foundation revealed that she had taken part in a conference in Norway together with prominent conspiracy theorists and other controversial individuals, including disgraced British MP Andrew Bridgen, who has compared COVID-19 vaccination to the Holocaust.¹²⁷ Widding later joined the aforementioned AGE party MoD but left it again after less than two weeks, and has since created her own party, Ambition Sverige. Although her rise to parliament was celebrated by those in the far-right and the AGE community familiar with her, she never became a truly mobilising figure and her fall from grace did not cause any notable offline reactions among AGE actors. It is likely to have strengthened the view in the AGE community that "truth-tellers" like Widding will never "be allowed to succeed" by the elites within the traditional institutions.

¹²⁶ Niclas Nilsson, "Med Widding i riksdagen stärks SD:s band till extremhögern", [With Widding in parliament, the Sweden Democrats' ties to the far-right are strengthened], *Expo*, 2 December 2022, <https://expo.se/kommentar/med-widding-i-riksdagen-starks-sds-band-till-extremhogern/> [Accessed 2025-11-03]

¹²⁷ Erik Glaad & Niclas Nilsson, "Widding (SD) delade scen med förintelseföringare och antivaccin-aktivister", [Widding (SD) shared stage with Holocaust denigration and anti-vaccine activists], *Expo*, 17 April 2023, <https://expo.se/nyhet/widding-delade-scen-med-forintelseforringare-och-vaccinmotstandare/> [Accessed 2025-11-03]

Transnational connectivity of AGE and Its Social Network Analysis

by Alessandro Bolpagni, Morgan Finnsiö, Menso Hartgers, Julian Lanchès, Marco Lombardi, Kacper Rekawek, Thomas Renard, Silvano Rizieri Lucini, Jacob Ware, Maria Zotova

Transnational Character of the AGE

As was demonstrated in ICCT's previous report on the issue of AGE, the milieu is transnational in nature – especially as far as common narratives binding the activists in different countries are concerned. This new report largely confirms these previous findings.

In order to further explore some of the transnational dimensions already highlighted across the previous chapters, we conducted a detailed social network analysis (SNA) of the AGE milieu for this report (see Annex), focused on Telegram channels. Indeed, AGE largely exists online, as discussed throughout this report, and is notably very active on Telegram, the network of choice for AGE activists.

The SNA encompasses 21,631 Telegram channels, focused on four countries: Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. It also studies the English-speaking AGE hubs in the US, but also in places such as Australia, the UK, or Ireland, given their level of penetration in European AGE milieus. The data was gathered through Telegram's *Export chat history* function, and all the channels classified as seed channels (provided to the research team by experts focusing on a given national AGE scene for this report) were public, thus not requiring any interaction to collect data. Finally, the data collection covers every post available within the seed channels starting from 1 June 2024 to 19 October 2025.

Linguistic clusters clearly emerge from our analysis, i.e. the German- (Germany and Austria), the Dutch- and the English-speaking clusters. Indeed, whereas our analysis highlights a number of transnational connections, AGE milieus also develop somewhat independently across countries and linguistic clusters.

The German AGE hub is the epicentre of the online universe studied in this report. This is possibly influenced by a bias resulting from the choice of countries and accounts, but it also arguably reflects the broader reality that AGE milieus are particularly developed in Germany (and Austria), as demonstrated in this report. It is largely self-sustaining but also has elements closely interconnected with the American hub – this is especially evident for its QAnon section. The German AGE hub is relatively central to the European AGE followers, but particularly to the Austrian (language plays a role here) and the Dutch ones. Although the connections are less pronounced with Swedish accounts, our analysis observed significant overlaps with other European communities beyond the countries covered.

The Austrian and the German scenes are closely intertwined, both online and offline. This is visible in the online sphere with German AGE Telegram channels often reposted by the Austrian channels or group chats frequented by AGE activists from both countries. Moreover, Austrian AGE alternative media often report on Germany – arguably, to win coverage amongst the more numerous German viewers. There are also membership overlaps between the organisational and offline emanations of the German Reichsbürger movement and leading sovereign citizen groups in Austria. The Dutch AGE milieu is almost inherently linked, due to language, with the Flemish speaking elements of the Belgian AGE milieu. Moreover, proximity to Brussels allows the

Dutch AGE activists to attend some of the demonstrations organised by the Belgian AGE in the EU's capital. Some sections of the Dutch milieu also bond with their German counterparts around the idea of both coming from *volk Germaniten* (Germanic people) – the adherents of this theory hold joint and offline events. The Swedish AGE ecosystem interacts more with the US one. This is likely facilitated by the English language, but also by receptive and well-developed far-right and conspiracist communities in Sweden.

Some German and Dutch channels are very actively spreading content within the AGE network. Their high activism and centrality within the European AGE online constellation makes them some sort of “superspreaders” of AGE content. However, English-language channels are generally the most popular ones, and therefore the most shared ones, usually spreading various conspiracy theories. In this sense, quite unsurprisingly, language matters for shaping online AGE communities, whereas English remains a more universal language.

A number of topics and narratives bind many AGE clusters together globally. This includes QAnon narratives, anti-vaccination and other conspiracy theories, pro-Russian narratives, far-right and conservative narratives, including anti-immigration, or antisemitism. These narratives form the proverbial glue of the online network, although they are far from the only topics discussed or shared within the AGE online macrocosm. Furthermore, many of these topics and narratives overlap and reinforce each other.

Pro-Russian narratives are quite prominent among AGE milieus, not least as Russian media are seen as reliable sources of information in contrast to the Western mainstream media, which is perceived as serving the so called corrupt global elite. This is another interesting transnational dimension. For example, the German AGE online milieu widely shares Russian sources – be it the likes of the German RT DE, the Russian Embassy in Berlin, or the super-nationalistic and pro-war Russian Z-bloggers. The Dutch milieu also uses Russian disinformation content as a source of world news. Moreover, a former Dutch foreign fighter (in Russian ranks), now based in the Russia-occupied Donbas, continues to yield some influence in the milieu. Furthermore, all of the national AGE scenes covered in this report regularly feature content (such as interviews) by or with Russian figures – be it “experts,” writers, intellectuals or respective Russian ambassadors to Austria, Germany, Netherlands, or Sweden.

In such conditions, Russia plays an influential role within the AGE milieu, feeding certain world views to AGE activists in the West. Furthermore, it is even possible that Russia could be supporting AGE milieus financially, through online donations which are increasingly popular among AGE activists, although this could not be established by this report.

The global AGE milieu is fascinated with disruptors or individuals seen as disruptors of the established or mainstream order. This allows for a fascination with unorthodox political figures in general, such as radical right European parties who have not yet been in government and are at times seen as an improvement on the global elite by the AGE, or specific individuals in particular, e.g. the US President Donald Trump. Discussions on developments in the US and about MAGA narratives is another transnational dimension visible in Europe. Our online observations noted for instance a marked rise in references or mentions of his name in the European online AGE milieu in recent years. Overall, across the sample of analysed country accounts, mentions of Donald Trump more than quadrupled, with a 315 percent increase from 2020 to 2025. This was particularly salient in Austria and the Netherlands, where mentions of Donald Trump were largely absent until 2023 but surged from 2024 onwards. Even in Germany, mentions more than doubled, with an increase of approximately 125 percent.

Thus, to conclude, there are significant transnational ties connecting the various AGE milieus in Europe. These ties include key online accounts that are widely shared across Europe, specific connections between small groups or organisations, as well as a relatively shared vision of the world (although very heterogeneous and underpinned by many contradictions) that facilitates these interactions. However, while acknowledging these significant transnational ties, most AGE communities remain strongly anchored locally, nationally, or regionally within linguistic clusters.

Evolution of State Responses to AGE

by Kacper Rekawek, Julian Lanchès, Maria Zotova, Menso Hartgers, and Morgan Finnsio

AGE is a very heterogenous phenomenon, and the responses to its rise and development vary widely across countries. As will be shown below, proper reckoning with the milieu is still a work in progress and a matter of discussion. On the one hand, almost a third of the EU Member States now monitor the milieu as a potential source of extremism and political violence, in line with other extremisms (i.e. jihadi, far-right, or far-left), but also more broadly as a challenge of social cohesion and the legal democratic order. At the same time, there exists an understanding that an excessive securitisation of the response to AGE, which is predominantly non-violent, could be counterproductive and actually play into the hands of those who denounce the allegedly totalitarian nature of the “deep state” rule. This contradiction remains a challenge and will continue to influence the behaviour of different governments vis-a-vis this phenomenon.

Austrian authorities demonstrate a growing awareness of the threat posed by the AGE milieu. In 2024, the domestic intelligence service, the The Directorate of State Security and Intelligence (*Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst*, DSN), updated its classification system and moved AGE from the former observation category of *subversive associations*, which had historically focused on traditional sovereign citizen groups, to the new category of *heterodox extremism*.¹²⁸ This change was intended to capture more accurately the reshaped AGE landscape that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Austria’s first National Action Plan (NAP) for Extremism Prevention and Deradicalisation, adopted in 2024,¹²⁹ does not explicitly mention the AGE, and Austria is still lacking a dedicated exit or deradicalisation programme for right-wing extremism or the AGE milieu.¹³⁰ In practice, Austrian responses to the AGE phenomenon have so far relied primarily on hard counter-terrorism measures and criminal prosecution, including arrests among sovereigntist groups.¹³¹

German intelligence services monitor closely sovereigntists as well as broader conspiracy AGE, as potential extremist threats.¹³² The German government has developed an action plan to combat right-wing extremism, several measures of which also target AGE, including the disarmament of right-wing and anti-government extremists, and the fight against conspiracy theories.¹³³ Since 2016, the weapons permits of more than 1,000 sovereigntists have been revoked.¹³⁴ Furthermore, authorities have released guidelines for local administrations on how to deal with sovereign citizens. German authorities have also made use of a number of additional executive measures; for instance, the financial supervisory authority (BaFin) took action against sovereign citizens attempting to establish independent financial structures.¹³⁵ German authorities have also succeeded in pre-empting several planned terrorist attacks, including those by the groups Unit-

128 *Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst (DSN)*, “Verfassungsschutzbericht 2023,” [Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2023], Vienna: 2023, https://www.dsn.gv.at/501/files/VSB/180_2024_VSB_2023_V20240517_BF.pdf.

129 Theo Anders, Jan Michael Marchart, “Aktionsplan soll Maßnahmen gegen Extremismus aufzeigen,” [The action plan is intended to outline measures against extremism], *Der Standard*, 14 December 2021, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000131571030/aktionsplan-soll-massnahmen-gegen-extremismus-aufzeigen>.

130 *SOS Mitmensch*, “Wir brauchen Aussteigerprogramme”, [We need dropout programs], 4 March 2023, <https://www.sosmitmensch.at/wir-brauchen-aussteigerprogramme>.

131 *Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst (DSN)*, “Aktuelles,” [News], 26 July 2023, <https://www.dsn.gv.at/news.aspx?id=6E516252524231467A79733D>.

132 *Bundesministerium des Innern*, “Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024,” [Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2024,] June 2025, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2025-06-10-verfassungsschutzbericht-2024.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4.

133 *Bundesministerium des Innern*, “Aktionsplan gegen Rechtsextremismus,” [Action plan against right-wing extremism], 2022, https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/2022/aktionsplan-rechtsextremismus.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3.

134 *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, “Reichsbürger“ und “Selbstverwalter”, 2023, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/reichsbuerger-und-selbstverwalter/2023-06-reichsbuerger-und-selbstverwalter-staatsfeinde-geschaeftemacher-verschwoerungstheoretiker.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=20.

135 *Bundesministerium des Innern*, “Verfassungsschutzbericht 2024,” [Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2024,] June 2025, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2025-06-10-verfassungsschutzbericht-2024.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4.

ed Patriots and Patriotic Union, whose members were arrested in large-scale security operations and have been or are currently being tried on terrorism charges.¹³⁶ More recently, in early 2025, the German Interior Minister banned the largest Reichsbürger group in Germany, *Königreich Deutschland*, due to its unconstitutional tendencies.¹³⁷ In November 2025, German authorities arrested a man who, motivated by sovereigntist beliefs, operated a dark-web site soliciting donations to commission contract killings of several German politicians.¹³⁸

Dutch response focuses on multi-stakeholder collaboration at multiple levels, including under the impulse of municipalities.¹³⁹ While both AIVD and NCTV have published documents on the Dutch AGE/sovereign citizens milieu, good practices can also be found in some municipalities. For example, The Hague and Southwest Friesland both emphasise engaging with conspiracy-minded citizens on specific issues, such as concerns regarding finances, social welfare, and childcare. Recently, an internal police document from July 2025 was leaked and then criticised online. It seemingly provided guidance to police employees on radicalisation – seen as a process which could escalate away from conspiratorial thinking towards terrorism.¹⁴⁰ It, however, showed a recognition of differences between the stages, and language and actions that can accompany them but should not have been interpreted as a one-way pathway from conspiratorial mindset to potential terrorism.¹⁴¹

The Swedish Defence Research Agency's 2023 report illustrates that Swedish agencies are beginning to take an interest in AGE, although a clear definition or consensus among agencies for labelling the phenomenon remains elusive. Public statements by the Swedish Security Service over the past few years show a vague but growing concern with AGE as a threat to national security.¹⁴² However, this concern remains limited, and there has been no mention of AGE in the annual terror threat assessments, which are produced jointly by the Security Service and intelligence agencies. Nor have political leaders made explicit mention of this kind of extremism. The Swedish public response to AGE so far has been to treat it mainly as a law enforcement issue. While such an approach may be warranted, the case of Theodor Engström's 2022 terror attack in Visby highlighted serious gaps in Swedish agencies' abilities to predict or prevent lone actors from striking at targets whose selection is inspired by AGE beliefs.¹⁴³

Overall, there is clearly a better understanding of the AGE phenomenon among European public authorities, notably among security services, but a comprehensive strategy with preventive measures seems still largely missing. Furthermore, the online aspects of this issue remain largely unaddressed.

136 *Der Bundesgerichtshof und die Bundesanwaltschaft*, "Anklage gegen zehn Personen u.a. wegen Mitgliedschaft in oder Unterstützung einer terroristischen Vereinigung und Vorbereitung eines hochverräterischen Unternehmens vor dem Oberlandesgericht Frankfurt erhoben," [Charges have been brought against ten people before the Higher Regional Court of Frankfurt, including charges of membership in or support of a terrorist organization and preparation of a treasonous undertaking], 12 December 2023, https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2023/Pressemitteilung-vom-12-12-2023_.html.

137 *Bundesministerium des Innern*, "Bundesinnenminister Dobrindt verbietet den Verein „Königreich Deutschland,“ [Federal Interior Minister Dobrindt bans the association "Kingdom of Germany"], 13 May 2025, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2025/05/verbot-koenigreich-deutschland.html>.

138 Timothy Jones, "Germany: Man arrested for darknet site targeting politicians," *DW*, 11 November 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-man-arrested-for-darknet-site-targeting-politicians/a-74696784>.

139 B. van Ginkel, F. van Deventer, Responding to Anti-Institutionalism in the Netherlands: Challenges and Opportunities for (Local) Policymakers, the Hague: ICCT, December 2024, <https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2024-12/Van%20Ginkel%20and%20van%20Deventer%20Responding%20to%20Anti%20Institutional%20Extremism%20in%20the%20NL.pdf>.

140 *Politie*, "Reactie op politiedocument radicaliserend door complottheorieën," [Reaction to police document on radicalization through conspiracy theories], 19 August 2025, <https://www.politie.nl/nieuws/2025/augustus/19/00-reactie-op-politiedocument-radicaliserend-en-extremisme-dat-uit-complottheorieen-kan-voorkomen.html>.

141 *Tweede Kamer*, "Vergaderjaar 2024–2025 Vragen gesteld door de leden der Kamer," [Meeting Year 2024–2025 Questions Asked by Members of the Chamber], <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/downloads/document?id=2025D35772>.

142 Hedwig Gordon, "Ökat hot från anti-statliga aktörer", [Increased threat from anti-government actors], *Expo*, 22 February 2023, <https://expo.se/nyhet/okat-hot-fran-anti-statliga-aktorer/> [Accessed 2025-11-26]

143 Jonathan Leman, "Almedalsdådet borde ha stoppats", *Expo*, [The Almedalen attack should have been stopped], 17 November 2022, <https://expo.se/nyhet/almedalsdadet-borde-ha-stoppats/> [Accessed 2025-11-03]

Conclusion

by Kacper Rekawek, Thomas Renard and Julian Lanchès

AGE is mostly an online phenomenon. Whereas AGE online activities have declined with the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the community stabilised afterwards and now remains relatively robust. Likewise, AGE offline activities have significantly diminished since mid-2024.

The online ecosystem is largely led or framed by (semi-) professional alternative media outlets, influencers, or group chats. Some channels act as “superspreaders” and hold a central role in the ecosystem. The vast majority of Telegram content (excluding YouTube) is not self-produced and rarely consists of original messages. Instead, channels predominantly repost external media content, usually news articles, either as direct links or screenshots. These sources include alternative media outlets, and even more frequently, mainstream and credible media. The materials from the latter are then selectively framed and weaponised to reinforce AGE worldview.

AGE key narratives focus on conspiracies, esoterism, spiritualism, sovereigntist thought or independent provision of news or lifestyle advice. The milieu remains obsessed with the proverbial global (evil) elite and the deep state allegedly operating against regular people. However, it has to a certain extent abandoned its focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, and has progressively shifted its attention to new topic(s). In this context, a growing prevalence of far-right themes and narratives has been clearly observed. Although AGE members are usually vehemently opposed to political parties, views have become more favourable to certain radical right political parties that have increasingly adopted some AGE narratives. While a clear proximity with the far-right is becoming clearer, this report did not seek to understand the underlying causes of this convergence between AGE and the far-right. However, we note this as a possible avenue for future research.

The growing prevalence of pro-Russian narratives was also clearly observable among AGE online channels. There can be many explanations for this, including past proximity between far-right and pro-Russian narratives, as well as Russia’s strategic campaign to spread anti-Western and conspiracy-oriented content online, which are then captured and circulated among AGE members. It was not the scope of this report to explore the extent to which Russia purposefully and proactively seek to influence European AGE milieus, but this could also be another future avenue for research.

AGE is transnational in nature, if not global, as a result of its online dimension, but it has also strong local or national roots, reflecting the concerns and priorities of AGE members. There is therefore a clear *glocal* dimension to AGE.

The US or English-speaking and German-speaking hubs constitute central elements of the AGE online ecosystem. Interestingly, and to some extent counter-intuitively, European national hubs covered by this report align more closely with its German counterpart than with the English-speaking ones.

Finally, it is worth emphasising that the milieu is non-violent in its vast majority, but retains a certain potential to violence that justifies continued monitoring. There are several sources of potential violence. First, AGE communities spread narratives and worldviews that are dehumanising and often exacerbate polarisation, resulting in a climate that could be prone to encourage violence by lone actors notably. Second, there is a small but consequential number of AGE members that

are deemed potentially violent by security services. This is particularly the case among sovereign citizens, and to a lesser extent among some conspiracy activists. Another concern comes from a possible “insider threat” – the possibility of members of law enforcement or military radicalising into AGE. Finally, as previously mentioned in this report, it is possible that some AGE online closed groups are more explicitly calling or preparing for violent action, but that could not be covered by this research due to our ethical protocols.

A last trend noted in this report was the growing popular attempt among AGE community to monetise their activities – either via selling access, advice, or products. This trend requires attention as it could contribute to sustaining the phenomenon over time, but also further cement the engagement of AGE members into the community and could contribute further to their radicalisation.

Annex: Social Network Analysis of European AGE Channels

by Alessandro Bolpagni, Silvano Rizieri Lucini, and Marco Lombardi

Building on an initial list of seed accounts identified by ICCT, based on its previous research report, complemented by country experts inputs, an extensive list of more than 20,000 Telegram channels¹⁴⁴ was compiled for this project through a snowballing method.¹⁴⁵ The authors carried out a Social Network Analysis (SNA) of these accounts to explore potential transnational dimensions within the AGE network related to Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The SNA was thus employed to conduct an empirical observation of various characteristics embodied by the considered AGE network. Specifically, the SNA has enabled the observation of the ability of the actors to relate to each other, their hierarchy, and the type of relational structure that exists within it.¹⁴⁶

The software used to represent the SNA and to calculate various SNA metrics was *Gephi*.¹⁴⁷ Overall, the SNA of the AGE network considers two types of nodes connected by a specific edge. Nodes represent the social entities forming part of the network, while edges represent the ties that link them together.¹⁴⁸ On the one hand, the nodes considered are Telegram channels. In particular, the SNA is composed of Telegram channels classified as seed channels and other Telegram channels whose posts were forwarded by the seed channels. On the other hand, the edges (namely, connections) are the connections between seed channels and channels, wherein the former is linked to the latter by the forwarding of its posts. The action of forwarding means sharing other Telegram accounts and/or channels' posts without modifying the content of the post.

The AGE network analysed through the SNA has been considered a 'directed network' because the connections between the nodes are directional and not mutual.¹⁴⁹ For example, in a Facebook network, which is an *undirected network*, if user A is friends with user B, user B is friends with user A, implying a mutual connection. Considering the AGE network, the action of forwarding is carried out only by the seed channels.

Using forwarding as a link is relevant for two main reasons: the first is that forwarding is an active decision coming from the admin(s) of the seed channels. Moreover, by focusing on the posts forwarded by the seed channels, it is possible to establish content they deemed important enough to be forwarded on their own channel. The second is that it is possible to reach new channels on Telegram while merely forwarding posts. Specifically, to create the dataset for the SNA and to delineate the directionality of the network within the SNA, the seed channels (which forwarded the posts) were considered the *source*, and the channels (which created the posts forwarded) constituted the *target* in *Gephi* (Figure 5). Hence, the connections, namely the edges,

144 This annex features altered names of the channels and accounts popular with the AGE milieu. This was done so that the authors and ICCT would "advertise" them and their content in an openly available report.

145 After identifying a first set of seed channels (the initial channels for the SNA suggested by the country experts (authors of chapters on the "national" AGE scenes in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and integrated by ITSTIME's research), it was possible to analyse which posts were forwarded by them. Forwards effectively act as suggested content, thus allowing the authors to find more channels that shared anti-government and anti-establishment ideas.

146 Barry Wellman and Stephen D. Berkowitz, *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, 1988th edn, vol. 15 (JAI Press, n.d.); John Scott, *Social Network Analysis*, Third Edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015); Michael Sierra-Arevalo and Andrew V. Papachristos, 'Social Network Analysis and Gangs', in *The Handbook of Gangs* (NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015).

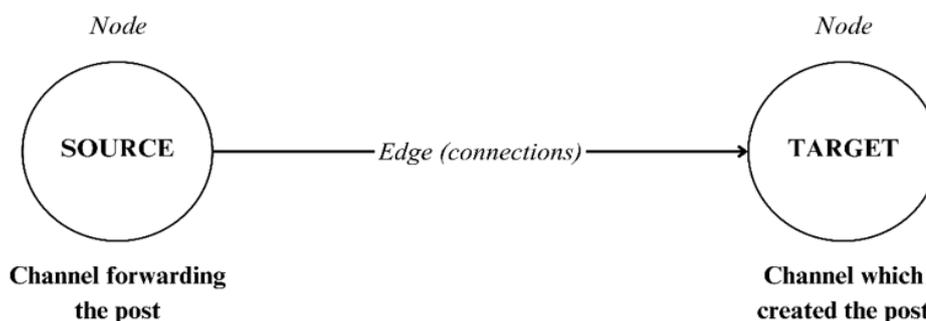
147 Mathieu Bastian et al., 'Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks', *Third International AAAI Conference and Social Media 3*, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v3i1.13937>.

148 Shazia Tabassum et al., 'Social Network Analysis: An Overview', *WIRES Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery* 8, no. 5 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1002/widm.1256>.

149 Statistics.com, 'Directed vs. Undirected Network', *Statistics.Com*, n.d., <https://www.statistics.com/glossary/directed-vs-undirected-network/>.

between the nodes were represented by the action of a seed channel forwarding posts from another channel.

Figure 5: Representation of the Source and Target of the Social Network Analysis (SNA)



The SNA conducted for this report encompasses 21,631 Telegram channels, of which 379 were classified as seed channels (see below for the mapping of the ecosystem of channels). The SNA boasts at least 67,381 edges. The data was gathered through Telegram’s *Export Chat History* function, and all the channels classified as seed channels were public, thus not requiring any interaction to collect such data. Finally, the data collection covers every post available within the seed channels starting from 1 June 2024 to 19 October 2025.

Mapping of the Online Ecosystem

Each seed channel has been assigned a colour based on the language most used in the messages shared within it. This allows for a graphical representation of clusters of channels based on the language used. To picture this, *Chat Analytics* was employed, which provides an overview of the channel, highlighting the most employed language within it.¹⁵⁰ Table 1 shows how the colours associated with the respective languages are visible in the images illustrating the SNA.

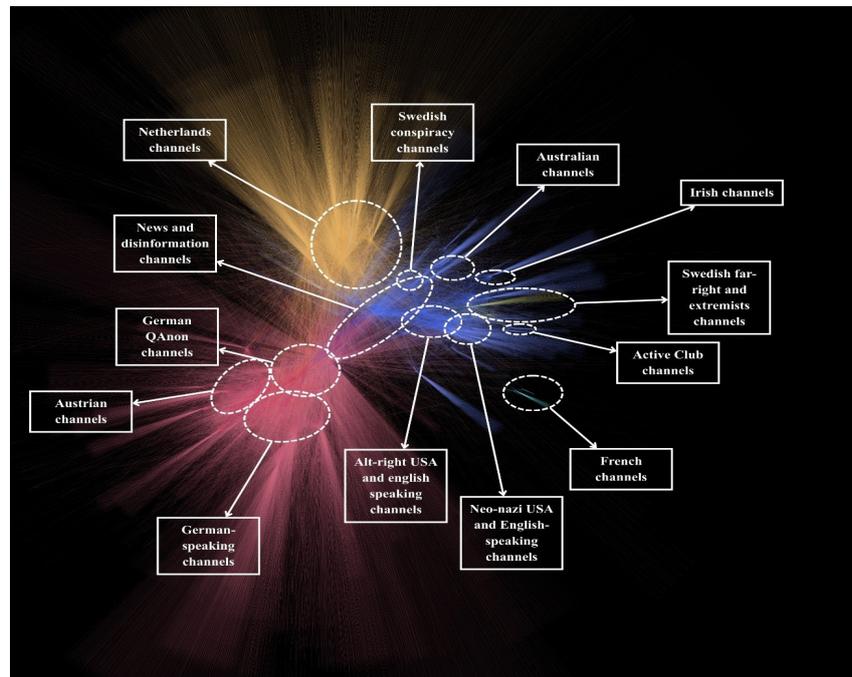
Table 1: Colours Associated with Specific Languages

Colour	Language	Number of seed channels
Blue	English	148
Cyan	French	4
Magenta	German	138
Yellow	Swedish	45
Orange	Dutch	41
Red	Russian	3

¹⁵⁰ mlomb, 'mlomb/chat-analytics', Github, 2023, <https://github.com/mlomb/chat-analytics>.

The network is divided into clusters based on the language used in their content and, in certain cases, on the main topics they deal with. A representation of this can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Representation of the AGE Network Through the SNA, Highlighting the Main Countries' Clusters



**Note: Throughout this annex, unless indicated otherwise, the colours assigned to Telegram channels/accounts match the colour scheme used in Table 1 above — that is, English channels are shown in blue, German in pink, Swedish in yellow, Dutch in orange, and so forth.*

The network, being divided into different language clusters, yet remaining connected in its whole structure, indicates that:

- Many channels focus on content in their own language; and that
- Some channels connect the language clusters through posts that get forwarded despite the language difference.

This highlights the transnational dimension of the whole network in two main ways. First, while it is clear that channels that share content in a specific language are clearly more focused on topics relevant to their own countries, there are channels whose content is forwarded despite the language barrier. The presence of linguistic clusters is attributable to the fact that not all seed channels are interconnected. Second, in spite of linguistic clusters, the transnational nature of the network is evidenced by the connections between the different linguistic clusters in the middle of the network.

In particular, two main clusters in the middle of the figure above are worth highlighting. These channels represent the backbone of the network, and the connection between the English-speaking, the German-speaking, and the Dutch-speaking sections of the network. The first cluster is made of the news and disinformation channels, which act as information brokers for a sizeable part of the network. The information channels, which mostly spread disinformation or partisan content, are heavily connected to the rest of the network. The second cluster comprises alt-right channels.¹⁵¹ It is worth noting that in these two main clusters, some QAnon channels are also present. QAnon in particular is a very important link that connects the US and German sections of the network, with the US usually being the main source of QAnon content.

¹⁵¹ The Alternative Right or alt-right, is a set of ideology, groups and individuals whose core belief was white supremacy.

'Alt-Right', *Southern Poverty Law Center*, n.d., <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/alt-right/#the-alt-right-and-street-activism>.

Zooming in further into language clusters, the German-speaking channels are mostly spreading news, disinformation, conspiracy theories but are also focusing on separatist narratives for certain German regions, and anti-vaccination *Querdenken* channels. The German-speaking channels are also heavily connected to two other clusters; one mostly composed of Austrian channels and the other focusing on sharing propaganda related to the QAnon phenomenon.

The Dutch-speaking channels are mostly focusing on a wide variety of conspiracy theories. Notably, two relevant channels share QAnon related content. Among the English-speaking cluster, there are a number of neo-Nazi channels, or broader far-right channels. Most of the Swedish channels are situated in their vicinity, due to the fact that we have detected a strong content overlap (focusing on fascist, antisemitic, or anti-immigration content) between the English-speaking and the Swedish clusters. In spite of a prominent far-right dimension in the Swedish cluster, there are conspiracy narratives as well, suggesting the existence of a more generic AGE ecosystem in Sweden – as is visible in the national clusters of channels for the likes of Germany or the Netherlands.

It is also worth noting that the English-speaking channels are not only based in the US. Other countries represented by these clusters include Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom.

These channels were forwarded by some of the seed channels for three main reasons: the first one is that speaking the same language easily allows the users to understand the topics discussed and the content shared by these channels. The second one is a common ground as far as topics are concerned (e.g. anti-immigration content). The third one is related to real-world events that were considered relevant by the seed channels. One such example is March for Australia, a series of anti-immigration rallies that happened in Australia from August 2025 to October 2025, which clearly resonated amongst AGE communities worldwide ¹⁵²

With regard to the main narratives observed inside the overall network of channels, the most relevant include:

- QAnon narratives;
- Anti-vax theories and other conspiracy theories;
- Anti-establishment and anti-mainstream media sentiments;
- Open or partially open support for pro-Russian narratives;
- Far-right and conservative narratives, including anti-immigration;
- Antisemitism.

However, it has to be noted that these narratives were not always present in every single seed channel. Furthermore, some of these narratives were adapted to the context of the specific countries.

Results

To uncover the specific characteristics of the AGE network through the SNA, three distinct levels of analysis were adopted: the whole network analysis, the subgroup analysis, and the node analysis. The whole network analysis focuses on the analysis of those properties, or metrics (such as density, reciprocity, and centralisation), of a network as a whole.¹⁵³ The subgroup analysis, instead, refers to the identification of subsets of nodes closely and strongly connected together,

¹⁵² 'Tensions Erupt on Melbourne Streets as Opposing Immigration Rallies Held across Australian Capitals', *ABC News*, 19 October 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-19/tensions-flare-melb-march-for-australia-anti-immigration-rallies/105908634>.

¹⁵³ Katherine Ognyanova, 'Social Network Analysis', in *Encyclopedia of Technology and Politics* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022).

forming what can be described as communities, clusters, or modularity classes.¹⁵⁴ Finally, the node analysis performs the study of an individual node (or actor)'s properties by computing node-level metrics such as degree, weighted degree, centrality, and clustering.¹⁵⁵

Modularity class

At the subgroup level analysis, the authors focused on measuring the modularity class, which is a metric used for evaluating the structure of networks. This perspective is measured by a score between $Q=0$ and $Q=1$, which identifies how well a network is divided into modules, also known as groups, clusters, or communities.¹⁵⁶ According to Newman and Girvan, high modularity scores, between around 0.3 and 0.7, indicate that the network has a strong community structure.¹⁵⁷ In this case, the AGE network has 33 modularity classes and a modularity score of 0.617, indicating a strong community structure. In an SNA, a strong community structure underlines the presence of subgroups, within which nodes are more strongly and densely connected with each other rather than with nodes of the rest of the network.¹⁵⁸

Degree

At the node level, degree centrality of the AGE network has been analysed. Degree centrality is the number of nodes adjacent to a given node and represents the number of direct contacts each node has,¹⁵⁹ thus defining the number of connections that a specific node has within the network. Since the AGE network under consideration is a directed network, it is possible to measure separately two types of degree centrality: in-degree and out-degree. In-degree measures the number of edges coming into a given node, while the out-degree measures the number of edges going out of a given node.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the AGE network can be analysed as a weighted network because edges are not just present or absent, but embody a specific weight.¹⁶¹ This weight is measured through the sum of the connections coming into a given node or going out of a given node.¹⁶² Therefore, as for the degree, when considering a weighted network, it is possible to delineate the weighted in-degree and weighted out-degree of a specific node. Weighted in-degree and weighted out-degree of the AGE network, just like in-degree and out-degree, will be discussed later in the chapter.

Considering the AGE network, the SNA can be adopted to show the degree centrality, both in its unweighted and weighted forms. In the first case, degree centrality represents the sum of the number of Telegram channels forwarded by a given Telegram channel (in-degree) and in how many Telegram channels the given Telegram channel has been forwarded (out-degree). For instance, Telegram channel A has been forwarded by five Telegram channels, and it has been forwarded by another two Telegram channels. Consequently, its degree centrality is seven. In the second case, weighted degree centrality indicates the sum of the number of posts of a Telegram

154 K. De Nooy, 'Social Network Analysis, Graph Theoretical Approaches To', in *Encyclopedia of Complexity and Systems Science* (Springer, New York, NY, 2009), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-30440-3_488; S. Wasserman and K. Faust, 'Cohesive Subgroups', in *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

155 Ricardo Lopes De Andrade and Leandro Chaves Rego, 'The Use of Nodes Attributes in Social Network Analysis with an Application to an International Trade Network', *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications* 491, no. 1 (2018): 249–70.

156 Mark E. J. Newman and Michelle Girvan, 'Finding and Evaluating Community Structure in Networks', *Physical Review Journals* 69, no. 2 (2004), <https://link.aps.org/doi/10.1103/PhysRevE.69.026113>.

157 Idem.

158 Newman Mark E. J., 'Modularity and Community Structure in Networks', *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 103, no. 23 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0601602103>; Andrea Lancichinetti et al., 'Characterizing the Community Structure of Complex Networks', *PLoS ONE* 5, no. 8 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0011976>.

159 Linton C. Freeman et al., 'Centrality in Social Networks: Ii. Experimental Results', *Social Networks* 2, no. 1 (1979): 119–41, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8733\(79\)90002-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8733(79)90002-9).

160 Jennifer Golbeck, 'Network Structure and Measures', in *Analyzing the Social Web* (2013).

161 Tore Opsahl et al., 'Node Centrality in Weighted Networks: Generalizing Degree and Shortest Paths', *Social Networks* 32, no. 3 (2010): 245–51, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2010.03.006>.

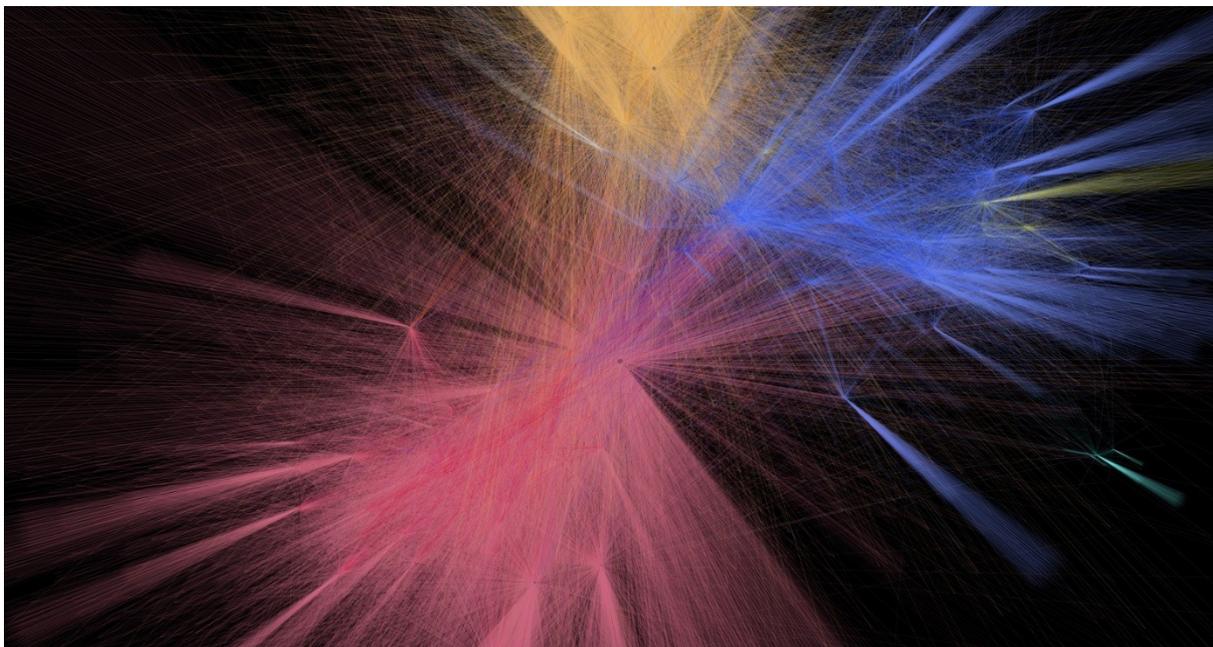
162 A. Barrat et al., 'The Architecture of Complex Weighted Networks', *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 101, no. 11 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0400087101>.

channel forwarded by a given Telegram channel (weighted in-degree) and the number of posts of the given Telegram channel forwarded by other Telegram channels (weighted out-degree).

Furthermore, the authors also decided to filter the network based on the weighted degree measure. Weighted degree, in this case, indicates the number of interactions a channel has had within the AGE network identified. By filtering out all the channels that had a single interaction, the ones that were not highly involved in the network were excluded.

Starting from the degree centrality, the SNA shows which are the most influential nodes, namely channels, within the AGE network. Figure 7 illustrates the network according to the degree centrality.

Figure 7: SNA Showing the Degree Centrality Metric of the AGE Network



In Table 2, it is possible to observe the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of seed channels with the highest degree score.

Table 2: 20 Seed Channels With the Highest Degree Score

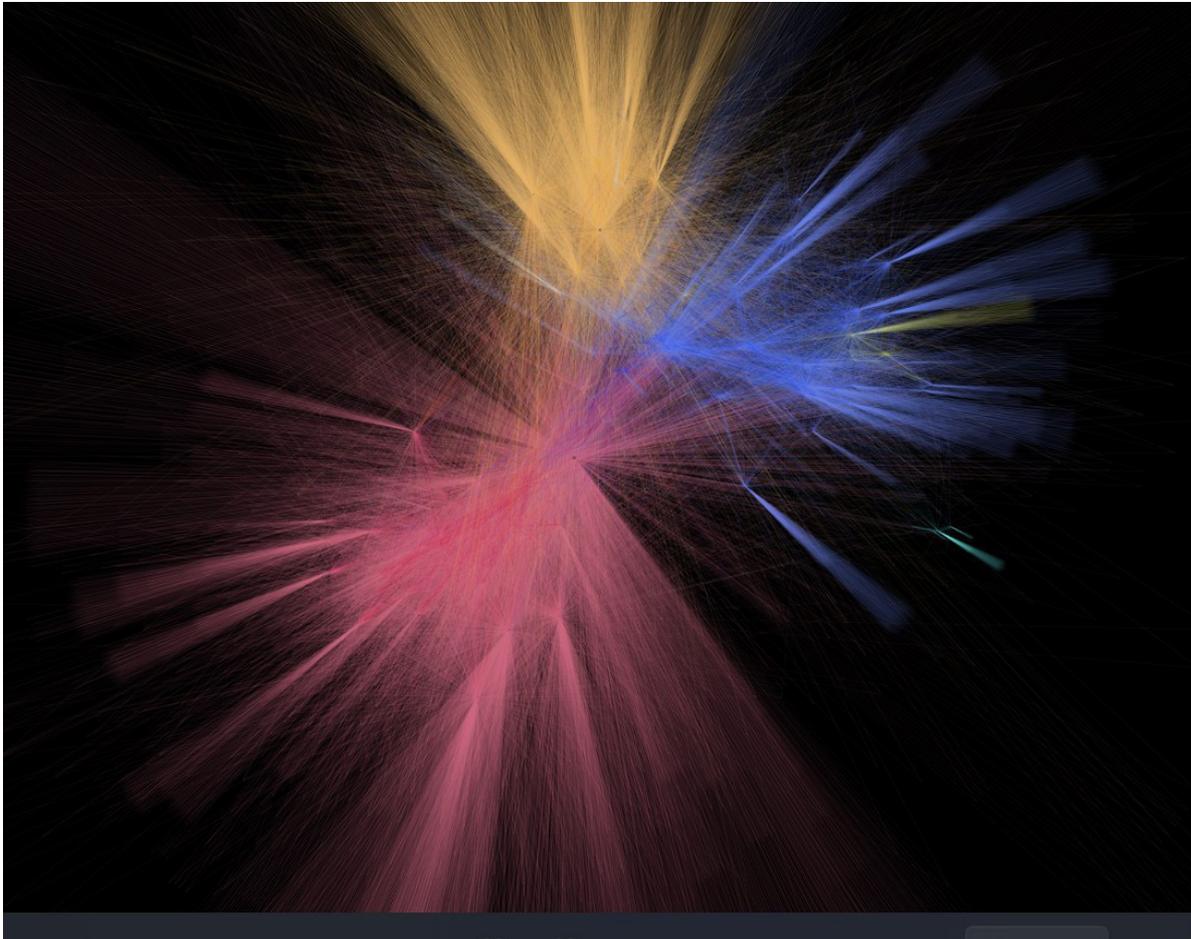
Language	Telegram channels	Degree score
	OutofTTTTTTTTTTgramm	5,558
	NederlandsTTTTTal	4,613
	InformationTTTTTeit	2,646
	RinusTTTT	2,298
	Die OffenbaruTTTT	1,913
	GehlktTTTT	1,696
	BÜRGETTTTT	1,508
	PatriotTTTT	1,297
	Q TTTTTKANAL TTTTT	1,214
	Qanon TTTTT	1,138
	CaptTTTT	1,133
	LiefdeTTTT	991
	De GuldeTTTT	985
	PlatteTTTT	915
	Alles ATTTTT	796
	X20TTTT	790
	WegTTTT	772
	SGB TTTTT	760
	DemoTTTT	742
	VRITTTTT	733

As previously stated, the degree measure is the sum of both in-degree and out-degree. Practically speaking, it represents the sum of the times a given seed channel has forwarded other channels and of the times that given channel has been forwarded by other seed channels. In other words, Table 2 shows the channels that ‘move’ the most content within the AGE network, in terms of the number of channels forwarded.

Out-degree

By looking at the out-degree is thus possible to see which are the seed channels that have forwarded the highest number of Telegram channels at least once within the AGE network. In Figure 8, it is possible to observe the SNA of the AGE network showing the out-degree.

Figure 8: SNA Showing the Out-Degree Centrality Metric of the AGE Network



In Table 3, it is possible to observe the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of seed channels with the highest out-degree score.

Table 3: 20 Channels With the Highest Out-Degree Score

Language	Telegram channels	Out-degree score
	OutofTTTTTTTTTTgramm	5,554
	NederlandsTTTTTal	4,597
	InformationTTTTTeit	2,635
	RinusTTTT	2,279
	Die OffenbaruTTTT	1,907
	GehlkTTTTT	1,685
	BÜRGETTTTT	1,503
	PatriotTTTTT	1,288
	Q TTTTTKANAL TTTTT	1,208
	Qanon TTTTT	1,115
	CaptTTTTT	1,090
	LiefdeTTTTT	973
	De GuldeTTTTT	967
	PlatteTTTTT	901
	X20TTTTT	761
	Alles ATTTTT	759
	SGB TTTTTT	748
	WegTTTTT	745
	DemoTTTTT	723
	VRITTTTT	720

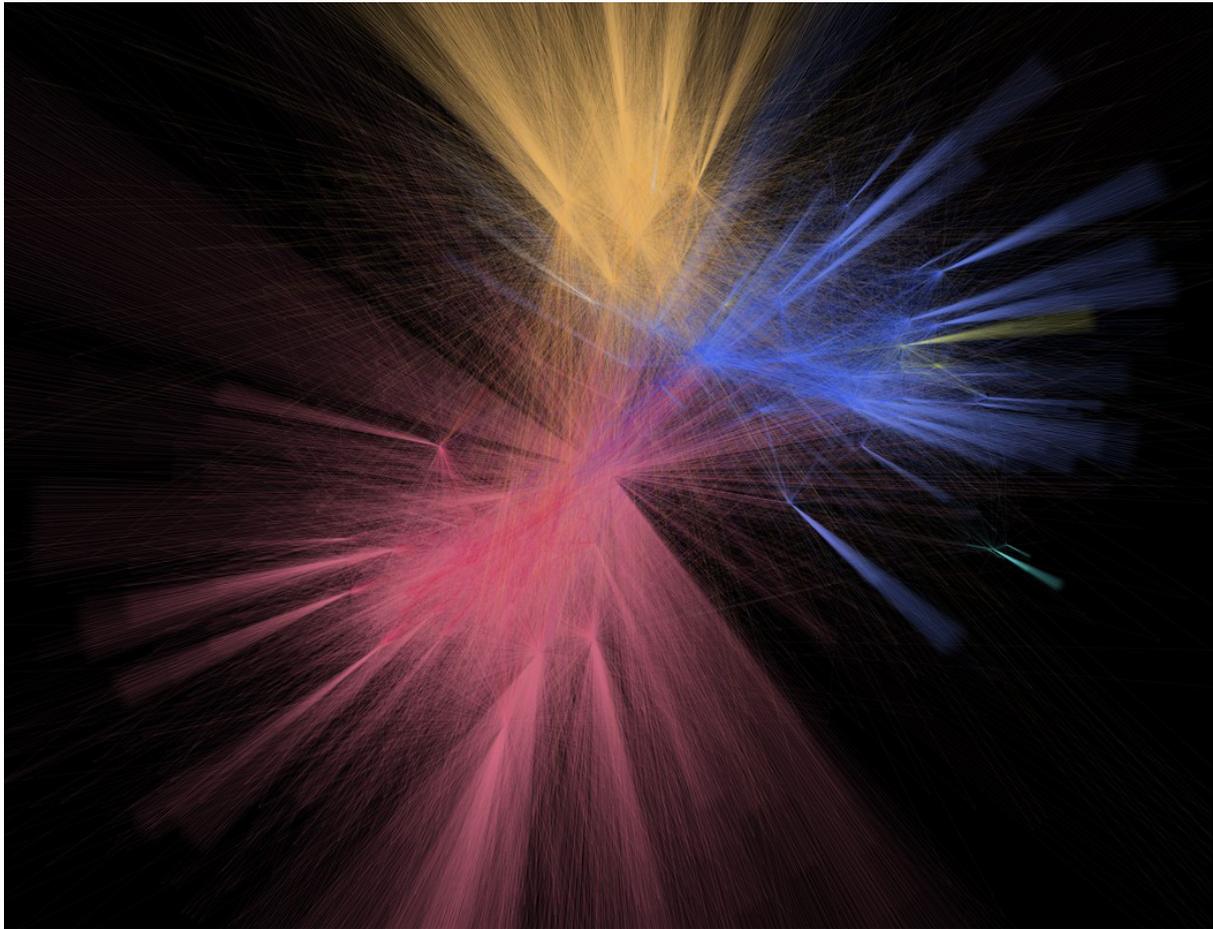
The degree and out-degree tables look fairly similar. In particular, OutofTTTTTTTTTTgramm and NederlandsTTTTTal have forwarded more channels than any other in the database. As a result, they can be considered as *super spreaders*, namely channels that share other channels' content rather than producing their own content. It is also worth mentioning that only one English-speaking channel is present in the top 5 percent of the out-degree score, highlighting how the top end of the forwarders in the network, as far as reaching new channels goes, is made up by mostly German-speaking and Dutch-speaking channels. Therefore, German-speaking and Dutch-speaking channels are those seed channels that are most actively forwarding other channels within the AGE network.

In-degree

By looking at the in-degree, it is noteworthy to observe which Telegram channels' contents have been forwarded the most by the Telegram seed channels. The in-degree thus shows how many times a channel's content has been forwarded at least once by the seed channel in the network.

The SNA observable in Figure 9 graphically shows which Telegram channels have the most shared posts from the seed channels.

Figure 9: SNA Showing the In-Degree Centrality Metric of the AGE Network



In Table 4, it is possible to observe the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of the Telegram channels (seed channels and not) with the highest in-degree.

Table 4: 20 Channels With the Highest In-Degree Centrality Score

Language	Telegram channels	In-degree score
	DiscTTTTT	114
	AUTTTTTF1	83
	MidnightTTTTT	79
	Eva HTTTTT	70
	UncutTTTTT	70
	LaurTTTTT	69
	BRICTTTTT	69
	RABBITTTTT	65
	Pavel TTTTTTT	65
	InsideTTTTT	63
	TTTTT GenTT	63
	BiTTTTTT	63
	TTTTTelegramTTTTT	60
	FreieTTT	59
	DaniTTTTTT	58
	SergeTTTTT	58
	HennTTTTT	58
	TTTDonTTTTTT	58
	TTTLioTTT	57
	Geopolitics Prime	57

In the network under analysis, the in-degree measure highlights radically different channels compared to the out-degree: English-speaking channels are way more relevant according to this measure. This is because in the AGE network, a lot of news and conspiracy theories are based on content generated from posts of US channels (such as QAnon). The main channel highlighted is DiscTTTTT, a well-known disinformation outlet based in Germany that spreads its content in English. DiscTTTTT has more than 358,000 subscribers. Other relevant channels highlighted by these metrics are:

- AUTTTTTF1: an Austrian disinformation outlet founded by StefanTTTTTTT, AUTTTTTF1 promotes anti-mainstream ideas and conspiracy theories, such as those regarding COVID-19 and vaccines. Furthermore, the channel has taken pro-Russia and pro-Putin positions in the past. On Telegram, AUTTTTTF1 has more than 288,000 subscribers;
- MidnightTTTTT: an English-speaking channel, is mainly focused on the US, particularly its domestic politics, and engages in anti-establishment commentary. MidnightTTTTT has more than 212,000 subscribers;
- Eva HTTTTT: Telegram channel of Eva Herman, a former television presenter,¹⁶³ who has been described in the past as “an icon of QAnon in Germany”.¹⁶⁴ Among the topics present in her Telegram channel, there is scepticism against the mainstream media and disinformation. Eva Herman has more than 196,000 subscribers on Telegram;

¹⁶³ ‘TV Host Fired for Praising Nazis’ Motherhood Views’, *The Guardian*, 10 September 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2007/sep/10/tvhostfiredforpraisingnaz>.

¹⁶⁴ Gianluca Mezzofiore et al., ‘How the “Parasite” QAnon Conspiracy Cult Went Global’, *CNN*, 7 October 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/07/tech/qanon-europe-cult-intl>.

- UncutTTTTT: Telegram channel of the website uncut-news.ch, a Swiss website that has shared a variety of conspiracy theories and fake news. The channel has more than 98,000 subscribers.

It is also worth noting that there exist three channels, among the 20 highest in-degree centrality score channels, that are not part of the seed channels used to identify the AGE network. Since they are not seed channels, it is interesting how they are among the top 5 percent shared channels. These are:

- BRICTTTTT: an English news channel that shares news related to BRICS countries. Specifically, it has a strong weighting toward Russia and China, showing heavy criticism toward the US, the European Union (EU), and NATO. Its narratives focused on a multipolar and pro-BRICS world, strong criticism of Western institutions and elites, sympathy for Russia, social conservatism, and populism.
- Pavel TTTTTT, Telegram's CEO and founder: the official and personal channel of Pavel Durov. It shares insights on Telegram, advertisements, personal statements, and commentary on digital rights and regulation. Posts are shared in English.
- TTTDonTTTTT:¹⁶⁵ a channel which is not in any way endorsed by the current US president but nonetheless, focuses on the US President TTTDonTTTTT. It shares news concerning the US internal and foreign policy and President Trump's political decisions. The main narratives are focused on migration and border control, right-wing populism, MAGA ideology, and anti-elite statements.

Except for Pavel Durov's Telegram channel, the presence of the BRICS News and the TTTDonTTTTT channels within the 20 most-shared channels of the AGE network is a result in line with what was observed by the authors. The narratives shared by these two Telegram channels – anti-establishment, anti-West, conservative, pro-Russia, etc. – are related to those shared by the other Telegram channels listed in Table 5. Moreover, these narratives are closely connected to the narratives that form the basis of the AGE network, namely conspiracy and anti-government theories. This is the reason why they rank in higher positions in the AGE network according to the in-degree centrality score.

Looking at the channels most shared by seed channels, English-speaking channels emerge as the most popular because the content they develop and/or share forms the basis of the narratives within the AGE network. Therefore, although English-speaking channels are not the most active 'spreaders' within the network, they are still the most shared channels. Among them, the 20 most-shared channels, in terms of in-degree centrality score, are related to disinformation, conspiracy theories, and partisan information.

¹⁶⁵ This is not the official Telegram channel of the current US President Donald J. Trump. Created on the 30th of October 2019 and named after Donald J. Trump, despite not being officially connected to the US President, the mentioned channel now has 639,307 subscribers. That account has been shared by 57 other accounts in the network at least once, despite hardly forwarding any other accounts.

Weighted out-degree

By looking at the weighted out-degree, it is possible to see which are the seed channels that have forwarded the highest number of Telegram channels' posts within the AGE ecosystem under analysis. In Figure 10, it is possible to observe the SNA of the AGE network showing the weighted out-degree.

Figure 10: SNA Showing the Weighted Out-Degree Centrality Metric of the AGE Network

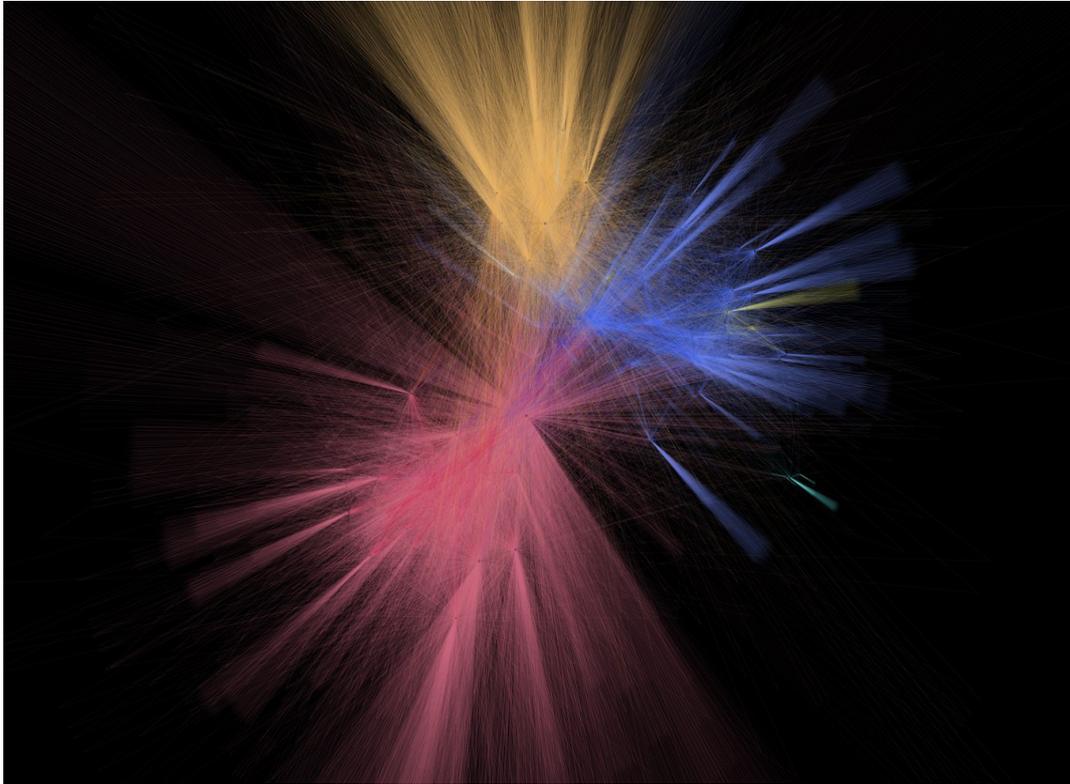


Table 5 ranks the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of the Telegram channels with the highest weighted out-degree.

Table 5: 20 Channels with the Highest Weighted Out-Degree Score

Language	Telegram channels	Weighted out-degree score
	OutofTTTTTTTTTTgramm	419,857
	NederlandsTTTTTal	166,423
	AzaTTTTT	124,928
	InformationTTTTeit	44,906
	BÜRGETTTTT	34,342
	RinusTTTT	31,973
	Die OffenbaruTTTTT	27,763
	De GuldeTTTTT	26,922
	X20TTTTT	24,202
	GehlkeTTTTT	21,697
	Q TTTTTKANAL TTTTT	21,223
	WWG1TTTTT	17,840
	CaptTTTTT	17,076
	WeTTTTT	16,682
	BellumTTTTT	16,477
	DemoTTTTT	15,426
	UnocupTTTTT	15,408
	OlivTTTTT	14,090
	S.H.TTTTT	13,719
	DotTTTTT	13,136

The weighted out-degree table highlights the channels that forward the most content. One of the main differences compared to the out-degree is the amount of English-speaking channels present in the top 20 content spreaders, rising from 1 to 6. In particular, alongside the two super spreaders mentioned previously (OutofTTTTTTTTTTgramm and NederlandsTTTTTal) emerges AzaTTTTT, an English-speaking super spreader. These are the top three channels by weighted out-degree, and they are the only ones with a score over 100,000, much higher than other channels.

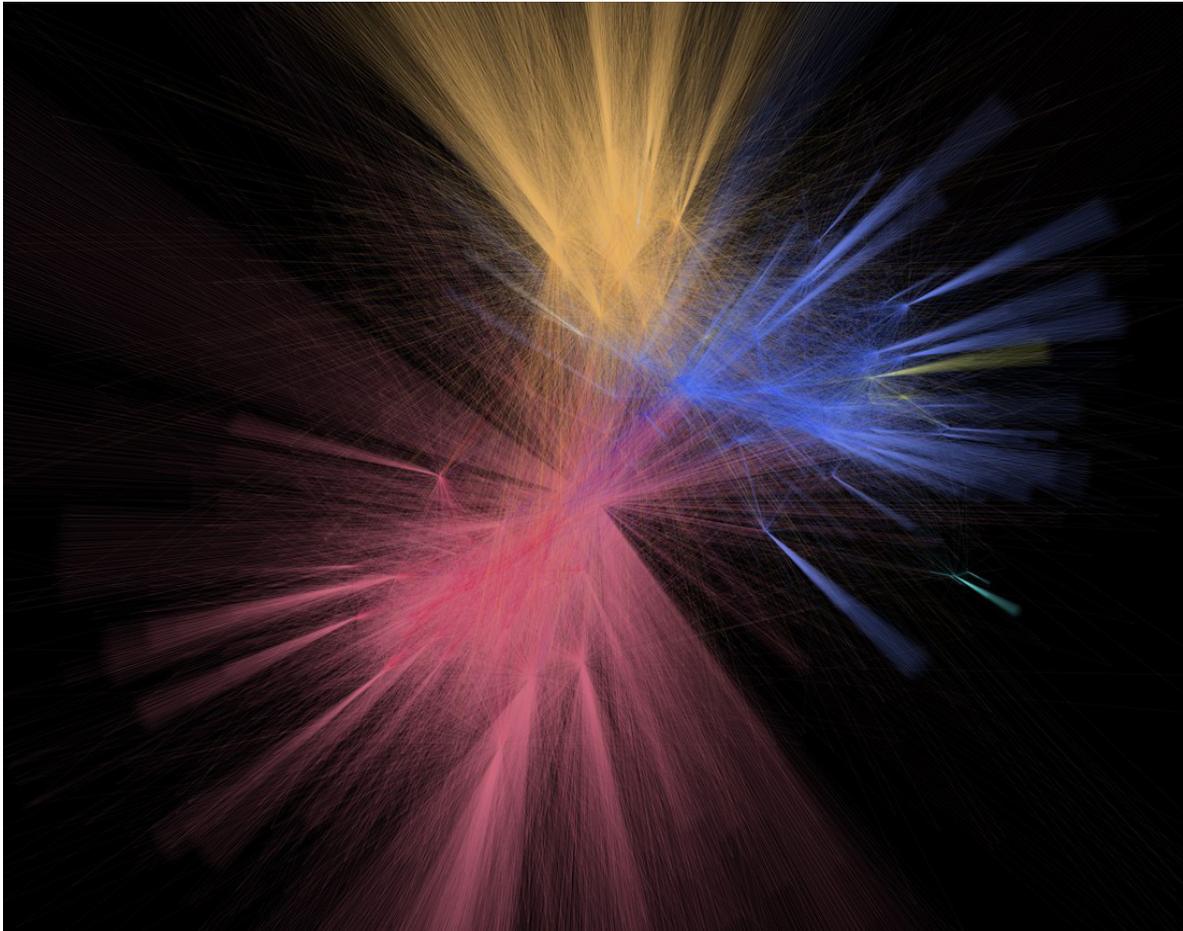
These 20 channels can be separated into three different macro-categories:

- Disinformation and conspiracy theories: these channels mostly focused on spreading false or partial information and news, or focusing on conspiracy theories. One such example is DotTTTTT, a Telegram channel with more than 29,000 subscribers, which, among others, spreads a lot of anti-vaccination theories and false narratives about climate change;
- Partisan news: these channels' content is mostly focused on news sharing, mostly from a partisan point of view. While the disinformation channels tend to take news only outside of mainstream media, the news channels also share information coming from reputable sources. One example of the category is the English-speaking channel BellumTTTTT, a channel with more than 105,000 subscribers;
- QAnon: QAnon channels, besides content from other channels promoting their own ideology, forward lots of material from disinformation channels. One example of the category is the Dutch-speaking channel WWG1TTTTT.

Weighted in-degree

By looking at the weighted in-degree, one can observe which Telegram channels have seen their content forwarded most frequently by the Telegram seed channels of this study. By examining the weighted in-degree, the SNA reveals which Telegram channels' posts have been most frequently forwarded by the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of the Telegram channels. In Figure 11, it is possible to observe the AGE network highlighting the weighted in-degree.

Figure 11: SNA Showing the Weighted In-Degree Centrality Metric Of The AGE Network



In Table 6, it is possible to observe the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of seed channels with the highest weighted in-degree.

Table 6: 20 Channels With the Highest Weighted In-Degree Centrality Score

Language	Telegram channels	Weighted in-degree score
	FirewTTTTT	78,523
	FriendsTTTTT	47,447
	WhipTTTTT	42,845
	VeikTTTTT	41,732
	X20TTTTT	30,273
	Q-TTTTT	30,028
	DooTTTTT	27,340
	DaniTTTTTT	21,147
	QfTTTTT	20,273
	S.TTTTTT	19,621
	MidnightTTTTT us	18,073
	WegTTTTT	17,541
	DEEPTTTTT	16,289
	TTQTTT	12,054
	TTTQ-TTTTT	11,503
	TNo TTTTT	11,090
	AlfTTTTTT	11,078
	GerTTTTT	10,661
	DiscTTTTT	10,384
	Qanon TTTTT	9578

It is worth noting that seven new channels have emerged through this measure, which were not part of the seed channels:

- FirewTTTTT: English-speaking channel.
- FriendsTTTTT: German-speaking group.
- DooTTTTT: an English-speaking channel sharing that shares content related to scepticism toward EU green policies, EU welfare system, and anti-woke, national identity, and conspiracy theory. It is not related to a specific country, but the content is focused on the US and the EU. It is highly shared by AzaTTTTT.
- DEEPTTTTT: An English-speaking channel explicitly aligned with QAnon, which shares content related to far-right ideologies (racism and xenophobia), secret society, deep-state, anti-elite and Christian nationalism.
- TNo TTTTT: English-speaking channel heavily focused on antisemitic conspiracy theories.
- AlfTTTTTT: Dutch-speaking channel.
- GerTTTTT: Dutch-speaking channel that shares content related to a strong anti-globalist and anti-United Nations (UN), populist, anti-establishment, anti-EU, against health policies (such as the COVID-19 vaccines campaign), and QAnon. It is highly shared by NederlandsTTTTTal.

As observed when analysing the in-degree, it is possible to note that the number of English-speaking channels is greater. Again, it can be asserted that the content shared by English-speaking channels forms the basis of the narratives circulating within the AGE network. However, when it comes to which channels have been forwarded the most, given the fact that the biggest spreader in the network is by far a German-speaking channel (OutofTTTTTTTTTgramm), German-speaking channels stand out.

Overall, looking at degree centrality (weighted and unweighted), two main initial conclusions can be drawn. Looking at the seed channels that share the largest number of channels within the AGE network, two super spreaders have been identified, namely a German-speaking and a Dutch-speaking channel. Specifically, these two channels are the main nodes connecting all language clusters (except French and Swedish) within the AGE network, as they share content from German-speaking, Dutch-speaking, and English-speaking channels. To a lesser extent, the other seed channels, which are among the top 5 percent of seed channels with the highest out-degree and weighted out-degree scores, also share content from other language clusters, thus forming, together with the super spreaders, the main transnational crossroad of the AGE network.

PageRank

Within a directed network as the one under analysis, it is useful to observe the PageRank to capture the prestige or importance of a given node. PageRank was created by Google's founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, to rank web pages by treating the internet as a directed network.¹⁶⁶ As explained by Google itself, "PageRank works by counting the number and quality of links to a page to determine a rough estimate of how important the website is. The underlying assumption is that more important websites are likely to receive more links from other websites."¹⁶⁷

When applied to a network, PageRank thus allows to identify the most influential and important elements, whose reach extends beyond just their direct connections.¹⁶⁸ Within the SNA, PageRank is a variation of eigenvector-based centrality that measures the influence of a node in a network.¹⁶⁹ PageRank thus assigns each node a score that reflects its prominence based on how many other nodes are connected to it and how prominent and influential those connected nodes are within the network.¹⁷⁰ In other words, nodes acquire importance whether they are connected to other important/influential nodes. Furthermore, PageRank refers to the probability distribution for nodes in a network, measuring how likely a node is to reach a specific node from other nodes in a network.¹⁷¹ It is adopted in directed networks because it uses the in-degree – incoming relations – as a metric to estimate the level of influence. Moreover, the weighted PageRank was employed since the AGE network is a directed network. In this way, it is therefore possible to calculate a more accurate PageRank because it uses the direction and weight of the edges, together with node-level analysis information.¹⁷² In contrast, ignoring the edge weight can lead to incorrect results.¹⁷³ In Figure 12, it is possible to observe the distribution of the nodes according to the PageRank metric.

166 Polo Chau, 'What Is PageRank? Why Does It Matter? How Is It Calculated?', *Medium*, 12 November 2023, <https://medium.com/polo-club-of-data-science/pagerank-algorithm-explained-with-examples-a5e25e2594c9>.

167 *Page Rank Algorithm and Implementation*, GeekforGeeks, n.d., <https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/python/page-rank-algorithm-implementation/>.

168 Andrew Disney, 'PageRank Centrality & EigenCentrality', *Cambridge Intelligence*, 14 January 2020, <https://cambridge-intelligence.com/eigencentality-pagerank/>.

169 "Eigenvector centrality refers to the idea that a node in a graph is more central if it is connected to other important nodes. It is calculated based on the node's connection to other nodes and their centrality."

'Eigenvector Centrality', *Science Direct*, n.d., <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/eigenvector-centrality>.

170 Panpan Zhang et al., 'PageRank Centrality and Algorithms for Weighted, Directed Networks', *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications* 586 (2022).

171 Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page, 'The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine', *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems* 30, nos 1–7 (1998): 107–17, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7552\(98\)00110-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7552(98)00110-X).

172 Zhang et al., 'PageRank Centrality and Algorithms for Weighted, Directed Networks'.

173 Zhang et al., 'PageRank Centrality and Algorithms for Weighted, Directed Networks'.

Figure 12: SNA Showing the PageRank Metric of the AGE Network

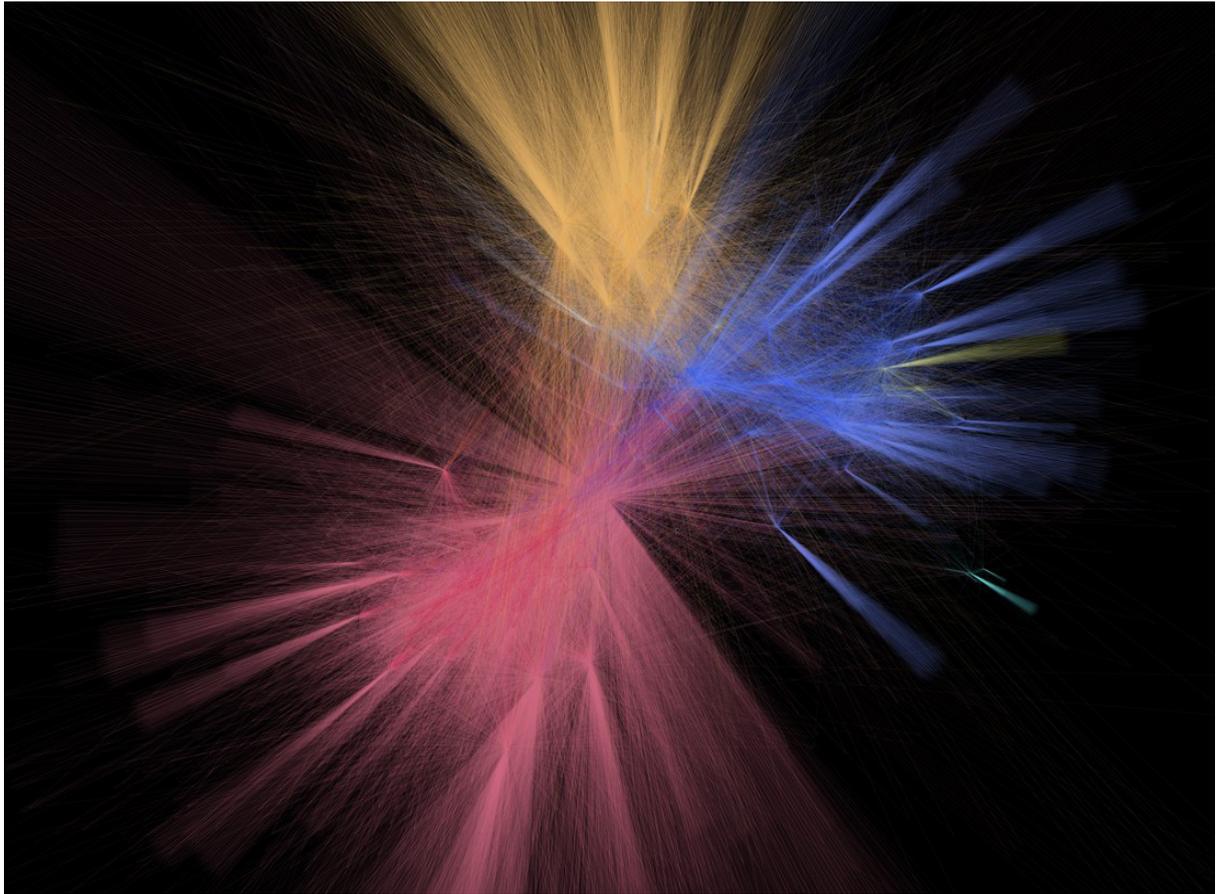


Table 7 ranks the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of the Telegram channels (seed channels and not) with the highest PageRank.

Table 7: 20 Channels With the Highest PageRank Score

Language	Telegram channels	PageRank score
	AUTTTTTF1	0.000363
	StefanTTTTTTT	0.00032
	The VigTTTTT	0.00032
	The D TTTTTT	0.000319
	DiscTTTTT	0.000275
	DetTTTTTTT	0.000259
	MidnightTTTTT us	0.000227
	MotsTTTTTTT	0.000222
	Dan TTTTTTT	0.000217
	INFOTTTTTTTTT	0.000211
	TTTMotsTTT	0.000207
	DaniTTTTTT ✨	0.000206
	TTTAlexTTT	0.000187
	TTTLioTTT	0.000169
	TTTNorTTTTT	0.000166
	TNo TTTTT	0.000162
	TTTImmTrTTT	0.000157
	Q-TTTTT 🖤 🖤 🖤	0.000151
	TTTDirTTT	0.00015
	TTTPatriotTTTTT	0.000147

As far as the PageRank is concerned, the channels with more authority in the network are a mix of German-speaking, English-speaking, and Swedish-speaking channels. Concerning the Dutch-speaking channels, only two seed channels are ranked in the top 100, specifically at the 69th and 74th positions. Moreover, it is worth noting that there are five Swedish-speaking channels in the top 5 percent. Given that Swedish channels do not appear among the top 5 percent when applying any of the other SNA metrics, their ranking may seem unusual. However, this is due to the fact that, according to PageRank, a very small and uninfluential node can gain notoriety (and therefore a high PageRank coefficient) if it is connected to another node or other nodes with a high PageRank coefficient.¹⁷⁴ In other words, it is not only the number of incoming connections (weighted in-degree) that is important, but also which nodes they come from, particularly if they are influential nodes and with many connections within the network. In this case, for instance, DetTTTTTTT ranks highly because it is linked to several English-speaking channels, in particular Mark Collett, a channel that is among the top 55 channels with the highest PageRank in the network. As for the other channels, especially English-speaking and German-speaking ones, in addition to having a high out-degree (such as DiscTTTTT), they are shared by super spreaders (in particular, OutofTTTTTTTTTTgramm and NederlandsTTTTTaI), thus earning a high score in terms of PageRank.

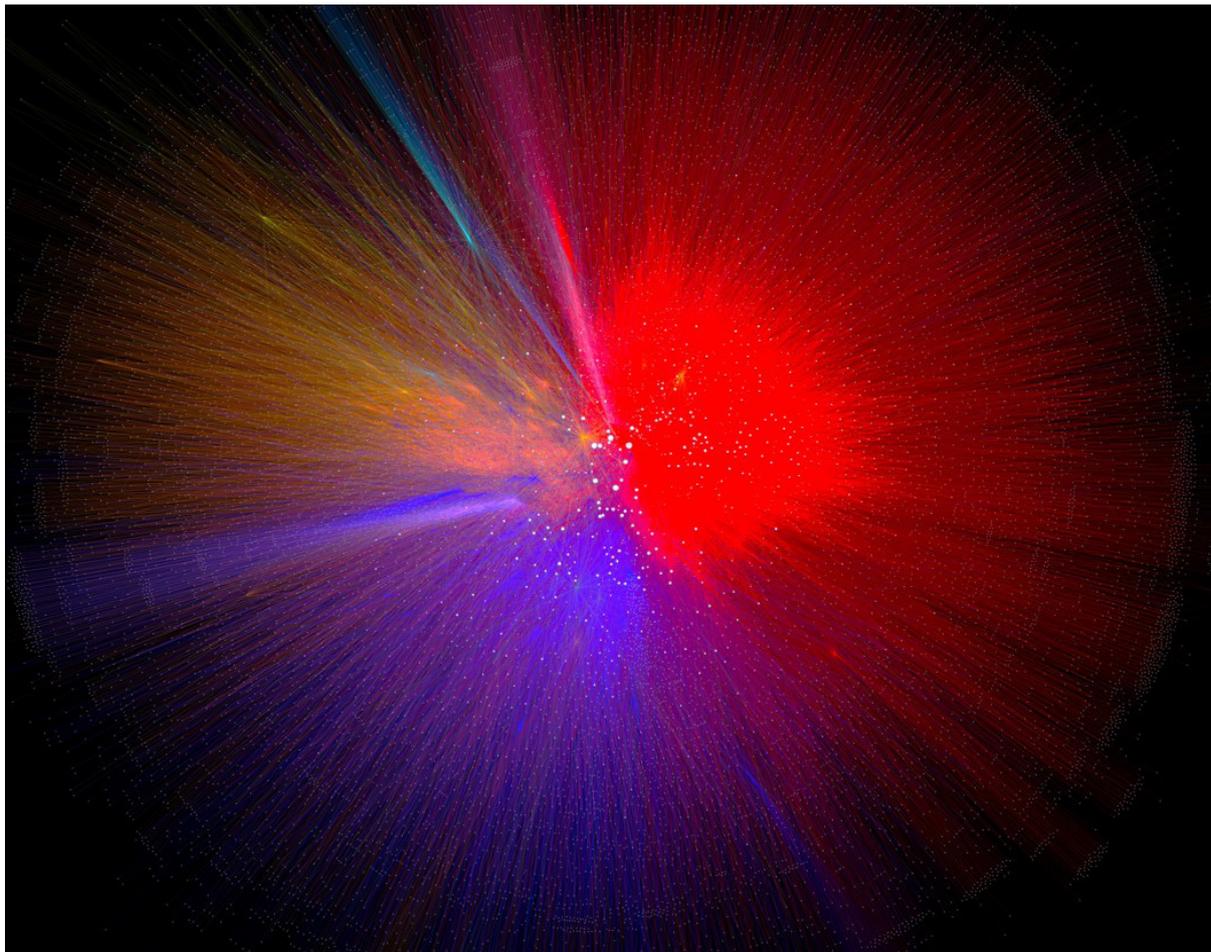
¹⁷⁴ Zhang et al., 'PageRank Centrality and Algorithms for Weighted, Directed Networks'.

Outlinks stream within the AGE network

Finally, the last analysis taken into consideration is the one performed on the outlinks present inside the AGE network. This allows us to see which social media platforms or websites are linked by the actor present inside the network. The authors decided to filter the network based on degree to exclude all the websites linked only once.

As can be seen in Figure 13, the Telegram channels once again remain separated in clusters based on the language spoken.

Figure 13: SNA of the Most Shared URLs Within the AGE Network



**Note: In this figure, red indicates German-language URLs, while pink indicates Russian-language URLs.*

In Table 8 and Table 9, wherein the most shared links inside the networks are classified, the colour green represents a social media platform (messaging platform or social network), while purple indicates a website. The two metrics analysed in Table 8 and Table 9 are the in-degree and weighted in-degree scores. The first one highlights which domains were shared by the most seed channels, while the second shows the number of times a domain has been shared. Both tables rank the 5 percent (rounded up to 20 channels) of the URL (seed channels and not) with the highest in-degree and weighted in-degree.

Table 8: 20 URLs With the Highest In-Degree Centrality Score

Platform	Outlink	In-degree score
	t.me	332
	youtu.be	317
	youtube.com	312
	x.com	308
	rumble.com	269
	twitter.com	233
	instagram.com	233
	facebook.com	202
	odysee.com	201
	dailymail.co.uk	190
	tiktok.com	190
	t.co	184
	nypost.com	181
	m.youtube.com	170
	theguardian.com	166
	bbc.com	166
	reuters.com	164
	nytimes.com	164
	truthsocial.com	159
	msn.com	159

Table 9: 20 URLs With the Highest Weighted In-Degree Centrality Score

Platform	Outlink	Weighted in-degree score
	t.me	1,246,906
	x.com	285,711
	youtube.com	130,720
	youtu.be	103,478
	twitter.com	81,951
	rumble.com	63,858
	truthsocial.com	51,911
	thegatewaypundit.com	44,749
	odysee.com	33,219
	telegra.ph	26,809
	ko-fi.com	22,643
	m.bild.de	18,029
	bild.de	17,621
	facebook.com	17,503
	druschbafm.com	17,490
	kopp-verlag.de	16,488
	instagram.com	14,643
	dagelijksestandaard.nl	14,367
	uncutnews.ch	14,166
	dailymail.co.uk	13,341

The common threads between the two different metrics are that social media platforms are by far the most shared domains, followed by information and news websites. Thus AGE channels share more often social media posts than news websites' content. By far the most relevant social media platform for the network is Telegram, both looking at the in-degree and the weighted in-degree. This is obviously because that's where the network being analysed has developed. However, other social media are particularly relevant. First and foremost, YouTube has been shared heavily inside the network, just like X, Facebook, and Instagram. Three social media platforms that are also extremely relevant (not as mainstream as the ones mentioned before) are Rumble, Odysee, and Truth Social.

If we focus on the websites present in the table, Ko-fi stands out as a possible source of income for some channels inside the network. Ko-Fi is a crowdfunding platform where creators can create a page and receive donations from their fans.¹⁷⁵ In the past, there were already cases where Ko-Fi, as a platform, has been exploited by extremists to fund extremist actors.¹⁷⁶

As far as news sources, the in-degree highlights some mainstream media sources such as *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, *BBC*, *New York Times*, and *Reuters*. They could be used as either a way of confirming the bias of the user posting them or to highlight the corruption of mainstream media. Furthermore, past research also confirmed that mainstream and conspiracy content mixing was present in right-wing communities, which are present inside the AGE network: by mixing them together, the mainstream content can be used to legitimise non-credible sources.¹⁷⁷

Instead, if we focus on the weighted in-degree, the most shared links in absolute terms by the network, we see websites more focused on spreading disinformation and fake news.

- The Gateway Pundit: a US-based far-right fake-news website. Its URL is the most shared website inside the network;
- DruschbaFM, a German and English media project which focuses on alternative media sources. The websites heavily focus on Russia and Russian sources;
- Kopp Verlag, a German publisher which heavily focuses on conspiracy theories;
- De Dageijkse Standaard, a Dutch website connected to right-wing conservatives, which also shared conspiracy theories of various entities, such as climate denial;
- Uncut-News is a Swiss website that presents itself as alternative media, which in the past has shared a variety of fake news and conspiracy theories, taking a position against vaccines, among others.

The outlink analysis further solidifies what was previously seen in the first SNA regarding the nature of the content present inside the network, while also showing on which social media platform they get their content from.

Conclusions

The application of the SNA to the AGE network has allowed the authors to highlight the morphology of the network and its most important actors – Telegram channels – in particular, those most active in sharing content and those whose content is the most shared. Starting with the Telegram channels most active in spreading content, on the one hand, the authors first observed how the German- and Dutch-speaking seed channels are the ones that share the highest number of Telegram channels. Specifically, there are two super spreaders. On the other hand, English-

¹⁷⁵ 'Getting Started on Ko-Fi', *Ko-Fi*, n.d., <https://help.ko-fi.com/hc/en-us/articles/360014098514-Getting-started-on-Ko-fi>.

¹⁷⁶ Ariel Bogle, *Buying and Selling Extremism: New Funding Opportunities in the Right-Wing Extremist Online Ecosystem*, no. 49 (ASPI, 2021).

¹⁷⁷ Benjamin D. Horne et al., 'Different Spirals of Sameness: A Study of Content Sharing in Mainstream and Alternative Media', *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 13 (July 2019): 257–66, <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v13i01.3227>.

speaking channels rank among the most shared channels. In particular, the authors observed that DiscTTTTT was the most shared within the AGE network. Moreover, if we look at the content shared, in terms of posts forwarded by the seed channels, the SNA shows how German-, English-, and Dutch-speaking channels are the most active. Specifically, it highlights how there are three main super spreaders within the AGE network.

As far as the Telegram channels whose posts are the most shared, the SNA underlines that the most shared content is in English and German. Finally, the SNA was also employed to observe the URL stream of the AGE network on Telegram to understand the morphology of the internal and external content flow. Specifically, the authors highlight which URLs were shared by the highest number of seed channels and which were the most shared URLs, in terms of absolute numbers. In the first case, seed channels mainly share social media URLs (Telegram, YouTube, X, Instagram, Facebook, Odysee, etc.) and *outlinks* to the main US and UK newspapers (*Daily Mail*, *New York Post*, *The Guardian*, *BBC*, *Reuters*, *New York Times*, etc.). In the second case, social media still ranks among the most shared, which are followed by a far-right fake-news website (The Gateway Pundit), a crowdfunding platform (Ko-fi), a news outlet (Bild and Daily Mail) and other conspiracy theories and fake news websites.

As far as narratives are concerned, looking at the more relevant channels highlighted through the SNA, the network seems to be mostly based around a variety of conspiracy theories and anti-establishment ideas. Crucially, not all the channels present in the network share the same narratives or ideas, but they sometimes diverge on them.

Inside the network, QAnon theories seem to be still present, particularly in English- and German-speaking channels. Other narratives that were found inside the network were pro-Russian stances, anti-vaccine theories and anti-immigration rhetoric. The latter especially overlaps between the conservative channels, the far-right ones and the fascist ones, which were mostly English-speaking channels. Overall, most of the narratives seem to find their origins in English-speaking channels, while German-speaking channels are the biggest spreader of content in the network individuated.

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