



Hate Speech Among the Far-Right in Austria and Germany

Definitions, Indicators, Actors, Platforms, and Context Factors

This report was produced as part of the EU-funded RECO_DAR project: Right-wing extremist eco-systems driving hate speech: dissemination and recruitment strategies

The project generates a deeper knowledge and understanding about ecosystem of right-wing actors in German-speaking countries and their use of hate speech online. This should lead to sustainable and more effective prevention programmes in online and offline spaces and improve the protection of minority groups, women, and minors often targeted by hate speech.

More information: www.scenor.at/recodar

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This report explores the concept of hate speech within the context of social, cultural, and political evolution. Hate speech, a 20th-century development influenced by historical events like World War II and the Civil Rights movement lacks a universal definition. The report scrutinises various perspectives, highlighting the challenges in identifying and categorising hate speech. The RECO-DAR project, which this report is part of, is financed by the European Union and aims to significantly increase our understanding of online hate speech in a specific Austrian-German context. This report focuses on German-speaking far-right online ecosystems promoting hate speech. It seeks to comprehend communication patterns and their impact on youth (for more information on the project, please visit the website: www.scenor.at/recodar). The report examines various definitions, the role of digital platforms, intersections of hate speech, and freedom of speech concerns. It underscores the complex, multifaceted nature of hate speech and its relevance in today's interconnected world.

The report discusses the collective findings from 30 expert interviews conducted in Germany and Austria. It focuses on hate speech definitions, indicators, keywords, narratives, actors, and platforms. Hate speech is multifaceted, and definitions vary among experts. It encompasses

linguistic or image-based actions against individuals or groups aimed at degrading, hurting, intimidating, or threatening them based on group affiliation or political commitment. Hate speech involves stereotypes, violence, and norm-breaking communication, impacting individuals' ability to live discrimination-free lives. There is a consensus that context matters, especially online, where platforms affect expression. Indicators of hate speech are challenging to define due to the dynamic nature of language, evolving platforms, and the various intentions of actors. General indicators include dehumanising language, stereotypes, conspiracy theories, and incitement to violence. Specific narratives in right-wing extremist hate speech cover Third Reich nostalgia, romanticising history, anti-wokeness, delegitimising democracy, white supremacy, anti-LGBTQIA+, and more. LGBTQIA+ narratives target gender and sexual orientation with derogatory terms.

Prominent actors in the German context include Martin Sellner, Alice Weidel, and grassroots individuals. Austrian actors include the *Identitäre Bewegung* (Identitarian Movement, or Generation Identity), political parties like FPÖ and AfD, proxy organisations, and individuals on social media who are not involved in organisations. Platforms used for hate speech

Specific narratives in right-wing extremist hate speech cover:



Third Reich nostalgia



Delegitimising democracy



Romanticising history



White supremacy



Anti-wokeness



Anti-LGBTQIA+



include Telegram, TikTok, and newer ones, while Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit also play roles. Austrian actors include the Generation Identity Movement, political parties like FPÖ and AfD, and proxy organisations. Telegram remains a key communication platform for many hate speech actors.

This report also discusses the unique characteristics of hate speech in Germany and Austria. In Germany, the historical backdrop of the Third Reich has sensitised the nation to extremist ideologies, making hate speech and Nazi-related symbols and ideas less tolerated. The legal system is adept at addressing hate speech, particularly concerning Holocaust denial and glorification of the Third Reich. The nation's immigration history and conspiracy theories are factors that contribute to hate speech. Austrian hate speech shares similar narratives with Germany but has distinctive features. Austrian experts emphasise subcultures and target groups, and English terms often appear in online hate speech. Austrian fraternities' role in right-wing extremism influence hate speech, and the *Identitäre Bewegung* introduced unique terminologies. Both countries see hate speech as encompassing verbal, non-verbal, and digital expressions, targeting marginalised groups. The challenge for those opposing hate speech lies in legality thresholds. German experts focus

on violence, while Austrian experts highlight discursive strategies.

Context plays a pivotal role in understanding the nature and impact of hate speech, which is challenging to differentiate from hurtful language. Toxicity, shaped by various factors, is complex to measure practically. Narratives and indicators in right-wing hate speech overlap, including Third Reich nostalgia, white supremacy, anti-semitism, and anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments. Hate speech is a strategy used in right-wing ecosystems, which spread through various media, impacting society and fuelling scepticism. Austrian and German experts also note the rise in misogynist and anti-trans narratives and that hate speech spreads on platforms like Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok. Diverse actors use various platforms, fostering transnational connections. Therefore, monitoring and regulating hate speech is challenging because actors disseminate it on various evolving platforms.

In conclusion, hate speech is complex and profoundly intertwined with societal contexts, posing challenges to defining, identifying, and curbing its proliferation. This report's findings will inform the RECO-DAR project's next phase, which aims to measure hate speech and its flow across platforms.

This report results from the second work package in the RECO-DAR project, which aims to understand the ecosystem of far-right hate speech on TikTok and so-called fringe platforms. The report's primary goal is to develop a comprehensive working definition of hate speech to guide the project's data selection and subsequent analysis. That definition is crucial to clarify and consistently identify instances of hate speech on TikTok. The researchers' approach relies on insights gathered from expert interviews conducted in Austria and Germany and focuses on German language hate speech in online spaces. The authors have tailored the report for a diverse audience, including academia, social workers, civil servants, community leaders, educational staff, child protection professionals, policymakers, NGOs, and IT companies.

Hate Speech

...any communication that disparages a person or a group on the basis of some characteristics such as race, colour, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion...

”

Tontodimamma et al. (2021, p.157)

Regrettably, social exclusion, derogatory statements, and violence against individuals or groups are not new phenomena. However, the concept of hate speech, as we presently understand it, is predominantly a 20th-century development shaped by the atrocities of World War II and the Civil Rights movement in the United States (Walker 1994). After World War II, with the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights in 1948 and subsequent human rights conventions, the notion of hate speech started to take form in international law. For example, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations in 1966, includes provisions in Article 20 that effectively ban hate speech.

Today, the concept of hate speech continues to evolve, shaped by sociocultural, geographic, and political contexts. Therefore, various definitions exist. For example, Tontodimamma et al. defined it “as [...] any communication that disparages a person or a group on the basis of some characteristics such as race, colour, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion” (2021, p.157). While the precise formulation varies, academics and practitioners concur on the group-based criterion as the decisive factor. However, that understanding leaves the challenge of putting theory into practice because no universal agreement exists on which statements constitute hate speech. There are remaining questions, such as: do words change meaning according to context? What makes a statement toxic? Where does hate speech occur? Who defines the threshold of hate speech: the sender, the receiver, or the third-party observer? Do other types of hurtful language, such as insults and mobbing, differ from hate speech?

The plethora of perspectives contributes to a vibrant discourse around the concept of hate speech but does not provide a clear definition necessary to detect it. A stringent set of criteria decreases the amount of hate speech detected, thus reducing the incentives for companies, states, and societies to act against those spreading violent language towards vulnerable groups. On the other hand, a low bar potentially inflates the number of cases, infringes on freedom of speech and obscures the genuine state of affairs.

Nonetheless, only with an accurate depiction of the problem can we discover efficient solutions to counteract the sources and effects of hate speech.

This issue presents the intellectual and methodological challenge central to the RECO-DAR project (“Right-Wing Extremist Eco-Systems Driving Hate Speech: Dissemination and Recruitment Strategies”). RECO-DAR aims to analyse German-speaking far-right online ecosystems that disseminate hate speech. Far-right worldviews promote national, racial and cultural purity, thereby marginalising and attacking individuals or groups who do not conform to their in-group perspective (Haslam and Loughnan 2014). Hate speech depicts out-groups as threats to a state’s current social, cultural, or political order. The proliferation of social media platforms and online forums provides a new arena for far-right groups to propagate their views, including hate speech (Jaki & DeSmedt, 2019). Simultaneously, far-right groups target receptive or vulnerable individuals online to recruit them. While mainstream platforms have taken action to limit or ban hate speech, far-right groups frequently resort to multi-platform strategies, migrating to less regulated platforms with less stringent moderation policies (Schwartz, Nelimarkka, and Larsson, 2022).

RECO-DAR strives to understand the evolution of such communication patterns across platforms and their effects on young people. Researchers

from SCENOR and modus|zad chose Germany and Austria, two primarily German-speaking countries that struggle with online hate speech. Indeed, hate speech in the German-speaking online community has consistently risen, particularly following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering the challenges surrounding the concept of hate speech, the project’s first step involves formulating a definition and articulating hate speech indicators to develop a codebook for reliably identifying instances of hate speech. Therefore, the RECO-DAR researchers conducted, recorded and transcribed 30 virtual interviews between April and June 2023 with academics, practitioners, and legal specialists engaged with the issue, 15 experts from Germany and 15 from Austria. SCENOR and modus|zad then conducted a qualitative content analysis relying on the academic discourse around key components of the phenomenon along the following lines: definitions, differentiation from other hateful acts of communication, context, toxicity, indicators, narratives, actors, platforms, and the specific context for each country.

The report begins with a literature overview and describes the methodology. Subsequently, it presents and compares the empirical results from each expert cohort. The paper concludes with an overview of the key findings.





Hate speech is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is not uniformly understood because it is shaped, among other things, by its sociocultural context (Sellars 2016, 31) and the perspective of the person interpreting it. As a communication form, hate speech encompasses overt and more implicit content (Meibauer 2013; Hübscher and von Mering 2022). Particularly in the case of implicit content, perpetrators do not necessarily exhibit feelings of hate (Meibauer 2013, p.3).

Despite the diverse definitions employed in the literature, commonalities emerge, such as using discriminatory or hateful language and targeting specific group-based characteristics. The defining feature often concerns the in-group/out-group-based dimensions of exclusion and derogation (Schmitt, 2017; Paasch-Colberg et al., 2021). Thus, hate speech often has a binary structure, compelling individuals to identify with their in-group and establish a firm boundary against the out-group.

Hate Speech

...any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with references to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor...

”

United Nations (2020, p.2)

The United Nations offers the following definition: “[Hate speech is] any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with references to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor” (2020, p.2). The Institute for Strategic Dialogue adds to these definitions by including a wider variety of actions, regarding hate speech as an attempt to “attack, malign, delegitimise or exclude an entire class of people based on immutable characteristics” (2021, p.8). Similarly, Tontodimamma et al. define it “as [...] any communication that disparages a person or a group on the basis of some characteristics such as race, colour, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion” (2021, p.157). Tontodimamma et al. also underscore the significance of the impact of hate speech rather than the perpetrator’s intent. Their stance contrasts with that of other authors who accentuate intentional behaviour as a key criterion (Klant 2021; Kopytowska 2017).

The role of digital platforms in either facilitating or curbing hate speech is a recurring theme in the literature. Although hate speech did not emerge as a result of digital spaces (Strick/Wizorek 2021), their unique characteristics remove time and space limitations, accelerating transmission and enabling orchestrated hate campaigns by

previously unconnected groups, leading to the creation of shared identities (Kopytowska 2017, p.2). These digital platforms can connect marginalised groups for support and disseminate harmful language at an unprecedented pace (ibid). In that context, Nowotny and Reidy, concerning the nature of hate speech related to internet memes, suggest that the manifestation of hate speech is not confined to conventional verbal or written communication but extends to other forms of digital expression.

Hate speech may involve specific contexts and various perspectives. Klant emphasises the challenges faced by intersectional identities and marginalised communities, who are more likely to experience discrimination and targeted hate speech (Klant 2021, p.122). Gender is particularly salient in the hate speech discourse (Prasad, Bauer, and Hartmann 2021). Women often experience the most severe forms of hate speech, especially those representing underprivileged intersectional identities, such as women of colour (Strick and Wizorek 2021, p.121). Given the disproportionate impact on them, women, on average, participate less in online discourse due to fear of retaliation (HateAid 2022; 2021). That tendency may not be present in specific contexts or communities where women play crucial roles in recruitment or propaganda.

While countering hate speech is unequivocally stressed in scientific literature, differentiating hate

speech from free speech proves challenging. Meibauer (2013, p.8) emphasises that while it is vital to curb hate speech, it is equally critical to ensure that free speech, a cornerstone of any democratic society, is protected. Because definitions vary depending on context, the lines between hate speech, free speech, and political discourse can become blurred. There exists a need to balance the democratic value of freedom of expression with protecting individuals and groups from harm.

Taking a more academically critical position, Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas (2021) indicate the lack of critical approaches and information about researchers' positions within societal power structures while pointing out the tendency of researchers to focus only on the expression of hate speech, disregarding the institutional and structural aspects behind it.

In summary, the academic literature on hate speech is vast and varied, reflecting the issue's complex and multifaceted nature. While there are commonalities in hate speech definitions, the concept is contextual, dynamic, and subject to individual interpretations. Clearly, hate speech is not merely an act of expression but is intertwined with broader social, political, and cultural dynamics. Therefore, effectively addressing hate speech requires a nuanced understanding that acknowledges its various dimensions and the perspectives of those involved, including victims.

HATE SPEECH MAY INVOLVE SPECIFIC CONTEXTS AND VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES



The role of digital platforms in either facilitating or curbing hate speech is a recurring theme



Differentiating hate speech from free speech proves challenging



While it is vital to curb hate speech, it is equally critical to ensure that free speech, a cornerstone of any democratic society, is protected



Academic literature on hate speech is vast and varied, reflecting the issue's complex and multifaceted nature



The researchers conducted 30 interviews with experts in April, May, and June of 2023 in Germany and Austria, 15 per country. The authors selected the interviewees primarily based on two criteria: proven expertise in hate speech and diversity in disciplines and activities. The authors identified and contacted 24 potential interviewees in Germany and 26 in Austria and contacted them via email in April and May. As a result, the researchers interviewed two legal experts, five researchers (four social science and one IT expert), seven practitioners (representatives of NGOs or civil society organisations), one decision-maker (MP), and one community manager in Germany. In Austria, the researchers interviewed four legal experts, six researchers (five social science and one IT expert), and five practitioners.

When requesting interviews, the researchers provided potential interviewees with a project information and data protection sheet. The researchers also asked experts who responded positively to read and sign an informed consent form concerning how the project would use the data collected.

The interviews were conducted in German and took between 30 minutes and one hour. As an

initial step, the researchers re-introduced the project to each expert and answered all open questions. Project staff then went through questions specified in the agreed interview guide. Given the diversity of interviewees and time limits, the researchers adapted the questions in real-time to fit the given expertise or if the interviewees had already answered questions through previous questions. The researchers conducted all interviews via *Microsoft Teams*, in compliance with European data protection guidelines that demand end-to-end encryption and that all data be stored in Europe. The researchers recorded and automatically transcribed the interviews using the built-in tool in *Microsoft Teams* or *Amberscript*. When needed, the project staff manually corrected the interview transcripts. As a final step, the project staff translated all transcripts into English and summarised them as needed for the project report. The researchers have decided not to cite individual experts for practical and legal considerations. The authors destroyed all recordings after processing them. The interviews and the literature review build the baseline for the project's hate speech definition.



This chapter summarises the collective findings from the 30 expert interviews conducted in Germany and Austria. The authors outline the most important findings regarding hate speech definition(s), indicators, keywords, narratives, actors, and platforms. See the Annex (Appendix A – Codebook) for a table summarising all narratives, indicators, actors, and platforms. Each section offers common and diverging points for both countries.

4.1 Definition(s)

The concept of hate speech is multifaceted, and definitions vary significantly among experts, although many share common elements. The following bullet points encompass the key elements of hate speech conveyed during the interviews with the German and Austrian experts:



- Specific linguistic or image-based actions and statements outside the realm of facts against individuals or groups aimed at degrading, hurting, intimidating, or threatening them because of their association with a particular group in society or their political commitment to democratic values.

- An expression of hatred against individuals or groups, especially expressions intended to disparage, marginalise and defame specific groups, including propagating fear, based on the assumption that they are less worthy in order to deny their rights.

- A discursive strategy aiming to degrade and humiliate people.

- Stereotyping, particularly racist, Islamophobic, or xenophobic stereotypes, deliberate or unintentional, comprising discriminatory or defamatory statements related to groups marginalised due to their supposed ethnicity, language, nationality, or skin colour.

- A form of violence or violent language, especially within the public sphere of digital spaces.

- Specific forms of incivility or norm-breaking communication, deviating from established norms, such as politeness and respectful communication.

- A public statement in speech, writing, or images that aims to deny a person or group their human dignity and right to exist because of their characteristics.

- A linguistic practice that devalues individuals or groups and affects their ability to live a life free of discrimination, particularly those who are minorities or marginalised.

Evidently, there is a broad consensus that hate speech involves discrimination and degradation based on group affiliations. A common denominator among the interviewed experts was the recurring reference to the criterion of *gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit* (group-focused enmity). Similarly, one Austrian expert defined hate speech by equating it with the following: sexism, ethnocultural devaluation, racism, anti-semitism, anti-Roma discourse, classism, Neo-Nazism, ableism, and homophobia.

In both countries, there was a strong echo of the contextual nature of hate speech. The importance of context escalates in online spaces because of platforms' various functions and guidelines. Some limit the word count in posts and captions, prioritise visual content, or have varying levels of content moderation, leading to differences in how perpetrators express hate speech. Perpetrators may express themselves via broken sentences, memes, emojis, videos, or hashtags. Both expert groups agree that this introduces difficulties for the automated detection of hate speech. Whether something is seen as hate speech further depends on its geographical and cultural context. Based on socialisation, specific terms can be considered hate speech in certain contexts but barely insulting in others.

Both expert groups echo the literature by highlighting that hate speech should not be seen exclusively as an online phenomenon because it also occurs in non-digital spaces and traditional media forms. Nonetheless, several experts in Germany argued for treating hate speech primarily as an online phenomenon. Austrian experts made a point of including articulations that precede hate speech. Perpetrators achieve devaluation and discrimination through language, a fundamental power instrument. Accordingly, it is essential to be mindful of where such linguistic articulations begin and not only consider them when they become explicit hate speech. That further highlights the importance

of increasing localised knowledge about hate speech, which is this project's aim.

Some experts in Austria failed to provide a comprehensive definition of hate speech but listed some key components, including forms of communication that target groups or individuals due to their association with a group, communications that are hateful in nature, or public statements.

4.1.1 Areas of Disagreement

In the Austrian context, the researchers observed a certain level of disagreement about separating (cyber) mobbing and hate speech. Some experts claimed that from the perspective of young people, hate speech is everything that degrades people, belittles them, makes them look bad, or could cause psychological or physical damage. However, other experts state that mobbing should not be seen as hate speech unless it involves specific characteristics associated with a group the target is perceived as a member of.

In the German context, two main fields of tension emerged:

1 Intent vs. effect

2 The perspective of the individuals affected (*Betroffenenperspektive*)

In the first, researchers observed a discussion on whether the intent of perpetrators or the effect hate speech has on individuals and societal discourse at large should be central to the definitions. Intent is central in most existing definitions, but a handful of German experts urge a rethink of that approach. The second field of tension is closely related to the first. The affected people's perspective is seen as a critical aspect in the context of hate speech, which has not been considered in many definitions. That is important because a statement not perceived

as offensive by the majority may be deeply hurtful to marginalised communities. That underscores the importance of relying on and listening to those affected by hate speech to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Lastly, two experts in Germany noted that the concept of hate speech was not central to their work. Instead, one practitioner focused on addressing specific violent social encounters people face, irrespective of whether those encounters qualify as hate speech. Another expert, active in the judiciary, focused on determining whether an act is legally relevant or irrelevant from a criminal perspective. Those diverging perspectives underscore the complexities of the hate speech phenomenon.

4.2 Indicators, Keywords, and Narratives

According to experts, hate speech, in its many forms, is a complex phenomenon that makes it challenging to define and identify consistently. Developing universal hate speech indicators is challenging due to the aforementioned reasons, such as specific sociocultural and linguistic elements, the perpetrator's intent (particularly online where non-verbal cues are absent), and the receiver's perception. Moreover, language is inherently dynamic: slang, euphemisms, codes, and symbols used in hate speech can change rapidly, especially in the digital environment. This is particularly true on the internet and on social media platforms. As most digital platforms moderate their content, platform users often deliberately manipulate or reinvent language to evade detection and censorship, a phenomenon commonly referred to as *algospeak*.

Despite these challenges, both expert groups see it as crucial to identify and counteract hate speech to maintain a respectful and inclusive discourse. They suggest using the key indicators below.

THERE IS A STRONG ECHO OF THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF HATE SPEECH

The importance of context escalates in online spaces because of platforms' various functions and guidelines

Perpetrators may express themselves via broken sentences, memes, emojis, videos, or hashtags

Expert groups agree that this introduces difficulties for the automated detection of hate speech

That further highlights the importance of increasing localised knowledge about hate speech, which is this project's aim

4.2.1 General Indicators

German experts mention the following general indicators to identify and counteract hate speech:

Dehumanising metaphors that degrade or dehumanise a person or group based on perceived characteristics are prevalent in hate speech. Such language ranges from slurs and insults to coded language, including labelling people as vermin, garbage, or other non-human entities. Perpetrators use such language to dehumanise another person or group and *other* them, to justify their mistreatment or threats made against them. Hate speech invokes stereotypes and uses discriminatory language. That can take the form of racist, sexist, ageist, ableist language, and more. Hate speech often pertains to group-focused enmity. That is evident in language that seeks to belittle or insult individuals based on their perceived membership of a particular group. The more social categories perpetrators address in an instance of hate speech, the more likely it is to be identified as such. Hate speech may involve the production and perpetuation of conspiracy theories. According to experts, this often takes the form of general distrust of the state and, by extension, the media, fostering a general suspicion towards institutions and a sense of ‘us versus them.’

Austrian experts mention that general indicators of hate speech include structural factors within messaging, such as the addressee’s identity, authorship, content, type of attack (nationality, religion, ethnicity, physical, psychological), presence of political ideologies, generalisations, stereotypes, and the absence of argumentation. They also mention that indicators of hate speech include glorifying violence, especially

when intertwined with other forms of bigotry, such as Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism, as observed in Austrian hate speech against refugees. The trivialisation or glorification of crimes, insulting human dignity, and derogatory terms also indicate hate speech. Finally, Austrian experts believe that focusing on specific individuals, known as disinformation leaders, may indicate hate speech.

The experts also provided the following questions readers can ask to identify hate speech:

- Who is the addressee of the statement?

- Who is the author of the statement?

- What is the content of the statement?

In terms of classification, indicators included discrimination categories, targets (individuals or groups), recognisability of danger, the extremist nature of discourse, whether it was structured rather than spontaneous, and its legal relevance.

4.2.2 Right-Wing Extremist Hate Speech Narratives and Indicators

When discussing specific narratives, indicators and terminologies that typify far-right actors, experts generally expanded the previous discussion to include specific ideological elements. Considering the contextuality of hate speech, they deemed it necessary to look at indicators embedded in certain narratives. A common consensus between the experts was that indicators and language that perpetrators use can change rapidly, but their narratives remain. The authors wish to highlight the presence of conspiracy theories and disinformation in many hate speech narratives. The following highlights the more commonly used narratives and related indicators in both Germany and Austria.



ANTI-WOKENESS

A prevalent narrative suggests that progressive voices, extending beyond the political left, are part of a supposed *woke*, leftist, or even Jewish conspiracy. The purpose of this narrative is to delegitimise those voices. It includes attempts to delegitimise political opponents and parties, specifically the Green Party. Accusations against the *woke* include unnecessary language prohibition and open borders for refugees.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include attacks on political opponents reduced to personal attributes, memes (e.g., that girl with purple hair and piercings), hashtags (e.g., #FCKANTIFA), and framing political opponents as part of a militarised or terrorist left (*linksgrünversifft*).



THIRD REICH NOSTALGIA

Right-wing communities use historical Nazi references and propaganda techniques. Their narratives center around denying and affirming Third Reich atrocities.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include Nazi symbols (the Nazi *Swastika*, *88* and the *Reichsflagge*), Third Reich phrases *Freies Deutschland* (Free Germany) and *Freiheit und Gleichheit für alle Deutschen* (Freedom and Equality for all Germans), and Holocaust denial.



THE ROMANTICISATION OF THE HOMELAND

Romanticising the homeland and the nation's bloody history was another narrative, including protecting the homeland. That often leads to glorifying dictators and fantasies about re-establishing perceived "traditional" values and norms from the country's past.

4.2.3 Delegitimisation of (liberal) democracy

Right-wing extremist narratives endeavour to sow scepticism and mistrust of the state, media, and democratic institutions. Those narratives frequently involve scapegoating specific groups, such as foreigners, Asians, or Jews, and attributing societal problems to them. Therefore, one can observe right-wing extremist hate speech being repackaged as *critical journalism* in an effort to remain below the legal threshold. Allegations of fake news and the promotion of conspiracy theories are crucial elements here. Moreover, some of these narratives envision an imminent, unavoidable collapse of the liberal democratic order that could lead to civil war.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include the following: conspiracy theories (e.g. *Reichsbürger*), the COVID-19 Pandemic (e.g. anti-vaccine narratives and anti-Asian racism), undermining and attacking journalists (especially those assumed to be immigrants), and *Day X* fantasies.



WHITE SUPREMACY

Many delegitimisation of liberal democracy narratives invoke racist framing, frequently targeting refugees, perceived Muslims, or anyone who does not belong to the *white race* or perceived dominant culture. They attempt to incite fear by depicting others as violent, accusing others of Islamizing societies, and posing a threat to national cultural values. The narratives frame refugees as sexual predators who wish to corrupt women. They build an ideological base for conspiracy theories, such as *The Great Replacement Theory*, which intersects with the anti-Semitic idea that *the Jews* are sending migrants to destroy or overwhelm the *white race*.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include the following: Memes (e.g. *Pepe the Frog*), dark humour, militarisation, dehumanisation (e.g. *barbarians* or *hordes*), and *us against them* framing, which depicts others as *threats* or *invaders* (e.g. *Goldstücke* [gold nuggets]).



ANTI-IMMIGRANT

Closely related to white supremacy, the narrative of migrant *hotspots* (or *Brennpunkte*) emerged recently, particularly in Austria, suggesting that individuals with migration backgrounds cluster in specific neighbourhoods, thus creating dangerous areas for mainstream society, such as the *Brunnenmarkt* in Vienna. These narratives often intertwine with anti-Muslim discourses.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include the following: criminalising specific groups, securitisation of religions beyond Christianity, devaluing foreign languages, marginalising groups, calls for citizenship denial, propagating envy, and portraying foreigners as favoured over autochthones.



ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitic narratives persist, promoting ideas such as a *global Jewish conspiracy* or insinuations that Jews orchestrate various conspiracies, including encouraging mass migration. Discussions relating to Israel also contribute to anti-semitic rhetoric. For instance, anti-semitism often revolves around the construct of Jewish power, feeding the idea of a dangerous *other*. Anti-semitism is prevalent in the majority of right-wing conspiracy theories. That constructed *danger* has the potential to instigate violent actions detrimental to the psychological and physical health of Jewish people.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include the following: anti-Semitic keywords, e.g. *Globalisten* (Globalists), *Freimaurer* (Freemasons), *die Ostküste* (the East coast), *die Geheimen Eliten* (the secret elites), *die Strippenzieher* (the puppet master), New World Order (*NWO*) and humour mocking or trivialising the Holocaust.



MISOGYNY AND ANTI-FEMINISM

Women, particularly those in political or influential roles, are subjected to far-right attacks characterised by sexism, violence, and threats of sexualised violence. The narratives insist that women are supposed to adhere to traditional gender roles and are mentally unfit or incompetent to hold political office or work in high-ranking positions. According to experts, female politicians are frequently targeted unfairly because of their gender, often facing a disproportionately higher hate focus than their male counterparts. That can involve undue attention to their appearance, unconstructive criticism, and even threats of sexual violence.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include the following: references to female sexual attributes, dehumanisation (e.g. *femoids* or *female*), and labelling women as promiscuous to shame and degrade them.



ANTI-LGBTQIA+

Anti-LGBTQIA+ narratives, specifically anti-trans narratives, have gained significant prominence in derogatory online posts. The narratives portray those communities and their lived experiences as a *threat* to envisioned right-wing societies driven by traditional values. All far-right actors have repeatedly taken up the overall narrative for years. It is dynamic, and the content frequently has slight changes, creating a multitude of sub-narratives. The narrative is not new. The strategy behind such narratives, especially related to gender, children, and their perceived *early sexualisation*, is that a share of the middle classes will receive them well. Thus, right-wing actors use these narratives to reach their target group and spread hostile ideologies. Hate speech targeting LGBTQIA+ people is often paired with counter-narratives of how an ideal world would look for right-wing extremists.

A traditional image of women, the family, and sexuality ideologically unites all actors in this spectrum.

Readers should note that both expert groups have stressed the recent escalation of this narrative. Hate speech against members of the LGBTQIA+ community has increased dramatically, and violence and threats of violence against them have become more prominent.

Right-wing actors frame gender queerness and non-heterosexual sexual orientations as mental illnesses and consistently oversexualise members of the LGBTQIA+ community. They focus particularly on trans women, labelling them as a threat to *genuine womanhood*, a status that, according to trans-exclusionary feminists, only ciswomen can claim. The narratives claim that trans women will never be *real women* and accuse them of violence or being a threat to cis-women, which is a popular argument in the discussion on gendered-neutral bathrooms. The equating of homosexuals and trans people with paedophiles is common in this narrative. The narratives frequently view emasculation, the so-called *softening* of boys and men, as problematic and a reason why society is degrading. The narratives encompass a range of derogatory terms and phrases, aiming to target individuals based on their gender or sexual orientation. Another narrative associates homosexuality with Zionism, arguing it is a Zionist invention. In the context of foreign right-wing extremism, LGBTQIA+ people are compared with animals and portrayed as perverted unbelievers who threaten society.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS include: Hashtags like *#genderwahn* or *#gendergaga*, emojis and symbols like *kiwis* or *dinosaurs*, framing sexual identities as mental illnesses, reducing people to their sexual attributes, branding people as sexual predators, and framing them as disease spreaders (e.g. HIV is spread by gays), and specific terms including, *homo-lobby*, *transgender agenda*, *unmenschlich* (inhuman), *unnatürlich* (unnatural), *Memme* (sissy), *Kampflesben* (fighting lesbians), and *pervertierte Menschen* (perverts).



4.3 Relevant Actors

Expert groups in Germany and Austria slightly diverged in their assessment of the centrality of actors and groups. Nonetheless, both expert groups highlighted prominent actors. Several German experts stated that few *influencers* disseminate problematic content online. Instead, there seems to be a trend towards grassroots individuals disseminating problematic content online autonomously. The experts argue that over time, specific groups have internalised who, what, and how they should target. Austrian experts pointed out that hate speech is predominantly driven (quantitatively) by unorganised individuals active on social media rather than specific groups. They identified several significant actor groups within the German-speaking far-right spectrum, each propagating online hate speech to varying degrees.

This report discusses platforms mentioned by experts throughout the interviews in the following analysis of right-wing actors. The authors observed no significant difference between platform use in the countries the report investigated.

4.3.1 The German Context

Despite his declining influence, Martin Sellner is a relevant central figure in the *Identitarian Movement*. Alice Weidel is a prominent member of the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Stefan Magnet, the editor-in-chief of AUF 1 (an Austrian “alternative” media outlet), has become increasingly prominent since the COVID-19 pandemic began. He has gained recognition for disseminating conspiracy theories like *The Great Reset*. Another notable individual is Nicolai Lehring, also known as *Der Volkslehrer Lehring*, who is involved in the *völkisch* (ethnic-

nationalist) and *Querdenker* (lateral thinking) movements, distributing content across various platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram. German experts also identified Alina Lipp, Erik Weber, and Miro Bolsfeld (known online as *Unblockt*) as prominent German hate speech actors.

The experts also identified several groups and organisations as prominent German hate speech actors. These include the *Identitarian Movement* and the *AfD*, a far-right German political party. The experts also include the music group *Neuer Deutscher Standard*, linked initially to the *Identitarian Movement* but now openly connected to *Neo-Nazism*.

The ensuing list enumerates all mentioned actors and entities: Martin Sellner, Nicolei Lehrling (*Der Volkslehrer*), Alina Lipp, Attila Hildmann, Tim Kellner, Heiko Schrang, Peter Weber, Alice Weidel, Stefan Magnet, *AUF 1* (media outlet), *Compact* (publication), *Tichis Einblick*, *Neuer Deutscher Standard* (music group), *Identitäre Bewegung* ((Identitarian Movement, or Generation Identity), *NPD* (National Democratic Party), *Querdenker* (lateral thinking movement), and *Unblockt*.

Regarding platforms, the interviewees emphasised the transition of hate speech from established platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to newer ones like Telegram and TikTok. They suggest that while Facebook is perceived as *old school* and enforces stricter content policies, it is still home to posts that include racist comments, esoteric conspiracy theories, and pronounced anti-semitism. Telegram is now a highly influential platform with wide-ranging networking capabilities that attracts diverse extremist groups. Experts have identified TikTok as a recruitment platform for younger extreme right-wing target groups. Experts noted that Instagram hosts content linked to right-wing terrorism and combat sports, which the platform's moderation team often overlooks. Despite attempts to eliminate harmful content, YouTube retains significant relevance concerning hate speech because of the sheer volume of uploads.

The experts also mentioned platforms such as Twitter, Discord, Reddit, and Gap, emphasising that moderation levels vary based on the platform and specific users. They noted that Reddit has a well-moderated German-speaking community with minimal hate speech. The experts cited other platforms such as VKontakte, Twitch, and alternative video platforms as hosts to existing extremist communities.

4.3.2 The Austrian Context

The *Identitäre Bewegung* (Identitarian Movement, or Generation Identity) is a prominent disseminator of online hate speech. Experts highlighted that de-platforming limited the movement's reach and forced them to move to less successful platforms like *VKontakte*. The *movement* has also established proxy organisations like *Die Österreicher* (the Austrians), *Wiener Wehrmänner*, also known as *Wiener Widerstand* (Viennese Resistance), *Patrioten in Bewegung* (Patriots in Movement), and *Eisenfaust Nonkonforme Ästhetik* (Iron Fist Non-Conformist Aesthetic). According to the experts, Telegram remains the leading hate speech communication platform. Other platforms used for extreme right-wing rhetoric and hate speech include *TikTok Live*, *BitChute*, *DLive*, *Odysee*, and *Twitter*.

Experts further identified relevant political parties involved in hate speech, including the *FPÖ* (Austria) and the *AfD* (Germany), and smaller parties like *Dritte Weg* (The Third Way) and the *Partei des Volkes* (Party of the People). Both major parties maintain social media accounts, supplemented by national and regional group accounts that cater to diverse audiences. Experts noted a general decline in Twitter use, and the *FPÖ's* activity on Instagram and TikTok remained unclear. The experts also mentioned organisations affiliated with the *FPÖ* hosting German nationalist individuals and groups.

Neo-Nazi individuals and groups frequently use the platform *unwiderstehlich* (irresistible). Telegram channels are especially popular among coronavirus deniers and conspiracy theory proponents, often linked to the extreme right-wing milieu. Prominent actors at Coronavirus demonstrations include *Generation Identity*, Neo-Nazis like Gottfried Küssel and key players like Monika Donner, Martin Rutter, and the administrators of QAnon Austria. Christian fundamentalists and anti-abortionists are minimally present on social media platforms due to their traditional communication methods. Notable exceptions are the Telegram channel *Catholic Resistance* and *Gloria TV*, both particularly relevant in the context of homophobic and transphobic hate speech. Readers must note that hate speech, particularly of a right-wing extremist nature, is propagated not only by right-wing extremists but also by right-wing populists and some ÖVP politicians, as demonstrated by a racist video about a Viennese market circulated on social media.

Experts noted that far-right hate speech often involves right-wing populist actors, as their narratives frequently legitimise right-wing extremist narratives. Prominent right-wing populist parties and individuals like Viktor Orbán, Giorgia Meloni, and Björn Höcke are highly relevant in this context. Internationally recognised figures like Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson are also influential among youth in German-speaking countries.

Alternative media platforms are pivotal in the digital context. Key players include *Compact* magazine, *Neuer Deutscher Standard*, *AUF 1*, *Info-Direkt*, *Wochenblick*, *Report24*, *Die Tagesstimme*, *Heimatkurier*, Martin Sellner and Jürgen Elsässer.

EXPERT GROUPS IN GERMANY AND AUSTRIA SLIGHTLY DIVERGED IN THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE CENTRALITY OF ACTORS AND GROUPS



German experts stated that few influencers disseminate problematic content online



Instead, there seems to be a trend towards grassroots individuals disseminating problematic content online autonomously



Austrian experts pointed out that hate speech is predominantly driven by unorganised individuals active on social media rather than specific groups



According to the experts, Telegram remains the leading hate speech communication platform



The experts discussed a variety of unique characteristics pertaining to hate speech in Germany, including the following issue areas.

The history of the Third Reich in Germany is instrumental in influencing the understanding of and approach to hate speech. This historical context cultivates a heightened sensitivity to and awareness of extremist ideologies and symbols associated with the Nazi regime. Hence, expressions of these ideologies and their associated symbols and language are less tolerated in Germany than in other nations.

Therefore, the German legal system is relatively well-prepared to address hate speech, especially concerning historical sensitivities such as Holocaust denial, glorification of the Third Reich, and anti-semitism. However, many acknowledge the need for improvement, especially in reporting mechanisms and the capacity to analyse digital evidence. Germany's history of immigration and the treatment of individuals with an immigrant background contribute to some facets of hate speech within the country. The experts identified the conspiracy narrative of *BRD GmbH* (that

Germany is a company as opposed to a state) perpetuated by the so-called *Reichsbürger* (Reich citizens) as a distinctive characteristic of hate speech in Germany.

While Germany possesses unique characteristics, readers must consider the international context for a broader understanding. The interviewees argued that hate speech exists in numerous forms and contexts globally, and Germany is no exception.

IN GERMANY



Historical context cultivates a heightened sensitivity to extremist ideologies and symbols



The German legal system is relatively well-prepared to address hate speech, especially concerning historical sensitivities



Some experts observed that hate speech narratives and terminology in Austria are strikingly similar to those in Germany. Some advised against distinguishing between the countries, favouring an emphasis on subcultures and target groups such as young people, adults, and specific communities, for instance, youth language and diction employing specific expressions and terminology unique to their context. Despite coming from German-speaking countries, experts noted that online hate speech was often interspersed with English terms.

However, most interviewees concurred that each language area had unique features, including individual terms exclusive to the Austrian, German, or Swiss dialects. They identified specific political and historical discourses embedded with distinctive terms. The experts pointed out that new terms frequently surfaced after events, like the Halloween riots in Linz, where terms such as *Athena asylum seekers* were swiftly coined and used in derogatory and hateful contexts. Regional differences within Austria have also been identified by some experts,

attributing them to various speech patterns, terminologies, socialisation processes, and cultural acceptance across regions. The migration influx added another layer of complexity because new hate speech terminologies and perspectives have become prevalent since then.

Hence, experts argue that it is reasonable to expect Austrian hate speech to have unique features influenced not only by political and historical circumstances but also by current domestic occurrences. In Austria, a distinctive factor was the long-standing tradition of fraternities, known to propagate right-wing extremism and ideologised hate speech across generations. The history of National Socialism in Austria significantly influences societal perceptions of extremist hate speech. The experts highlighted that right-wing extremists appear more frequently in Austrian media than in other countries. An expert further observed the blurred line between tasteless and right-wing extremist comments in Austrian politics.

One unique feature associated with Austria is the Identitarian Movement's influence over the past decade. The *Movement* has introduced specific terminology, such as *die Grüninnen* (the Greens) and *linksgrünversifft* (dirty Green Left), considered disrespectful language. Ruth Wodak introduced the specific term *calculated ambivalence* for the strategic use of such terms by FPÖ in the 1990s, which approach allows right-wing extremist actors to send ambiguous messages while maintaining plausible deniability by disavowing hateful interpretations.

Austria's hate speech landscape experienced a significant increase with the increased influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016. According to one expert, Austrian hate speech has become highly intersectional, targeting refugees and impacting immigrants disproportionately.

IN AUSTRIA



A distinctive factor was the long-standing tradition of fraternities, known to propagate right-wing extremism and ideologised hate speech across generations



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Hate speech landscape experienced a significant increase with the increased influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016



When comparing the two cohorts of interviewees, the overwhelming majority of both Austrian and German experts identify hate speech as encompassing verbal and non-verbal expressions. These expressions include images, memes, and non-verbal cues that insult, degrade, and discriminate against individuals due to their perceived group affiliation. Consequently, hate speech often targets marginalised groups or individuals based on, but not limited to, their race, religion, sexual orientation, origin, ethnicity, or physical features. Some experts even regard articulations preceding hate speech as contributing to the marginalisation of social groups because those markers of difference construct exclusivity and divergence. Moreover, the findings indicate that hate speech occurs in both digital and analogue public spaces. The interviewees stressed the interconnectedness of those spaces and argued for the consideration of hate speech as a phenomenon transcending specific communication mediums.

Another common theme was the legality problem. Neither country has laws which specifically target hate speech. Some laws deal with specific offences within the concept of hate speech. For example, Germany has laws against insults and defamation (*Volksverhetzung*), and Austria has laws against slander. However, experts stress that hate speech often occurs within the legal threshold.

While these topics elicit similar views, there are differences between the groups. German interviewees placed more emphasis on the violent element of hate speech, referring to violent language. German experts also acknowledged the occurrence of unintentional hate speech, where individuals unconsciously reproduce harmful narratives that the public absorbs over time. The Austrian experts did not highlight that facet of hate speech. Instead, an Austrian interviewee termed it a discursive strategy, implying a level of intent and rationality.

The perspectives differ between German and Austrian experts regarding whether hate speech exclusively targets groups or also includes attacks on individuals. Some experts argue for a hate speech definition that includes both. Others maintain that hate speech primarily targets representatives of specific groups and exclude attacks on individuals from their definition. This issue pertains to whether hate speech only affects marginalised groups, a viewpoint held by a majority of both expert groups. The German experts emphasised the importance of considering the perspective of individuals affected by hate speech.

The Distinction Between Hate Speech and Hurtful Language

Understanding the nature of hate speech involves differentiating it from closely related concepts such as personal insults, cyberbullying, and trolling. A majority of both expert groups view hate speech as a more perilous form of hateful speech than other types because of its broader societal impact and potential to incite discrimination and violence. Within this notion, hate speech is a form of digital violence targeting individuals based on their association with a particular group.

The interviewees acknowledge the blurred boundaries between hate speech and other forms of harmful speech, such as personal insults, slander, and defamation. For example, an insult might stem from a minor personal interaction, whereas hate speech blames inherent characteristics or group affiliation. Moreover, hate speech has a political dimension absent in other forms of offensive language. Its direct impact on public discourse further differentiates it from personal insults.

However, differences in the experts' understanding of hate speech and other offensive language exist. German experts emphasise distinguishing hate speech from impulsive and context-specific personal disputes targeting individuals. A minority of German

experts also categorise insults, especially from a legal perspective, as a manifestation of hate speech, arguing that they can serve to isolate entire groups. From a legal standpoint, experts criticised Austria's absence of a formal hate speech definition despite numerous related offences under which prosecutors could bring a case, such as the Austrian prohibition law (*Verbotsgesetz*, banning National Socialist activities), coercion, defamation, dangerous threats, or sedition. Generally, the concept of hate speech is primarily situated and used within civil society. On the other hand, the judicial system can prosecute actions such as insulting. However, currently, there is no way to prosecute an act of hate speech.

Role of Context

Both cohorts recognise and stress the critical role of cultural, social, political, and geographic context in identifying hate speech. Context is also essential when considering the specific characteristics of the person targeted by toxic comments, such as personal vulnerabilities, experiences, or circumstances. The context can fluctuate based on the communication medium, the social group involved and prevalent power dynamics.

These findings concerning the societal contexts of hate highlight that there is no one-size-fits-all interpretation of hate speech. Speech is an utterance embedded in a particular communicative context. Specific expressions or gestures have distinct meanings in different communities or online platforms. Keyword searches may prove ineffective in identifying hate speech because it is necessary to understand the context of the content and comments. Furthermore, the meaning of words can fluctuate depending on context and intent. For instance, the word *gay* carries both positive and negative connotations. Therefore, an automated search may be unable to return instances of hate speech.

Toxicity and Hate Speech

Austrian and German experts perceive toxicity in the context of hate speech as a complex concept influenced by numerous factors. Shared views between both groups include the following:

1. Context-dependent

Defining something as toxic or hate speech depends on the context because the definition fluctuates based on the speaker's intent, reach or influence, the directness or subtlety of their language, and the potential harm they can inflict on targets.

2. Various influential factors

Toxicity is shaped by elements such as the type of hate speech (sexism, racism, homophobia), the type of messenger, the presence of explicit or coded language, the reach of the message and its potential to mobilise harmful action, the hate speech target group, and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes or biases. For instance, Austrian experts emphasise that if hate speech targets people who are vulnerable and already experience significant exclusion, it is likely more toxic than if directed against a privileged group. German interviewees underscore that explicit insults or threats are not the sole determinants of toxicity because even subtle or coded language (e.g. *dog whistles*) can contribute to a toxic environment.

3. Varying toxicity thresholds

Individuals may have different thresholds for what they consider toxic, depending on their personal experiences, beliefs, and values.

4. Violence

Threats and endorsements of criminal acts are at the upper end of the toxicity scale. Death threats or the explicit desire for an individual to suffer severe accidents constitute high toxicity levels because they directly endanger an individual's life or physical safety.

However, both expert groups found it challenging to engage with the toxicity concept. Although it is regarded as theoretically valid, its practicality is often questioned or considered highly complex to measure.

Key Takeaways: Narratives, Indicators, and Context

This study's interviews from Germany and Austria highlighted several country-specific hate speech characteristics. Both countries exhibit sensitivity concerning hate speech due to their specific historical backgrounds concerning World War II. In Germany, this sensitivity manifests through a focus on Holocaust denial and an aversion to glorifying National Socialism. Concurrently, in Austria, the influence of National Socialism and right-wing extremism, primarily through fraternities, significantly moulds societal perceptions of extremist hate speech.

Notwithstanding the specific politics of memory and historical experiences with fascism, both nations grapple with the issue of right-wing extremism fuelling hate speech. In Germany, right-wing extremists exploit platforms like Telegram and Odyssey by carving out niche spaces for hate speech. Conversely, in Austria, right-wing extremism seems to command a more substantial media presence, with mainstream media platforms hosting extreme right-wing personalities. Both Germany and Austria have witnessed an escalation or transformation of hate speech in response to the influx of refugees, which started in 2015. That situation has spurred the development of new terms and narratives within hate speech.

The previously outlined aspects make it apparent that creating a fixed list of hate speech indicators using keywords and phrases is too static to identify hate speech. Most experts in Austria and Germany agree on this challenge of operationalising against the phenomenon. The context and influence of other structural factors, such as power imbalances, make it challenging to define and identify hate speech. However, they substantially enrich our understanding of it.

The interview summaries above outline the various elements we must consider to identify hate speech. They include the historical, sociocultural, political, and interpersonal context, the producer's intent, the effect on individuals and public discourse, the content, group-focused enmity, political ideologies, the use of stereotypes, violence, and unfounded generalisations.

Within that list, group-focused enmity is one of the key indicators of hate speech. As the experts consistently mentioned, hate speech targets specific groups based on their social minority status or marginalised position with the goal of *othering* and further exclusion. Therefore, when individuals are attacked, it is within the context of their perceived identity. Furthermore, the glorification of violence can indicate hate speech. For example, hate speech may trivialise and glorify crimes in contexts where Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment relate to hate speech against refugees.

As for the extreme right-wing ecosystem and its use of hate speech, the interviews in both countries showcased a significant overlap of narratives and indicators.

Therefore, in conclusion, the interviewees stressed the importance of studying narratives present in the ecosystem rather than working with indicators. However, the narratives build an umbrella under which we can identify specific indicators. In this context, the list of indicators is dynamic and increasing as right-wing hate speech

adapts to different contexts and the (political) goals of the actors involved. The following summarises commonalities, differences, and critical takeaways concerning right-wing hate speech in Germany and Austria.

The narratives building the right-wing hate speech umbrella include the following: Third Reich nostalgia, the delegitimisation of political or ideological opponents, destabilising democracy, white supremacy, anti-semitism, misogyny, anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-Western sentiments, and *homeland* romanticisation. All of these narratives overlap and intersect with each other at various points. The experts also clarified the role conspiracy theories play in these narratives. Some conspiracies are a bridge between various narratives. For example, the *Great Replacement Theory* encompasses white supremacy, anti-semitism, homeland romanticisation, and other hate speech narratives. Austrian experts also mentioned theories such as *The Great Reset* and *Transhumanism*, gaining more traction recently. Anti-semitism also runs through most of the narratives to increase mistrust and solidarity within the ecosystem concerning outside influences and power. Antisemites use hate speech as a strategy to frame their goals and identify actors or entities responsible for the assumed degradation of society to mobilise existing adherents and potential supporters.

Using hate speech, particularly online, is a valuable strategy for the right-wing ecosystem. As the interviews highlighted, hate speech can be spread through multiple forms or media and is not limited to written or spoken words. Visuals, such as memes or TikTok videos, are effective tools to make hate speech more palatable and accessible and spread it more widely than otherwise possible. The covertness of hate speech through dark humour, *algospeak*, emojis, and other more indirect forms of communication facilitate its promulgation among potential audiences. These factors make it more likely for right-wing narratives, ideologies and hate to promulgate and increase recruitment to extreme right-wing groups.

Concerning the current impacts of right-wing hate speech, the experts highlighted the rising scepticism towards governments, media, and democratic institutions in general. The rise of the *post-truth era* is an example of that rising scepticism. A German expert emphasised a rise in hate speech attacks against journalists, especially those who are women, LGBTQI+, or assumed to have an immigration background. The same is true concerning politicians. More people are turning to alternative news outlets and so-called *citizen journalists* on social media. Experts in Germany noted that the time of right-wing thought leaders and influencers may be over because the ecosystem has internalised the narratives, framings, and strategies such as *dog whistling*. Therefore, right-wing communities are more autonomous and do not need leaders. These dynamics are not only present online. The Austrian experts stated that television and other mainstream media outlets invite guests who espouse extreme right-wing narratives. These observations stress the ability of hate speech to spread and eventually become adopted into broader societal dialogues. Current crises, such as the war in Ukraine and Israel as well as the influx of refugees to Germany and Austria, enrich the breeding ground for current and future use of hate speech and hate campaigns.

A concerning trend, both expert groups mentioned, was the rise in misogynist and anti-trans narratives. Right-wing ecosystems spread anti-LGBTQIA+ narratives because gender queerness and sexual orientations other than heterosexuality threaten their goal of a traditionalist society. However, anti-trans narratives have received increased attention. Recent German legislation making gender-affirming surgery more accessible to trans people and events like Pride Month have triggered right-wing hate speech campaigns, such as *#Stolzmonat* (Pride Month). The AfD uses various platforms to spread these anti-trans narratives, and alternative news outlets and citizen journalists have followed suit.

Austrian and German experts provide insights into the social media channels used to spread hate speech. Platforms acknowledged by both include Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. According to the Austrian experts, platform popularity varies depending on user demographics. In contrast, the experts in Germany observed a migration from established platforms like Facebook to newer, less regulated ones, such as Telegram and TikTok. Experts in both countries highlight other less prominent fringe platforms, such as Gap and Bitchute. The recent use of Twitch, Spotify and other non-traditional social media platforms indicates a shift to a more varied use of media formats such as podcasts or live streams for spreading hate speech. Users of all of these platforms can monetise their content under given conditions. International figures such as Andrew Tate have shown how hate speech can be used to garner an audience and subsequent financial gain. In that context, the relationship between hate speech and emotion emerges, whereby hate speech-filled content goes *viral* or helps to *build communities* on these platforms.



Lastly, it is clear from the interviews that there is a diverse group of right-wing and populist individuals and groups using various platforms for different purposes and audiences. Digital platforms allow for transnational connections between actors and a significant overlap of the narratives and communication strategies used. Looking at the media landscape in both countries, Austrian actors continue their presence in mainstream media outlets, whereas German actors have migrated to alternative media outlets or digital platforms. Overall, it is vital to acknowledge that while each country has unique characteristics concerning hate speech, there are observable international commonalities. Groups have formed connections and shared certain ideologies, leading to transmitting and translating specific forms of hate speech across national boundaries. Martin Sellner and the

AfD are examples of that phenomenon. This observation underscores the irony that while some argue for closed borders, extremist groups have effectively networked and established international cross-border communities.

Both expert groups underscore the challenges of monitoring and regulating hate speech across these platforms. Despite robust moderation policies, the sheer volume of content and the evolving nature of platforms make controlling hate speech an ongoing battle.



Hate Speech

is a form of communication, verbal, written, or visual, that intentionally or unintentionally degrades, discriminates against, devalues or threatens individuals or groups based on their inherent characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other societal categorisation. Even without explicit derogatory language, hate speech can exclude and impact individuals by constructing an alien “other”.

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The following definition of hate speech draws on the discussions and findings within this report to capture the key elements:

Hate speech is a form of communication, verbal, written, or visual, that intentionally or unintentionally degrades, discriminates against, devalues or threatens individuals or groups based on their inherent characteristics such as

race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other societal categorisation. Even without explicit derogatory language, hate speech can exclude and impact individuals by constructing an alien *other*.

The following are the report’s key findings:



1

A holistic understanding of hate is needed

The focus tends to be on online text-based expressions of hate speech, hindering the identification of the phenomenon, especially on platforms where visual content is predominant. The interviews underscore the complexity of hate speech, urging an extensive understanding of hate speech to encompass non-verbal cues, such as memes.

2

Context plays a pivotal role in identifying hate speech

Context plays a pivotal role in identifying hate speech. The context of hate speech is multifaceted and changes constantly. Cultural, social, political, and geographic factors, as well as who is targeted and through which communication medium influence the interpretation of hate speech.

3

Hate speech predominantly targets marginalised groups and individuals, *othering* them based on their perceived identity

There is a broad consensus among experts and relevant literature that the core element of hate speech lies in its group-based orientation, typically against marginalised communities, suggesting a societal impact beyond personal disputes or conflicts. Even if hate speech does not convey immediate danger, it can cause significant emotional harm.

4

Hate speech can be implicit and unintentional

Explicit insults and threats are not the only characteristics of hate speech. It can consist of or include more subtle language forms, including coded expressions or *dog whistles*. That is particularly the case on platforms where users are aware of potential social and platform-specific consequences, such as having their accounts and videos suspended or removed. Furthermore, specific instances of hate speech can be reproduced unintentionally.

Therefore, we must acknowledge that the challenge lies in defining hate speech, identifying it, curbing its proliferation, and addressing its social implications. The RECO-DAR project will use this report's findings to tackle part of this challenge in its second phase to measure hate

speech and its flow across various platforms. In that way, the authors hope to contribute to the collective understanding of this pressing issue and guide initiatives to counter hate speech in the digital age.

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Codebook

Table 1 Key Narratives and Associated Indicators

NARRATIVES	INDICATOR
Third Reich Nostalgia	Nazi symbols (e.g., <i>88</i> and <i>Reichsflagge</i>), Holocaust denial, phrases from the Third Reich (e.g. <i>Freies Deutschland</i> (Free Germany) and <i>Freiheit und Gleichheit für alle Deutschen</i> (Freedom and Equality for all Germans))
Anti-Wokeness	Attacks on political opponents reduced to personal attributes, memes (e.g., the girl with purple hair and piercings), hashtags (e.g. <i>#FCKANTIFA</i>), framing political opponents as part of a militarised or terrorist left, <i>linksgrünversifft</i> (dirty Green Left)
Anti-Establishment	Conspiracy theories, including <i>Reichsbürger</i> and those surrounding the COVID-19 Pandemic, such as anti-vaccine narratives and anti-Asian racism, and undermining and attacking journalists, especially those assumed to have an immigrant background
White Supremacy	Memes (e.g. <i>Pepe the Frog</i>), dark humour, militarisation, <i>dehumanisation</i> (e.g. <i>barbarians</i> or <i>hordes</i>), <i>us against them</i> framing, framing others as <i>threats</i> or <i>invaders</i> or <i>Goldstücke</i> (gold nuggets)
Anti-Semitism	Anti-Semitic keywords, including <i>Globalisten</i> (Globalists)), <i>Freimaurer</i> (Freemasons), <i>die Ostküste</i> (the east coast), <i>die Geheimen Eliten</i> ('the secret elites '), <i>die Strippenzieher</i> (the puppet master), and <i>NWO</i> (New World Order) as well as humour mocking or trivialising the Holocaust
Misogyny and Anti-Feminism	Reducing women to their sexual attributes, dehumanisation (e.g. the terms <i>femoids</i> or <i>female</i>), and labelling women as promiscuous, aiming to shame and degrade them

NARRATIVES	INDICATOR
Anti-LGBTQIA+	Hashtags (e.g. #genderwahn or #gendergaga), emojis and symbols (e.g. kiwis or dinosaurs), framing of diverse sexual identities as mental illnesses, reducing people to their sexual attributes, branding as sexual predators, and framing as spreaders of diseases, such as HIV, and the use of terms including <i>homo-lobby</i> , <i>transgender agenda</i> , <i>unmenschlich</i> (inhuman), <i>unnatürlich</i> (unnatural), <i>Memme</i> (sissy), <i>Kampflesben</i> (fighting lesbians), and <i>pervertierte Menschen</i> (perverts)
Homeland Romanticisation	No specific Indicators were mentioned
Anti-immigrant	<i>Brennpunkt</i> (focal point), securitisation of religions other than Christianity, criminalisation of specific groups, devaluation of foreign language, citizenship denial, propagation of envy, the portrayal of foreigners as favoured over autochthons

Table 2 Key Actors in Germany and Austria

GERMAN ACTORS	AUSTRIAN ACTORS
INFLUENTIAL FIGURES	
Alina Lipp	Gottfried Küssel
Stefan Magnet	Monika Donner
Nicolei Lehrling aka Der Volkslehrer	Martin Rutter
Erik Weber	Jürgen Elsässer
Miro Bolsfeld (online handle: Unblockt)	Martin Sellner
Attila Hildmann	
Tim Kellner	
Heiko Schrang	
Peter Weber	
Jürgen Elsässer	
Björn Höcke	
Alice Weidel	
POLITICAL PARTIES	
<i>Dritte Weg</i> (The Third Way)	<i>Partei des Volkes</i> (Party of the People)
<i>NPD</i> (National Democratic Party)	<i>FPÖ</i>
<i>Alternative für Deutschland</i> (Alternative for Germany)	

GERMAN ACTORS	AUSTRIAN ACTORS
MOVEMENTS	
<i>Querdenker</i> (lateral thinking movement)	Identitarian movement with several branches or associated group: <i>Die Österreicher</i> (the Austrians), <i>Wiener Wehrmänner</i> or <i>Wiener Widerstand</i> (Viennese Resistance), <i>Patrioten in Bewegung</i> (Patriots in Movement), and <i>Eisenfaust Nonkonforme Ästhetik</i> (Iron Fist Non-Conformist Aesthetic)
<i>Identitäre Bewegung</i> (Identitarian Movement, or Generation Identity)	
MEDIA OUTLETS/ENTITIES	
	<i>Info-Direkt</i>
	<i>Wochenblick</i>
	<i>Report24</i>
	<i>Die Tagesstimme</i>
	<i>Heimatkurier</i>
	<i>AUF 1</i>
	<i>Compact</i>
TELEGRAM CHANNELS	
	Catholic Resistance
	OriaTV
	<i>Unwiderstehlich</i>

Table 3 Online Platforms Relevant to Hate Speech in Austria and Germany

MAINSTREAM SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	FRINGE PLATFORMS
Facebook	VKontakt
Instagram	Discord
Youtube	Reddit
Telegram	Gap
TikTok	Twitch
Twitter	Bitchute
	DLive
	Odysee



Hate Speech Among the Far-Right in Austria and Germany

Definitions, Indicators, Actors, Platforms, and Context Factors



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