DeRadicalisation
in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate

Cultural Drivers of Radicalisation

Austria/5.1 Country Report
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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	German	English
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland	Alternative for Germany
BM.I	Bundesministerium für Inneres	Federal Ministry of the Interior
BVT	Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung	Austrian Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counter-Terrorism
DÖW	Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes	Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreich	Austrian Freedom Party
HiNBG	Hass-im-Netz-Bekämpfungs-Gesetz	Hate-on-the-Net-Combat-Act
ÖH	Österreichische Hochschüler_innenschaft	Austrian National Union of Students
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei	Austrian People's Party
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs	Social Democratic Party of Austria
StGB	Strafgesetzbuch	Austrian Criminal Code
VdU	Verband der Unabhängigen	Federation of Independents
VerbotsG	Verbotsgesetz	National Socialist Prohibition Law
VersG	Versammlungsgesetz	Austrian Assembly Act

About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and wider social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) with the goal of moving towards the measurable evaluation of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, which include the person's sense of being victimised, of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures, as well as coming under the influence of "us vs them" identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia, Austria and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation in order to test practical interventions geared towards prevention, inclusion, and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of 17 nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts will be crucial in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalisation often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing, and devising solutions to online radicalisation will be central to the project's aims.

Executive Summary

The present report aims at identifying and analysing cultural drivers of radicalisation in Austria, to explain the process of radicalisation, and to detect patterns of radicalised ideas and their mainstreaming through digital platforms. We focus on right-wing extremism because this is the most institutionalised strand of radicalisation that dominated Austrian post-war history. As right-wing extremism is a multi-faceted phenomenon, we include YouTube videos from two different actors, one inside and the other outside institutionalised politics. The first video stems from the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), an elected party which has successfully mobilised using right-wing populist hate speech and is currently part of the opposition. The second actor is the so-called "Generation Identity", a right-wing extremist youth organisation that forms part of the "new right". Both videos include online representations that are closely connected to concrete offline events. This allows for a comparative analysis of the events as such and of their representation in the online world. This is accompanied by an analysis of the reception of the messages conveyed in the videos by commentators.

Both videos appear to be successful in mobilising support and in creating audiences. The video published by the FPÖ features a demonstration against government measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, advocating for basic rights and the freedom of speech and proclaiming a movement that "can no longer be stopped", thus constructing a strong and powerful "us" element. The – more extreme – second example is a video published by the Generation Identity. The "we" proclaimed here is constituted by young Austrians without a migration background who are said to be "forgotten". Contrary to the ideas featured in the FPÖ video, this video documents a disruptive action at a play that was performed together with refugees at the University of Vienna. The activists took over the stage to enrol a banner, distribute leaflets, and spill fake blood. Though different in their expression and extent of extremism, both videos display signs of perceived injustice and grievance, and both contribute to polarisation.

1. Introduction

The aim of this report is to identify and analyse cultural drivers of radicalisation in Austria. In the country report "Stakeholders of (De)-Radicalisation in Austria" (Haselbacher et al., 2021), we identified two current strands of radicalisation, namely right-wing extremism and jihadism. While the latter is a rather new phenomenon in Austria, the first has been the country's most dominant strand of radicalisation throughout post-war history (see ibid., 2021). More importantly, the electoral successes of right-wing parties, above all the FPÖ, have led to a process of institutionalisation and normalisation of right-wing politics in the political system which is peculiar in Europe (Heinisch and Hauser, 2016; Pelinka, 2013). We will thus focus on right-wing extremism in this report and give insights into cultural drivers of radicalisation on the far right. In D.Rad, we understand socio-cultural factors as predictors of radicalisation. The analysis of cultural drivers of radicalisation consequently is crucial for explaining the process of radicalisation on the one hand and for detecting patterns of radicalised ideas and their mainstreaming through digital platforms and popular culture on the other.

To approach the topic empirically, we will compare right-wing extremist representation on YouTube and consequent mobilisation within and outside institutionalised politics. The platform YouTube is of special interest for studying right-wing online mobilisation, since it is the most-used social network in Western European countries, it is popular among right-leaning users, and it unites the features of sharing, rating, and commenting on videos (Munger and Phillips, 2020). The first example we chose is a video of the FPÖ, an elected party whose key actors are known for making use of anti-immigrant and nativist sentiments in populist speech (Wodak, 2020). There is an ongoing debate in scholarly literature whether or not the FPÖ classifies as a right-wing extremist party. Some scholars have ascribed the party to the field of populist radical right parties (Mudde, 2007). Brigitte Bailer has summarised this debate by saying that the party's content is right-wing extremist and that it is propagated by using populist means (Bailer, 2021). The Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) has classified some exponents as well as the FPÖ as right-wing extremist due to organisational, personal, and ideological overlaps with right-wing extremist groups, above all nationalist fraternities (Bailer, n.d.; Peham, n.d.; Reiter et al., 2020).

The second video originates from the Generation Identity, a right-wing extremist youth organisation from the spectrum of the new right, which includes fascist elements regarding its ideological foundations and aesthetics (Goetz, 2020; Goetz et al., 2018; Strobl and Bruns, 2016). Originating in France, the Generation Identity Austria was founded in 2012 and has successfully attracted media coverage through provocative and action-oriented interventions in public space. The group describes itself as patriotic, whereas big campaigns such as "the great replacement" reproduce anti-pluralist, elitist, and nationalist worldviews. The case of the Generation Identity is especially interesting when looking at the management of social media and the creation of audiences. While the movement has strategically established "new specialized forms of media and institutions, and increasingly took to the streets" (Strobl and Bruns, 2016: 105), it has recently suffered from de-platforming.

Both videos are related to a concrete offline event, making it possible to study the connection of physical spaces and online geographies (Ozduzen, 2020; Ozduzen et al., 2020). The first video is a recent clip by the FPÖ, published on FPÖ TV, the official YouTube channel of the party. In this video, prominent members of the party mobilise during a demonstration against

the COVID-19-measures of the government, especially criticising the Austrian chancellor Se-bastian Kurz. The video by the Generation Identity is a documentation of a disruptive action that has taken place in April 2016. Activists disturbed the performance of a play written by the Austrian author and Nobel Prize Winner Elfriede Jelinek. The play was performed by refugees at the main auditorium of the University of Vienna, when activists took over the stage and enrolled a banner which read "you hypocrites" (*Ihr Heuchler*) before spilling fake blood on the banner and the stage. The following analyses of the videos are based on the elements of representation and mobilisation on the one hand and circulation and consumption on the other. This enables us to grasp both the creation of narratives and the creation of audiences. In the next sections, we will give an overview over the methodology of the report (chapter 2) and the cultural and political context of radicalisation in Austria (chapter 3), before we present the results from our empirical analysis in chapter 4.

2. Methodology

Following a practice-based media research methodology (Couldry, 2004), we propose a re-flexive approach that includes the elements of representation, mobilisation, circulation, and consumption. This allows us to be aware of the construction of an "us" and "them"-construct and to pay attention to the process of audience creation. The media ecology approach (Sco-lari, 2012) helps us to grasp the role of media in nurturing feelings relevant for the study of the I-GAP spectrum, namely (in)justice, grievance, alienation, and polarisation.

To study *representation* and *mobilisation* in media objects, we chose two media objects on the platform YouTube that contain explicitly radicalised ideas that are – partially – prone to violence. Including one actor inside and one outside institutionalised politics, the case selec-tion is representative for the right-wing extremist scene in Austria. In order to identify videos, we conducted an online search on the YouTube channels of the two actors. Regarding the FPÖ, we chose a recent video that is connected to a controversial demonstration against COVID-19 measures. This is of special interest, because it is linked to the recent emergence of anti-COVID demonstrations, which includes people across the spectrum of the far right, and because it shows how the FPÖ has changed its positioning after it returned to the role of an opposition party. The video of the Generation Identity is closely linked to an action that caused much outrage and led to a lawsuit against persons involved. Furthermore, the video includes key theories of the movement and makes it possible to analyse its ideological foundations. We then downloaded the videos and made a detailed transcript of the images, the soundtrack, and the text. Additionally, we collected information on the context of the videos. These sources made it possible to contextualise and to historicise the discourses in the multimodal text of a YouTube video and formed the basis for the content analysis (Benson, 2017; Mattoni, 2017).

To study the *circulation* and *consumption* of the media objects, we had to choose different approaches for the two videos, since the commentary function for the video of the Generation Identity had been deactivated. We thus harnessed data on the reactions in the form of com-mentaries (FPÖ video) in the one case, and media articles and statements on the event in the other (Generation Identity video). Our approach therefore combines an analysis of YouTube commentaries as well as online and legacy media on the videos. The YouTube commentaries were collected on the 30th of March 2021 through YouTube API, applying Mozdeh software. By April 13, 2021, the video had 13,546 likes and 338 dislikes, 176,336 users accessed the

video since it had been published. The comments were then transferred to an Excel file and we conducted a content analysis, observing the orientation of the comments (positive, negative, neutral, own agenda). Regarding the video of the Generation Identity, we included newspaper articles on the event as well as all material concerning the action from the official webpage of the movement. Furthermore, we included more general articles that discuss right-wing extremist representations in the media and the use of media platforms by right-wing exponents. These insights form the basis for the following section, and contextualise our research.

3. Media landscape, cultural and political context of radicalisation in Austria

The development of the right-wing extremist scene in Austria is closely tied to the country's history, its National Socialist past, and its role in the Second World War. Historians have shown how the theory of victimisation served as the foundational narrative of the Second Republic, which means that Austria's co-responsibility for the war was downplayed or negated and the prosecution of Nazi crimes was carried out inconsistently (Rathkolb, 2017; Uhl, 2020). The Austrian Declaration of Independence of 1945 denied any co-responsibility for the Nazi-regime, stating that Austria was "the first free country which fell victim to Hitler's aggression"[1] (Declaration of Independence, 1945 quoted in Uhl, 2020). As a consequence, attempts of real denazification were limited to the years 1945 and 1946, and post-war Austria subsequently followed the path of *politics of integration*, e.g. the re-integration of former Nazis into politics and society (Falter, 2018; Manoschek and Geldmacher, 2006; Uhl, 2020). The victimisation myth was not challenged until the 1980s, at the onset of the Waldheim affair.[2] In 1991, former chancellor Franz Vranitzky for the first time openly addressed Austrian complicity in a speech in parliament, which led to the establishment of The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism (1995) and the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism (2001).

Matthias Falter (2018) demonstrates how the abovementioned politics of integration has led to a normalisation of far-right positions and the political re-organisation of the far right. The most prominent party on the Austrian far-right spectrum, the FPÖ, was founded in 1956 as a successor of the Federation of Independents (VdP). Both parties had united a number of former Nazis and returnees in their ranks and had the goal to establish a third political camp apart from the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP) (Bailer-Galanda, 2004;

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[1] The Declaration of Independence was based on the Moscow Declaration of 30 October 1943. In this document, the Allied Forces state that Austria is "the first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression" and that it "shall be liberated from German domination" as they wish to see re-established a "free and independent Austria". However, it also explicitly declares that Austria "has a responsibility which she cannot evade for participation in the war on the side of Hitlerite Germany" (Moscow Declaration; see also Karner et al., 2015).

[2] Kurt Waldheim was one of the most controversial politicians in Austria. He was foreign minister and Secretary General of the United Nations before he became president of Austria in 1986. During the presidential election, journalists started to investigate his role in the Second World War, discovering his military record. After his election, he was internationally isolated and placed on the watchlist of the United States. For more information see Good et al., 1999.

Falter, 2018; Reiter, 2017; 2019).[3] Until Jörg Haider became party chairman in 1986, the electoral success of the FPÖ remained limited and its main clientele were people from the influence sphere of nationalist fraternities. The rise of the party under Jörg Haider was closely tied to his xenophobic and populist rhetoric, as well as the strategic generation of media coverage based on targeted provocations (Bailer, 2021). For example, Haider initiated an "Austria first" referendum, spoke of "good employment policies" in the Third Reich and repeatedly made use of hate speech when speaking of immigrants (Goetz et al., 2021; Rheindorf and Wodak, 2019; Wodak and Pelinka, 2002). This rhetoric and form of politics were assumed by some of Haider's successors, most notably by H.C. Strache and Herbert Kickl. The linguist Ruth Wodak demonstrates how nativist ideologies form the basis of these dehumanizing discourses and how increasingly aggressive provocations have moved "right-wing extremist, formerly taboo contents and terminology" from the margins to the centre (Wodak, 2020: 238).

Regarding the history of right-wing extremism and radicalisation in Austria, report 3.1. on Stakeholders of (De)Radicalisation revealed a "gap between the number of incidents, perceptions by the public and the political elite and de-radicalisation programmes aiming at right-wing extremism" (Haselbacher, Mattes and Reeger, 2021: 21). Generally speaking, Austria is characterised by a rather moderate protest culture and violent incidents with fatalities have been the rare exception. Nevertheless, the number of right-wing extremist incidents and crimes has constantly been high and the right-wing extremist scene holds well-established structures and networks across all societal segments (Weidinger, 2016). Its most prominent political stakeholder is the FPÖ. Whereas former Nazis and nationalist fraternities were at the centre of right-wing extremist activities in the post war decades, skinheads and hooligans dominated the scene until the end of the 1990s. The Mauthausen Committee noted that today right-wing extremism is no longer easy to recognise, as its appearance, codes, and symbols have changed (Bauer and Mernyi, 2020).

The Generation Identity forms part of the so-called new right, representing a "modernised" form of right-wing extremism (Winkler, 2018). The group is not large in number but has successfully drawn public attention with its actions and has established its own vocabulary to spread its ideology and to redefine the parameters of what can and may be said. The Generation Identity thus employed new terms such as "ethnopluralism" to avoid open racism and antisemitism, while holding on to a nationalist and anti-pluralist ideology (Strobl and Bruns, 2016). By calling themselves a "movement", the group suggests being large in number and by calling its action-oriented forms of protest "aesthetic interventions", they reframe its actions as peaceful and artistic. Scholars have thus ironically called the movement "Gangsters of the occident" and have pointed to the professionalisation of online campaigns and the usage of pop-cultural aesthetics (Bruns et al., 2016; Goetz et al., 2018). The group purposefully includes elements of Conservatism and represents a bourgeois and elitist spectrum. This corresponds well with general shifts in the far right, after repressions and the dispersal of the neo-Nazi and skinhead scene. Its core campaigns, including "Defend Europe" or "The Great Replacement", are based on scenarios of threat and nativist ideas which are deeply racialised and anti-plural (Goetz, 2020). These radical and highly visible campaigns have led to the ascent but also to the downfall of the movement, as it had increasingly become isolated when

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[3] It is important to note that former Nazis were also included in other parties and that the politics of integration pertained all societal segments.

connections between the assassin responsible for killing 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019 and the Generation Identity became apparent (ibid.).

The relationship between media in general and right-wing extremist actors is ambivalent: While mainstream media are frequently portrayed by right-wing actors as forming part of an elitist system that is dominated by the left, right-wing extremists have been successful in drawing media attention and in gaining coverage. The Austrian media system has a rather consolidated newspaper market, where tabloids have a great influence on political opinion-forming (the tabloid *Kronen Zeitung* is one of the widest reaching newspapers worldwide) (Prander and Glatz, 2021). The rise of right-wing populists is closely tied to their presence in the media which increases popularity and serves to spread their ideologies (Goetz et al., 2021). Scholars have thus pointed to the role of the media in giving right-wing actors a stage and in nurturing their rise (FIPU, 2021; Sulzbacher, 2021; Weidinger, 2021). The media have not yet discovered a way of dealing with right-wing populism: On the one hand, agitating headlines sell well, on the other, there are some provocations that cannot be ignored (ibid.). Similar to the situation in other countries, right-wing extremists have accused the media of spreading fake news, have discredited reporters and have undermined critical journalism. The FPÖ has most frequently spoken of the red/socialist media (*Rotfunk)*, when speaking of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF to allude to the political composition of the board of directors. Alternatively, the press has been called "press of the system" (*Systempresse*) or "press of lies" (*Lügenpresse*) (Goetz, 2021). Nevertheless, media coverage remains to be highly relevant for the right-wing scene to spread ideas and worldviews on the one hand and to recruit and to mobilise followers on the other.

The right-wing scene in Austria has built up its own media network. Several magazines and online platforms, such as *Die Aula*, *zur Zeit*, or *info.direkt*, fulfil the function of linking parliamentarian right-wing extremism and protagonists of the FPÖ with extra-parliamentary groups (ibid.). This happens, on the one hand, as a result of overlaps in personal engagement, and on the other because of a discursive exchange across the right-wing extremist scene. The individual media hereby take on different functions and are either explicitly ideologically oriented and tailored to a narrower target group, or more broadly diversified in order to reach other societal segments as well.

Conway (2017: 83) demonstrates that the right-wing extremist scene has a "history of violence and a very long online history". The role of social media for right-wing networks should therefore not be underestimated. Brodnik (2021) illustrates how right-wing actors easily adapt to new platforms and how populist speech corresponds well with the fast pace and the emotional nature of online debates. The internet provides an easily accessible platform to share (violent) extremist content as well as political and radicalised worldviews, to engage in strategic exchange and networking activities, and to recruit followers and young people (Aly, 2016; Conway, 2017; Marone et al., 2019; Miller-Idriss, 2020). While extremist groups have frequently developed their own websites or turned to online channels that are sparsely monitored, such as Telegram (Bloom et al., 2019; Urman and Katz, 2020), YouTube remains popular among right-wing extremists due to its range and because it offers the possibility to attract new followers by mixing mainstream interests with far-right ideology (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Munger and Phillips, 2020; Ottoni et al., 2018).

The FPÖ has discovered the possibilities of social media quite early and has successfully established communication channels beside mainstream media (FIPU, 2020). FPÖ TV, the official YouTube channel of the party, currently has more than 100,000 subscribers and produces short video clips on a nearly daily basis. According to the statistics on YouTube, the party's channel started in 2012 and the videos have been accessed over 67 million times.[4] FPÖ TV has thus become one of the core channels of communication of the party with its followers.

For the Generation Identity, social media has been an important tool since its formation in 2012 as it could not count on any fixed coverage by mainstream media. The movement was highly successful in drawing the attention of certain parts of public attention by strategically planning activities that generate strong images (Goetz, 2018). Recently, the movement has suffered from its de-platforming on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In July 2020, YouTube blocked the channels of Martin Sellner, the head of the Movement in Austria, due to a violation of the Hate Speech Usage Policy of the platform. At the time, Sellner managed three channels, with more than 100 videos and 38 million views (DÖW, n.d.). The attempt to take legal action against YouTube and to re-establish the channels failed. As a consequence, Sellner moved to Telegram and currently has a channel with more than 60,000 followers (Gartner et al., 2020).

In this context, feelings of grievance and injustice come into play. Martin Sellner attempted to oppose the decision of YouTube but failed. In his first reaction, he stated that the verdict would have "lasting consequences for the entire patriotic sphere of opinion". Furthermore, right-wing actors complain that they are continuously marked as Nazis and that they suffer from being excluded from public debates. At the same time, actors from the far-right fuel polarisation and construct themselves as an opposition to the elite. Recent anti-COVID demonstrations have been used by both the FPÖ and the Generation Identity as an opportunity to nurture feelings of injustice and to mobilise among right-wing extremist groups in order to recruit new followers.

4. Representation, circulation and consumption context of the media objects

In this section, we present the main findings of the analysis of the two videos. We discuss each video separately, starting with the video of the FPÖ. After a short contextualisation of each video, we summarise the content and the composition, before continuing with an analysis of representation, narratives, and the construction of identity frameworks. Each section concludes with empirical insights into the circulation and the consumption of the media object.

4.1. Analysis of the video of the FPÖ

The first example is a very recent clip by the FPÖ or more precisely by its "TV station", FPÖ-TV, which is in fact a YouTube channel. In the video "this movement can no longer be stopped" (FPÖ TV, 2021), prominent members of the party mobilise in a demonstration against the anti-COVID-measures of the government, specifically criticising the Austrian chancellor, Sebastian

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4   https://www.youtube.com/c/fpoetv/about, last accessed 24 April 2021.

Kurz. The central figure featured throughout the video is Herbert Kickl, who has long been an important politician in the populist FPÖ and a witness to the ups and downs of this party. The FPÖ has not always been an opposition party but it had been a governing party in Austria on the federal level in a coalition with the conservative ÖVP from 2000 to 2005 and again from 2018 to 2019. He has reached a personal career summit when he was the Federal Minister for the Interior in the latter period. A political scandal caused by FPÖ politicians (referred to as the so-called "Ibiza Affair") ended the coalition and Kickl returned to being an opposition politician in parliament, remaining a leading figure in the FPÖ.

Contrary to what the video might suggest, there had been 36 groups that had officially signed up for demonstrations on Saturday, 6 March 2021, twelve of which were prohibited by the police in advance for reasons of health protection (Kleine Zeitung, 2021). The demonstration of the FPÖ featured in the video was allowed and it mingled with the other anti-Corona demonstrations and rallies on that specific day. Leftist groups organized counter-demonstrations, albeit with low numbers of participants. Vienna once more turned into a hotspot of anti-Corona-demonstrations, attracting participants from all over Austria (and Germany) who came by bus. The exact number of participants is unknown; different actors and the media mention between 15,000 and 20,000 protestors and 1,500 police officers. Various groups from society were represented among the protestors, from young families to retirees, from the extreme right (e.g., members of the Generation Identity) to conspiracy theorists and people interested in esotericism.

One therefore must place the facts in perspective: the FPÖ was only a part – albeit a significant part – of what was going on in terms of views and tropes conveyed. Yet, Kickl took centre stage twice, spontaneously right in front of the Federal Chancellery on the *Ballhausplatz* and, according to the initial plans of the FPÖ, in the local recreation area *Prater*, where he talked for 40 minutes in a rally on "Democracy, Fundamental Rights, and Freedom", addressing topics such as power frenzy of the government, propaganda in the media, Kurz' recent visit to Israel, and the "health apartheid" there, which provided an antisemitic undertone as some political commentators argue (Die Presse, 2021, March 8). He ended with a poem he had written himself on the "Corona tyranny" (Die Presse, 2021, March 6).

The accompanying text to the video reads as follows: "We are on your side and march together with you, side by side, for democracy, basic rights, and our freedom! The mood on Saturday was incredible: thousands of citizens have shown together with liberal politicians that they have had enough. The discontent in the population is growing and that is a good thing. The fact is: this patriotic movement can no longer be stopped!" (FPÖ-TV, YouTube).

There are several elements in the video that need to be considered. Firstly, the element "speech and interviews" consists of clips from Kickl's speeches as well as of short statements made by other FPÖ-politicians and protestors. In the opening statement of the video, Kickl argues "I want a chancellor who is not a lobbyist of the pharmaceutical industry, but I want a chancellor who is a lobbyist for our freedom and our fundamental rights". In the following sequences, audiences see FPÖ politicians and protestors just stating "Kurz must go". Furthermore, there are shouts of groups from the off with the same message, which is the central one keeping the whole content rather clear and simple. This resembles anti-elitist frames of "the people versus the elite" and portrays Kickl as representing the interests of ordinary citizens vis-à-vis the political class (Della Porta, 2018; Wodak, 2015). The second element concerns

the visual messages in the video. This includes banners (mostly "Kurz must go" but also slogans such as "criticism is not a crime"), pictures of people not wearing masks and people wearing masks (above all a mask in the colour blue, the colour of the FPÖ, with the slogan "for freedom"), and the waving of flags (mainly the Austrian flag). Kickl, for example, is shown several times shaking hands with people he meets along the way, although social distancing is currently "the name of the game" and hand shaking should be avoided in times of a pandemic.

The third element is that of place. Where did the demonstration take place and what do these places signify? The offline demonstration moved from *Ballhausplatz* to *Heldenplatz*, on to the Ring and split up to arrive finally at the *Prater*. The video does not adhere to this sequence, with scenes being displayed in a jumbled manner. Place is highly symbolic both for online and offline audiences. *Ballhausplatz* is the centre of political power in Austria, as institutions such as the Federal Chancellery and the Federal Presidential Chancellery are located there. It has a long history as the focal point for demonstrations, rallies, and protests. The same applies to the directly adjacent *Heldenplatz*, which is another highly symbolic venue in Vienna. The *Ringstrasse* is a boulevard leading around the historic city centre of Vienna. It, too, has been a classical venue for protestors ever since it was built more than 140 years ago. Finally, the local recreational area *Prater* is close to the city centre and offers enough free space for larger protests. The representation of places in the digital environment concentrates on the most symbolic ones like *Ballhausplatz* and *Heldenplatz* and on scenes from the crowd gathered at the *Prater*.

Another central message this video seeks to convey is that of a "movement", blurring the lines between the party and a movement in the process of mobilisation (Minkenberg, 2019). This is produced both in words ("this movement can no longer be stopped") and in filmed sequences showing people marching together, holding up signs and banners. In one of the final scenes of the video, we see cinematic aerial views of a larger crowd in the *Prater* and a voice from the off followed by an interviewee summarising the event: "There's something standing up, and if that is followed through, then Sebastian Kurz needs to prepare for the worst, because this movement is simply unstoppable".

Comment Sphere

At the time of our download, 1,442 user comments had been posted to the FPÖ video, which we sorted according to the time of posting. We eventually chose the first 500 comments for our analysis. These had all been written on the day of the publishing of the video. We did not take 17 of these comments into consideration, as they consisted of single letters only or contained links to other YouTube videos.

Among the remaining 483 comments, we discerned four major categories:

- Positive comments: in agreement with the content of the video. These constituted the clear majority, namely 378 of 483 comments (78.3 per cent).

- Negative comments: taking a critical stance towards the messages conveyed in the video and the main actors, 40 comments (8.3 per cent).

- Comments presenting a different agenda beyond the one presented in the video (conspiracy theories, esoteric, and religious narratives): 31 comments (6.4 per cent).

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- Neutral comments, a category that includes unrelated or unidentifiable contents: 34 comments (7.0 per cent); these were not analysed further.

In many comments, we observed a strong use of emojis. Some comments only consisted of emojis, others were a mixture of emojis and words, all of which we also took into consideration. Some scholars (Hagen et al., 2019; Stark and Crawford, 2015) have pointed to the fact that various actors expose striking differences in their emoji usage as these symbols are rich in social, cultural, and economic significance and the combination of different emojis creates meaning.

Positive comments

The central message of the video is short and simple: "Kurz must go", referring to the current Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz. This message is conveyed in short statements by people who were interviewed on camera, in clippings of Herbert Kickl's speech, and on banners and masks. It is simply repeated in numerous comments (70). In single instances, Kurz is compared to members of the Nazi-Regime (Mengele, Dollfuss) or he and his party are criminalised ("Kurz and Co are criminals against their own people, hope you get put on trial for treason IMMEDIATELY"), with reoccurring references to the "current dictatorship" ("Bravo Kickl! Away with the dictatorship. Kurz is the puppet of Merkel and Israel!"). In addition to that, 72 comments provide a general approval (by simply saying "Bravo" or "Go on like that", "Super", "Strong", "God save Austria", "Thank you", or using heart and thumbs up emojis).

44 positive comments go beyond "Kurz must go", blaming other members of the current government, of the German government (notably Angela Merkel), and the EU for the ongoing pandemic or more precisely the measures to counter its effects ("Our governments all over Europe must resign. They are at their end").

Many commentators furthermore state that they considered Herbert Kickl and/or the FPÖ great and admirable. Kickl, in particular, is seen as the "true representative of the people", and many commentators would want him to be the next Austrian chancellor. They consider the FPÖ to be "on the right way". He is the true hero of the hour with "Personal strength, courage, honesty, more intelligence than others" and "Only people who prefer slick, slimy, lying and corrupt politicians hate Kickl!".

There is a considerable number of positive comments coming from neighbouring countries (58 comments, 12.2 per cent), predominantly from Germany. The majority of these contain simple congratulations, sometimes expressing the wish that Germany could also have a strong political figure such as Kickl, or similar to "Kurz must go", applying the frame "Merkel must go". "Germany is lost, but there is still hope for Austria" was one of the rather pessimistic comments, considering Kickl "a hero of freedom and of the Austrian people in general". Some commentators mention the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) together with the FPÖ, hoping that these political parties might take over in the near future.

Finally, some positive comments focus on the importance of personal freedom that has been taken away and can be restored through demonstrations, as well as on an emerging movement that is unstoppable. The demonstrations are seen as events of solidarity and as glimpses at a "normality that has been taken away from us". Comments like these prove the success of the conveyed argument that there is a strong "us" in this movement.

Roughly one in ten commentators raises a critical voice on the video and the ideas behind it. These results should be interpreted cautiously, as we find two different strands of argumentation. The first group (n=21) contains critical comments against the FPÖ and Herbert Kickl, who is, for example, said to be a rabble-rouser and a danger to humanity, with references to the Nazi past and the right-wing scene of Austria. Others criticise the participants in the demonstration for wearing masks and thus not being credible in their claims (n=19; e.g.: "Why do they all run around with masks if it's for nothing? ... As long as this rag is not removed, there is no end in sight ... so it remains a clown show! Demo against a thing but going along is a little perverse!"). Still, the second group of negative comments does not explicitly include the transition to conspiracy theories, as the next examples display.

Own agenda

Conspiracy theorists as well as religious and esoteric activists used this comment section as a platform to present what we call their own agenda. They do not so much refer to the content of the video, nor do they share their assessment of what is conveyed, but clearly go beyond this to present their own ideas. We find references to large pharmaceutical firms that have the power over the politicians, who are only seemingly in charge, and are interested in a decimation of the population. A paedophile, satanic power elite is said to currently rule the world. George Soros and Melinda and Bill Gates are mentioned as well, though only once each. Other commentators see Jesus as the only solution and expect that he will come back soon and heal the world.

4.2.   Analysis of the video of the Generation Identity Movement

As is the case with other videos by the Generation Identity Movement, the "Audimax action video" (Identitäre Bewegung Österreich, 2016) documents one concrete activity on the one hand and serves to recruit followers and to spread key messages and narratives on the other. The action documented in the video took place in April 2016. A number of around 30-40 activists (Zeit online, 2016) entered the main auditorium of the University of Vienna (*Audimax*) during the performance of the play "Charges (The Supplicants)" (*die Schutzbefohlenen*) by Elfriede Jelinek, which was jointly performed by refugees and professional actors. The video is divided in three parts. The first is an introduction to Elfriede Jelinek, her play, and the so-called "ideology of multiculturalism", the second part contains live recordings from the events at the University of Vienna, and the third part is used to recruit and solicit supporters. While the first and last parts have the character of animated PowerPoint presentations that present key narratives of the movement, the second part serves to present the action from the Generation Identity perspective and to create audiences. Aesthetically, the first and the last parts of the video are kept mostly in black and white, with only small elements in colour, most of them in red. The voiceover is supported through citations and quotes on the slides, which serve to underline key messages. The latently menacing music in the background supports the arc of tension and builds up towards the second part of the video. Here, the image suddenly switches to colour and we see live recordings from the action at the *Audimax*.

The video starts with Elfriede Jelinek, who is introduced as an Austrian author who "hates Austria" (with these words in capital letters), and who is being "showered with prizes" by left-

wing cultural politics. The next images introduce the play, which advocates for "open borders" and "mass migration". The subsequent sequences of the video establish a connection between the play, the summer of migration in 2015, and the terror attacks in Brussels and Paris (Batacan) as well as the incidents from New Year's Eve at the central railway station of Cologne. This is supported with strong images showing (presumably) large numbers of refugees at the borders as well as victims of terror attacks. The text continues by saying that people in favour of multiculturalism (so called *Multi-Kultis*) have brought chaos and terror to Europe and that "the supplicants show their true colours". In the following sequence, the lettering changes from "the Supplicants" to "the Forgotten" and the voiceover says that the victims of terror have long been forgotten "but we do not forget". Here, the pictures change and we see the University of Vienna. A voice tells us that it is the 14th of April 2016 and that we are about to witness a demonstration of power by the "ideology of multiculturalism", but that Generation Identity activists will impede this by bringing the blood of Bataclan to the stage and to "stand up for their future and show face".

When the second part of the video starts, we see recordings from the *Audimax* action, and the sound and the images suddenly change. At first, we see people who gather and walk together through the corridors of the university towards the *Audimax*. Members of the movement enter the room and storm the stage to enrol a banner which reads hypocrites (*Heuchler*). A person is shouting over the megaphone that this is not directed against the people on the stage but against the audience, and another activist sheds fake blood on the banner and the stage. The rest of the messages shouted through the megaphone are partially inaudible but are similar to the content of the first part of the video, including references to Bataclan and Cologne. The situation soon gets tumultuous with people in the audience shouting, "Nazis out" (*Nazis raus*) alongside scuffling and the activists leaving the premises. At the end, we can see the activists running down a hallway. The picture changes back to black and white and police sirens, which have been added to the footage artificially, can be heard.

The last sequence returns to the animated slides mostly in black and white, with the first reading "the truth, high risk", and the voiceover continuing. These last slides are dedicated to reactions and newspaper articles, and the voice speaks of media bias and prejudgement, complaining that the movement is placed in the proximity of Nazism. It closes with saying: "We are no Nazis, we are your children, we are the youth without migration background and we want a future for us in this country". After this, we once again see pictures of activists walking away from the university before the words "join the movement" appear. The last slide contains links to Facebook and Twitter as well as to the homepage of the movement. This demonstrates how different media platforms converge and how actors aim at amplifying the impact of online communication tools by diversifying the content and the communication channels.

Although the video is seemingly directed at the "generation of '68" and the so-called *Multi-Kultis*, the "hypocrites", it is a xenophobic manifestation that builds on the narrative of the "Great Replacement". Central right-wing extremist narratives can be found here, including a menacing population exchange through mass migration, accompanied by a drop in the birth rate, and consequently the decline of the European culture. In the description below the video, protagonists of the movement warn of an imminent "Islamisation, mass migration and the great exchange", activists on the other hand are called "patriots", who are part of "the last generation who is able to change something". The group is staged as a "patriotic NGO" and multicultur-

alism is construed as the bogeyman that deprives natives of their right to a state which corresponds with their "ethnocultural" identity (Rajal, 2018). This is part of a strategy to make use of a modernised and less burdened vocabulary and to avoid explicit racist or national socialist language (Goetz, 2020).

The movement thus makes use of two very prominent populist frames, namely "us" against "the other" and "us" against "those up there" (see Mudde, 2007; Wodak, 2015). Amidst the representation of refugees as the racialised and dangerous "other", the movement constructs scenarios of threat based on a rhetoric of fear (Winkler, 2018). The movement is hereby construed as opposing criminal and dangerous refugees as well as left-wing politics. This is explicitly linked to a process of polarisation. Through the *Audimax* action, the movement has thus targeted several institutions and persons that have served as enemy images in the past, such as the Austrian National Unit of Students (ÖH), who had organised the theatre performance, and the person of Elfriede Jelinek. The ÖH is traditionally left-leaning and has repeatedly positioned itself as anti-fascist and contra right-wing extremism. The oeuvre of Elfriede Jelinek addresses socio-political events of the past years and critically engages with populist discourses, the construction of difference, and processes of exclusion (Janke et al., 2018; Teutsch, 2019). The author has frequently been the target of right-wing extremists and was being called a traitor who denigrates her own country.

The construction of enemy images accompanies the expression of feelings of grievance and injustice which are transported through the video. While the movement is attempting to save the occident and is portraying itself as the voice of the (unheard and oppressed) youth, it positions itself as having to act against the dominance of the ideology of multiculturalism and suffering from its representation in the media. Its portrayal of itself as a victim is an important factor in evoking emotions and driving radicalisation. Disputes on representation and the prerogative of interpretation also determined the circulation and consumption of the video.

Circulation and Consumption

The first reactions came via Facebook and Twitter on the evening of the incident. Almost 700 people were present during the play, and the message of what had happened spread quickly. The ÖH tweeted right after the disruption that the Generation Identity Movement had attacked "their" performance (ÖH Uni Wien, 2016). While those present in the audience expressed their dismay and indignation, the movement tried to spread its own version of the events. In this context, a public dispute about the power of interpretation arose. People who have been present in the audience shared their impressions. During the activities on the stage, other activists had distributed leaflets which read "multiculturalism kills". The ÖH noted in a press release on the following day that several persons in the audience and on the stage had been beaten, pushed, and injured and pressed charges of bodily injury. After a break, the staging of the play continued under police surveillance and the police tried to identify the aggressors based on video recordings. The day after the performance, a series of newspaper articles published in Austria and Germany discussed the incident. Some prominent voices from arts and politics spoke out and condemned the action. Due to a lawsuit against certain persons involved in the case, it remained present in the media for some years.

The texts on the movement's official webpage attempt to falsify media reports, and to narrate their own version of the event. In this context, the movement portrays itself as victim of a left-wing elite on the one hand, and as saviour of a "silent patriotic majority" (Identitäre Bewegung,

2018a) on the other. The components of grievance and injustice become instruments for gaining support and serve as a basis for legitimacy. A major confrontation concerns the topic of violence. While the public outrage was closely linked to the aspect of violence, members of the Generation Identity Movement insist that it had been a "peaceful" and "short" action (Identitäre Bewegung, 2018b). In this way, they pursue a certain strategy by deliberately using loopholes in the law and moving on the borderline between activism and open violence. Some articles and even another YouTube video thereby expose the so-called "Audimax lie" and undignified reporting in order to correct it. At the same time, financial support is solicited to pay for the legal costs.

In contrast to the video of the FPÖ, which serves as a tool for followers to express their support and to contribute to the shared reality and the formation of an online identity (Brown and Pearson, 2019), the consumption and the circulation of the video of the Generation Identity is not interactive and rather top down. Both videos, however, amplify the impact of their messages and act as a "force multiplier" (ibid., 155) that makes extremist communication "simultaneously continuous and instantaneous". In the conclusion we will discuss in detail the similarities and differences we found in our analysis.

5. Conclusion

In the contemporary context of COVID-19, online forums as cultural drivers of radicalisation have gained ever more relevance. Some people turn away from mainstream media and search for their own alternative sources of information. Videos spread rapidly and, considering the sphere of comments, it becomes obvious how videos successfully fulfil the function of mobilising support and creating audiences. Most strikingly, there are almost no negative comments, meaning that the people prone to radicalised ideas remain largely among themselves online. The importance of online platforms also becomes obvious when looking at the case of the Generation Identity Movement. Online platforms are highly relevant for extremist groups in terms of mainstreaming and spreading their ideas and narratives. The movement has suffered strongly from its de-platforming in the previous year as it suddenly lost important means to spread ideas and to communicate with followers. Nevertheless, the multiple crises of the COVID-19 pandemic have helped radicalised groups at the margins, such as the Generation Identity Movement: On the one hand, new platforms besides the big four (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) have gained importance, and on the other, these groups were able to build new alliances in the course of the formation of a new protest movement.

This also points to the important connection between online and offline spaces. Both videos are closely connected to a concrete offline event and the two videos share a number of features. First, both events – a demonstration in the first case and a disruptive action in the second – represent the protest culture of the far right. Second, the protests are directed against the elite, and advocate the rights and interests of "Austrians", thus uniting key right-wing extremist frames. Third, both activities aim at recruiting followers and mobilising sympathisers. In the videos, we can see how followers march together and stand up for their cause, constructing an "us" that is strong and powerful. Fourth, both videos nurture feelings of grievance and injustice while driving polarisation and making strategic use of crises, namely the so-called

migration crisis of 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. And fifth, both groups and videos make an effort to not include explicitly radicalised ideas while deliberately expanding the borders of what is considered mainstream.

Nevertheless, there are some important differences which are closely tied to the type and form of actors. Members of the FPÖ, an elected political party, do not make use of any form of explicit physical violence. Instead, the FPÖ has recurred to populist rhetoric and hate speech. With the Generation Identity Movement, the contrary is the case. It specifically avoids certain terms and rephrases its extremist messages while strategically choreographing and staging its actions. While the first actor provokes primarily through language, the second makes use of strategic public interventions that trigger a calculated outrage. Ultimately, this has led to the de-platforming of the movement and the ban of its symbols. The results of this report all need to be seen in the light of the Austrian case, which is characterised by the strong degree of institutionalisation of right-wing politics on the one hand and a rather moderate protest culture with almost no incidents of physical violence on the other.

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