

Call for Papers

Extreme Right Radicalization Online: Platforms, Processes, Prevention

A Media & Democracy Workshop

Brooklyn, NY | May 14–15, 2020

OVERVIEW

Right-wing terrorism is on the rise in the West, from El Paso, Texas, to Christchurch, New Zealand. Of the five deadliest years for extremist violence in the US since 1970, three have occurred in the past decade, and many of the perpetrators of these acts of violence have broadcast their actions or ideology online to increasingly large audiences. But for 30 years or more, terrorism studies focused almost exclusively on leftist groups; in more recent times its focus has narrowed to jihadi terrorism. Less is known about the processes driving right-wing extremism—white nationalism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, virulent misogyny, etc.—or the distinct mechanisms by which they may occur online.

Concerns over online radicalization have arisen at a time of major academic uncertainty about media habits and effects. The rise of smartphones, apps, and platforms has changed media habits—e.g., how we read the news or engage in online debate—as well as the state of information diversity. And while it is clear that right-wing extremists exploit social media for political purposes, the extent to which they were radicalized online is far less certain.

In order to effectively confront extreme right radicalization, we must first expand the available academic scholarship on this and related topics. It is in this context that the [Media & Democracy program](#) at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) is proud to announce an open call for papers for an interdisciplinary research development workshop to be held at the SSRC in Brooklyn, NY, on May 14–15, 2020. This workshop will be cochaired by Professor Maura Conway (Dublin City University) and Professor Fenwick McKelvey (Concordia University).

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

This research development workshop will give participants the opportunity to receive in-depth feedback from their peers on in-progress research projects, to give feedback to other workshop participants, and to meet fellow scholars who work on similar topics.

The workshop will be geared toward scholars who have previously completed research on this or related topics. Early-career scholars are particularly encouraged to apply. We welcome applications from all relevant fields, including computer science, communication, cultural studies, international relations, journalism, media studies, political science, psychology, sociology, terrorism studies, and others. We also welcome a variety of methodological approaches, including quantitative and qualitative research, large-N studies, single and comparative case studies (of groups, platforms, etc.), and ethnographies.

Applications are due November 18, 2019. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the organizers. All accepted participants will be expected to circulate a working paper by April 12, 2020, and to read and prepare feedback on the manuscripts submitted by other participants prior to the workshop on May 14.

WORKSHOP THEMES

We welcome proposals for research that will address whether and how changes in media and technology are shaping the way that extreme right radicalization occurs today. Substantive research themes may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

Theories of Online Radicalization:

Do online mechanisms of radicalization differ significantly from offline mechanisms? How do older theories of radicalization apply to the contemporary context? What distinguishes radicalization from polarization and/or mobilization?

To what extent is the rise in right-wing extremism connected to the affordances of networked technologies, including increased access to extremist content, versus traditional explanations such as anxiety about declining social power, feelings of exclusion, and/or the desire for a social identity/community?

How do extreme right online radicalization processes compare to those of violent jihadis or processes of radicalization in non-Western contexts (e.g., in Brazil, India, or the Philippines)?

Dissemination and Exposure:

Are individuals exposed to greater amounts of extremist content online than offline? If so, to what effect? Apart from major social media platforms, what other online spaces and services, including messaging apps and alternative social networks, are currently trafficked by the extreme right and why?

Do elites and mainstream organizations normalize extremist content through their platforms? If so, how? What mechanisms exist for tracking the pathways that individuals take to get to right-wing extremist content or sites?

What are the online vernaculars and visual cultures of radicalization? How do memes and other phenomena of participatory culture become enlisted in right-wing extremists' radicalization efforts? What is the role of disinformation in contemporary extreme right online activity?

What are the ethical issues attached to studying the contemporary online extreme right and how should we manage these? What are the potential negative consequences of prolonged repeated exposure by researchers to right-wing extremist content and what measures can we take to mitigate them?

Aggregation, Suggestion, and Algorithmic Manipulation:

To what extent do social media algorithms push or suggest extremist content to audiences that would not have otherwise sought out such content? Do platforms benefit financially by recommending right-wing extremist content? How has the turn to artificial intelligence in algorithmic regulation impacted media tactics and strategies of online radicalization?

Do extremist groups employ different means to manipulate algorithms than campaigns by mainstream political organizations or social movements? If so, to what effect? How are embedded logics of algorithmic optimization (e.g., viewing time, adjacent relationships, collaborative filtering) exploited to amplify extreme right voices?

Regulation and Interventions:

What interventions have worked to reduce or reverse extremism and what can we learn from them? What are the unintended

consequences of interventions by platforms or governments in extremist spaces? What kinds of media interventions are appropriate? How can they complement deradicalization efforts and other “offline” approaches?

Are there comparative research frameworks to study the regulation of extremist political activity in digital media systems? How do different constitutional approaches to hate speech in the US and Europe (especially Germany) affect companies’ decision-making in relation to extreme right content?

TO APPLY

To apply, please send the following materials to mdapplications@ssrc.org by **November 18, 2019**. Please include “Application for Online Radicalization workshop” in the subject line.

- Current C.V. of the author who will attend the workshop (maximum two pages).
- An abstract of up to 500 words. The abstract should clearly outline the main theoretical and/or empirical contribution of the paper.
- A short statement (up to 300 words) detailing your interest in the workshop and how it will advance your research agenda. If you have publications or projects that are related to the research detailed in your abstract, please feel free to list up to three citations in this document.