

Far-right populists much more likely than the left to spread fake news - study

Amplifying misinformation is now part of radical right strategy, says Dutch study of tweets by MPs in 26 countries



📷 The AfD co-chair Alice Weidel speaking to Elon Musk during the German party's election campaign launch in Halle. Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/EPA

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Far-right populists are significantly more likely to spread fake news on social media than politicians from mainstream or far-left parties, [according to a study](#) which argues that amplifying misinformation is now part and parcel of radical right strategy.

“Radical right populists are using misinformation as a tool to destabilise democracies and gain political advantage,” said Petter Törnberg of the University of Amsterdam, a co-author of the study with Juliana Chueri of the Dutch capital’s Free University.

“The findings underscore the urgent need for policymakers, researchers, and the public to understand and address the intertwined dynamics of misinformation and radical right populism,” Törnberg added.

The research draws on every tweet posted between 2017 and 2022 by every member of parliament with a Twitter (now X) account in 26 countries: 17 EU members including Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, but also the UK, US and Australia.

It then compared that dataset - 32m tweets from 8,198 MPs - with international political science databases containing detailed information on the parties involved, such as their position on the left-right spectrum and their degree of populism.

Finally, the researchers scraped [factchecking and fake news-tracking](#)

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By crunching all the different datasets together, the researchers were able to create what they described as an aggregate “factuality score” for each politician and each party, based on the links that MPs had shared on Twitter.

The data showed conclusively that far-right populism was “the strongest determinant for the propensity to spread misinformation”, they concluded, with MPs from centre-right, centre-left and far-left populist parties “not linked” to the practice.

Far-right populist parties such as Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the National Rally (RN) in France and the Dutch Freedom party (PVV) have made major gains across [Europe](#) in recent years and are in government in several countries.

The researchers noted that they would not be able to expand their dataset of MPs’ posts on X because the platform - now owned by the US billionaire Elon Musk, who has made no secret of his [support for far-right parties](#) - no longer offers data access.

Recent research suggests most people do not consume or share misinformation - defined as the unintentional and the deliberate sharing of false information - which instead was heavily concentrated in particular electoral groups, the study said.

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The research suggested that rather than the anti-elitism of populists generally, it was “the exclusionary ideologies and hostility towards democratic institutions of radical right populism” that lay behind most misinformation campaigns, Törnberg said.

Misinformation was less useful to far-left populists, who focus more on economic grievances, but far-right populists’ emphasis on cultural grievances and opposition to democratic norms was “fertile ground” for misinformation, the authors said.

The study also highlighted the “symbiotic relationship” between far-right populists and “alternative” media. “Radical-right populists have been effective in creating and utilising alternative media ecosystems that amplify their viewpoints,” Törnberg said.

Those ecosystems were amplifying misinformation and shaping far-right populist movements, he said, strengthening their ideological messages, creating a sense of community among voters, and providing a counter-narrative to mainstream media.

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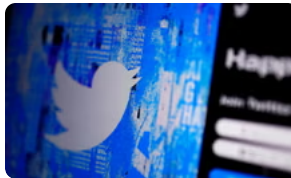
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