

Document 1 -The Role of Alternative Social Media in the News and Information Environment

Reprot, Pew Research Center, October 6 2022

Free speech ideals, heated political themes prevail on these sites, which draw praise from their users and skepticism from other Americans

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The full report is here <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2022/10/06/the-role-of-alternative-social-media-in-the-news-and-information-environment/>

Alternative social media sites attract a small, loyal base of news consumers; top accounts often espouse pro-Trump, pro-America, religious themes



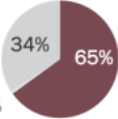
6%

of U.S. adults **regularly get news** from at least one of these sites:

BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social

% of alternative social media news consumers who say they ____ of people that share their views

Have not found a community



Have found a community

No answer 1%



15%

of prominent alternative social media accounts have been **banned or demonetized** by other social media sites

% of prominent alternative social media accounts that have appeals to each value

26%

Right-leaning/
Trump supporting



21%

Patriotism/
Pro-America



21%

Religious
identity



Note: N=1,400 prominent accounts (200 sampled from the accounts on each site with the most followers). See methodology for more details.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 16-22, 2022; Pew Research Center analysis of 200 prominent accounts on each alternative social media site conducted June 2022.

"The Role of Alternative Social Media in the News and Information Environment"

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In recent years, several new options have emerged in the social media universe, many of which explicitly present themselves as alternatives to more established social

media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube – especially by opposing free speech restrictions they say are rife at those sites.

These newer sites have created a small but satisfied community of news consumers, many of whom say one of the major reasons they are there is to stay informed about current events, according to a new Pew Research Center study. The study included a survey of U.S. adults along with an audit of seven alternative social media sites – BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social – and a detailed analysis of prominent accounts and content across them.

Although fewer than one-in-ten Americans say they use any of these sites for news, most who do say they have found a community of like-minded people there. And news consumers on the four sites with large enough numbers to be analyzed individually – Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social – largely say they are satisfied with their experience getting news on the sites, that they find the information there to be mostly accurate, and that the discussions are mostly friendly.

At the same time, however, the study finds signs that these sites may be another symptom of the increasingly polarized public discourse – and Americans' partisan divisions in the broader news media environment.

A majority of those who regularly get news from at least one of the seven alternative social media sites (66%) identify as Republicans or lean toward the Republican Party, in contrast with the news consumers on more established social media sites, who largely identify as Democrats or lean Democratic. And this trend is common among prominent accounts as well, with about a quarter of these accounts (26%) identifying as conservative or Republican or supportive of former President Donald Trump or his "Make America Great Again" movement. In addition, many prominent accounts express other values such as patriotism and religious identity.

Several sites are linked to conservative backers – including Truth Social, which was launched by Trump about a

year after he was “indefinitely” and “permanently” suspended from Facebook and Twitter. This is not a unique phenomenon: The study found a noteworthy percentage of prominent accounts on these seven newer sites (15%) have been banned or demonetized elsewhere on social media.

Perhaps connected to that, Americans who have heard of these sites but do not use them as sources for news are skeptical of them. When asked for the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about alternative social media sites, people in this category commonly cite inaccuracy and misinformation, political bias and the political right, and extremism and fringe ideas.

Other elements of the study speak to some of these associations. A small but measurable share of prominent accounts across these sites (6%) mention a connection to the set of conspiracy theories known as QAnon. And an analysis of recent content posted by prominent accounts on these sites finds that the most common phrases include some that are controversial and even inflammatory such as wariness toward vaccines and negative associations with LGBTQ people. Moreover, one of the most prevalent destinations for links found in these posts is The Gateway Pundit, a digital outlet that has been criticized for publishing false information.

These are some of the key themes to emerge from this major new study, which was designed to look at multiple aspects of the world of alternative social media. It examines those who turn to these sites for news, explores how the sites present themselves, and reports on the kinds of accounts that draw the most attention and the types of conversations taking place there.

For the first component, researchers conducted a survey of news consumers on seven sites: BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social. Four of these – Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social – had enough news consumers to do a deeper dive.

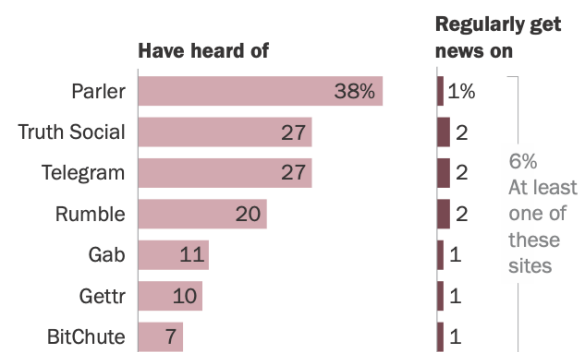
Next, researchers conducted an audit of all seven sites that explored elements of how the sites present themselves, privacy features, and other characteristics. Researchers then analyzed 200 prominent accounts sampled from those with the highest number of followers on each of these sites. They examined these 1,400 accounts for several attributes, including how they describe themselves in their profiles. Finally, researchers collected all 585,470 posts published by these accounts in June 2022 and examined their key phrases, themes and the links included in the posts. For more details, see the methodology. The rest of this overview discusses the key findings of the study in more detail.

Alternative social media sites have small, largely Republican audiences; prominent accounts tend to

emphasize right-leaning identities and religious and patriotic values

Wide variance in the sites Americans have heard of, but few get news on any

% of U.S. adults who ____ each alternative social media site



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 16-22, 2022.
“The Role of Alternative Social Media in the News and Information Environment”

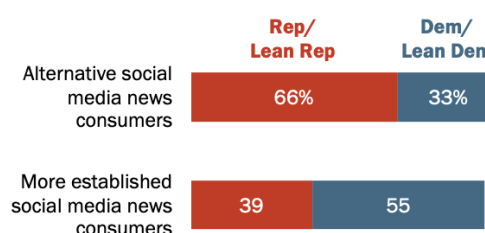
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These sites have become a refuge for some who feel they do not have a home on the more established sites.

Still, relatively few Americans use these alternative social media sites for news – though larger portions have heard of each of them. Parler is the best known of the seven sites named in the survey, with 38% of U.S. adults saying they are familiar with it. The share who get news on these sites is much smaller: Just 6% of Americans get news from at least one of the seven sites mentioned, and no single site is used for news by more than 2% of U.S. adults.

About two-thirds of alternative social media news consumers are Republicans

% of each group who are ...



Note: “Alternative social media news consumers” are the 6% of U.S. adults who report regularly getting news on at least one of the following social media sites: BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social. “More established social media news consumers” are those who report regularly getting news on at least one of the following social media sites: Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Alternative social media news consumers may also get news on more established social media sites and vice versa.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 16-22, 2022.
“The Role of Alternative Social Media in the News and Information Environment”

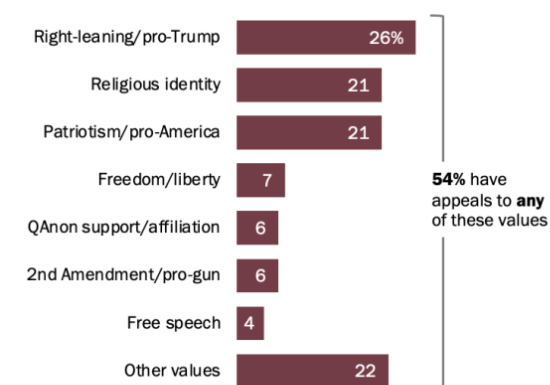
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The news consumers on these sites lean heavily Republican. A majority of those who get news from at least one of the seven alternative social media sites (66%) are

Republican or lean Republican. This is in contrast with more established social media sites, where news consumers are more likely to be Democrats or lean Democratic. (For more about news consumers on these more established sites, read our Social Media and News Fact Sheet.)

About a quarter of prominent alternative social media accounts link themselves to GOP, Trump

% of prominent alternative social media accounts that have appeals to each value in their profiles



Note: N=1,400 prominent accounts. 200 were sampled from each of seven alternative social media sites: BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social. Prominent accounts are those with the highest number of followers on each site. Accounts may express more than one value appeal. See methodology for more details. "Other values" include value appeals that appeared less frequently than others, including opposition to Big Tech, opposition to mainstream media, and ethnic identity. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 200 prominent accounts on each site conducted June 2022.

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This report also looks at a sample of 200 of the prominent accounts on each site – those with the greatest number of followers – to determine what kinds of accounts tend to gain the most traction on alternative social media.

Roughly half (54%) of prominent accounts appeal to some kind of value or political orientation in their profiles. The most common of these values was right-leaning – 26% of prominent accounts expressed some kind of right-leaning or pro-Trump appeal – more of which centered around Trump or his "Make America Great Again" movement than with the Republican Party or conservative ideology.

Other expressed values included appeals to a religious identity (21% of prominent accounts), patriotism/pro-America views (21%), freedom and liberty (7%), pro-gun or pro-Second Amendment positions (6%), and support for the set of conspiracy theories known as QAnon (6%).

A close look at who is behind the prominent accounts shows that about eight-in-ten (83%) are run by individuals. That can mean either a single person with a noted affiliation to an organization or one without any organizational affiliation. Another 12% are organizations, including news organizations, nonprofit groups and others. Along with a prevalence of conservative values and identities in prominent account profiles, political topics were common in the content posted there. This study collected all posts published by the 1,400 prominent accounts in June 2022 and identified those that were about

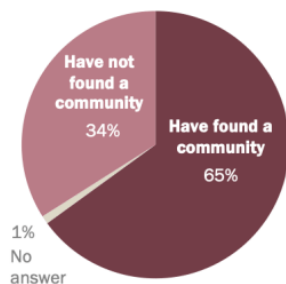
five politically oriented topics: abortion; guns, gun control and shootings; the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol and subsequent congressional hearings; LGBTQ issues; and vaccines.

The discussion around these issues often reflects fringe and controversial worldviews on the political right. For instance, some of the most common terms in posts about the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol include "political prisoner," "DC gulag," "unselect committee," "witch hunt" and "sham hearing." Meanwhile, posts about vaccines indicate a deep and consistent concern about the impact of vaccination. These posts regularly refer to a small group of influential vaccine skeptics. The most common terms in these posts point to a widespread fear of real but rare impacts of vaccination ("side effect," "adverse reaction," "blood clot," "heart inflammation") but also diseases or symptoms for which the medical literature finds little evidence of being tied to vaccines ("[sudden adult] death syndrome," "sperm count"). And posts about LGBTQ issues commonly referred to drag queen "story hour" (a common target of anti-LGBTQ groups) or derisive allegations toward gay and transgender individuals, such as "pedo" and "groomer," implying that they prey on children. See Appendix C.

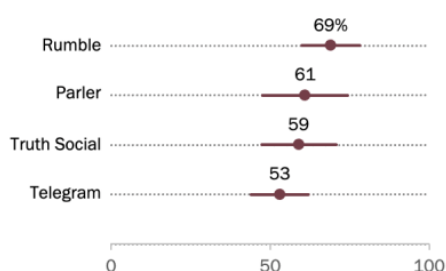
Most alternative social media news consumers feel a sense of community on these sites, which prominently identify themselves as havens of free speech

Most alternative social media news consumers feel a sense of a community there and say discussions are friendly

% of alternative social media news consumers who say they ____ of people who share their views there



Among those who regularly get news on each site, % who say discussions they see on those sites are mostly friendly



Note: "Alternative social media news consumers" are the 6% of U.S. adults who report regularly getting news on at least one of the following social media sites: BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social. In the second graphic, respondents who did not give an answer not shown; BitChute, Gab and Gettr not shown due to insufficient sample size. Lines surrounding data points represent the margin of error of each estimate.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 16-22, 2022.
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About two-thirds of individuals who get news on at least one of the seven alternative social media sites (65%) say they have found a community of like-minded people there. In a related finding, those who get news from Rumble, Parler, Truth Social and Telegram are far more likely to see these spaces as friendly than unfriendly. About half or more of those who get news on each of them – ranging from 53% to 69% – characterize the discussions they see on these sites as mostly friendly, while no more than a third of each site's news consumers say the conversation there is mostly unfriendly (the rest say conversation is about an equal mix of friendly and unfriendly).

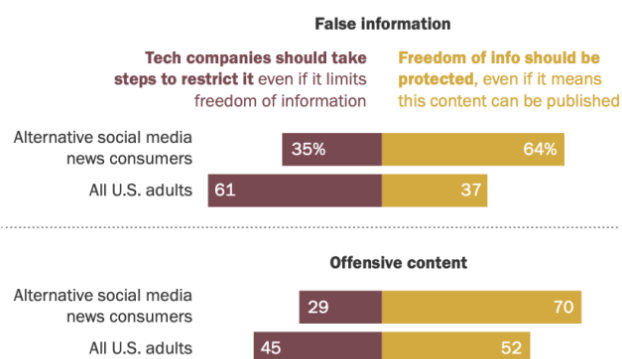
In some cases, the activity on these sites moves beyond the digital realm. One-third of alternative social media news consumers (33%) say they have participated in an in-person political rally or other political activity they learned about on these sites, and a similar share (36%) have donated money to accounts they follow on these sites.

A central way these sites depict themselves, one that may help give users that sense of community, is as welcoming havens for free speech as well as antidotes to the censorship and "cancel culture" they say exist on more

established social media sites. Indeed, all of the seven sites examined explicitly state that they support free speech. That message has clearly resonated with those turning to those sites for news. When users of alternative social media sites were asked to describe, in their own words, the first thing that comes to their mind in connection with these sites, 22% mentioned something related to the concept of freedom of speech, anti-censorship and an alternative to more established social media – far more common than any other type of response.

Alternative social media news consumers more likely than Americans overall to favor free speech protection over safeguards against false or offensive content

% who say the following about false information and offensive content online



Note: Respondents who did not answer not shown. "Alternative social media news consumers" are the 6% of U.S. adults who report regularly getting news on at least one of the following social media sites: BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 16-22, 2022.
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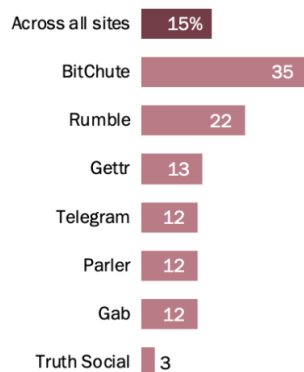
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Alternative social media news consumers are particularly supportive of these concepts. Compared with Americans overall, alternative social media news consumers are more likely to say that freedom of information should be protected – even if it means allowing false information and offensive content online – than they are to say technology companies should take steps to restrict false information. For example, nearly two-thirds of alternative social media news consumers (64%) favor the protection of free speech even if it brings with it some false content, while the majority of all U.S. adults (61%) prefer that tech companies take steps to restrict this kind of content even if it limits freedom of information.

15% of prominent accounts on alternative social media sites were banned elsewhere

15% of prominent alternative social media accounts have been banned or demonetized on other social media sites

% of prominent accounts on each alternative social media site that have been banned or demonetized by other social media sites



Note: N=1,400 prominent accounts. 200 were sampled from the accounts with the most followers on each of the seven alternative social media sites listed above. See methodology for more details. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 200 prominent accounts on each alternative social media site conducted June 2022.

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The free speech philosophies of these alternative social media sites have attracted some user accounts that were banned elsewhere. This may be connected to the perception among Americans who are aware of these sites but don't get news there that the sites host misinformation. Indeed, 15% of prominent accounts across the seven sites, including Trump's account, have been indefinitely or permanently suspended, banned or demonetized on more established social media. This is particularly common on BitChute, a video-focused site, where about a third of prominent accounts (35%) have been banned or demonetized elsewhere.

In a number of cases the banning or demonetization was based on evidence that they had spread misinformation and inaccurate information (one example being COVID-19 vaccine skeptic Dr. Robert Malone).

That perception clearly exists among the larger segment of the public that does not use these alternative social media sites for news. When asked to name the first thing that comes to mind when they think of alternative social media sites, adults who have heard about these alternative social media sites but do not get news on them most commonly voice thoughts of inaccuracy and misinformation: 16% of responses. Another 11% of these U.S. adults cite political bias or associate the sites with the political right, and 6% associate alternative social media with extremism or consider them dangerous. Those who get news on these sites are less likely to mention these ideas and more likely to associate them with a lack of censorship or as alternatives to Big Tech.

The content on these sites also raises some questions about the credibility of the information found there. In June

2022, the most prominent accounts commonly linked to digital-only outlets such as The Gateway Pundit, Rebel News, Zero Hedge and Breitbart – each of which have been banned or demonetized by technology companies or other social media sites for misinformation or hate speech. Overall, during this period, there was a clear preference for material from other social media (45% of links) and relatively new, digital-only news sites (20%) rather than legacy news organizations like print publications (4%), radio or podcast sites (1%) or television (1%) sites. In fact, the same share of links went to The Gateway Pundit as to all print publications combined (4%).

Almost all alternative social media sites studied moderate content to some extent and also give users the option to do so

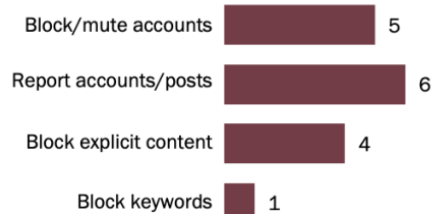
Most alternative social media sites in the study moderate their content to at least some extent

Of seven alternative social media sites studied, number that moderate content on their site in each of the following ways

Site/group-level moderation



User-level moderation



Note: Sites audited are BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Telegram, Rumble, and Truth Social. Data reflects the state of each site when collected; sites may have changed since then. Researchers reviewed terms of service, "About" pages and similar sections of the websites and examined features of the websites available to logged-in users.

Source: Data from Pew Research Center audit of seven alternative social media sites, collected April 2022 and verified August-September 2022.

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Notwithstanding their allegiance to free speech, almost all of the sites analyzed have at least some restrictions on content.

Every one of the sites, with the exception of Gab, moderates user content beyond the existing legal requirements to remove illegal content and cooperate with law enforcement requests.¹ In some cases, sites have agreed to certain restrictions due to outside pressure from governments or mobile app stores like Apple's App Store or the Google Play Store. This moderation includes

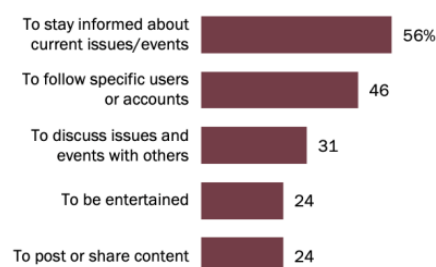
removing posts that may contain violent, racist or offensive content and, in some cases, for the political viewpoint expressed.

In addition, almost all these sites give their users options to control the content they see. Five sites let users block or mute other users from their news feed, six sites let users report either accounts or posts, and four of the sites allow users to block explicit content.

Alternative social media news consumers largely satisfied with news they find there, which is often government and political news they wouldn't have seen elsewhere

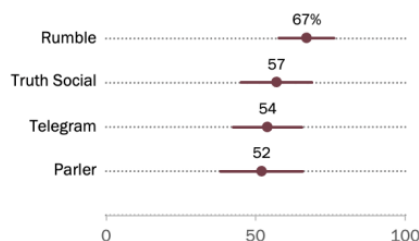
Staying informed about current events is a top reason people use alternative social media sites ...

% of alternative social media news consumers who say each is a major reason they use these sites



... and users are generally satisfied with their news experience

Among those who regularly get news on each site, % who say they are at least somewhat satisfied with getting news on the site



Note: "Alternative social media news consumers" are the 6% of U.S. adults who report regularly getting news on at least one of the following social media sites: BitChute, Gab, Gettr, Parler, Rumble, Telegram and Truth Social. BitChute, Gab and Gettr not shown in the second chart due to insufficient sample size. Lines surrounding data points represent the margin of error of each estimate. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 16-22, 2022. "The Role of Alternative Social Media in the News and Information Environment"

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For many users, these sites are an important source of information about current events – often government and politics news – and they report finding news that they wouldn't necessarily find elsewhere.

A majority of those who get news on at least one of the seven sites (56%) say a major reason they go to these sites is to stay informed about current events and issues. And much of what they see is government and political news: 52% say this is the most common type of news they come across on these sites.

In general, alternative social media news consumers like their experience there. About half or more of news consumers on Rumble, Truth Social, Telegram and Parler say they are very or somewhat satisfied with the experience of getting news there, and this overall satisfaction extends to their perception of the accuracy of the information they find. Fewer of the news consumers on each of these sites – roughly a quarter or less – say they are *dissatisfied* with the experience, while the rest say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

These news consumers also say that much of the news they see on alternative social media sites is information they wouldn't find elsewhere. Roughly half of news consumers who get news on at least one of the seven sites (52%) say they at least fairly often come across news on these sites that they would not have seen elsewhere, with an additional 32% who sometimes encounter unique news there.

Document 2 -The Far-Right Is Flocking To These Alternate Social Media Apps — Not All Of Them Are Thrilled

[Siladitya Ray](#)

Forbes, Jan 14, 2021, Updated Apr 14, 2022

After being purged from Facebook and Twitter, Trump supporters and far-right groups are turning to smaller platforms that either promise to be bastions of free speech or operate with limited policing, and while some of these platforms have embraced the newcomers, others are stepping up their moderation efforts.

Key Facts

Traffic has surged on Gab, a right-wing alternative to Twitter, mostly from new members who are Trump supporters, believers of the QAnon conspiracy theory and other right-wing extremists. The platform, which has been joined by several prominent right-wing extremist figures, said Wednesday it has had 1.7 million signups and clocked 52 million page views in the past week.

While Gab's claims have not been independently verified, publicly available data from web analytics firm Alexa and Google Trends show a significant spike in interest in the platform in the past month.

Downloads of the app for Rumble, a conservative alternative to YouTube that's supported by pundits and Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), doubled in the last week, according to *Axios*.

Social media platform MeWe — which presents itself as an alternative to Facebook without targeted ads — was an unexpected beneficiary of the online migration in the past week, with the company's app becoming the fifth most popular free app on Apple's App Store and Google Play on Monday.

While MeWe seems happy about the influx of new users, its CEO Mark Weinstein told *Fortune* that the platform will be "more vigilant" in moderating content and does not want to become an "anything goes" app.

Downloads of messaging app Telegram — already popular in Russia, Eastern Europe and parts of Asia — spiked last week and it has risen to No. 2 in the list of most downloaded free apps on Apple's App Store since Monday. The messaging app, which recently surpassed 500 million active users, has cracked down on public channels belonging to QAnon supporters and right-wing militias threatening further violence in Washington, D.C.

Tangent

The Guardian reported Thursday that members of a militia group that participated in the occupation of the Capitol last week used the walkie-talkie app Zello to coordinate the attack. One female militia member reportedly offered play-by-play updates to other members who were watching the events unfold offsite. Zello acknowledged its platform was "misused by some individuals" who stormed the Capitol and said it has moved to ban all militia-related channels, deleting more than 2,000 hours after the report was published.

Key Background

Several experts who follow extremist movements have cautioned that banning them from mainstream platforms may not stop them and could drive them further underground. Of particular concern is the embrace of messaging apps like Signal and Telegram, which allow users to encrypt their communications (Signal does this by default) making it impossible for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to monitor them. Harry Fernandez, a director at Change the Terms, a nonprofit tracking online hate speech recently told *Forbes* "it's dangerous that they don't appear to have any infrastructure in place to police these platforms." For most of the 2010s, the terror group Islamic State used Telegram as an effective recruitment and propaganda tool for its wars in Iraq and Syria. The jump in use of Signal and Telegram over the past week has also been driven by a backlash against Facebook-owned WhatsApp, which updated its privacy policies this month to allow it to share more data with its parent company.

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Further Reading

[Gab CEO Denies Responsibility For Capitol Attack Amid Increased Scrutiny](#) (Forbes)

[Meet The Billionaires Behind Signal And Telegram, Two New Online Homes For Angry Conservatives](#) (Forbes)

[The online far right is moving underground](#) (Axios)

[Trump supporters flock to MeWe, Gab, and Rumble after Parler goes offline](#) (Fortune)

Document 3 - The far-right's favoured social-media platform plots a comeback

What to make of Parler's return



Fancy meeting you here Image: Getty Images

The Economist, Feb 15th 2024 | NEW YORK

AH, TWITTER IN 2020. X was just a letter in the alphabet. Elon Musk was preoccupied with implanting computer chips into pigs. Donald Trump wasn't yet banned, though his tweets were loud, alarming—and getting fact-checked by the platform itself. Tired of liberal big-tech companies telling them what they could post, some Republicans had started to defect to a rival platform launched two years earlier: Parler. It looked similar to Twitter, but with less content moderation. More began to announce their migration from the nest with the hashtag #Twexit. “Hey @twitter, your days are numbered,” tweeted Brad Parscale, then Mr Trump’s campaign manager, with a link to Parler.

Parler has since earned a darker reputation. Messages exchanged on Parler have been presented in court as evidence to convict rioters who broke into the Capitol on January 6th 2021. Misinformation and far-right conspiracy theories shared on the platform came to the fore. The app was taken off the Apple and Google app stores (although it was later restored). A legal battle with Amazon Web Services, the cloud platform that hosted Parler, ensued. For a brief moment in 2022 Kanye West, a controversial rapper, attempted to buy it. The app eventually went down altogether.

Now it is promising a “big comeback” after being acquired by PDS Partners, a Texas-based company. Parler rejects its association with January 6th. Shortly after the insurrection, the platform’s previous ownership denounced “Big Tech’s scapegoating of Parler” in a letter to the House Oversight Committee (HOC) and said that Parler had shared concerns about violent activity with law enforcement before January 6th.

“Many people organised to be at that event on all different platforms,” says Elise Pierotti, the firm’s returning chief marketing officer. “Parler was the only one that was scrutinised.” Ms Pierotti, who claims that Parler’s move to return in an election year is coincidental and that the firm is “not thinking about politics”, says that the platform will allow users to say that the 2020 election was stolen (“because that is a personal opinion”) and that mail-in ballots are fraudulent. “When it comes to open discussion, or people presenting, you know, different ideas, that’s not up to us.”

Parler is not the only fringe platform to have won favour among those on the right, but it is the best-known. Nor was it the only social-media service to be cited in the House’s January 6th report, though the committee notes that it found “alarmingly violent and specific posts that in some cases advocated for civil war” on Parler. “It’s hard to imagine that the brand itself, the name Parler, has shed the public understanding of the app as being a place [where] many who were part of January 6th got organised and shared resources,” says Joan Donovan of Boston University.

Will fans of Parler return? Twitter (now known as X) looks very different under Mr Musk’s ownership; these days it is liberal users who threaten to go elsewhere. Mr Musk has dismantled or weakened X’s fact-checking tools as part of his own free-speech crusade, claiming that the platform “has interfered in elections”. He recently shared posts about America’s “insane” voting system and why “you can’t trust the media” to his 172m followers (by comparison, Ms Pierotti estimates that Parler had almost 20m users at its peak).

If Parler does return, how concerning would that be? Social media’s ability to influence extreme political acts is notoriously difficult to quantify. Several papers published since January 6th 2021 have begun to paint a more nuanced picture of the link between platforms of all stripes, polarisation and violence. Parler’s unique contribution to January 6th is “very unclear”, reckons Daniel Karell, a sociology professor at Yale University who co-authored a study on Parler,

platforms like it and civil unrest. He found that while it is unlikely someone could have been radicalised by posts on Parler alone, the platform did attract like-minded people with extreme views and gave them a space to affirm each other's ideas. In other words, a loosely moderated forum made storming the Capitol seem almost like a normal thing to do.

As private, encrypted channels—which can offer both unfiltered conversation and fewer prying eyes—grow in popularity, such conversations will become harder to see. One thing supersedes the power of content moderation altogether: the charismatic figure that rallies others to their cause (or social platform of choice). Ms Donovan says her own research into networked incitement has found a common thread among those who were arrested at the Capitol: “they came because Trump asked them to, very simple.” Whether Parler's user base will return or grow remains to be seen. The conversations it hosted never went away. ■

Document 4 - Far-right news sites have been radicalizing Republican politicians and are dividing the party.

blogs.lse.ac.uk March 30th 2023

(LSE = London School of Economics)

The last 15 years have seen the Republican Party move farther to the right than its Democratic counterpart has moved to the left. Could the GOP's embrace of more radical policy preferences and a more combative communication style be linked to the rise of far-right media websites? In new research, Mike Cowburn and Curd B. Knüpfer track the influence of far-right news websites on Republican members of Congress. They find that the more a Republican House representative engaged with these sites, the more their communication was radicalized during the Trump presidency.

Republican intra-party conflict was again in the news at the start of this year, with an important minority of US House representatives refusing to support the election of Speaker Kevin McCarthy across fifteen rounds of voting. Recognition of the party's internal conflicts has been growing among media commentators and academics since the emergence of Tea Party in 2009. The past decade has also been marked by a broad acknowledgement that the Republican Party has become increasingly radical in policy preferences, communication style, and (non-)adherence to democratic norms. This period has also witnessed a rise in far-right alternative news sources, which promote conspiratorial beliefs.

Our research shows that Republican members of Congress frequently refer to these far-right news sources. Representatives who are identifiably on the right of the party share more content from “alternative media” sources online. We argue that this marks an emerging fault line within the GOP. Not all Republican politicians are willing to engage with this far-right content. And those that do are noticeably further to the right on other measures, such as voting behavior and membership of ideological groups like the House Freedom Caucus.

Importantly, we show that the more a Republican representative engaged with these sites, the more their communication was radicalized during the Trump presidency. This trend has important implications for both asymmetric polarization and Republican intra-party division. Many Republican politicians are increasingly catering to niche and hyperpartisan news environments which incentivize them to adopt more radical positions.

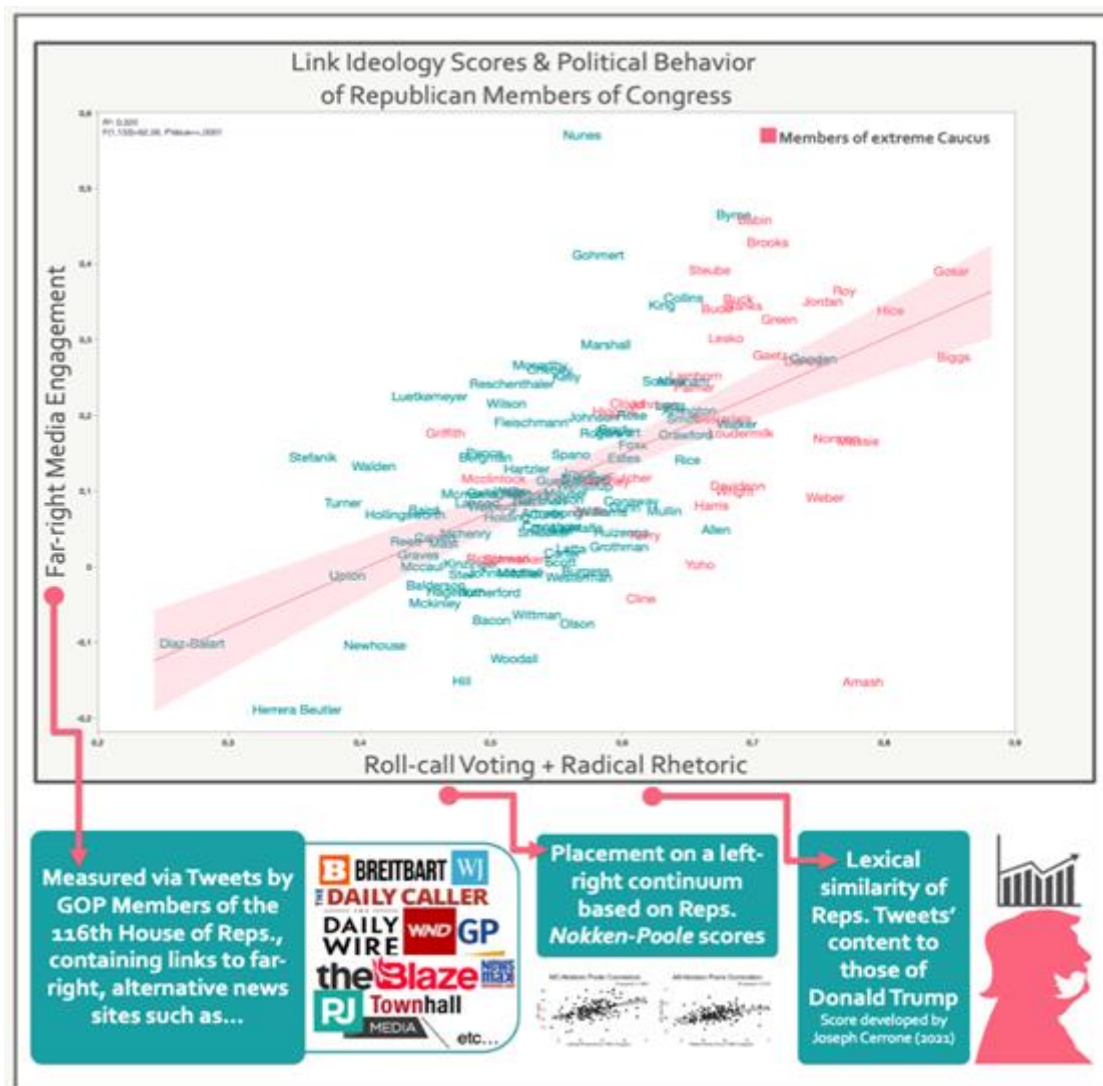
In our research, we analyze hyperlinks to news sources found on the Twitter feeds of Republican House Members in the 116th Congress. Because ideological positions are contestable, we use three independent approaches to classify the links we find. Our first metric gauges the partisanship of websites by identifying whether audiences that link to them tilt liberal or conservative. The second metric classifies sites according to crowdsourced and expert-based evaluations of partisan bias. The third metric is a smaller sample of qualitatively assessed collection of websites deliberately presenting themselves as a right-wing “alternative” to more established media sources. Sites such as *Breitbart*, *The Daily Caller* and *The Federalist* were identified as right-wing under all three metrics. These sites have been shown to have influenced the wider media ecosystem and agenda since 2016.

Having identified representatives' online media patterns, we are able to position Republican politicians based on their media diet. The positions on scales are closely linked to representatives' behavior in Congress and align with other measures of online communication.

Media Consumption Aligns with Radicalization

Our scales are very good at predicting the increasing radicalization of how individual members of Congress communicate. Given Trump’s dominance over the GOP since taking office and his unusual, if not unique, rhetorical approach, we consider similarity with his language as evidence of rhetorical radicalization. Using an approach developed by George Washington PhD student Joseph Cerrone, we compare representatives’ language to that of Donald Trump. Even controlling for factors such as voting record, caucus membership, district partisanship, racial and economic factors, our media scales were the strongest predictor of an increasingly Trumpian communicative style. Put simply, engaging with far-right alternative news was closely associated with radicalization.

Figure 1 – Link ideology scores and political behavior of Republican members of Congress



An Asymmetric Media Environment

Contemporary US politics is increasingly marked by forms of asymmetric polarization. This means that one party—the GOP—is shifting rightward far more quickly than its Democratic counterpart is moving to the left. In recent years, similar trends have been emerging in other democratic countries.

How can this radicalization be explained? Though there are doubtless multiple causes at work here, our research demonstrates that the shifting information environment, which (some) elites cater to for attention, is supplying them with agenda items and talking points shared by their potential constituents. As data on shifting news consumption dynamics indicate, many Republican voters are also increasingly tapping into an alternative sphere of information production. Here too, a vast alternative informational ecosystem has emerged on the right, with no equivalent counterpart on the American left, either in size or connection to the formal apparatus of the Democratic Party.

The effects of these novel forms of connectivity between emerging ideological, highly partisan actor types and political parties is still understudied. More work needs to be done to explain the mechanisms by which a changing information

environment might foster or incentivize forms of political posturing and pull politicians to embrace more extreme positions.

- *This article is based on the paper 'The Emerging Fault Line of Alternative News: Intra-Party Division in Republican Representatives' Media Engagement in Party Politics.*

About the authors

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[The explainer](#)

Document 5 - Tommy Robinson: the voice of Britain's far-right

The best-known figure on the UK's extreme-right has been accused of playing a part in inciting the recent riots



Tommy Robinson outside Westminster Magistrates court in London (Image credit: Getty Images_Mark Kerrison)

The Week UK, August 24, 2024

On 29 July, the day of the attack on a group of young girls in Southport, far-right influencer Tommy Robinson repeated on X the false rumour that a Muslim asylum seeker who'd arrived on a Channel boat was the culprit. On the site, where he has nearly one million followers, he repeatedly linked the stabbings to the Muslim community, and said that the Government was "gaslighting" the public about the events. In the days after the attack, his X posts received an average of around 54 million daily views.

Robinson has become the figurehead for Britain's decentralised, or "post-organisational" far-right: rather than trying to run a political party, he builds support by spreading his beliefs online. His ideas clearly resonate with many Britons. Several thousand supporters marched in his "patriotic rally" in London on Saturday 27 July, the largest far-right demonstration since the collapse of the EDL. And he attracts vocal support and funding from the US, where he has become a darling of the Trumpian and libertarian Right.

Who is Tommy Robinson?

The 41-year-old's real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon. He grew up in Luton, in Bedfordshire, a town with a large Muslim minority. He was an apprentice aircraft engineer at Luton Airport, but in 2005 he assaulted an

off-duty police officer during a drunken row, which resulted in a 12-month sentence. In 2004, he had joined the far-right British National Party. By that time, he'd had a long association with football gangs linked to Luton Town FC (his nom de guerre was supposedly taken from a notorious Luton Town hooligan). In early 2009, the Islamist extremist group al-Muhajiroun protested noisily in Luton against a parade by members of the Royal Anglian Regiment, who were returning from service in Afghanistan. In response, Robinson and others linked to football gangs formed the English Defence League (EDL), which held anti-Islam demonstrations across England.

What happened to the EDL?

In its first few years, it grew fast, holding protests in areas with big Muslim populations, sometimes thousands strong, at which there were frequent violent clashes. Then in the early 2010s, the EDL declined amid internal divisions, and after it was revealed that members had links to the Norwegian white supremacist mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik. Robinson was convicted for assaulting a fellow member in 2011, and received a suspended sentence. In 2013, he underwent an unexpected political conversion and left the EDL, citing the "dangers of far-right extremism", supported by the anti-extremist think-tank Quilliam. This proved short-lived: Robinson reverted to far-right politics, with an attempt to set up a UK branch of the European counter-jihadist organisation Pegida.

What has Robinson done since?

He has set himself up as a journalist and online influencer. From 2017, he was a correspondent for Rebel News, a Canadian far-right website, and made films about the "grooming gangs" run by Asian men in Northern towns and cities. While reporting he has twice been convicted of contempt of court for making prejudicial public claims about grooming cases. In 2019, he ran as an independent candidate for North West England in European elections, receiving only 2.2% of

the vote. Since then, he has turned away from electoral politics.

What does he believe in?

The two main themes of his thinking are opposition to immigration and to Islam. As he put it in a recent interview: "We're losing our culture. We're losing our identity. We're being replaced. We're becoming minorities in most major cities. We're being driven out of our own country, our own towns." In 2016, he said: "I'm not far-right, I'm just opposed to Islam. I believe it's backward and it's fascist." He made this argument in detail in "Mohammed's Koran: Why Muslims Kill For Islam", a 2017 book he co-wrote. His social media feeds return continually to immigrant – and particularly Muslim – criminality.

Robinson also believes that Western elites have plotted against ordinary people to allow this immigration to occur. He also often states that Britain has a "two-tier police force" that comes down "like a ton of bricks" on white miscreants, but is soft on migrant criminals. Robinson believes that the mainstream media has connived in this by failing to report on these issues fairly.

Ought his views to be censored?

In general, Robinson stops short of directly inciting violence, and has never been prosecuted for that. But his influence has long been linked to far-right violence. The wife of Darren Osborne, who carried out the attack on Finsbury Park mosque in 2017, stated that Osborne had "been watching a lot of Tommy Robinson stuff on the internet", and had been "brainwashed". Robinson was banned from Facebook and Instagram in 2019, for "posting material that uses dehumanising language and calls for violence targeted at Muslims". In 2018, he was banned from Twitter for violating its rules on "hateful

conduct": he had, to take only one example, liked a post calling on people to "make war" on Muslims. But, following Elon Musk's purchase of the site, Robinson's account was reinstated late last year.

Police are allegedly investigating his role in the riots. He could be vulnerable under the new Online Safety Act, which makes it an offence to convey false information likely "to cause non-trivial psychological or physical harm".

What about Robinson's legal woes?

On top of his two assault convictions, in 2013 Robinson was jailed for ten months for travelling to the US on another man's passport. The following year, he was sentenced to 18 months for mortgage fraud. In 2017, he was convicted of contempt of court: he had recorded a report outside a trial in Canterbury Crown Court, in which he described the defendants – before the verdict was reached – as "Muslim child rapists". He was given a suspended sentence, which became a nine-month jail sentence after he reported live outside Leeds Crown Court during a similar trial; he not only once again broadcast prejudicial comments, but also confronted the defendants, risking the trial's collapse.

In July 2021, Robinson was ordered to pay £100,000 in damages for libelling Jamal Hijazi, a 15-year-old Syrian refugee who had been badly bullied at his school in Huddersfield; Robinson had claimed, baselessly, that the boy "violently attacks" English girls. He then repeated these claims in his film, "Silenced", which portrays him as a free-speech martyr. Robinson was due in the High Court in late July, because he had broken an injunction preventing him from releasing the film. Instead, he left the UK for Cyprus; he has yet to return. Robinson's tax affairs are also reportedly under investigation.

Document 6 - Stoking hate: Elon Musk and Tommy Robinson

SENSEMAKER - Tortoise Media, Tuesday 6 August 2024 - Producer and Reporter, Xavier Greenwood

Tommy Robinson, who has been accused of stoking the anti-immigration riots, owes his huge platform to Elon Musk.

As violent riots spread across the UK last week, Tommy Robinson made an appearance on the Alex Jones Show from a luxury resort in Cyprus. The far-right agitator was ebullient – and made a point of thanking Elon Musk for giving a "voice for the truth".

So what? Robinson, who has been accused of stoking the anti-immigration riots, owes his huge platform to Musk. The billionaire owner of X rescued Robinson from the digital wilderness by restoring his account last November. In the past few days Musk has:

- responded to a post by Robinson criticising Keir Starmer's response to the widespread disorder – amplifying it to Musk's 193 million followers;
- questioned Robinson's recent arrest under anti-terror laws, asking what he did that was "considered terrorism"; and
- allowed Robinson's banned documentary, which repeats false claims about a Syrian refugee against a UK high court order, to rack up over 33 million views on X.

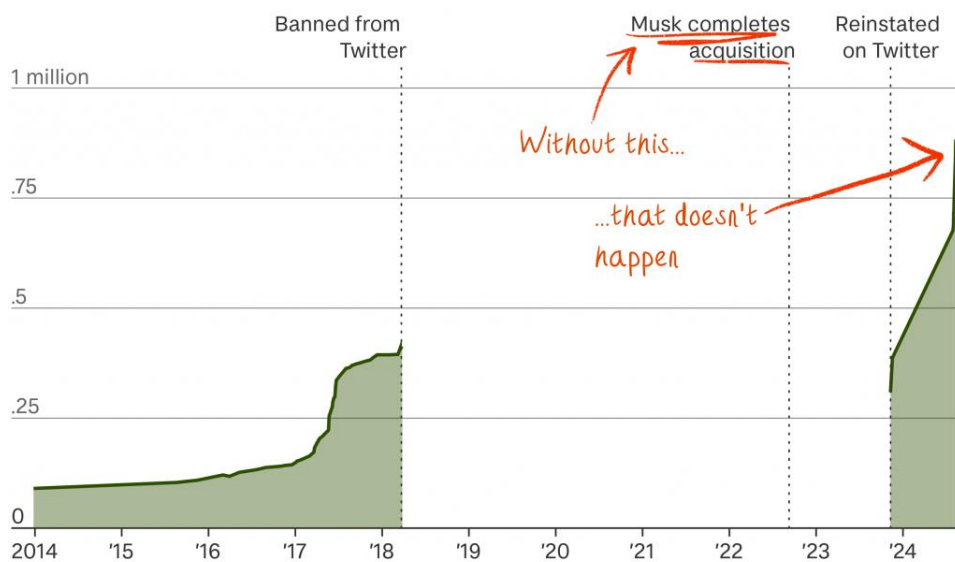
It was the screening of this documentary at a demonstration in London last month that prompted Robinson's arrest under counter-terrorism powers. Robinson left the UK the day before he was due in court, and is currently believed to be staying at a five-star hotel in Ayia Napa. He is due in court for a full contempt hearing in October. None of this has stopped Robinson incessantly tweeting about the riots, where far-right groups have regularly chanted his name. He has:

- falsely claimed that people were stabbed by Muslims in Stoke-on-Trent and Stirling;
- called for mass deportations, shared demonstration posters, and described violent protests in Southport as "justified"; and
- shared a video that speculated that the suspect in the Southport stabbings was Muslim, a widespread piece of disinformation that helped trigger the riots across the country.

Making the weather. The far-right activist has nearly 900,000 followers on X, but reaches a much larger number of people. Tortoise calculated that Robinson's 268 posts over the weekend had been seen over 160 million times by late Monday afternoon.

Analytics published by Robinson last week showed that his posts had been viewed 1.2 billion times in the three months to August, with 4.5 million people visiting his profile. Every data point indicates that Robinson's platform on X has massively grown over the past six months.

Tommy Robinson's Twitter followers



Source: X

Robinson has called Musk "the best thing to happen for free speech this century". He's perhaps not the only person to feel this way. The far-right activist is part of a wider constellation of agitators, right-wing media commentators, online influencers and self-styled news aggregators who have used X to foment unrest in recent days.

"It's like a school of fish," said Joseph Mulhall, director of research at the advocacy group Hope Not Hate. "People like Tommy Robinson are the weathermakers."

Absolute state. Mulhall described a decentralised "post-organisational network" of accounts consuming, creating and engaging with far-right content. These accounts include Musk, who has called himself a free-speech absolutist. On Sunday Musk, who lives 5,000 miles from the streets of Middlesbrough and Rotherham, responded to a tweet that blamed what was happening in the UK on its diversity. He wrote that "if incompatible cultures are brought together without assimilation, conflict is inevitable". Later he replied to a video of riots in Liverpool: "Civil war is inevitable".

A spokesperson for Starmer said there was "no justification" for Musk's comments, and that the "organised violent thuggery" happening in the UK has no place on the streets or online.

The role of X and its owner in stirring up the riots will put to test the UK's online safety bill, which is designed to hold social media companies to account.

“Elon Musk needs to be called into parliament,” said Mulhall. “Twitter should be facing extraordinary scrutiny, both legal and financial. Musk as an individual and the platform that he’s curating is having a disastrous effect on our streets and in our communities.”

What’s more. Yesterday afternoon Musk responded directly to a social media post from Starmer, questioning the prime minister’s pledge to protect mosques. Robinson continued to post about the riots from his sunbed. Neither is behaving as if they have much to fear.

Document 7 - Southport stabbings: how online disinformation ignited unrest across the UK

Technology

Tortoise, Friday 2 August 2024, Producer and Reporter, [Xavier Greenwood](#)

Axel Rudakubana has been named as the 17 year-old charged with three counts of murder and 10 counts of attempted murder at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport. Rudakubana was not initially named as he is a minor.

The judge lifted the anonymity order on Thursday, but Rudakubana had been successfully identified online as early as Tuesday. Internet users pieced together his identity after the BBC reported that the teenage suspect was born in Cardiff, with parents from Rwanda.

The murder of Bebe, six years old, Elsie, seven, and Alice, nine, has been followed by violent far-right protests across the country. These riots were fuelled by disinformation that the suspect was a Muslim asylum seeker called Ali Al-Shakati.

The first known use of this name was by Bernie Spofforth, an X-user who has previously spread Covid and climate disinformation, and appeared on GB News as an anti-lockdown campaigner.

The Southport murders triggered a range of disinformation from major accounts on X. The YouTuber Andrew Tate falsely claimed the attacker was an “illegal migrant”, the former boxer Anthony Fowler posted a video saying it was a “fellow from Syria”, while a third account called Europe Invasion said the suspect was a “Muslim immigrant”. These three posts alone have had 26 million views and impressions. None have been removed.

Disinformation that the attacker was called Ali Al-Shakati appears to have spread organically, but the name was also suggested to users as a trending topic in the UK.

Many of the major right-wing accounts who incorrectly named the suspect cited a report from a news website called Channel3 Now. The origins of the site, which is makeshift and posted graphic photos of children being treated at the scene, are unclear. The earliest videos on its Youtube channel are in Russian. After a five-year gap, the channel began posting about Pakistan and later US news. This drastic change in subject matter suggests the account may have been hijacked and then repurposed.

Tortoise could only find one named author on the news site, a young man who runs a lawn mowing business in Nova Scotia in Canada. The site has apologised about falsely naming the Southport suspect, saying its article did not meet its “standards of reliability and integrity”. That was too late to stop the pursuant violence.

In Southport, London and Hartlepool, far-right protesters threw bricks, injured police, shouted racist chants, and set vehicles on fire. A video posted online showed Hartlepool rioters cheering as a person of colour walking past was punched in the face. Police are investigating the assault.

Far-right groups appeared to mobilise, in part, through TikTok, with screenshots encouraging people to organise then shared on Telegram and X. One user who shared a protest poster wrote that children were being slaughtered at “the alter [sic] of uncontrolled mass migration.”

Locals in Southport, a community in grief, have been left to pick up the pieces. A mother of one of the victims called for the violence to stop, saying “we don’t need this”. The protesters who descended on the seaside town shouting “English ‘til I die” aren’t thought to be local.

On Wednesday, Southport residents came together to repair a mosque deliberately targeted in the riot. Young children were among those who helped.

Slate, Vincent Bresson – Édité par Diane Francès – 31 janvier 2023

Le rachat de Twitter par le milliardaire s'est accompagné d'une nouvelle politique de modération favorable aux franges les plus radicales, qui font leur grand retour sur le réseau social.

«Venez comme vous êtes.» C'est peu ou prou le message envoyé par Twitter ces derniers jours en réintégrant de nombreuses personnalités d'extrême droite. Banni fin 2021, Renaud Camus a pu réintégrer la plateforme le 25 janvier et il ne s'est pas privé de rattraper le temps perdu en tweetant de manière compulsive, relayant au passage ses vieilles publications. «Un charter qui décolle c'est une prison qui ferme», a-t-il ainsi retweeté, comme pour tester la nouvelle politique de modération de la plateforme rachetée par Elon Musk.

Le retour de l'homme qui a mis le «grand remplacement» sur toutes les lèvres à l'extrême droite a immédiatement été salué par Gilbert Collard, un temps cadre du Rassemblement national avant de passer à Reconquête, et par Damien Rieu, ancien porte-parole de Génération identitaire rallié à Éric Zemmour.

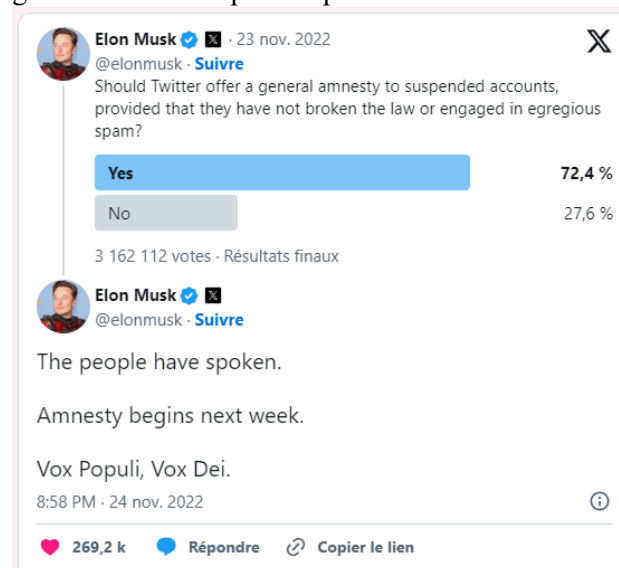
Twitter ne s'est pas arrêté en si bon chemin. Par un tir groupé, la plateforme a également mis fin à la suspension de Jean Messiha, lui aussi banni en 2021. «L'oiseau est libre! Jean Messiha est de retour! Merci beaucoup Elon Musk!», s'est empressé de commenter l'ex-soutien du RN et de Reconquête.



Le compte «Alain Soral» de la messagerie Telegram revendique également la réouverture du compte de l'essayiste antisémite. Petite subtilité: son compte n'est toujours pas accessible depuis la France (une contrainte pas bien compliquée à contourner avec un VPN).

Modération à la sauce Musk

Quelques semaines après avoir officiellement racheté Twitter fin octobre, Elon Musk ouvrait les hostilités en tweetant: «Le peuple a parlé. L'amnistie commence la semaine prochaine. Vox Populi, Vox Dei.» Le patron de Tesla a le beau rôle et il se l'est lui-même attribué. Avec cette annonce, il jure respecter les résultats d'un sondage publié sur son compte à propos d'une «amnistie générale» des comptes suspendus.



Du côté de l'extrême droite, le message est reçu cinq sur cinq. Contrairement à Donald Trump qui n'a encore réinvesti sa plateforme préférée, l'antisémite et négationniste Hervé Ryssen, condamné à plusieurs reprises, n'a pas attendu bien longtemps avant de tweeter à nouveau.

D'autres, comme Pierre-Nicolas Nups, responsable Lorraine du Parti de la France condamné pour incitation à la violence et à la haine homophobe en 2018, ont même pu revenir sur la plateforme avant le sondage. Comme Hervé Ryssen, ce cadre d'un mouvement proche de Reconquête ne se prive pas d'user à l'excès de la «liberté» mise en avant par Elon Musk. Sous un tweet expliquant que «le premier amour d'Hitler était Juif», il répond qu'«elle lui a brisé le cœur, donc il lui a niqué sa race». Des propos qui, six jours après avoir été publiés, sont toujours en ligne.

Cette résurgence des composantes les plus radicales de l'extrême droite sur Twitter était si prévisible... qu'elle l'a elle-même vue venir. Dès les premières rumeurs sur le rachat de Twitter par le patron de Tesla, Mathieu Goyer, jeune responsable Civitas Paris, s'amusait à prédire le futur de la plateforme avec jubilation: «Nous allons peut-être pouvoir voir le retour sur Twitter des comptes de Donald Trump, Rivarol, Alain Soral, Égalité & Réconciliation, Hervé Ryssen,

Thaïs d'Escufon... et tant d'autres. Le rachat de Twitter annonce vraiment une grande bonne nouvelle.»

Force est de constater que la prédiction s'est révélée juste: une grosse partie de ces personnalités a déjà retrouvé une place sur le réseau social. Elon Musk, l'extrême droite lui dit merci.

«Un Twitter enfin libre!»

Elon Musk s'époumone à force de le répéter: son rachat de Twitter s'accompagnera d'une plus grande liberté d'expression. Cette communication a très vite séduit l'extrême droite française qui, à l'image de Mathieu Goyer de Civitas, voit le milliardaire comme un allié de circonstance lui permettant de tenir tous types de propos. Mais que gagne le patron de Tesla dans cette affaire? Le rachat de Twitter n'a pour le moment rien du bon plan côté financier. Il permet à Elon Musk, tout au plus, de renforcer son image de libertarien et de se mettre dans la poche les militants les plus dissidents de son réseau social. Une façon peut-être également de tenter de le redynamiser en le polarisant.

Quelle que soit la manière dont Elon Musk en tire parti, cette nouvelle politique de modération ne profite pas seulement à l'extrême droite française, mais aussi aux sphères pour qui la pandémie n'est que conspiration. Opposé aux restrictions sanitaires et grand pourfendeur du «Great Reset», l'ufologue Silvano Trotta a, lui aussi, bénéficié de l'«amnistie générale». Loin de Twitter, il avait réuni avec succès une nouvelle communauté sur la messagerie Telegram. Il n'a pourtant pas boudé la possibilité de retrouver ses 90.000 abonnés sur le réseau social à l'oiseau bleu, tweetant mi-décembre:



More here:

- **An investigation about Tenet Media**

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/style/media/2024/09/05/tenet-media-russia-rt-tim-pool/>

- **False information cases in wake of riots test UK's online safety law – The Financial Times**

<https://www.ft.com/content/39d93099-e27c-4b86-bd37-d49e61ed70d8>

- **'High risk' of further far-right riots if disinformation isn't curbed – Times Radio**

An analysis on how the police needs to respond fast-spreading disinformation online – The closing of the information gap

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FW2wHjBEM08&ab_channel=TimesRadio

Tout le monde ne se montre pas aussi satisfait que Silvano Trotta. Quelques déçus constatent qu'il existe toujours une modération sur le réseau social, aussi infime soit-elle. Thomas Joly, président du Parti de la France, en a fait les frais à la mi-décembre. «*La liberté d'expression sur Twitter version Elon Musk atteint très vite ses limites*», s'est-il indigné, sur Telegram, après la suspension de son compte.

Donald Trump bientôt de retour?

Sans surprise, un mouvement similaire se produit de l'autre côté de l'Atlantique. Banni d'Instagram, de Twitch, de TikTok et de YouTube, le streamer nationaliste blanc Nick Fuentes, pour qui Hitler était «*vraiment cool*», a vu son compte Twitter débloqué le 24 janvier. Un «Space» sur Twitter et puis s'en va: moins de vingt-quatre heures après avoir été autorisé, son compte a été de nouveau fermé à la suite de propos antisémites. D'autres figures extrémistes américaines comme Ryan Dawson et Andrew Anglin sont, pour le moment, toujours les bienvenues.

À un peu plus d'un an de la présidentielle américaine, c'est peu dire que Donald Trump est très attendu sur Twitter. L'ancien président des États-Unis avait fait du réseau social son arme de communication préférée. Avec la reprise en main de la plateforme par Elon Musk et la politique d'«amnistie générale», le chef de file de l'alt-right est en droit de revenir. Et ce n'est peut-être qu'une question de mois.

Selon le magazine Rolling Stone, le milliardaire attendrait l'expiration en juin prochain de son contrat d'exclusivité avec Truth, le réseau social qu'il avait créé dans la foulée de son bannissement. Après des midterms décevantes pour les Républicains, récupérer 87 millions de twittos aidera-t-il Trump à regagner sa place à la Maison-Blanche?