

From Fiction to Reality: As Hate Speech Spread so Does Hate Crime?

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Introduction

Since the **right-wing extremist attacks** in Christchurch, New Zealand, (03/2019), and Halle, Germany, (10/2019), were to be transmitted via a livestream of the perpetrator in the internet a linkage between those attacks and the internet is not to deny (Gruber and Kiran 2020). Therefore the question of the linkage of radicalization and the internet, especially, social media rises more often. Furthermore, the Interview from Lisa Hegemann and Karolin Schwarz (Hegemann 2020) shows that the perpetrator of the latest right-wing extremist attack in Hanau, Germany, (02/2020) was probably also radicalized by the Internet. Unfortunately, this linkage was rarely examined in the scientific literature. Most scientists examined social networks on the internet and not the linkage between the online and the offline world. Just a few researches investigate the online hate speech in social networks (Chan et al. 2016; Awan & Zempi 2016; Hanzelka & Schmidt 2017; Müller & Schwarz 2019a, 2019b; Ozalp et al. 2019). Therefore, Hanzelka and Schmidt (2017) shows that political motivated hate speech nearly always comes from the right-wing. **A causal effect of online hate speech on Facebook predicts offline crime** against refugees in Germany during the refugee crises in 2015 was shown by Müller and Schwarz (2019b). But this paper have just a focus on the Facebook posts of the right-wing party "Alternative für Deutschland" (AfD, English: Alternative for Germany) and not a sample of hate comments from all German users. Hence, I am going to investigate a causal effect between German Tweets which contain hate speech against refugees and offline hate crimes against refugees. Based on this my research question is supposed to be "In which way is there a causal effect of Twitter hate speech on hate crime against refugees in Germany?".

Theory

Müller and Schwarz (2019a, 2019b) are so far the only ones who examine the linkage between online hate speech and offline hate crimes with an approach which not follows the social network theory. But unfortunately, **they do not provide one with a theoretical argumentation**. In my research social networks have also a minor part. Nonetheless, the understanding of mechanism on online social networks is crucial to know where the radicalization transpires on a macro-level.

The theory of *homophily* and *echo chambers* states that people with similarity characteristics like sociodemographic, intrapersonal, moral concept, behavioral or similar (McPherson 2001), come together more often. This provides homogenous social networks and can be applied on online social networks as well (Kersting and Mehl 2018). I will focus on the political homophily of the right-wing. This homophily can result in an echo chamber. Metaphorically speaking, an *echo chamber* describes a (filter-) bubble in which only one's own view of the world holds

(Rokeach 1960, Jamieson and Cappella 2008). Other views cannot hold and will be declared as wrong as well as the own view of the world is overestimated and overrated. Therefore, I imply that if one is in an online *echo chamber* these views become more acute, and then eventually they leave the anonymous space of the Internet and become offline actions.

Moreover, on a more individual level the term *stochastic terrorism* (sometimes also called *lone wolf terrorism*) describes a phenomenon where many individuals get radicalized until it is stochastically more probable that one individual commits an act of terror (Schwarz 2020, Bell 2019). This radicalization transpires in these before mentioned *echo chambers*. Munn (2019) shows that in these *echo chambers* a radicalization can transpire in a cognitive process that takes place in three phases: **normalization, acclimation and dehumanization**. This does not necessarily transpire linearly but these phases can also overlap. The normalization is achieved by the fact that the resentments come along in contemporary pop-cultural presentation like Memes or transgressive irony. **At first these irony seem shocking but as time goes on they become common**. So, the spreading of these ironies has an identity-forming effect. Furthermore, it also serves as an excuse, because 'it is all irony' and so on. Based on this, these users immunize themselves and discuss with critics, because they seem too sensitive. Following this, the fronts harden and the users try to get more engaged with other users who have similar views. Then the users get acclimated to this 'new' social environment and views get more radical. Furthermore, the third cognitive phase is the dehumanization where entire groups get assigned to a different ethnic and in this construct no more rights apply to them. This dehumanization creates the foundation of violence in the online spheres as well as in the offline world expressed by assaults against minorities. So, I assume that the lower the hate speech the lower the offline hate crimes against refugees.

Data

To answer my interest of research I will scrape German Tweets with certain hashtags (see Table 1, p. 4) in the period of **2015 until 2017** and compare them with anti-refugee incidents. Unfortunately, the German government or the German federal criminal police office (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) do not provide any public data of political motivated crime like the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) in the US, only some annual report as a PDF and news account (Bundeskriminalamt 2020). So I got the data of the anti-refugee incidents from Müller and Schwarz (2019b). These dataset includes 3,335 incidents of "anti-refugee graffiti, arson of refugee homes, assault, and incidents during protests in Germany between January 2015 and early 2017" (Müller & Schwarz 2019b, p.8 f.). Although this data were produced by the Amadeu Antonio Foundation and the NGO "Pro Asyl" it is a high quality dataset, because more than half of the data were reported by the federal government, other were reported by the police and national/local media outlets (Müller & Schwarz 2019b). **The measuring baseline of anti-refugee hate speech in the paper of Müller and Schwarz (2019b) are the weekly posts of the AfD page which contains the word "Flüchtling" (refugee)**. I will also use the weekly number of Tweets

which contains hate speech, but in difference to them I will use only negative Tweets of all users. This can be realized by the selection of the hashtags and an applied sentiment analysis on these Tweets.

To analyze the data I will use a fixed effects regression with hate speech as the independent variable and offline hate crime as the dependent variable. Moreover, I have to control this analysis, especially the anti-refugee incidents, with a general racism level at municipality, population density, refugee density, foreigner's density, and digital infrastructure.

Current problems

Unfortunately, I got no permanently updated dataset of the government which contains every reported anti-refugee incident like the UCR or the Police Data Initiative (PDI) in the United States of America. Furthermore, I would like to have a dataset which is more up-to-date, especially, with a look of the racism terror attacks I described in the introduction. Moreover, the casual dynamic between online hate speech and offline hate crime is suppositious. There is no empirical evidence of online hate speech that is matched to precise offline hate crime.

Hashtag

Islamisierung
Multikulti
Nafris
Asyltouristen
Merkel-Gäste
Illegale
Wohlstandsflüchtlinge
Zudringlinge
Musel
Salafistenschwestern
Kampfmuslimas
Burka-Frauen
Kloneger
Buntland
Dummstaat
PlemPlemLand
Schandland
Bundeskloake

Table 1: Slurs against refugees which are an indicator of hate speech (based on Jaki and De Smedt 2019)

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