

# Extremism and Threats to Liberal Democracy

— Online Radicalization,  
Antisemitism & AI

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# Executive Summary

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Liberal democracy is struggling. Violence, especially political violence and violence against minorities, is growing at an alarming rate. Trust in institutions has never been lower. Online extremism and radicalization are major drivers of this trend. And antisemitism is a crucial component of online radicalization and extremism.

Although these challenges—**threats to liberal democracy, online extremism, and antisemitism**—have received extensive treatment individually and in pairs, the relationship between all three has received limited systematic, empirically grounded analysis. This is particularly true concerning **influencer-centered social media environments**. The present report addresses this gap through an empirical study of **how influencers and their publics jointly produce illiberal discourse** in digital spaces. It also explores **the structural role antisemitism plays** within these dynamics.

While much attention has been paid to the threat that politicians, influencers, and other elite actors pose to liberal democracy, our report provides vital new insights by focusing on the **comment sections of social media platforms**. As we show, the best way to understand how radicalization actually works is to see it as a co-production **formed by content creators, algorithms – and commenters**. Far from being passive sites of reception, the comment section is the place where conspiratorial narratives crystallize, hostility toward democratic institutions becomes overt, and violence against minorities is promoted and normalized.

Rather than treating extremist rhetoric as necessarily marginal or episodic, the study thus **situates radicalization within more mainstream digital environments** where influencers, platforms, and audiences interact in real time. Our analysis shows that

radicalization unfolds through a cascade effect: framing choices by influencers and content creators are taken up and intensified through audience participation, accelerating the consolidation of illiberal discourse within participatory digital environments.

Another key novelty of the study lies in its **contrastive analytical lens**, which examines these processes across two Western democratic contexts with markedly different historical trajectories, regulatory traditions, and memory cultures. By comparing influencer-driven discourse in the United States and Germany, the report situates online radicalization against the background of divergent national experiences with extremism, antisemitism, and democratic rupture, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of both shared mechanisms and context-specific variations.

The Zera Institute's research initiative *Extremism and Threats to Liberal Democracy* thus approaches online radicalization as a deep challenge to liberal democracies. Unlike research that conceptualizes radicalization primarily as an individual psychological trajectory or as a function of social networks, this project treats radicalization as a discursive process. It examines how extremist meanings emerge, circulate, and consolidate through everyday communicative practices.

This report also demonstrates that antisemitism is not only a kind of hostility – namely, hostility to Jews specifically – but a structural driver of contemporary illiberal discourse more broadly. As the report shows, it serves as a connective discursive grammar that links conspiracy thinking, institutional delegitimization, misogyny, and the legitimation of violence across otherwise divergent ideological camps. In this sense, antisemitism functions less as a discrete ideological position than as an enabling

framework through which illiberal worldviews are articulated, stabilized, and justified.

The study analyzes more than 10,000 user comments collected within one week of three major violent or politically charged events in 2025 across four platforms: YouTube, X (Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram. The analysis combines rigorous qualitative multimodal coding conducted by native-speaker experts with exploratory AI-assisted pattern detection used in a strictly auxiliary and non-deployment-oriented role, enabling a systematic cross-national comparison of illiberal discourse dynamics within democratic societies.

The findings demonstrate that while surface expressions of extremism vary significantly

across national, legal, and cultural contexts, the **underlying mechanisms of democratic erosion are structurally consistent.**

Illiberalism is not a fixed ideology but a **flexible discursive toolkit** that adapts to local constraints while preserving its core functions: enemy construction, institutional delegitimization, and the normalization of violence. And **antisemitism functions as a key driver of radicalization across a range of ideological milieux.** These insights have direct implications for platform governance, counter-extremism education, and early-warning systems. By tracing how extremist narratives move through mainstream digital infrastructures and escalate through participatory discourse, the study identifies concrete intervention points within contemporary radicalization pipelines.

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# Key Findings and Illustrative Evidence

## A. Most Salient Findings

**1 Moral framing, not explicit calls to violence, normalizes escalation**  
Across both national contexts, escalation rarely occurs through direct advocacy of violence alone. Instead, it is normalized via **moral and epistemic framing.** In German right-wing spaces (e.g., *Gollan, Jäger*), violence is framed as a *reluctant but foreseeable necessity* in response to institutional collapse or left-wing aggression. In U.S. left-wing Israel-related discourse, violence is more openly justified as *morally legitimate resistance*, especially when framed through oppressor-victim schemas. In both cases, moral certainty precedes and enables escalation. Likewise, U.S. right-wing spaces build on previously established mores that simultaneously frame violence as a legitimate response to tyranny and left-wing influence as tyrannical.

**2 Conspiracy accelerates escalation – but with different roles across contexts**  
Conspiracy narratives appear across ideologies and countries, but their **discursive function diverges sharply.** In Germany, conspiracies (e.g., media bias, judicial complicity) tend to prepare escalation by eroding trust and legitimizing defensive postures; they frame the speaker's group as threatened and abandoned, which in turn makes defensive postures (self-protection, resistance rhetoric, withdrawal from democratic norms) appear reasonable or even necessary. In U.S. discourse—both left- and right-wing—conspiracy often serves as a primary explanatory framework and means of delegitimizing political opposition, frequently collapsing into explicit antisemitism and directly legitimizing violence, including armed resistance or revolution. This distinction marks a qualitative difference in escalation readiness.

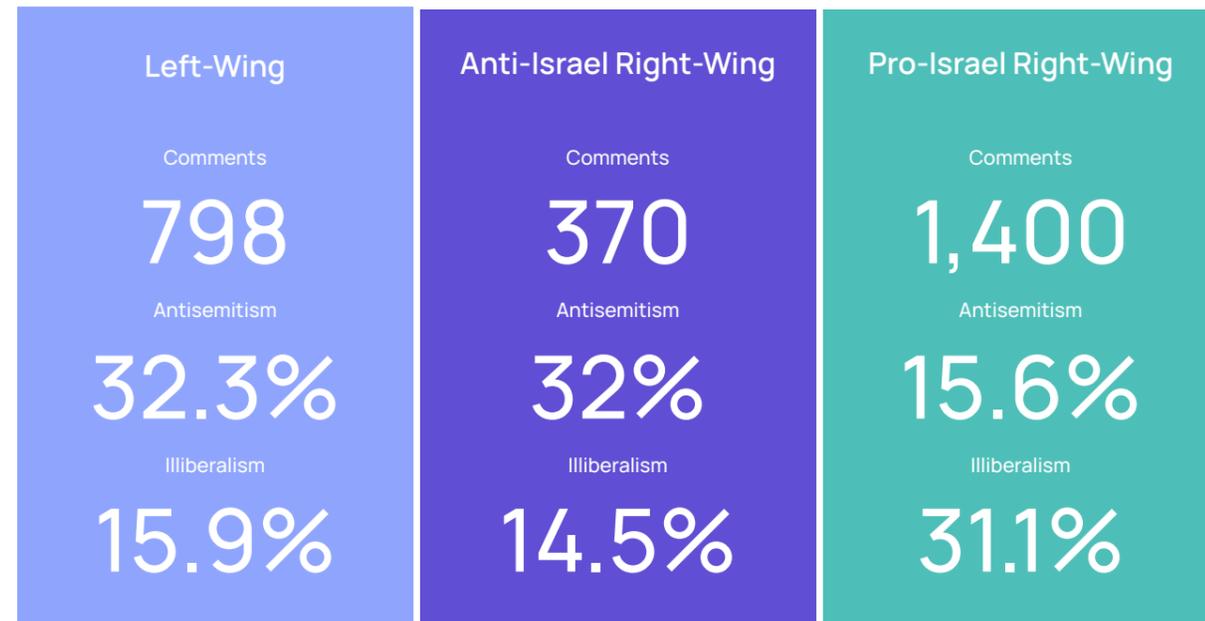
**3 Linguistic habituation cements discursive norms that transcend context**  
When particular illiberal themes are used repeatedly enough within individual communities, these themes tend to remain relatively consistent across platforms and regardless of specific contexts. Influencers and users cooperatively establish these themes over time. Once sufficiently entrenched, context becomes a secondary factor in theme selection behind community standards, even when the influencer is actively attempting to suppress certain themes.

**4 Ideological closure, not loudest rhetoric, causes highest escalation**  
The most explicit normalization of violence occurs not in the most chaotic or vulgar discourse spaces, but in those with **high ideological closure.** Fundamentalist Christian milieux (e.g., *Ketzer der Neuzeit*) and rigid moral frameworks related to Israel produce clearer friend-enemy distinctions and stronger justifications for violence. By contrast, ironic, pluralistic, or entertainment-oriented spaces—even when hostile—tend to inhibit sustained escalation.

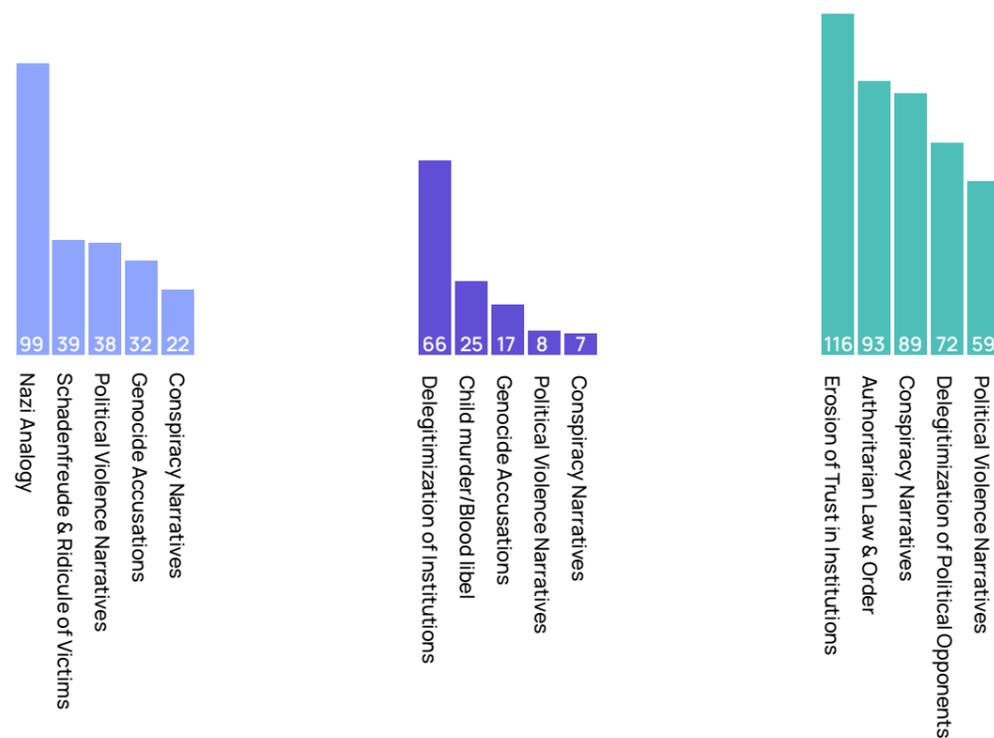
**5 Antisemitism drives illiberal radicalization across ideologies**  
Across ideologies, antisemitism plays an essential role in forging and accelerating the uptake of conspiracy theories, providing clear explanatory power which can integrate political frustration, institutional distrust, and moral absolutism into a single frame. It also plays a central role in normalizing violence; anti-Israeli violence is frequently framed as natural or justified resistance, while Jewish or Israeli victims are dismissed, ridiculed, or erased—either by claiming they deserved violence or by denying the reality of the event itself.

To illustrate how antisemitic and illiberal discourse concentrates and differentiates across ideological discourse spheres in the immediate aftermath of a violent event, the table below provides a descriptive snapshot of comment-level frequencies and dominant tropes from one analyzed case (6.2). These figures are not population estimates, but contextual indicators of discursive density and composition during a high-risk escalation window.

### Digital Aftermath of the Washington, D.C. Hate Crime (May 2025)



### Top Narrative Tropes by Discourse Environment (Absolute Frequencies)



## B. Why This Matters

Taken together, the findings outlined above challenge several common assumptions about how digital radicalization operates and where democratic risk emerges.

- 1 Focus on “mainstream discourse,” not extremist spaces**  
 Escalation is not confined to overtly extremist spaces or explicit calls for violence. Instead, **radicalization often unfolds through gradual shifts in moral framing, interpretive certainty, and community norms.** This means that discursive environments can become escalation-prone long before they exhibit content that would traditionally be classified as extremist or violent.
- 2 Focus on posts AND comment sections, not just single posts or actors**  
 The analysis highlights the importance of interactional dynamics rather than isolated content. Influencers and commenters are co-creators; **escalation emerges through repeated co-production between influencers and audiences, where meanings are sharpened, normalized, and stabilized over time.** This suggests that focusing exclusively on individual posts, keywords, or actors risks missing the cumulative processes through which illiberal discourse gains durability and legitimacy.
- 3 Focus on illiberal discourse, not ideological orientation**  
 The cross-national comparison underscores that democratic erosion operates through structurally similar mechanisms across contexts, even when surface expressions differ due to legal, historical, or cultural constraints. **Illiberalism should therefore be understood not as a fixed ideological package, but as a flexible discursive toolkit that adapts to local conditions** while relying on recurring patterns of enemy construction, institutional delegitimization, and moral polarization.
- 4 Focus on discursive closure, not ideological orientation**  
 Third, the findings demonstrate that **ideological orientation alone is a poor predictor of radicalization risk.** The decisive factor is **not whether discourse is left- or right-wing**, but whether it becomes **narratively consolidated, morally closed, and resistant to internal contestation.** Communities characterized by high internal coherence and limited tolerance for dissent exhibit stronger escalation dynamics than more chaotic or pluralistic spaces, even when the latter appear more hostile on the surface.

Recognizing these dynamics is essential for assessing democratic vulnerability in contemporary digital environments. It shifts attention away from episodic “extreme” content and toward the slower, less visible processes through which exclusionary worldviews become normalized, defensible, and increasingly difficult to contest.

## C. Illustrative Corpus Examples

### United States

“[M]y point is that radicalism and extremism is not necessarily a bad thing by its nature. You need to be radical to stop a genocide. You need to be extreme to change the systems that kill and oppress innocent people. Of course.”

(US-WA-YT-03[20250524]).

This comment demonstrates how left-wing discourse utilizes moral framing to justify the use of political violence. By generalizing the positioning of political opposition as inherently immoral, the use of violent force is legitimized as a reasonable response, even without the explicit call for violence.

“ALL libs need to be rounded up. No mercy. Not after today. This has gone on for far too long. EVERY LAST ONE must be placed inside a prison camp after this terrible tragedy.”

(US-CK-YT-29[20250911]).

This commenter characterizes Charlie Kirk's assassination as a reflection of a broader pattern of left-wing violence, framing the left as an intrinsically violent and dangerous movement. Designating the left as a danger to democracy and to society allows the user to advocate for authoritarian oppression of their political opponents.

“Who created the far left? Who brought nonWhite immigrants to our lands? The answer to both questions is, of course, JEWS.”

(US-WA-X-06[20250522]).

This user combines multiple target outgroups into a single, coherent conspiracy designed to victimize the commenter and their demographic group. By discounting the popularity of the left and reframing demographic shifts as a malevolent plan, the commenter accomplishes two goals, both positing that these are not naturally occurring phenomena and identifying a culprit who can be blamed for any perceived experiences of victimhood.

“All the great revolutionaries thruout [sic] history disagree with you. And besides, violence against those upholding Imperial & Colonial violence should not even be called violence.”

(US-WA-X-21[20250522]).

This user is directly opposing an attempt, aimed at suppressing an illiberal theme that is a standard of their community's discourse, by the influencer to which they are responding. They legitimize the use of violence against their political opponents both by justifying the morality of such violence, and by denying the violent nature of such acts to begin with.

### Germany

“The left is not fighting the right. The left is fighting God... controlled by the devil... dangerous for democracy. Anyone who truly listens to the left will automatically become right-wing.” (GER-CK-YT-08[20250913]).

This quote demonstrates **ideological escalation through moral-religious absolutism**, transforming political disagreement into a cosmic struggle between good and evil that forecloses pluralism. For policy intervention, it highlights how political radicalization can be reinforced by religious framing; for democratic resilience, it normalizes enemy construction and frames democratic coexistence as morally illegitimate.

“The AfD is the best party in Germany. All the old parties – the so-called cartel parties – are left-wing extremists destroying Germany. The German flag is our identity. No gay rainbow flag. Only the German flag for Germany. Merkel is a crazy person who has destroyed Germany by flooding our beautiful country with these Islamist migrants. For that, Merkel belongs in prison immediately.” (GER-CS-YT-01[20251026]).

This comment reveals how digital radicalization operates via **ideological bundling**, fusing nationalism, anti-elite sentiment, anti-LGBTQ+ exclusion, and punitive authoritarianism into a single closed identity narrative. For platform moderation, such content often evades intervention because individual elements appear permissible; for democratic resilience, it signals a shift from competitive pluralism toward the normalization of coercive, exclusionary politics.

“The world believes Gaza is occupied by Israel, but the truth is that the world is occupied by Israel... except for: GAZA.” (GER-BAE-IG-01[20251007]).

This statement illustrates **conspiratorial inversion as a radicalization mechanism**, reframing a concrete territorial conflict into a **totalizing narrative of global domination** that collapses political critique into a worldview of omnipresent control. For platform moderation and prevention policy, such rhetoric is challenging because it is **rhetorically indirect and metaphorical**, yet it activates well-established antisemitic conspiracy schemas that can rapidly escalate within comment-section dynamics. In terms of democratic resilience, the normalization of global-occupation narratives **erodes trust in democratic institutions** and international order by portraying **political processes as fundamentally manipulated and illegitimate**.

# Part One

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## Introduction, Theory, and analytical Foundations

### 1. Introduction Why This Study—And Why Now

Across the United States and Europe, the boundary between online extremism and real-world political violence is increasingly eroding. Digital discourse no longer merely reflects political polarization; it actively shapes the conditions under which violence becomes thinkable, justifiable, and, in some cases, discursively normalized or endorsed. Understanding contemporary extremism therefore requires close attention not only to violent acts themselves, but to the discursive environments in which extremist worldviews are produced, circulated, and gradually normalized.

This linkage between online discourse and offline harm is increasingly supported by applied research. A recent analysis by Moonshot documents how digital hate ecosystems in the United States have evolved in ways that intensify threat signaling, grievance amplification, and behavioral mobilization, underscoring the role of online discourse as a facilitating environment for real-world violence (2025).

Recent developments highlight the analytical necessity of this shift. In Germany, federal prosecutors arrested three men on October 1, 2025, on allegations that they were acting as Hamas operatives tasked with procuring weapons for attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets. Coordinated raids across Berlin and other cities recovered firearms and substantial quantities of ammunition (Noryskiewicz, 2025). These arrests occurred

amid a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents, which nearly doubled year over year in 2024, highlighting the security relevance of antisemitism in the context of the ongoing Israel–Hamas war (Escritt, 2025).

The United States presents a structurally distinct but comparably significant pattern. While far-right and jihadist violence remain serious threats, recent data indicate a diversification of extremist activity. A brief by the Center for Strategic and International Studies documents that in the first half of 2025, left-wing terrorism incidents—previously rare—outnumbered far-right incidents for the first time in more than three decades, even as both remain potentially lethal challenges to democratic stability (Byman & McCabe, 2025). These developments point not to a simple ideological shift, but to a broader transformation in how extremist narratives circulate and gain traction within digital publics.

Two features of this violence are notable. One is the frequency with which political actors are targeted. In the span of four months in 2025, Melissa Hortman, the Speaker of the Minnesota State Legislature, and the political activist Charlie Kirk were both assassinated. In 2024, President Donald Trump survived two assassination attempts; in 2025, there were assassination attempts against Josh Shapiro, the Governor of Pennsylvania, and John Hoffman, a state legislator in Minnesota.

As will be observed below (1.3), this violence was mirrored by several physical assaults on German politicians, including two in the greater Berlin area, Franziska Giffey (May 2024), the Berlin State Senator for Economy, Energy and Enterprise (and former Mayor of Berlin), and Andreas Büttner (January 2026), the Antisemitism Commissioner for Brandenburg.

A second is the frequency with which Jewish people have been targeted. In the course of three months in 2025, an attacker in Boulder, Colorado used a homemade flamethrower and Molotov cocktails to injure six members of a vigil for the hostages in Gaza, ultimately killing an elderly Holocaust survivor; Shapiro's house was set aflame by an arsonist on the first night of Passover; and, as we will discuss below (6.2), in May, a gunman murdered in cold blood two attendees of an American Jewish Committee event in Washington, D.C. In the last 18 months, high profile acts of violence against Jews have occurred across Western liberal democracies, including the murder of 15 Jewish people celebrating Hanukkah in Sydney, Australia (December 2025), the stabbing of two Jewish worshippers at a synagogue in Manchester, UK (October 2025), multiple sexual assaults of a young Jewish girl in France (June 2024), and several episodes in Berlin (1.3)

Many influential philosophers and political theorists in the second half of the 20th century, including Rawls, Habermas, Dworkin, and Shklar, have made severe restrictions on the legitimate use of violence central components of their theories of liberalism, a point which has recently been reaffirmed by contemporary theorists such as Danielle Allen and Cass Sunstein. Similarly, many theorists of liberalism make institutions constitutive of their conception of liberalism. The increase in violence, especially political violence and violence against minorities, and the erosion

of trust in institutions thus both pose serious threats to liberal democracy; indeed, for some theorists, the erosion of trust in institutions and an increase in violence are already signs that liberal democracy is breaking down.

Taken together, these points highlight the urgent need for a research agenda capable of understanding, analyzing, and tracking the discursive ecosystems that surround political violence, violence against minorities, and the erosion of trust in institutions.

## 1.1 Platform Dynamics as Systemic Accelerants

Online radicalization is not a fringe phenomenon confined to extremist subcultures; it is a systemic outcome of platform environments that reward attention, speed, and emotional intensity. Content that provokes outrage or moral certainty is algorithmically advantaged, while nuance and contextual explanation are structurally disfavored.

In such environments, comment sections function as key sites of discursive consolidation, where interpretive frames are reinforced, contested, or radicalized through participatory engagement.

## 1.2 Why a Cross-National Comparison Matters

Germany and the United States represent structurally distinct environments of online radicalization. German discourse operates under tighter legal constraints on incitement and Holocaust denial, incentivizing linguistic coding, moral inversion, and historical reframing. U.S. discourse, by contrast,

remains concentrated on mainstream platforms with large audiences and strong monetization incentives, allowing illiberal actors to operate more openly and at scale.

This comparative design enables the observation of how identical illiberal repertoires—enemy construction, institutional delegitimization, conspiratorial reasoning, and the normalization of violence—mutate across regulatory, historical, and cultural contexts. Crucially, discursive patterns that gain prominence in the U.S. do not remain geographically contained but increasingly travel across platforms and borders, where they are rearticulated in locally adapted, legally compliant forms—particularly in European contexts such as Germany.

Understanding these transnational dynamics, and the recursive relationship between offline trigger events, online discursive escalation, and subsequent offline consequences, is therefore becoming increasingly critical. Growing empirical evidence points to correlations between spikes in online hate communication and episodes of physical violence. This suggests that extremism adapts strategically to democratic constraints rather than disappearing under them—and that digital discourse functions not merely as reflection, but as an active driver of radicalization pathways.

## 1.3 Special relevance for Berlin

While this project tackles a problem common to many liberal democracies and therefore takes a cross-national perspective, it also has special relevance to Berlin. As noted above, Berlin and its immediate environs have been the site for an alarming range of violence

against both political actors, especially those associated with antisemitism, and Jewish people and Jewish-related spaces. Since 2024, both the Berlin State Senator for Economy, Energy and Enterprise (and former Mayor of Berlin) and the Antisemitism Commissioner for Brandenburg have suffered serious physical attacks. A Jewish student at the Freie Universität Berlin suffered a brain hemorrhage after a violent attack in central Berlin by a former fellow student, while a visitor to the Berlin Holocaust Memorial suffered life-threatening injuries after being stabbed by a perpetrator whose stated aim was to harm Jews. Understanding the dynamics underlying the increase in political violence and violence against Jews is therefore particularly relevant to Berlin.

Moreover, prominent social media influencers studied in this report are currently based in Berlin; several are also from Berlin, studied at institutions in Berlin, or have been employed in Berlin. These influencers both reflect Berlin's culture and shape it. It does, however, highlight the important role played by Berlin's Senat, and especially the Department for Culture and Social Cohesion, in shaping not only the culture of Berlin, but also discourse more globally. What happens locally in Berlin can thus be amplified globally - and, as the preceding paragraph makes clear, what is happening across the globe can lead to violence and other negative effects locally in Berlin. In addition to this, since Berlin is the capital of Germany, many of the country's important institutions and politicians are also based in Berlin; the erosion of trust in these institutions takes on a special significance, as does the possibility of violence related to this. Finally, Berlin is also home to Germany's largest Jewish population and is the location of many of the country's most famous Jewish sites, which also makes violence against Jews a topic of relevance.

## 2. Antisemitism as a Structural Driver of Illiberalism

Building on the dynamics outlined above, this report conceptualizes antisemitism not merely as a kind of hostility, but as a structural driver of contemporary illiberal discourse. Antisemitism occupies a central place within contemporary extremist discourse—not merely as hostility directed at Jews, but as a structural and connective discursive grammar that links conspiracy thinking, institutional delegitimization, misogyny, and the legitimization of violence across otherwise divergent ideological camps. In this sense, antisemitism functions less as a discrete ideological position than as an enabling framework through which illiberal worldviews are articulated, stabilized, and justified.

The Zera Institute's research initiative *Extremism and Threats to Liberal Democracy* approaches online radicalization as a systemic challenge to the liberal democratic order. Unlike research that conceptualizes radicalization primarily as an individual psychological trajectory or as a function of social networks, this project treats radicalization as a discursive process. It examines how extremist meanings emerge, circulate, and consolidate through everyday communicative practices.

These practices include repetition, irony, meme-based framing, moral inversion, and the gradual lowering of thresholds for exclusion and violence. Over time, episodic expressions of outrage harden into durable interpretive frameworks that shape political identities and moral judgments.

### 2.1 Antisemitism Beyond Prejudice: A Discursive Infrastructure

In contemporary digital environments, antisemitism rarely appears solely as overt demonization of Jews. More commonly, it operates as a discursive infrastructure: a set of narrative templates, interpretive habits, and symbolic cues that render the world legible through the lens of hidden control, orchestrated deception, and existential threat. This infrastructure is ideologically flexible. It can be activated within far-right ethnonationalism, within segments of left-wing anti-imperialism, and within conspiracist subcultures that frame “global elites” as the agents behind social change.

As a result, antisemitism frequently functions as a bridge between otherwise distinct political camps. It provides a shared explanatory grammar capable of linking grievances about media, finance, migration, war, feminism, or liberal institutions into a unified worldview in which democratic complexity is reduced to intentional manipulation by a powerful outgroup.

### 2.2 Linguistic Habituation and the Normalization of Extremism

A crucial mechanism in this process is linguistic habituation. Continuous exposure to coded, ironic, or conspiratorial language renders certain patterns of speech routine, embedding them into the everyday texture of online political debate. Especially among younger users, repeated encounters with dehumanizing or conspiratorial discourse can normalize exclusionary worldviews long before explicit calls for violence appear. Discursive rituals solidify into political identities; irony gives way to conviction.

Closely related is the challenge of implicit hate speech, whose scale is often underestimated. Findings from the Decoding Antisemitism project indicate that the vast majority of antisemitic expressions rely on implicit or context-sensitive forms rather than explicit slurs. Statements that appear innocuous in isolation may activate antisemitic meaning through association with images, hashtags, narrative templates, or shared cultural knowledge.

This phenomenon can be described as *communication latency*: the persistence of antisemitic meaning in coded or camouflaged forms that remain intelligible to in-group audiences while retaining plausible deniability. Typical examples include rhetorical questions (“who benefits from this?”), ironic formulations (“every single time”), or symbolic visual markers such as altered spellings or echo parentheses. A comment reading “interesting how they always seem to come out ahead” may never mention Jews explicitly, yet it activates antisemitic meaning for audiences attuned to conspiratorial framing. These strategies enable speakers to evade sanction while contributing to the gradual normalization of antisemitic thought patterns.

# 3. Structural Conditions Shaping Contemporary Online Radicalization

While the preceding sections establish antisemitism as a structural driver of illiberal discourse and outline the empirical scope of the study, this chapter situates those findings within the broader structural environment in which contemporary online radicalization unfolds. Rather than presenting additional empirical results, it identifies three contextual conditions that shape how radicalization dynamics emerge, spread, and stabilize in mainstream digital spaces. These conditions explain why approaches focused narrowly on fringe actors, isolated platforms, or explicit hate are insufficient for understanding current threats to liberal democracy.

## 3.1 Platform Dynamics and Algorithmic Amplification

Contemporary online radicalization unfolds within platform environments whose architectures systematically reward attention, speed, and emotional intensity. Recommendation systems, engagement metrics, and monetization incentives privilege content that provokes outrage, moral certainty, or conspiratorial suspicion, while penalizing nuance, contextualization, and deliberative exchange.

Within these environments, illiberal discourse acquires structural advantages regardless of ideological orientation. Irony functions as camouflage, outrage as currency, and ambiguity as a mechanism for broadening reach while maintaining plausible deniability. Importantly, amplification is often driven not by endorsement but by engagement as such: critical responses, ironic commentary, or performative disagreement can contribute equally to visibility. As a result, harmful narratives are not merely tolerated but systematically advantaged by platform dynamics, transforming illiberal discourse into a scalable form of political communication.

These dynamics do not determine content outcomes mechanically, but they shape the conditions under which certain discursive forms flourish. Understanding radicalization therefore requires attention not only to actors and messages, but to the infrastructural logics that structure visibility, circulation, and persistence.

## 3.2 Event-Driven Discursive Surges and the Digital Afterlife of Violence

Episodes of political or sectarian violence act as catalysts for rapid cycles of online sense-making. In the immediate aftermath of such events, attribution, blame, moral judgement, and justificatory narratives emerge under conditions of heightened emotional intensity and informational uncertainty. These moments function as discursive shocks: periods in which interpretive boundaries are renegotiated in real time.

Comment sections play a central role in this process. Even when perpetrators' motives are unclear or contested, online discourse rapidly fills interpretive gaps with ideologically convenient explanations, including conspiratorial attributions, false-flag narratives, and retrospective legitimization of violence. Over time, repeated exposure to these frames contributes to the normalization of moral inversion and eliminationist reasoning, producing what may be described as the digital afterlife of political violence.

These dynamics are temporally sensitive. The first hours and days following triggering events are particularly consequential, as early frames can stabilize discourse trajectories and shape downstream norms of interpretation. This temporal concentration helps explain why short observation windows can nevertheless yield policy-relevant insight into escalation processes.

## 3.3 Antisemitism in Radicalization Dynamics: A Cross-Cutting Pattern

Across platforms, events, and ideological alignments, antisemitic narratives recur with notable consistency as cross-cutting drivers of radicalization. Rather than being confined to explicitly extremist subcultures, antisemitic motifs circulate through mainstream political discourse in coded, ironic, or visually mediated forms. These motifs link otherwise disparate grievances—against media, governments, financial systems, or international institutions—into coherent conspiratorial worldviews.

This cross-cutting function complicates both detection and intervention. Keyword-based moderation systems struggle to identify implicit or context-dependent expressions, while ideological classifications fail to capture how similar discursive repertoires operate across left-wing, right-wing, and conspiracist milieus. Antisemitism thus functions as a connective grammar within contemporary illiberal discourse, enabling coalition-building across political divides and accelerating pathways from symbolic hostility to the moral legitimization of violence.

Importantly, the significance of antisemitism in this context does not lie solely in its prevalence, but in its explanatory power. It provides a historically sedimented narrative infrastructure through which political frustration, institutional distrust, and moral absolutism can be integrated into a single, mobilizing frame. For this reason, antisemitism occupies a structurally distinct position within the broader illiberal repertoire analyzed in this report.

# 4. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Building on the preceding diagnosis of antisemitism as a structural driver of illiberal discourse and the empirical realities shaping contemporary online radicalization, this section outlines the conceptual and analytical framework guiding the study. Its purpose is to formalize the theoretical assumptions, clarify core analytical concepts, and specify how illiberal discourse is identified and differentiated—prior to any discussion of data, methods, or empirical cases.

## 4.1 The Decoding Antisemitism Framework: From Open Hate to Coded Discourse

This section does not restate empirical findings presented earlier, but formalizes the analytical framework used throughout the study to identify and differentiate antisemitic meaning across cases. The analysis is grounded in the Decoding Antisemitism (DA) framework, which conceptualizes antisemitism as a dynamic, adaptive system of meaning rather than a static set of stereotypes or slurs. The DA framework captures the full spectrum of antisemitic expression, ranging from overt demonization and dehumanization to implicit, ironic, and context-dependent forms that rely on shared cultural knowledge.

Central to this approach is the recognition that antisemitic meaning often emerges relationally: through narrative framing, visual cues, metaphorical language, and intertextual references rather than explicit naming. By focusing on patterns of meaning rather than isolated keywords, the framework enables systematic analysis across platforms, ideological contexts, and national settings.

## 4.2 Antisemitism as Discursive Infrastructure for Hate and Illiberalism

At this stage of the analysis, antisemitism is no longer treated primarily as an empirical pattern, but as an explanatory mechanism within the broader framework of illiberal discourse. Within the Decoding Antisemitism framework, antisemitism functions as a discursive infrastructure that enables and stabilizes broader forms of illiberal and anti-democratic thought. Antisemitic narratives provide explanatory templates through which complex social phenomena are reduced to intentional manipulation by a hidden, malevolent actor.

This infrastructural role allows antisemitism to connect disparate ideological projects. Conspiratorial claims about media control, financial domination, moral decay, or geopolitical conflict frequently rely on antisemitic assumptions even when Jews are not explicitly mentioned. In this way, antisemitism operates as a latent grammar that renders delegitimization of democratic

institutions, demonization of political opponents, and justification of violence intelligible and morally permissible.

Because this grammar is adaptive and context-sensitive, it cannot be reliably captured through ideological classification or keyword-based detection alone. Antisemitism thus occupies a structurally distinct position within contemporary illiberal discourse: not merely as one grievance among others, but as a connective mechanism that facilitates coalition-building across political divides and accelerates pathways from symbolic hostility to the moral legitimization of violence.

## 4.3 Linguistic Habituation and Discursive Normalization

A key mechanism linking discourse to radicalization is linguistic habituation. Repeated exposure to coded hostility, conspiratorial insinuation, and ironic dehumanization gradually lowers normative thresholds, making exclusionary or violent interpretations appear reasonable, familiar, or self-evident. Over time, ambiguity functions less as restraint and more as a gateway through which explicit extremism can emerge.

Discursive practices that initially appear playful, ironic, or merely provocative can solidify into stable interpretive frameworks. As audiences become habituated to these patterns, resistance diminishes and moral boundaries erode. Linguistic habituation thus provides a bridge between everyday political communication and the normalization of illiberal worldviews.

## 4.4 A Virological Approach to Hate and Extremist Discourse

To conceptualize these dynamics, the study adopts a virological approach to hate discourse (see also Becker, 2025b). Antisemitism and related forms of illiberal communication are treated as transmissible, mutating phenomena that spread through communicative contact, adapt to environmental constraints, and exploit structural vulnerabilities within digital ecosystems.

Discursive forms of hate mutate in response to legal regulation, platform moderation, and shifting social norms. They circulate through language, imagery, memes, and narrative templates, persisting even when overt expressions are sanctioned. Democratic constraints, from this perspective, do not eliminate extremist discourse but shape its form, coding, and modes of circulation.

The virological framing is used here as a heuristic model rather than a literal theory of transmission, intended to capture patterns of adaptation, persistence, and spread in discursive systems.

## 4.5 Operationalizing Illiberalism

Within this conceptual framework, illiberalism is operationalized as a set of recurring discursive repertoires rather than a single ideological position. The analysis focuses on identifying how specific patterns of meaning contribute to democratic erosion, irrespective of partisan alignment. Core repertoires

include the delegitimization of democratic institutions, the construction of political enemies as existential threats, the erosion of trust through conspiratorial narratives, and the normalization or glorification of violence—both against political opponents and against minorities.

The core illiberal repertoires guiding the analysis include:

- **Delegitimization of democratic institutions**, including the portrayal of parliaments, courts, or elections as inherently corrupt or illegitimate.
- **Enemy construction and delegitimization of political opponents**, framing adversaries as existential threats to the people, the nation, or civilization.
- **Erosion of institutional trust through conspiratorial narratives**, encompassing both antisemitic and non-antisemitic conspiracy frameworks.
- **Normalization or glorification of political violence**, presenting violence as a legitimate or necessary instrument of political struggle.
- **Normalization or glorification of violence against minorities**, targeting protected or marginalized groups as legitimate objects of hostility or exclusion.

These categories build directly on theoretical foundations in democratic theory and populism research (Mudde 2004; Mouffe 2005; Norris & Inglehart 2019; Wodak 2015) and connect the study of antisemitism to broader structures of illiberal and anti-democratic discourse. They function as analytical lenses rather than exhaustive

typologies, enabling systematic comparison across cases while preserving sensitivity to context, ambiguity, and discursive innovation. By formalizing these repertoires at the conceptual level, the framework establishes clear criteria for distinguishing illiberal discourse from legitimate political criticism, dissent, or satire.

## 4.6 Building a Custom Toolkit: How Influencers and Users Cooperatively Select Illiberal Themes

The prevalence and relative importance of individual illiberal themes within specific comment sections result from a co-productive process between influencers (who initiate posts) and users (who populate comment spaces). From a shared global repertoire of illiberal themes, actors collectively select a context-specific subset, or toolkit, shaped by three primary factors:

1. the political alignment of the influencer and their audience,
2. the nature of the triggering discourse event, and
3. the intentions and agendas of participating users.

Each influencer and their community is associated with a particular political alignment, which correlates with a characteristic subset of illiberal themes. For example, communities centered on anti-capitalist influencers tend to foreground erosion of trust in institutions, frequently framing democratic systems as corrupted by corporate or elite influence. By contrast, communities oriented around migration-critical influencers more commonly activate anti-minority resentment and authoritarian law-and-order narratives, often framed as necessary responses to perceived societal threat.

Importantly, the resulting toolkit is not limited to themes that directly reflect the influencer's own alignment. It also includes supportive corollary themes, as well as contrasting or adversarial themes introduced by opposing users. These opposing users typically

originate either from political counter-publics or from rival influencer communities. Their participation serves performative functions: antagonizing the dominant position, asserting alternative identities, and publicly signaling dissent. Together, supportive and adversarial themes form a community-specific toolkit that structures discourse across posts within that influencer's space.

This toolkit is further narrowed at the level of individual posts. The subject matter of the post and the framing adopted by the influencer generate a post-specific toolkit, even within the same community. Two different discourse events will produce distinct toolkits even when framed similarly. Conversely, the same event can generate markedly different toolkits if framed differently across posts—for example, when an influencer initially condemns violence but later implies victim culpability or moral justification.

The post-specific toolkit is neither static nor exhaustive. As users comment in response to the post and to one another, they continuously refine the discursive environment. Each user independently decides whether to engage illiberal themes and which specific theme to deploy. This decision is shaped primarily by user intention—ranging from performative support and dialogue-seeking to antagonistic or conflict-driven dissent—and by factors such as degree of political radicalization, alignment with the community consensus, strength of in-group identification, and personal stakes in the discourse event.

With these conceptual foundations in place, the report now turns to the empirical design of the study. The following section outlines the data sources, research design, and methodological procedures through which these analytical concepts are operationalized and applied to concrete cases of online discourse.

# Part Two

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## Corpora and Methods

### 5. Datasets and Research Design

This part details the empirical architecture of the study, describing how discourse events were selected, how datasets were constructed, and how qualitative, quantitative, and AI-supported methods were combined to analyze online radicalization across platforms and national contexts. The methodological design is explicitly event-centered and comparative, enabling systematic analysis of discursive escalation dynamics while preserving sensitivity to contextual variation.

The section proceeds in five steps. First, it outlines the research design guiding event selection, platform scope, and influencer sampling. Second, it describes the construction and structure of the datasets used in the analysis. Third, it presents the qualitative discourse-analytic approach that forms the core of the study. Fourth, it introduces the quantitative assessments used to contextualize qualitative findings. Finally, it provides an overview of exploratory AI-supported methods employed to extend and scale qualitative insights.

#### 5.1 Research Design: Event Selection, Platforms, and Influencer Sampling

The research design adopts an event-centered approach to the study of online radicalization. Rather than analyzing static corpora or long-term user trajectories, the study focuses on discrete political or violent events that generate heightened public attention, emotional intensity, and rapid meaning-making within digital environments. Such events create analytically privileged moments in which illiberal repertoires, conspiratorial interpretations, and justificatory narratives emerge with particular clarity.

Event selection was operationalized through three analytically motivated criteria: the presence of a clear triggering incident capable of generating sustained online engagement; the activation of antisemitic and broader illiberal repertoires within public discourse; and the analytical potential for comparative analysis across platforms, ideological alignments, or national contexts. Priority was given to events that produced extended comment-section dynamics, enabling observation of participatory escalation processes over time.

The study includes events that differ in political context, national setting, and symbolic significance. This variation allows the analysis to distinguish between structural discursive mechanisms and their context-dependent manifestations, while maintaining a consistent analytical lens across cases.

## 5.1.1 Event Selection and Inclusion Criteria

Event selection followed a set of analytically motivated inclusion criteria designed to capture moments of heightened discursive volatility and escalatory potential. Central to this approach was the identification of triggering incidents that produced a clear temporal rupture in public discourse, allowing for precise and comparable sampling windows immediately following the event. Such ruptures create conditions in which interpretive frames are contested, moral boundaries are renegotiated, and illiberal repertoires surface with particular density.

In addition, selected events were required to generate substantial audience engagement on at least one major platform. This criterion ensured that discourse extended beyond isolated reactions and developed into sustained comment-section dynamics, enabling observation of participatory meaning-making and escalation processes. While cross-platform resonance was analytically valuable, it was not a mandatory requirement; in cases where a single platform produced sufficiently dense interaction, that platform alone constituted a robust empirical site.

A further inclusion criterion concerned the activation of antisemitic and broader illiberal repertoires. Events were selected not for their topical focus per se, but for their capacity to mobilize narratives of conspiracy, delegitimization, enemy construction, or violence legitimization. Single-issue controversies that did not give rise to such dynamics were excluded, even if they attracted significant attention.

Finally, where applicable, events were evaluated for their relevance to cross-national comparison between the United States and Germany. This criterion was applied flexibly. Some events were included precisely because they revealed nationally specific patterns of illiberal discourse under distinct legal, cultural, or historical constraints, while others enabled direct comparison across discourse spheres.

## 5.1.2 Platform Scope and Data Access Constraints

The empirical analysis spans four major social media platforms—YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram—each characterized by distinct communicative affordances that shape how illiberal discourse is articulated, amplified, and contested. Including multiple platforms allows the study to trace how identical events generate divergent discursive patterns depending on platform architecture, interaction design, and algorithmic logic.

YouTube supports long-form video content and threaded comment sections, enabling extended argumentative exchanges, narrative elaboration, and the development of complex conspiratorial frames. Its comment architecture facilitates sustained interaction among users.

X prioritizes rapid-response political communication. Its character limits and real-time affordances favor condensed formulations, slogan-like expressions, and meme-based propagation, often accompanied by high-speed affective escalation. Discursive shifts on X tend to occur quickly, allowing for the rapid crystallization of conspiratorial interpretations and moral judgments.

TikTok enables short-form, highly visual communication and plays a disproportionate role in shaping discourse among younger audiences. Through repetition, imitation, and algorithmically driven trend amplification, TikTok facilitates the circulation of simplified narratives and emotionally charged frames.

Instagram combines visual signaling with caption-based discourse, producing hybrid forms of political communication that blend affect, identity performance, and narrative framing. Political meanings on Instagram often emerge through image-text constellations rather than through explicit argumentation.

Platform inclusion was shaped not only by analytical considerations but also by data access constraints. Changes in platform APIs, moderation policies, and access restrictions limit the availability and completeness of data, particularly for historical content. The study therefore prioritizes publicly accessible material and documents platform-specific limitations where relevant, avoiding claims that exceed the empirical reach of the available data.

## 5.1.3 Influencer Sampling and Discursive Entry Points

Influencer content served as the primary discursive entry point for the analysis. Influencers were selected not to achieve ideological balance, but to maximize discursive diversity and analytical leverage. The objective was to examine how structurally similar illiberal repertoires operate across different political alignments, rhetorical styles, and audience communities.

Selection prioritized influencers whose posts related to the triggering event generated

substantial audience engagement during the observation window. These posts functioned as focal points around which comment-section discourse coalesced, enabling systematic analysis of how elite framing is adopted, intensified, contested, or reinterpreted by audiences.

Influencers were drawn from across the ideological spectrum, including right-wing, left-wing, populist, activist, and conspiracist figures. This strategy reflects the study's analytical premise that illiberal discourse is not confined to a single ideological camp, but manifests through adaptable repertoires that cut across partisan boundaries.

By anchoring the analysis in influencer-generated entry points while focusing empirically on user-generated responses, the research design captures the interactive dynamics through which discursive escalation unfolds. This approach allows the study to trace reinforcing dynamics between influencer framing and audience participation, highlighting how illiberal meanings are collectively produced, normalized, and, in some cases, intensified within mainstream digital environments.

Incidentally, the inclusion of an influencer in the sample does not necessarily imply that the individual is considered extremist, illiberal, or supportive of such positions, though some are. For the purposes of the following analysis, influencers are treated solely as discursive entry points whose posts served as catalysts for highly engaged comment-section discussions during the observation period. The analysis does not imply ideological orientation or normative commitments of influencers from the content or dynamics of user-generated responses. Rather, it examines how extremist or illiberal positions may emerge, circulate, or be contested within comment threads associated with their posts.

## United States

The U.S. sample includes influencers across the ideological spectrum, ranging from establishment commentators to activist and conspiracist figures:

### Right and Far-Right:

- @ Tim Pool
- @ Candace Owens
- @ Jackson Hinkle
- @ Megyn Kelly
- @ Ben Shapiro
- @ LibsofTikTok/Chaya Raichik

### Left and Progressive:

- @ Guy Christensen
- @ Hasan Piker
- @ Brian Tyler Cohen
- @ Vaush/Ian Kochinski
- @ The Majority Report with Emma Vigeland
- @ Some More News/Cody Johnston
- @ CODEPINK/Medea Benjamin

- @ Maurice Vision
- @ Hoss & Hopf
- @ eingollan
- @ KuchenTV
- @ Martin Sellner
- @ Björn Banana
- @ Alice Weidel
- @ Triene
- @ Anna Leisten

### Left and Progressive:

- @ Tilo Jung
- @ Helen Fares
- @ Ole Nymoen
- @ Jean-Philippe Kindler
- @ Julia Pustet
- @ Wolfgang M. Schmitt
- @ Nurder Koch
- @ Vollmarcantkeine
- @ erinnerungskultur
- @ Ricarda Lang
- @ Andreas Bergholz
- @ Ben Bobby K
- @ Nadine Primo
- @ Jan Skudlarek
- @ Düzen Tekkal
- @ Sebastian 23
- @ Annika Brockschmidt

## Germany

The German sample similarly spans right-wing populist, far-right, and left-progressive actors, including politicians, journalists, activists, and pseudonymous commentators operating within more restrictive legal environments:

### Right and Far-Right:

- @ Naomi Seibt
- @ Marie-Thérèse Kaiser
- @ Leonard Jäger



## 5.2 Dataset Construction and Corpus Architecture

This section describes how the empirical datasets were constructed from the selected discourse events, platforms, and influencer entry points. The objective of the dataset architecture is to enable systematic and comparable analysis of discursive escalation while preserving contextual integrity, traceability, and cross-case consistency.

The corpus is event-anchored. For each selected discourse event, data collection focused on publicly accessible posts that generated substantial audience engagement within a defined observation window following the triggering incident. Influencer-generated posts served as discursive entry points, while user-generated comments constituted the primary analytical material. This structure allows the analysis to capture both elite framing and participatory uptake within a single, integrated corpus.

### Dataset Snapshot (Structural Overview)

Across the three primary discourse events, the annotation corpus comprises **10,526 user comments**, sampled from high-engagement influencer posts across **YouTube, X (Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram**. Data collection followed an event-anchored design, concentrating on discourse emerging within approximately one week after each triggering event in order to capture periods of heightened emotional intensity and narrative instability.

- **Capital Jewish Museum Shooting (May 21, 2025)**: 2,568 comments
- **Charlie Kirk Assassination (September 10, 2025)**: 6,009 comments
- **Frankfurt Cityscape Controversy (October 2025)**: 1,949 comments
- **Micro-Level Analysis of Left-Wing Online Discourse in Germany (October 2025)**: 400 comments

Comments were sampled primarily from posts generating substantial audience engagement (typically 500 or more comments), ensuring analytically rich environments for observing discursive escalation. This corpus structure provides a comparable empirical basis for cross-case analysis while preserving sensitivity to event-specific and platform-specific dynamics. Detailed corpus characteristics are introduced at the beginning of each case study in Chapter 6.

Tarek Baé’s corpus is smaller because his posts activated antisemitic narratives within a comparatively narrow and already ideologically aligned audience, limiting broader discursive diffusion. This remains analytically meaningful, as it highlights how antisemitic frames can be reproduced with high intensity even in low-volume discourse environments. The uneven corpus sizes result from an availability-based sampling strategy. Rather than normalizing comment counts, data collection followed actual platform visibility and engagement, increasing ecological validity by reflecting real-world discursive conditions instead of artificially balanced datasets.

### Event Selection and Temporal Framing

For each event, data collection focused on the early post-event phase, typically covering the first several days following the incident. This temporal strategy captures what may be described as the digital afterlife of political violence or controversy: a period in which attribution, blame, justification, and normalization interact before discursive patterns stabilize or are reshaped by external interventions such as media framing or platform moderation.

### Platform Scope and Data Sources

The dataset spans four major social media platforms—YouTube, X (Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram—each characterized by distinct communicative affordances that shape how illiberal discourse is articulated and amplified. Cross-platform presence was not a prerequisite for inclusion. Where a single platform, most commonly YouTube, generated sufficient engagement to sustain complex discourse dynamics, that platform alone provided an analytically robust corpus.

All data were collected from publicly accessible content. No private groups, encrypted channels, or closed forums were included. This approach ensures transparency, reproducibility, and ethical compliance while focusing the analysis on discourse environments that are visible, influential, and embedded within mainstream digital infrastructures.

## 5.2.1 Units of Analysis and Corpus Structure

The basic unit of analysis is the individual user comment, analyzed in relation to its immediate discursive context. Each comment is linked to (a) the triggering event, (b) the platform on which it appeared, and © the influencer post to which it responds. This relational structure preserves the interactional dynamics through which meanings are produced, contested, and escalated.

**The corpus is organized hierarchically:**

- **Event level:** discrete political or violent incidents serving as temporal and interpretive anchors
- **Platform level:** YouTube, X, TikTok, or Instagram, reflecting distinct communicative affordances
- **Influencer level:** public-facing posts that frame the event and attract audience engagement
- **User level:** comment-section discourse in which participatory meaning-making unfolds

This architecture enables cross-case comparison while allowing fine-grained analysis of how identical discursive repertoires manifest across different platforms, political contexts, and national settings.

## 5.2.2 Data Collection, Cleaning, and Documentation

Data collection was restricted to publicly available content and conducted as close as possible to the triggering events in order to capture early-phase discursive reactions. Comments were collected manually or through platform-supported retrieval methods, depending on access constraints, and stored in a structured format that preserves timestamps, platform identifiers, and relational metadata.

Prior to analysis, the data underwent systematic cleaning. This included the removal of duplicate entries, non-linguistic artifacts (e.g. broken links or empty comments), and content unrelated to the triggering event. Usernames were anonymized to minimize the risk of re-identification, while preserving information necessary for analytical consistency.

All datasets were documented with detailed metadata, including event timelines, platform-specific constraints, and sampling decisions. This documentation ensures transparency, reproducibility, and clear delineation of the empirical scope of the study, while avoiding claims that exceed the limits of the available data.

## 5.3 Qualitative Discourse and Content Analysis

Qualitative discourse and content analysis constitutes the analytical core of the study. This approach is designed to capture semantic, pragmatic, and contextual dimensions of illiberal discourse that remain inaccessible to purely quantitative or keyword-based methods. The analysis is

grounded in the Decoding Antisemitism (DA) framework and implemented using MAXQDA to support systematic coding, multimodal annotation, and structured comparison across events, platforms, and national contexts.

The DA framework conceptualizes antisemitism and related forms of illiberal discourse as adaptive systems of meaning rather than as fixed sets of lexical indicators. It enables analysis across a spectrum ranging from explicit hostility and dehumanization to implicit, ironic, and context-dependent expressions that rely on shared cultural knowledge, narrative positioning, or visual cues. This makes the framework particularly suited to contemporary digital environments, where strategic ambiguity and plausible deniability are common communicative strategies.

### Analytical Foundations: DA Guidebook and DA Lexicon

The qualitative analysis draws on two core methodological resources developed within the Decoding Antisemitism (DA) project: a structured coding guidebook and the DA Lexicon (Becker et al., 2024, see also Becker, 2021). Both resources were developed and refined through iterative pilot phases conducted at Technische Universität Berlin and King's College London, where they were tested across multiple datasets, languages, and annotator teams.

The DA guidebook provides detailed annotation guidelines for identifying antisemitic, racist, and illiberal discourse across varying degrees of explicitness. It specifies interpretive criteria, decision rules, and example-based clarifications for handling coded language, irony, historical analogies,

metaphorical framing, and multimodal references. The guidebook was designed to support consistent expert judgment in the analysis of discourse environments where meaning is distributed across text, imagery, and shared cultural context.

The DA Lexicon (Becker et al., 2024) complements the guidebook by offering a structured taxonomy of antisemitic discursive patterns, narrative templates, and rhetorical strategies observed in contemporary digital communication. Rather than functioning as a keyword list, the lexicon operationalizes antisemitism as a set of recurring meaning structures that can be instantiated through diverse linguistic and visual forms. This design enables cross-linguistic and cross-platform analysis while avoiding the limitations of surface-level lexical detection.

Together, the guidebook and lexicon provide a stable analytical backbone for the qualitative coding process. They ensure methodological continuity between the pilot phases of the DA project and the present study, while allowing for inductive extension where new discursive patterns emerge.\*

### Qualitative Multimodal Coding

Coding was conducted using MAXQDA and focused on both textual and visual dimensions of online discourse. In addition to written comments, the analysis incorporated emojis, images, memes, screenshots, and other visual markers where these contributed to meaning-making. Visual elements were analyzed in relation to accompanying text and to the broader discursive context in which they appeared.

The coding scheme combined deductive and inductive elements. Deductive categories

\* Certain aspects of these guidelines inevitably require normative choices to be made. In instances where there is scope for disagreement about these choices, especially concerning antisemitism, our projections do not suggest a material change to our analysis even if different choices are made.

were derived from the analytical framework outlined in Part I, including the core illiberal repertoires defined in Section 4.5. Inductive codes were developed iteratively during annotation to capture emergent phenomena such as novel meme formats, hybrid conspiracy motifs, shifts in affective tone, or evolving patterns of irony and ambiguity.

### Handling Implicit, Ironic, and Context-Dependent Hate

A central analytical challenge addressed by the qualitative approach concerns the prevalence of implicit and context-dependent forms of hate. Many expressions acquire antisemitic or illiberal meaning only through intertextual references, visual cues, narrative positioning, or shared cultural knowledge. Accordingly, comments were analyzed relationally rather than in isolation, with attention to surrounding discourse, platform-specific conventions, and recurring rhetorical patterns.

Strategic ambiguity and irony were treated as analytically meaningful features rather than as noise or uncertainty. Comments employing sarcasm, rhetorical questions, euphemisms, or coded references were evaluated in terms of their likely interpretive uptake within the relevant audience community, rather than their surface-level wording alone. This approach enables systematic identification of meanings that remain legible to in-group audiences while retaining plausible deniability in public-facing contexts.

### Annotation Protocol and Reliability

All comments were coded by native-speaker analysts working in the original languages of the material. This eliminated translation artifacts that could compromise semantic nuance, pragmatic force, or culturally embedded references. Analysts documented

interpretive reasoning for ambiguous cases, supporting transparency, methodological traceability, and reflexive calibration.

Intercoder reliability was addressed through a combination of selective formal testing and extensive collective discussion. Standard reliability metrics were applied to shared subsets of the data to identify points of divergence. However, given the prevalence of implicit, ironic, and multimodal discourse, reliability was ensured primarily through iterative calibration sessions focused on borderline cases, coded references, and contested interpretations. This combined approach prioritizes expert interpretive coherence over purely statistical agreement, reflecting the known limits of metric-driven reliability assessment in the analysis of complex, context-dependent discourse.

### 5.4 Quantitative Assessment and Visualizations

Quantitative assessments were used in a limited and targeted manner to support the qualitative discourse analysis. Their sole purpose is to visualize the relative frequency and distribution of the most salient discursive tropes related to illiberalism and antisemitism within each discourse event.

These quantitative summaries do not function as independent analytical findings. Rather, they provide an empirical overview of how frequently specific illiberal or antisemitic repertoires occur within the respective corpora, thereby contextualizing and orienting the subsequent qualitative analysis.

Visualizations derived from these assessments are presented at the beginning of each case study in [Chapter 6](#). They

serve as descriptive entry points, indicating dominant patterns and shifts in emphasis across events, platforms, and national contexts, before the analysis turns to in-depth qualitative interpretation.

All quantitative outputs are directly based on the qualitative coding scheme described in Section 5.3 and remain analytically subordinate to it. No claims of representativeness or causal inference are derived from these measures.

### 5.5 Machine Learning and AI-Supported Pattern Detection and Scaling

In addition to qualitative analysis, the study includes a limited, exploratory use of machine learning and large language models (LLMs) as a proof of concept. Here, “AI” is used in a broad methodological sense to refer to AI-assisted computational analysis, including both classical machine-learning approaches and transformer-based language models, rather than autonomous or generative systems. The purpose of this component is not automated detection or performance benchmarking, but to assess whether the discursive patterns identified through expert qualitative coding can, in principle, be recognized and scaled computationally.

AI-supported analysis was therefore used in a strictly auxiliary role. Experiments focused on testing alignment between human-coded discursive repertoires and model-assisted pattern recognition, particularly with respect to implicit, ironic, and context-dependent expressions of antisemitism and illiberalism. No standalone classification claims or deployment-ready systems are derived from this component.

Methodologically, the AI exploration followed a two-step logic. First, unsupervised approaches were used to examine whether machine-driven clustering reproduces, collapses, or reconfigures discursive distinctions identified qualitatively. Second, supervised approaches were tested on selected, human-annotated subsets to explore the extent to which expert judgment can guide model-assisted recognition of complex rhetorical cues.

Throughout this process, qualitative analysis remained the reference point. Model outputs were evaluated interpretively rather than statistically, with attention to reasoning traces, error patterns, and sensitivity to contextual cues such as irony, metaphor, and narrative framing. This approach reflects current best practice in exploratory AI-assisted discourse research and avoids premature claims about reliability or scalability.

The AI-supported analysis represents early-stage experimentation and is not intended as a validated monitoring or moderation tool. Its primary contribution lies in identifying methodological challenges and future requirements for integrating LLM-enhanced approaches into digital hate research, including annotation standards, training data needs, cross-linguistic transferability, and ethical governance frameworks.

A forward-looking discussion of these implications is provided in Part IV, where the potential role of AI in large-scale monitoring, early-warning systems, and research infrastructure is addressed in greater detail.

# Part Three

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## Empirical Results

## 6. Case Studies

The following analysis presents the core empirical findings of the study. Results are organized primarily by discourse event, tracing how escalation dynamics unfold within and across platform-specific comment ecosystems in the immediate aftermath of each triggering incident. Within each event, we then examine national context variation (Germany and the United States) and platform-specific patterns before turning to cross-event and cross-national comparison. All patterns reported here are based on systematic coding of 10,526 user comments across platforms and discourse events. While identical discursive mechanisms recur across cases, their concrete manifestation varies

depending on event characteristics, platform affordances, regulatory conditions, historical legacies, and cultural norms.

Detailed empirical documentation is provided in the Appendix. The Appendix contains the main quantitative and qualitative summary tables, as well as an overview of each analyzed comment thread, including identified themes, tropes, and dominant discursive patterns observed within the comment sections. These materials are intended to provide transparency, facilitate replication, and support more fine-grained secondary analysis beyond the synthesis presented in the main text.

### 6.1 Case Study 1

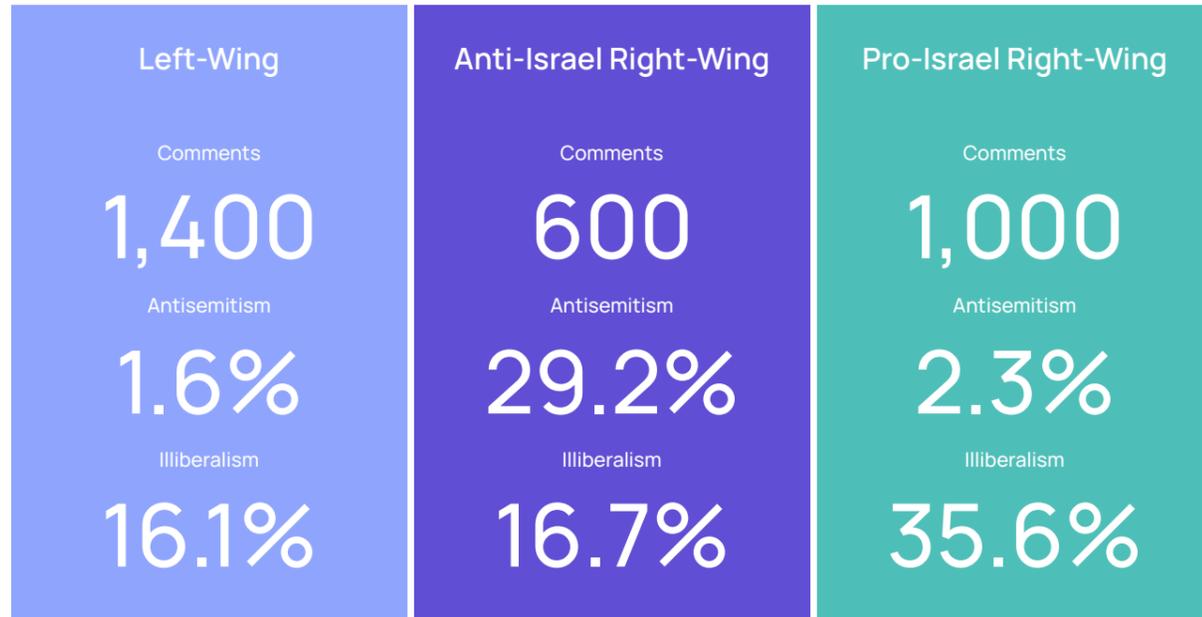
#### Charlie Kirk Assassination (United States & Germany)

On September 10, 2025, online commentator and political activist Charlie Kirk was shot in the neck with a high-powered rifle during a public debate on the Utah Valley University campus. Kirk later died from his injuries in a local hospital. Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA, was a well-known figure in right-wing circles online, taking highly controversial stances, especially regarding trans rights, and regularly engaging with political opponents in public debates, such as the event at which he was shot. Aspects of the motivations of the shooter, identified as Tyler Robinson, are still debated, and legal proceedings are in progress. While Robinson's family are strong Trump supporters, according to Robinson's parents and official documents, he had reportedly become radicalized to the left. According to the charging document filed by state prosecutors, Robinson had entered into a romantic relationship with his transgender roommate, and several times referred to Kirk as "spreading hate" and "full of hate." When asked why he had shot Kirk, he replied in a text message

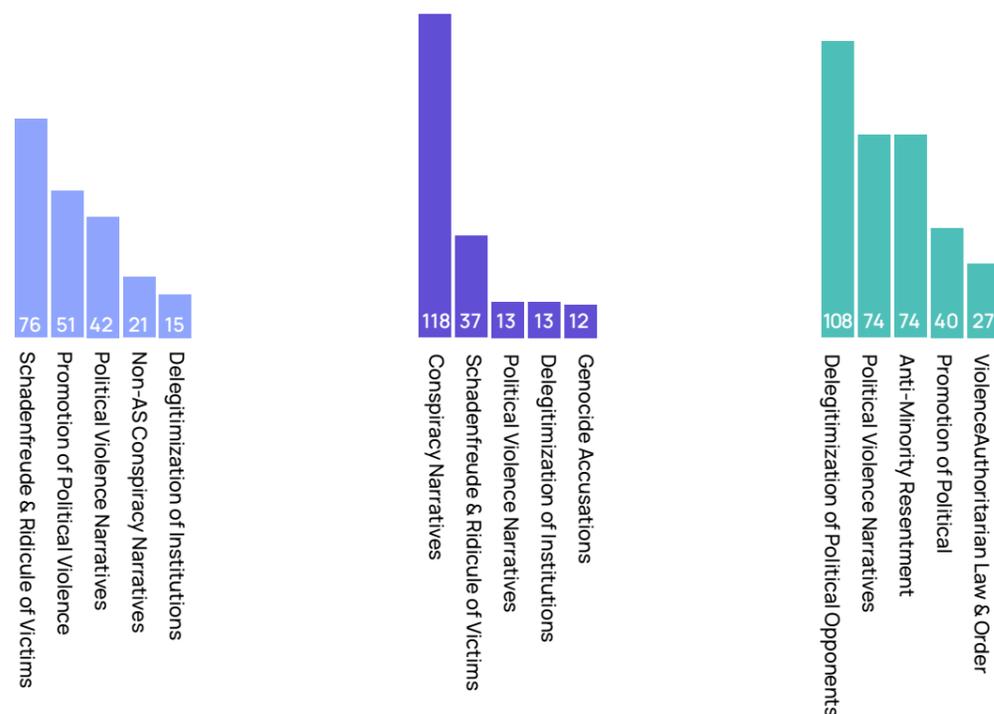
**"I had enough of his hatred.  
Some hate can't be negotiated out."**

# United States Discourse

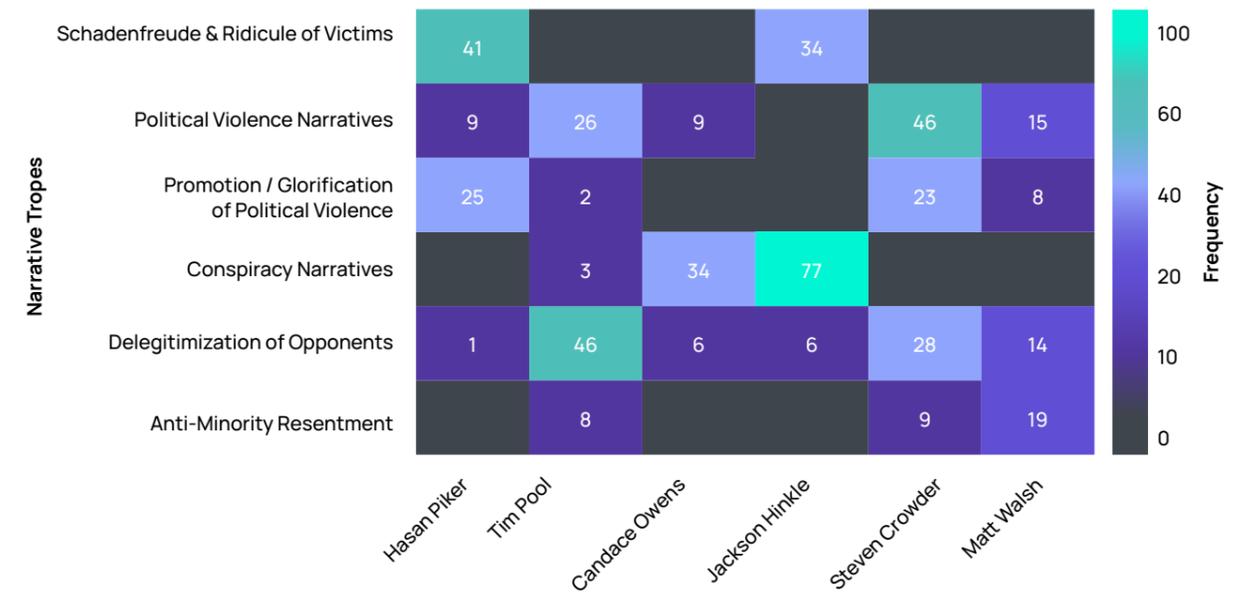
## Quantitative Overview



## Top Narrative Tropes by Discourse Environment (Absolute Frequencies)



## Heatmap – Dominant Tropes by Influencer



The United States discourse for this event comprises **15 comment threads** from influencers on **YouTube, X/Twitter, and TikTok**. A total of **3,000 user comments** were analyzed for this dataset. Influencers were selected across the political spectrum, with right-leaning channels intentionally overrepresented in order to reflect observed discursive dynamics and engagement patterns during the event (see also Becker, 2025a).

## Left-Wing Discourse Spheres

### Hasan Piker

#### Influencer Reframing

Hasan Piker is a professional content creator on multiple wideband platforms, with Twitch serving as his primary medium. He is known for aggressive anti-capitalist and anti-Western rhetoric and has been repeatedly embroiled in controversy, including for his support for authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China, his platforming a Houthi

terrorist (whom he compared to Anne Frank), and for other matters. His popularity, influence, and broad range of subjects make him one of the most important figures in the American left-wing arena.

Piker has made several posts related to Kirk's assassination. For this study, two YouTube videos have been selected, both posted the day after the shooting. In the

first, Piker reports on the news of Kirk's death and expresses his shock. He then pivots to outlining fears both of a potential pattern of attacks on political commentators like himself and of possible reprisals by the government against the left. He blames Kirk and the right for encouraging a culture of violence. The second video is focused on Trump's reaction to the killing and subsequent retributive threats against the left. Piker again focuses on the right's tendency towards violence and its demonization of the left. He also expresses his concern that Trump and those on the right will use this moment as an excuse to attack the left and warns that this will likely escalate into a period of "unimaginable political oppression" (US-CK-YT-12[20250911]).

### Audience Response

In both threads, the most prevalent illiberal themes were **schadenfreude and ridicule** of Kirk, as well as the **celebration of his death**; these threads were where some of the highest concentration of **the promotion or glorification of political violence** occurred among those studied in this report. "And good riddance. The world's a

### \_\_\_\_ Ian Kochinski (Vaush)

#### Influencer Reframing

Known mainly by his username Vaush, Kochinski is a member of a left-wing subcommunity known as 'BreadTube.' These influencers – who typically self-identify as socialists or anarchists – purposely design their content and online presence in such a way as to directly compete with the alt-right radicalization pipeline, eschewing typical academic and identity-based discourse themes. Kochinski intentionally curates an online image as a "dirtbag leftist": a brash, abrasive, anti-political correctness figure who

*much better place without Nazis like Charlie Kirk*" (US-CK-YT-10[20250911]). There was significant debate between supporters and detractors regarding the political affiliation of the shooter. Users on each side tended to promote pieces of evidence supporting their position (and disregard evidence to the contrary) and **blame the opposing ideology** for both this specific attack and general trends of political violence. The post focused on Trump generated a more diverse range of themes, with many users espousing the belief that the right had been waiting for a pretext to unleash wide-scale oppression and violence onto both the left and democratic institutions: "Rest in piss Charley Kirk. This post is the weaponization. Trump was already putting us in concentration camps if you didn't already think we are at war then you are one of them. You deserve to be next" (US-CK-YT-12[20250911]). Among these, some urged like-minded users to actively take action to oppose these efforts, up to and including **armed revolution** against the government. Illiberal discourse occurred at rates similar to those found in many of the threads of right-wing social media personalities studied here.

might appeal to the sort of impressionable young men who typically fall into the alt-right pipeline.

#### Audience Response

Notably, the post that was analyzed for this study (an announcement of the shooter's arrest) featured a relatively low level of illiberal discourse (7.5%). Most users debated the evidence and produced theories on Robinson's motivations without broaching the barrier to extremism. This is not to say the thread was civil; Kochinski's community is

well-known for its aggressiveness. This was on display throughout the thread, with users frequently disparaging each other and their opponents. The most common discourse was antagonistic, even abusive, but not directly illiberal or extreme. Those commenters who did cross the line tended either to **blame the right-wing** for general trends of political

### \_\_\_\_ Mainstream Progressives: Brian Tyler Cohen and The Majority Report

#### Influencer Reframing

Influencers like these host communities that are popular with users who are equally as passionate, but less radicalized, than those in more extreme communities like those of Piker, Christensen, or BreadTubers. They present their content as unbiased reporting of news. They tend to present the actions of political opponents as illegal, damaging to democracy, or immoral, without broaching the realm of extreme discourse. These standards remained constant in analyzed threads from both programs.

violence, or to **advocate for users to arm themselves** against potential future anti-left violent reprisals from lone wolves or the government: "No joke, best case scenario because if he was actively in any targeted community it would have suffered a lot! Retaliations are still very possible from the cult!" (US-CK-YT-35[20250912])

#### Audience Response

Threads from these and other, similar programs tend to have more civilized discourse overall with a consistent rate of illiberal discourse between 10-20%. Common themes in these threads were similar to those from other left-wing communities; the most dominant themes remained **schadenfreude, justification of the attack, and blaming the right for trends of political violence**. In response to a counter-commenter assigning blame to the left-wing, one user in the Brian Tyler Cohen thread commented "the hate is and always has been yours and your republican party of traitors" (US-CK-YT-13[20250913]). Users also commonly engaged in **conspiracies** that the shooting would be used as an excuse by the right-wing and by the government to oppress the left, curtail civil liberties, and institute authoritarian policies. Some commenters went so far as to propose that the assassination had been engineered for the purpose, like this comment in the thread from the Majority Report:

"There was no reason for anyone on the left to delete Charlie Kirk. Probably another staged shooting from the right. With that said, I celebrated what happened to him" (US-CK-YT-36[20250912]).

## Pattern Summary: U.S. Left-Wing Discourse

Left-wing discursive patterns remain consistent and stable in general theme selection regardless of individual agenda and level of radicalization. The main impact of these factors seemed to be an effect on the ratio and level of incidence among these themes. Discursive constructions of moral superiority frequently generate narratives holding political opposition wholly responsible for acts deemed immoral (e.g., politically or ideologically motivated violence). This is not seen as incongruous with the celebration of these acts, since many left-wing discursive patterns frame violence as morally permissible when the targets are constructed as inherently evil or immoral. Notably, while the level of extreme discourse recorded in threads from more extreme influencers fluctuated significantly (anywhere between 20-60%), comments that were not illiberal

were more likely to be borderline or antagonistic than those from more moderate communities, where much less illiberalism was found in general. While this was not captured as a formal quantitative metric, it was consistently observed that comments in more extreme communities relied more heavily on irony, ridicule, moral inversion, and implicit framing. As a result, categorization required more intensive contextual scrutiny and interpretive judgement than in more moderate communities, where illiberal discourse was both less prevalent and more explicit. Ridicule of Kirk, a sense of schadenfreude at his death, promotion or celebration of violence more broadly, and narratives about the violence undertaken by political opponents were the dominant themes.

## Anti-Israel Right-Wing Discourse Spheres

Unlike the U.S. left, the American right does not exhibit a unified stance on Israel. As a result, two distinct discursive toolkits emerge on the right depending on whether Israel is viewed favorably or unfavorably. Important figures in the latter camp are Candace Owens, Jackson Hinkle, and Tucker Carlson. Due to Carlson's posting patterns and slower rate of content production, he tends not to contribute to discursive event shocks in the way that is the focus of this study and has not been included in this section.

### \_\_\_\_\_Candace Owens

#### *Influencer Reframing*

Owens is a prominent far-right commentator who has previously worked for major right-wing organizations such as Turning Point USA, PragerU, and the Daily Wire. Initially aligned with mainstream conservative support for Israel, Owens has since repositioned herself as an overtly hostile critic of Israel, endorsing numerous classical antisemitic tropes. These include claims

of Jewish control over Hollywood and Washington, engagement with blood libel narratives, and depictions of Israel as a "demonic nation." Following October 7, her rhetoric intensified further, culminating in her dismissal from The Daily Wire.

A former colleague of Kirk from her previous employment at Turning Point USA, Owens has posted on the subject frequently. The tone of these posts quickly shifted from

grief to conspiracy, and within days, Owens hypothesized that Israel was responsible for Kirk's death. Although Kirk had been an outspoken supporter of Israel, a primary focus of Owens's content is that there were indications that he intended to break with this position, though there is no widely known evidence to support this. The video selected for analysis was the first post in which Owens directly outlined her belief that Israel was responsible.

#### *Audience Response*

Users overwhelmingly endorsed Owen's **conspiracy theory**. Throughout the thread, commenters expanded on the theory, engaged in explicit antisemitism, and warned Owens that she might suffer a fate similar to Kirk as a result of her exposing the alleged conspiracy. Extreme discourse unmitigated by euphemism or strategic ambiguity was

### \_\_\_\_\_Jackson Hinkle

#### *Influencer Reframing*

Self-described as a "MAGA communist," Hinkle combines far-right cultural positions with Marxist-Leninist economics. His content is dominated by antisemitic conspiracy theories, explicit support for terrorist organizations, and portrayals of Jews and Israel as satanic or Nazi-like. Banned from most platforms, he remains active primarily on X. His reaction to the shooting remained consistent with the general themes of his content, relating Kirk's assassination to his standard conspiracies of Jewish corruption, the ills of immigration and populism, and the left-driven collapse of the government and society. Two posts on X were analyzed; in the first, Hinkle characterized the shooting as a natural consequence of societal collapse, while in the second he directly engaged in the

common; users openly endorsed antisemitic tropes and conspiracies not found in other communities, even notably antisemitic ones. "*The entire west is compromised! Im from sweden and they controll our goverment here to. Wake up world, the most evil force is the askenazi jews, the zionists! War is coming, prepare to choose side. Humanity or the zionists!*" (US-CK-YT-23[20250916]). In many threads this comment would be a distinct outlier in terms of level of extremity and overtness, but it is fairly representative of the general tone of this thread as a whole. Tropes present in the thread included the belief that Jews were responsible for the **death of Christ**, the concept of a secret **Jewish cabal controlling world governments**, or that **Jews worship the devil**, and even the belief that Jews were actively attempting to bring about the apocalypse.

same conspiracy as Owens: that Israel had engineered the attack.

#### *Audience Response*

Commenters in the first thread used a variety of illiberal themes, echoing Hinkle's messaging. Users viewed themselves as superior to Kirk, his community, and those with different political beliefs; they believe that all others are the naive political tools of the **establishment**, **Israeli influence**, or both. Users mocked Kirk's death, **claiming he deserved** it for his allegiance to the system: "*Fuck him. He defended the literal murder of thousands of babies. FUCK. HIM.*" (US-CK-X-25[20250910]). Responsibility for the attack was spread amongst the left, the deep state, Israeli agents, and Muslim immigrants. In the second thread,

after Hinkle had sharpened his view and specifically selected Israel as the target of his **conspiracy**, users responded in kind. “*Mosaad agents live with dual citizenship in the US and many other countries. It’s easy to activate someone like that. It’s also possible that the Jewish-infiltrated CIA has a hand in it. We’ll see soon what lies they tell us about that!*” (US-CK-X-27[20250911]). Instead of a variety of themes, the thread was limited almost entirely to endorsement of the theory, though some did break away from the majority by positing the deep state as the true responsible party.

### Pattern Summary: U.S. Anti-Israel Right-Wing Discourse

Influencers and users in this sphere, regardless of the topic at hand, consistently

## Pro-Israel Right-Wing Discourse Spheres

### \_\_\_\_\_Megyn Kelly

#### Influencer Reframing

Kelly is a former establishment media personality on the right, having been employed by both Fox News and NBC. She has been slowly transitioning away from support for Israel; however, she has not yet crossed into direct opposition, and her community largely maintains its favorable view of Israel. For this reason, we include her here in the pro-Israel section, though this may change in future studies. Kelly’s exits from Fox and NBC were both influenced by significant controversy and conflict with the news organizations. Since becoming an independent content creator (mostly on YouTube), she has adopted a strong anti-establishment media stance. She has also

use conspiracy theories as the fundamental basis of their worldview. The actual content and tone of these conspiracies varies from one community to the next, but the general themes remain consistent. They tend to view all events as a consequence of a variety of conspiracies, most of which eventually boil down to Jewish influence. Members of these communities view themselves as superior to others for having perceived the truth of reality, expressing disdain for those who do not also believe in these conspiracies. Commenters often use conspiracy as a means of coping with personal circumstances – instances of personal misfortune can be explained as the outcome of a complex system of conspiracies designed to keep them powerless.

moved further to the right than previously, and places primary emphasis in her ideology on opposition to left-wing “woke” ideology and establishment politics.

Like others on the pro-Israel right, Kelly lionized Kirk, erasing his controversial past and demonizing those who criticized him or his actions. Kelly made several videos about Kirk and the shooting; two, each representing a specific tone, were selected. In the first, Kelly hosted Vivek Ramaswamy – a former entrepreneur and conservative politician – for a tribute to Kirk and his memory. This video maintains a civil tone, keeping the focus on mourning Kirk and celebrating his career, and does not activate illiberal themes. By contrast, the second video employs many of these. Throughout the video, Kelly focuses on the possible relationship between the shooter and his transgender roommate, as well as potential connections to LGBTQ+ activism. Kelly attributes responsibility for Kirk’s death to transgender individuals

as a group, employing generalizing and dehumanizing characterizations. She refers to people who are transgender as belonging to a death cult, associates them with the devil, and suggests that they are to blame for many of society’s ills.

#### Audience Response

Lacking any definitive direction by Kelly, commenters on the first video resorted to previously established standards from Kelly’s other content. Though illiberal discourse incidence was lower than in her other threads (14% versus an average of 38%), themes were consistent with her general messaging. Commenters focused on the **illegitimacy of the left, the political establishment, mainstream media, and universities**. The media was blamed for supposedly demonizing Kirk and making him a target for **violence from “the deranged left.”** Users engaged with a variety of **anti-minority and anti-pluralist** themes when invoking these concepts: “*we need to demand all these Left so call*

### \_\_\_\_\_Matt Walsh and Steven Crowder

#### Influencer Reframing

These two influencers typically occupy different roles within the pro-Israel right-wing. Walsh generally focuses on transgender people as scapegoats within a larger narrative of societal decline, while Crowder focuses primarily on the deep state and anti-establishment discourse. However, within the context of Kirk’s assassination, both Walsh and Crowder adopted virtually the same discursive pattern: blaming the left for political violence while simultaneously advocating for violence against the left.

Both influencers denied encouraging violence, framing their discourse as warnings

*reporters to be FIRED ..we have Black Fatigue , woke fatigue..LEFT liberal MEDIA FATIGUE ..we the people of America are sick of it!”* (US-CK-YT-29[20250911])

Users in the second thread enthusiastically embraced Kelly’s more virulent tone and the chance to demonize LGBTQ+ and the left-wing. Users endorse **authoritarian oppression** of – and grassroots violence against – **the left, the mainstream media, and LGBTQ+ individuals**, especially **transgender individuals**. All of these groups are characterized as mentally ill dangers to society who are intentionally attempting to victimize any who identify as white, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, or conservative. “*THERE IS A DISTINCT CORRELATION BETWEEN TRANS EXTREMISTS AND OPEN HOSTILITY/ VIOLENCE. TAKE A VULNERABLE PERSON, ISOLATE THEM BY TELLING THEM THEY ARE HATED BY EVERYONE ELSE, ADD HORMONES AND MENTAL ILLNESS... YOU GET A DEMONIC KILLER. IT’S JUST FACTS.*” (US-CK-YT-30[20250911]).

of future left-wing attacks. They advised users to be prepared to defend themselves and fight back against potential threats. Although the rhetoric of the two was similar, the themes employed in their comment sections reflected the difference in their previously set standards. Walsh’s video identifies the left and LGBTQ+ as a whole as terrorists, a stance the user base is well accustomed to. Meanwhile, Crowder spends his video addressing accusations that he had been previously advocating violence. He explicitly denies this, then proceeds to advocate violence, again using the cover of being proactive in defense of possible future left-wing violence.

### Audience Response

Users in Walsh’s community readily endorsed characterizations of **transgender individuals as mentally ill and violent**. The left-wing and liberals are consistently **portrayed as destructive to democracy**, and many users advocated the abolition of the democratic party in favor of a **one-party state**. This is not surprising, as Walsh has openly identified as a fascist in the past. Users repeatedly encouraged each other to be **prepared for leftist violence** and to take proactive action against potential threats. “*Anyone who believes that children should be mutilated is so far beyond rational thinking that murdering their opponents is not off the table for them*” (US-CK-YT-31[20250916]). Calls for **authoritarian oppression of all left-leaning individuals** were prevalent.

### Pattern Summary: U.S. Pro-Israel Right-Wing Discourse

Illiberal themes within this discursive arena vary considerably depending on the agenda of the influencer. Certain themes remain significant regardless of influencer rhetoric, like the delegitimization of left-wing ideology and the belief that the establishment media is biased against them. Sometimes users embrace these themes despite the influencer either excluding them entirely or directly opposing them. Otherwise, the toolkit among these spheres was inconsistent from one to the next, usually adhering closely to the personal agenda of the influencer. These agendas tended to fall into one of several major categories: anti-establishment – whose users mostly engaged in delegitimization of democratic institutions and political opponents, erosion of trust in institutions, and narratives of betrayal by the political elites; right-wing faithful – who validate the political power of the right by demonizing

As Crowder typically focuses on the deep state and race relations, rather than LGBTQ+, commenters mainly adopted these familiar themes. The left and Black Americans were consistently **derided, dehumanized, and threatened**: “*white liberals and blk people need to be taken care of Ive about doggone had it with these people!*” (US-CK-YT-32[20250916]). These were far from the only targets of vitriol, with some users choosing instead to focus on feminism, immigration, and others. As a result of Crowder’s anti-establishment profile, endorsements of authoritarianism were rare. Users instead preferred to either directly **advocate violence** or generally **wish death** on their selected target group.

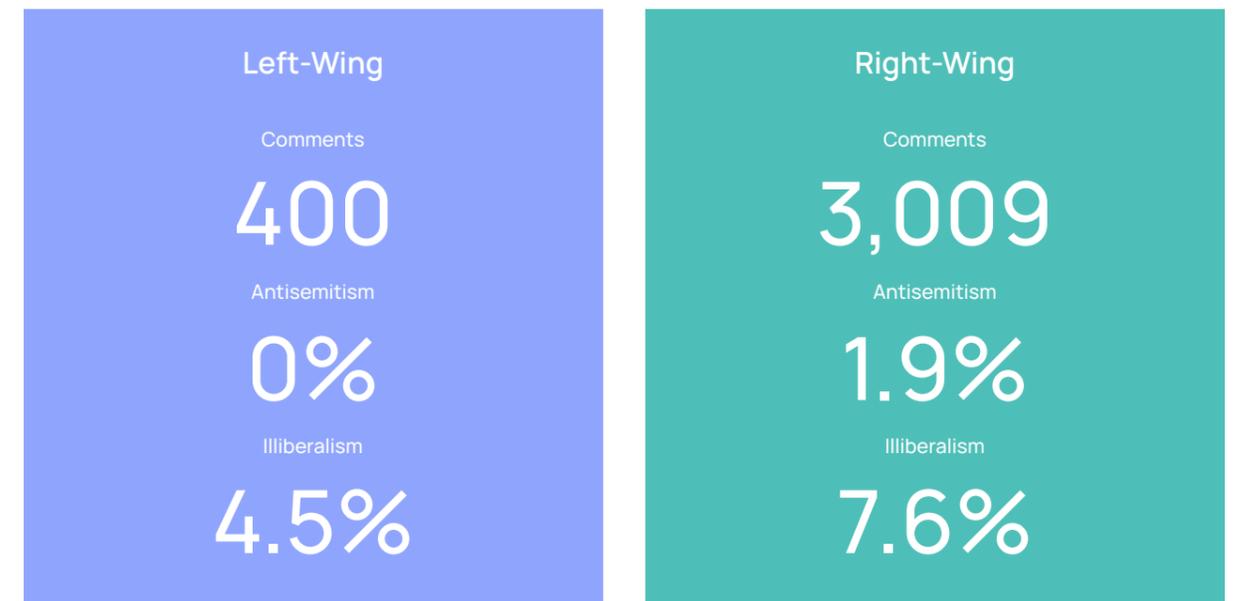
and dehumanizing the left, endorsing authoritarian law & order, and the rejection of civil liberties; and identity-based culture warriors – who focus their vitriol on the supposed detrimental effects of social aspects of the left (like support for pluralism, immigration, and LGBTQ+ advancement) by advocating for the revocation of social progress in these avenues and active dehumanization and oppression of these groups through authoritarianism.

## German Discourse

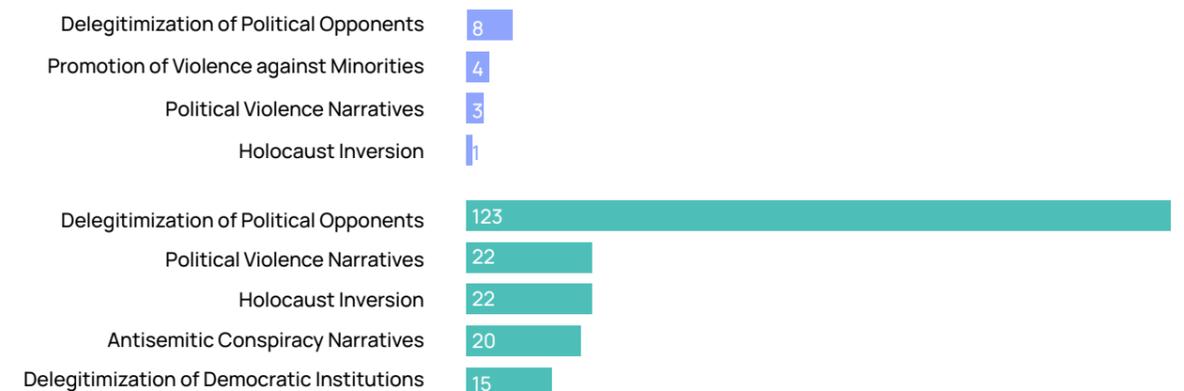
The discourse event examined in this section is the **murder of Charlie Kirk**, a high-profile right-wing political activist, and its subsequent reception within German-language social media environments. Although the killing itself occurred outside Germany, it rapidly became a transnational reference point that was appropriated into domestic political debates and ideological conflicts.

Across the corpus, the murder of Charlie Kirk is rarely treated as an isolated act of individual violence. Instead, it functions as a **discursive catalyst**, through which **broader narratives of ideological threat, political persecution, and the perceived erosion of democratic order** are articulated. The following sections therefore analyze the discourse influencer by influencer, distinguishing between influencer reframing and user and audience responses, in order to capture both top-down framing effects and bottom-up narrative production.

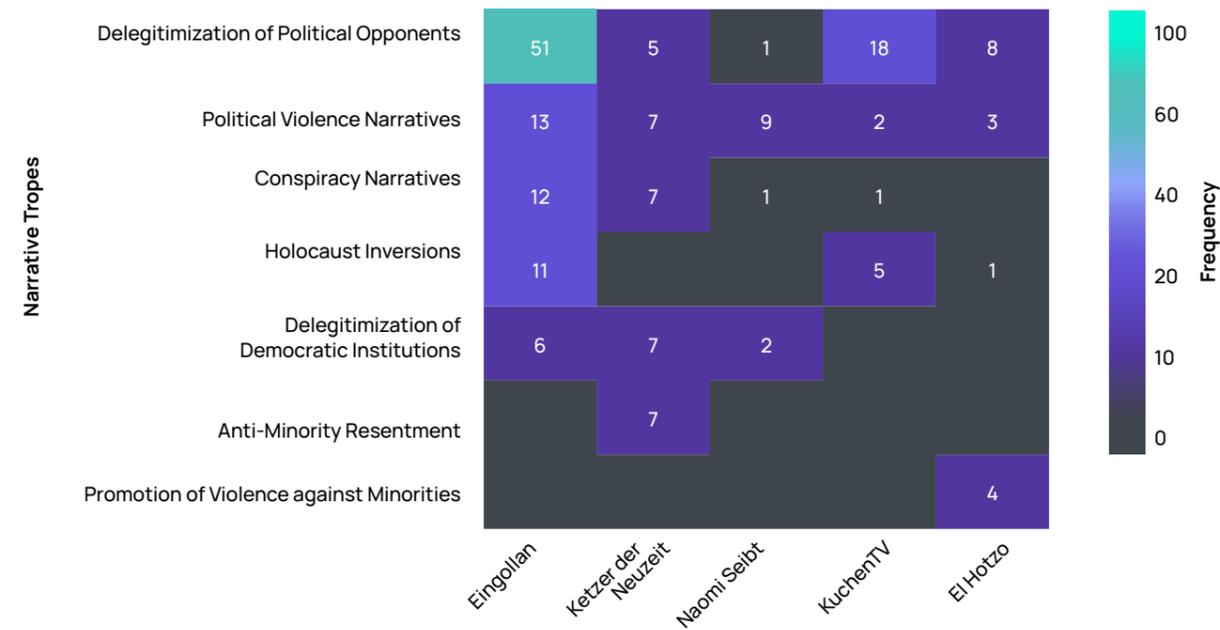
### Quantitative Overview



### Top Narrative Tropes by Discourse Environment (Absolute Frequencies)



## Heatmap – Dominant Tropes by Influencer



The corpus comprises **18 individual threads** published across **YouTube, Instagram,** and **X/Twitter**, associated with posts by German-language political influencers from both right- and left-leaning milieus. In total, **3,409 user comments** were analyzed. The material includes long-form videos, short-form video clips, and static posts, allowing for the observation of discourse dynamics across different platform affordances.

The dataset is strongly asymmetrical in its political composition. The majority of threads stem from right-wing or right-adjacent influencer spaces (including Michelle Gollan, Leonard Jäger, Tim Heldt, and Naomi Seibt), while left-leaning environments (most notably El Hotzo) are represented by a smaller number of threads and primarily serve as points of reactive engagement rather than discursive centers. This asymmetry is analytically relevant, as it shapes both the density and the narrative coherence of the discourse.

## Right-Wing Discourse Spheres

### Michelle Gollan (eingollan)

#### Influencer Reframing

Michelle Gollan is a right-wing conservative influencer with clear ideological proximity to the AfD and a strong focus on migration, media distrust, and the perceived dominance of left-wing actors within state institutions. Her audience is highly politicized and frequently self-identifies as a marginalized group of “truth-tellers” operating within an allegedly hostile political and media environment.

In her videos addressing Charlie Kirk’s murder—most notably “*Charlie Kirk ermordet – was auf uns zukommt*” (GER-CK-YT-17[20250916])—Gollan frames the killing not as an isolated act of political violence, but as a warning signal indicative of a broader climate of danger for conservatives. She repeatedly suggests that right-wing voices are increasingly unsafe and implies that institutional actors such as courts, media, and government can no longer be relied upon for protection. While she avoids explicit calls for violence, her framing emphasizes exposure, betrayal, and imminent threat, thereby structuring the interpretive space in which defensive and escalation-oriented readings become more salient.

#### Audience Response

The comment sections under Gollan’s posts exhibit a high degree of narrative consolidation and ideological alignment with the influencer’s framing. User responses overwhelmingly interpret the murder of Charlie Kirk not as an individual criminal act, but as confirmation of **systemic left-wing violence and institutional failure**.

Democratic legitimacy is repeatedly questioned through statements such as “*We haven’t had democracy for a long time*” (GER-CK-YT-17[20250916]) or “*Since Merkel, the government has been doing whatever it wants, against the will of the people.*” (GER-CK-YT-17[20250916]). These formulations construct democracy itself as hollowed out and non-functional.

The judiciary is frequently portrayed as structurally biased and complicit, for example in claims that “*the left-wing radical ‘justice’ system won’t do anything*” (GER-CK-YT-17[20250916]) or that **authorities deliberately tolerate violence against conservatives**. Within this interpretive framework, the **left** is not positioned as a political adversary but as **an existential enemy** embedded within state institutions. Conspiratorial elements further intensify this construction, such as assertions that the killing was “*satanic and deliberate*,” (GER-CK-YT-17[20250916]) implying intentional orchestration rather than individual responsibility.

Several comments move toward conditional **legitimation of violence**. Statements like “*If something happens to Eingollan, we’ll have to take matters into our own hands*” (GER-CK-YT-17[20250916]) explicitly position vigilante action as a conceivable response to perceived institutional collapse. While such comments remain numerically limited, their integration into a coherent threat narrative contributes to a discursive normalization of escalation, in which self-defense and retaliation are framed as increasingly unavoidable.

## Leonard Jäger (Ketzler der Neuzeit)

### Influencer Reframing

Leonard Jäger operates within a right-wing, fundamentalist Christian milieu. His content combines political commentary with religious language, moral absolutism, and apocalyptic imagery. Within this framework, Charlie Kirk's murder is framed not merely as political violence, but as a manifestation of civilizational, moral, and spiritual decay.

In videos such as “*Prove me wrong*” (GER-CK-YT-08[20250913]) and “*Ich bin fassungslos*” (GER-CK-YT-10[20250912]), Jäger presents the killing as evidence that the rule of law no longer functions and that Germany is sliding toward a “left-wing dictatorship.” Historical analogies to the Nazi era are repeatedly invoked, positioning contemporary left-wing actors as totalitarian successors. The framing is binary and moralized, leaving little room for ambiguity, pluralism, or contingency.

### Audience Response

Jäger's comment sections strongly mirror and intensify this framing. **The left is** consistently depicted not only as politically dangerous, but as **morally and spiritually corrupt**. Comments such as “*The left is the enemy of the free world*” (GER-CK-YT-08[20250913]) or “*Leftists are controlled by the devil*” (GER-CK-YT-12[20250913]) collapse political disagreement into metaphysical opposition, effectively removing the possibility of legitimate democratic contestation.

**Historical analogies** play a central role. The murder of Charlie Kirk is repeatedly interpreted through references to the **Nazi era**, for example in statements such as “*In 1933 people were killed for their opinions—history is repeating itself*” (GER-CK-YT-09[20250914]) or “*Germany is becoming a left-wing dictatorship again*.” (GER-CK-YT-08[20250913]). These narratives invert established historical memory by positioning **right-wing actors as imminent victims of repression**, while recasting the left as the primary totalitarian threat.

Religious language further reinforces these constructions. Calls to prayer coexist with **militant rhetoric**, including appeals to “*fight the left*” (GER-CK-YT-08[20250913]) or warnings that “*the rule of law no longer protects us*.” (GER-CK-YT-08[20250913]). Rather than moderating the discourse, religious framing reinforces binary friend-enemy distinctions and supplies justificatory resources for exclusionary interpretations. Violence is often framed as regrettable but inevitable, legitimized through appeals to self-defense, historical necessity, or divine order.

## Tim Heldt (KuchenTV)

### Influencer Reframing

Tim Heldt, known as KuchenTV, occupies an intermediary position within the right-wing media ecosystem. While not overtly extremist, he is associated with right-wing, misogynistic, and migration-critical positions and addresses a younger, predominantly male, entertainment-oriented audience. His engagement with Charlie Kirk's murder is more discursive than emotional, focusing on ideological classification and historical interpretation rather than mourning or shock.

In videos such as “*Klartext zu Fake-Linken und Charlie Kirk*” (GER-CK-YT-23[20250913]), Heldt emphasizes the alleged equivalence between left-wing ideology and historical totalitarianism. He repeatedly advances the claim that National Socialism was fundamentally left-wing, thereby reframing the murder as part of a longer trajectory of leftist violence rather than as an isolated act.

### Audience Response

In the comment sections, users actively adopt and radicalize these framings. Assertions such as “*Leftists have always been National Socialists*” (GER-CK-YT-23[20250913]) or “*These people are just as left-wing as the socialists who ruled from 1933 to 1945*” (GER-CK-YT-23[20250913]) illustrate how **historical revisionism** becomes a central tool of enemy construction. The murder of Charlie Kirk is frequently invoked as empirical confirmation of this narrative.

In several instances, the discourse shifts toward escalation. Comments such as “*Pandora's box was opened years ago by Antifa—now it's our turn*” (GER-CK-YT-23[20250912]) integrate the **killing into a logic of retaliatory necessity**. While explicit celebration of violence remains limited, many users frame confrontation as unavoidable. The boundary between analytical interpretation and moral legitimation becomes less clearly demarcated, particularly where passivity is portrayed as irresponsible or dangerous.

## Naomi Seibt

### Influencer Reframing

Naomi Seibt operates at the intersection of German and international right-wing discourse spaces. Active primarily on X, she addresses a transnational audience that overlaps with libertarian, conspiratorial, and far-right milieus. Her communication style is characterized by anti-establishment rhetoric, skepticism toward legacy media, and recurring references to global elite manipulation. Compared to Gollan or Jäger,

Seibt's framing is less emotionally charged and less focused on immediate threat, but more strongly embedded in generalized system critique.

In her posts reacting to Charlie Kirk's murder, Seibt does not construct an elaborate narrative of mourning or escalation. Instead, she situates the event within a broader framework of media manipulation and elite orchestration. The murder appears less as a singular tragedy than as another episode

in a perceived pattern of deception, in which public narratives are controlled and instrumentalized by powerful actors. This framing remains comparatively implicit, relying on allusion rather than overt accusation.

### Audience Response

The comment sections under Seibt's posts are less narratively dense than those of other right-wing influencers, but they nevertheless reproduce familiar **delegitimizing patterns**. Due to her partially English-speaking audience, a significant share of more extreme statements appears outside the German-language subset analyzed here. Within the German comments, illiberal expressions remain numerically limited, but conceptually consistent.

Users frequently invoke **conspiratorial interpretations**, for example by labeling Seibt

herself a "*puppet of the New World Order*" (GER-CK-X-01[20250921]) or suggesting that Kirk's death serves a larger, hidden agenda. The murder is occasionally reframed through **martyr narratives**, with calls to portray Kirk as a symbolic victim **sacrificed by shadowy elites**. Institutional delegitimization appears primarily in media-focused critiques, such as demands that "*the entire ARD and ZDF construct be shut down due to propaganda and fake news.*" (GER-CK-X-04[20250913]).

Notably, unlike in the discourses surrounding Gollan or Jäger, explicit calls for violence or escalation are largely absent. Instead, the dominant logic is one of epistemic distrust: reality itself is presented as manipulated, and official explanations as inherently unreliable. Charlie Kirk's murder thus functions less as a mobilizing event than as further confirmation of a generalized belief in systemic deception.

## Left-Wing Discourse Spheres

### \_\_\_\_ El Hotzo (Sebastian Holz)

#### Influencer Reframing

Sebastian Holz, known as El Hotzo, is a left-leaning satirical content creator whose communication style is characterized by irony, provocation, and deliberate boundary-testing. His content primarily targets a younger, urban, media-savvy audience and is embedded in a cultural rather than programmatic political register. In contrast to the right-wing influencers in the corpus, El Hotzo does not engage in sustained ideological framing or moral escalation when addressing Charlie Kirk's murder.

His posts referencing the event rely on irony and affective provocation rather than interpretive explanation. Importantly, El Hotzo does not construct a coherent narrative that situates the killing within a broader political struggle, nor does he frame it as a symptom of systemic violence or institutional failure. While his tone is deliberately confrontational, it remains detached from explicit justificatory or mobilizing logic. The absence of a structured framing leaves interpretive work largely to the comment section.

#### Audience Response

The comment sections under El Hotzo's posts display a markedly different dynamic from those observed in right-wing discourse

spaces. Rather than producing a consolidated internal narrative, the threads function as **reactive arenas** in which competing interpretations coexist without stabilizing into a dominant frame. A substantial share of the **most extreme statements** does not originate from El Hotzo's core audience, but from external users—predominantly **from right-wing milieus**—who enter the space to address "the left" as a homogenized collective.

Comments such as "*The entire left-wing political camp is morally bankrupt*" (GER-CK-X-26[20250910]) or "*Leftists are dehumanized and contemptuous of humanity*" (GER-CK-X-26[20250910]) **instrumentalize Charlie Kirk's murder as a moral indictment of an imagined left-wing totality**. In some instances, the

rhetoric escalates further, with dehumanizing formulations or violent metaphors that bear no direct relation to El Hotzo's original post. These comments do not receive sustained endorsement from the broader audience and are frequently contested, mocked, or left isolated.

As a result, the murder of Charlie Kirk does not function as a narrative anchor within this discourse space. Instead of being integrated into a coherent interpretive framework, it remains a point of friction that attracts episodic aggression from outside the community. The left-leaning discourse environment thus remains fragmented and narratively unproductive in illiberal terms, lacking the cumulative reinforcement and ideological closure observed in the right-wing influencer spaces.

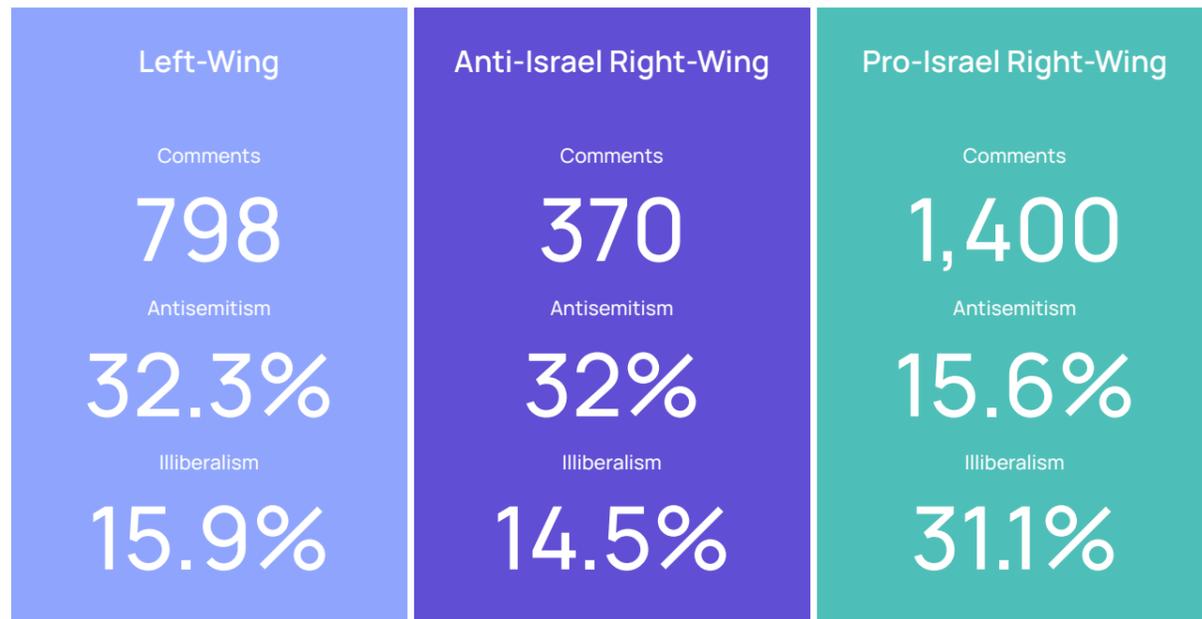
## 6.2 Case Study 2

### Capital Jewish Museum Shooting, Washington, D.C. (United States)

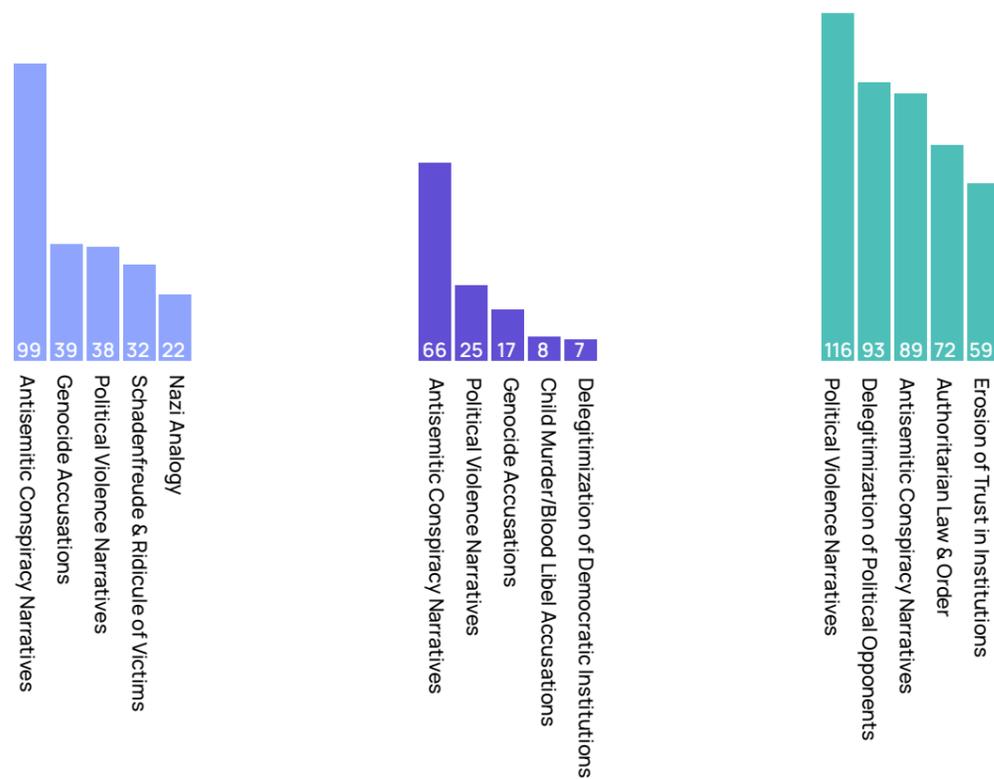
On May 21, 2025, two Israeli embassy staffers were shot and killed in Washington, D.C. Although typically referred to as the "embassy shooting," the attack took place outside a "Young Diplomats Reception" hosted by the American Jewish Committee at the Capital Jewish Museum. The victims were a couple: Sarah Milgrim, a Jewish American immigrant to Israel, and Yaron Lischinsky, a Christian German immigrant.

In the indictment filed by the Department of Justice, the perpetrator, Elias Rodriguez, displayed a red keffiyeh and shouted "I did it for Palestine. I did it for Gaza," "Free, free Palestine" as well as "intifada," "revolution," and "shame on Zio-nazi terror" after the shooting and at the time of his arrest. Available evidence indicates that Rodriguez selected his victims based solely on their attendance at the event, which was a networking event for Jewish diplomats and humanitarian aid organizations. In a manifesto published online, he wrote "those of us against the genocide take satisfaction in arguing that the perpetrators have forfeited their humanity." While some early reports suggested that Israeli embassy officials were the intended targets, the event itself was not affiliated with the Israeli embassy, and the majority of attendees had no direct connection to Israel or diplomatic service.

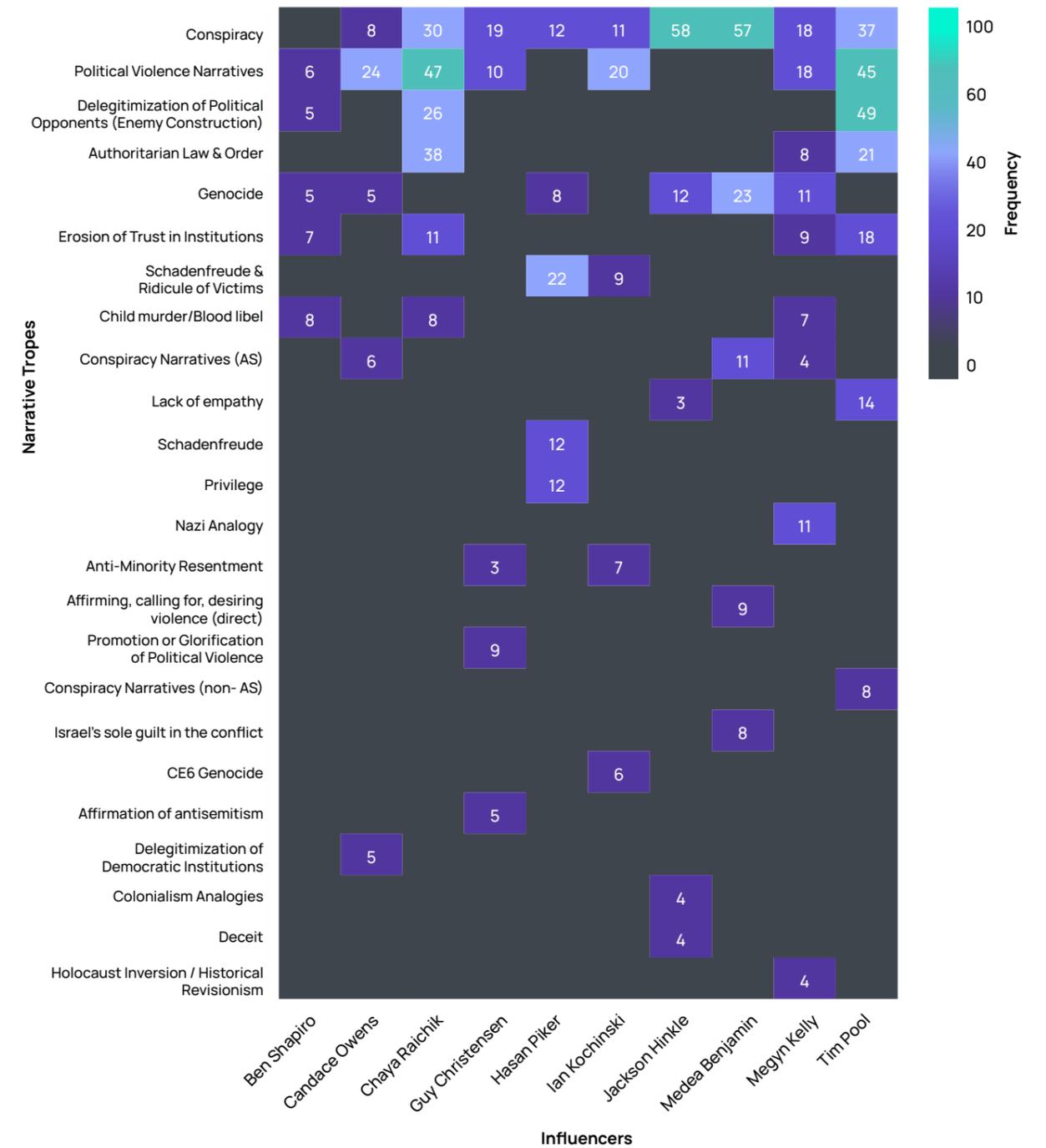
## Quantitative Overview



## Top Narrative Tropes by Discourse Environment (Absolute Frequencies)



## Heatmap – Dominant Tropes by Influencer



For this event, **13 threads** were selected for analysis, published on **YouTube, X/Twitter,** and **TikTok** from a variety of influential users ranging the political spectrum, including the far-left, progressive left, mainstream right,

and far-right. In total, **2,568 comments** were analyzed across these threads. Content includes breaking news reporting, short-form X posts, and long-form video commentary.

## Left-Wing Discourse Spheres

### \_\_\_\_Guy Christensen

#### Influencer Reframing

Guy Christensen is an online activist whose content revolves entirely around the Israel-Palestine conflict. Primarily active on TikTok, he commands a large youth audience and is known for his highly inflammatory anti-Israel rhetoric.

In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, Christensen posted multiple videos. While he initially condemned the shooting, he quickly deleted this post and replaced it with a new video disavowing his original condemnation, arguing that the attack was justified and describing the shooter as a “resistance fighter.” The backlash was swift and significant: Christensen was expelled from his college, and both his Facebook and Instagram accounts were permanently banned. As a result, he deleted the controversial video and uploaded several new posts that were framed as if he had not previously commented on the event. It was one of these following posts that was analyzed for the purposes of this study, as the original videos—and their comment sections—were no longer publicly accessible.

#### Audience Response

Unsurprisingly, the analyzed comments in Christensen’s post closely mirrored his standard framing. Over one quarter of comments were identified as some form of antisemitic or illiberal discourse. Most of these comments engaged in **antisemitic conspiracies, schadenfreude and ridicule** directed at the victims, and the **promotion or glorification of political violence**. The most prevalent narrative framed the shooting as a false-flag operation orchestrated by Israel – or more specifically the Mossad – with the intention of providing justification for a government crackdown on pro-Palestine protestors. *“I believe this is a false flag operation, staged by Israel to get the U.S. and Trump to focus on Israel and do everything possible to exonerate Netanyahu, an international fugitive wanted by the ICC and accused of genocide in Gaza, for crimes against humanity”* (US-WA-TT-01[20250522]). A secondary conspiracy theory alleged that Israel fabricated the shooting to divert attention from an unrelated incident involving Israeli troops firing warning shots at European diplomats.

Many commenters explicitly justified the killings, describing the victims as deserving their fate, mocked them posthumously, or claimed they were “going to hell.” Counter-speech was present but often adopted similarly extreme rhetoric, primarily blaming Christensen and his community for radicalizing the attacker. These comments were almost entirely characterized by accusing Christensen and his community of being to blame for the attack, describing them as terrorist sympathizers.

### \_\_\_\_Medea Benjamin (CODEPINK)

#### Influencer Reframing

Benjamin is a co-founder of CODEPINK, a feminist far-left activist organization that has attracted sustained scrutiny from U.S. lawmakers over its funding sources and political affiliations. A significant portion of the group’s funding comes from another founder’s husband, who is a wealthy Chinese national widely believed to be a funder of pro-Chinese propaganda. The group has taken positions supporting authoritarian regimes (including China, Venezuela, Cuba, and Iran), called for Ukrainian capitulation, and repeatedly framed Hamas as legitimate “resistance fighters” “breaking free from an open-air prison.” While CODEPINK’s official channels tend to employ a sanitized activist register, the personal accounts of Benjamin and other senior figures are more informal and rhetorically unrestrained. Traditionally, Benjamin’s social media posts take on a combative tone, and she often urges users to take direct action on a variety of issues. In a marked deviation from this established standard, her post in response to the shooting was an ostensible condemnation of the attack.

### \_\_\_\_Hasan Piker

#### Influencer Reframing

Piker differs from the previous influencers in two key respects. First, Israel-Palestine is only one of several core topics in his content; second, he is a professional influencer rather than an activist. His brand spans political commentary, gaming, and lifestyle content. As a professional content creator, Piker produced

#### Audience Response

The reaction in the comment section sharply diverged from this position. In line with a recurring pattern observed in extremist discourse spaces, users actively rejected the influencer’s digression from expected ideological alignment. Many commenters accused Benjamin of cowardice for attempting to distance herself from an act they assumed she should support.

This thread exhibited an exceptionally high proportion of extreme discourse (over 60%). As in Christensen’s case, **conspiracy narratives** dominated, with the Mossad falsely accused of orchestrating the shooting. Secondary themes were more varied than in Christensen’s comments, ranging from classic antisemitic tropes **portraying Jews and Israelis as evil** and child-murderers, and culminating in direct **endorsements of violence** against Israelis. *“The Empire of Lies and prepared propaganda to deceive the world is super active. This is mainly part of the manipulation. Keep in mind Satan, who manipulates weak unethical persons, is the father of Lies”* (US-WA-X-21[20250522]). Counter-speech again mirrored the tone of the dominant discourse, placing responsibility for the attack on Benjamin and her political milieu.

a high number of posts following the shooting. The post selected for analysis was a YouTube video in which Piker read aloud Rodriguez’s manifesto—an act that led to a temporary ban from several platforms. In the video, Piker explicitly rejected false-flag conspiracy theories while simultaneously asserting that the U.S. government would instrumentalize the attack to suppress pro-Palestinian protest.

## Audience Response

The comment section reflected Piker's characteristic use of identity conflict to drive engagement. The most prevalent themes were **ridicule of victims** and claims that they deserved violence. Users endorsed explicitly extreme political positions and the use of **violence against political opponents**. *"my point is that radicalism and extremism is not necessarily a bad thing by its nature. You need*

*to be radical to stop a genocide. You need to be extreme to change the systems that kill and oppress innocent people. Of course."* (US-WA-YT-03[20250524]). **Nazi comparisons** appeared with unusual frequency, more often than in other threads. Despite Piker's rejection of false-flag claims, **conspiratorial narratives** remained prominent. The thread also featured systematic **delegitimization of right-wing actors** and recurring **accusations of Jewish or Israeli control over U.S. politics**.

## Pattern Summary: U.S. Left-Wing Discourse

Across U.S. left-wing discourse spaces, thematic variation between influencers is limited in contexts related to Israel–Palestine. A stable discursive template emerges, combining anti-establishment and anti-capitalist narratives with reconfigured historical antisemitic tropes adapted to contemporary progressive moral frameworks. Central to this template is a power-asymmetry lens that assigns moral legitimacy primarily on the basis of perceived oppression rather than empirical responsibility or factual context. These spaces exhibit pronounced erosion of trust in governments and media,

reliance on conspiracy narratives, and a moral schema that assigns legitimacy almost exclusively to groups perceived as oppressed.

Within this framework, anti-Israeli violence is frequently framed as natural or justified resistance, while Jewish or Israeli victims are dismissed, ridiculed, or erased—either by claiming they deserved violence or by denying the reality of the event itself. The consistency of this pattern underscores the role of **antisemitism as a cross-ideological grammar that enables the normalization of political violence**.

## Anti-Israel Right-Wing Discourse Spheres

### \_\_\_\_ Candace Owens

#### Influencer Reframing

The general trend of Owens' content following October 7th is marked by endorsement and dissemination of antisemitic conspiracy theories, demonization of Israel, and the use of classic antisemitic tropes such as blood libel and nefarious Jewish influence over media and governments. In a post on

X following the shooting, Owens dismissed narratives holding pro-Palestinian actors responsible, while pivoting to condemn Israel's actions in Gaza. This post derided those who would frame the attack as related to anti-Israel sentiment in the United States, characterizing this sentiment as a "reasonable opinion" about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

## Audience Response

The comment section split along predictable lines: detractors focused on rejecting her framing, while supporters amplified **blood libel accusations, genocide claims**, and narratives portraying Jews as exploiting the attack for victimhood. Several conspiratorial narratives closely resembled those observed in left-wing spaces. *"But was the Israeli*

*embassy workers shooting a random "antisemitic" hate crime or a planned government psyop for pretext to pass new laws outlawing criticism of Israel and Jews?"* (US-WA-X-04[20250522]). Users characterized Israel as bloodthirsty, and that it would not hesitate to kill its own citizens as a means of gaining international sympathy.

### \_\_\_\_ Jackson Hinkle

#### Influencer Reframing

After it was revealed that Rodriguez had previously been a member of the left-wing organization 'Party for Socialism and Liberation,' Hinkle made a post on X alleging that this group was well-known for being suborned by U.S. federal agents. The post goes on to claim that the attack was a false flag perpetrated by these undercover agents.

#### Audience Response

Rather than generating a new narrative, the post activated a pre-existing conspiratorial schema, resulting in rapid discursive closure around an antisemitic explanatory frame.

The comment section overwhelmingly endorsed this conspiracy, reflecting the centrality of conspiracism as a worldview within his community. Conspiracies were markedly similar in both content and tone to those found in the Owens thread, including accusations against Israel and the United States, and arguments that the oppressive and bloodthirsty nature of both of these nations made it likely that they were to blame. *"Israel killed German soldiers and blamed Hitler to gain international sympathy. Can't it kill its own Jewish employees? Israel crucified the Prophet Jesus and claimed to love him, but they say he's in hell?"* (US-WA-X-12[20250522]).

## Pattern Summary: Anti-Israel Right-Wing Discourse

Anti-Israel right-wing discourse spheres tend to attract a distinct subset of users: traditional conservatives whose political worldview is strongly shaped by conspiratorial thinking. While their discourse overlaps with pro-Israel right-wing spaces in its virulent opposition to the political left, it diverges sharply in its epistemic structure. Here, conspiracy does not function as a

supplementary narrative device but as the primary organizing principle of interpretation.

As a result, conspiratorial explanations dominate these spaces, although their specific content varies according to the influencer's ideological framing. In the case of Candace Owens, Israel and Zionism are attacked through familiar antisemitic tropes

portraying Jews as immoral, malevolent, and actively hostile toward non-Jews. This framing produces a user discourse that depicts Jews as violent oppressors and treats Israel as an inherently criminal actor.

By contrast, Jackson Hinkle's rhetoric centers on explicitly anti-globalist conspiracies. Jews and Israel are constructed less as moral villains than as civilizational threats whose alleged objective is the destabilization and disintegration of Western society.

## Pro-Israel Right-Wing Discourse Spheres

Due to the expansion of pro-Israel right-wing commentary ecosystems over the past two decades, a relatively broad range of influencers was included in the sample. For the purposes of in-depth qualitative analysis, this report focuses on three

### \_\_\_\_ Tim Pool

#### Influencer Reframing

Tim Pool represents himself as an independent, centrist journalist, though his content reflects a more standard far-right populist philosophy. Pool, and his podcast *Timcast IRL*, primarily focuses on American politics, endorsing 'America first' ideology. A US Department of Justice indictment was unsealed in 2024, revealing that Tenet Media – an organization from whom Pool received significant funding – was operating as a tool of Russian state media outlet RT News in order to fund pro-Russian propaganda (Bond et al., 2024). While Pool has denied that his content is influenced by Russia, it has been repeatedly pointed out his

Accordingly, his audience gravitates toward narratives depicting Western governments as controlled or “puppeted” by Israel and Jewish power.

Across both cases, antisemitism operates as a flexible conspiratorial grammar, enabling different ideological agendas while sustaining a shared interpretive framework that normalizes extreme hostility and political delegitimization.

representative figures: Tim Pool, Megyn Kelly, and Chaya Raichik (Libs of TikTok). While united by general support for Israel, their discourse spaces differ markedly in ideological orientation, thematic emphasis, and escalation dynamics.

rhetoric has closely aligned with Russian interests, especially with regards to his demonization of Ukraine. Pool's content often trends towards anti-establishment themes, conceiving his community as the resistance to traditional politics. He also regularly demonizes and delegitimizes the left, framing them as a detrimental force that corrupts society. A significant portion of his user base characterize themselves as former liberals who abandoned the left as a result of discontent with its social values. Two of Pool's posts on X were selected for analysis; one of which was a simple reporting of the event in the immediate aftermath, the second post characterizing the attack as “far left violence.”

## Audience Response

Both posts had similar levels of extreme discourse and a nearly identical selection of themes. Predictably, the most common themes among all comments were the **delegitimization of the left** and assignment of blame to left-wing politicians and media figures. “*The media spent years screaming about “right-wing extremism” while grooming an entire generation of violent leftist radicals. Now they’re shooting up people at Jewish museums in the nations capital.*” (US-WA-X-06[20250522]). Users not only blamed the left for violence, they actively endorsed **retributive action against the left** as a whole. **Advocacy for mass deportations**

### \_\_\_\_ Megyn Kelly

#### Influencer Reframing

For this study, two posts by Kelly have been selected for analysis, a YouTube video and a post on X. The difference in platform and tone generated fairly dissimilar results. YouTube as a whole tends to have lower levels of counter speech as an outcome of the design of the platform, while X posts are more widely spread to those outside the intended demographic. In the YouTube video, Kelly reports on the incident and talks at length about perceived biased CNN coverage, as well as the shooter's connection to left-wing campus and activist groups. The X post was more innocuous, reacting to the breaking news and expressing sympathy for the victims.

## Audience Response

In response to her inflammatory tone, the comments on the YouTube video reached a general consensus, placing significant emphasis on erosion of trust in the media and universities. “*Racism & Anti-Semitism*

were common, as well as the censoring, jailing, and sometimes even execution of public left-wing figures like politicians and journalists. These proposals were not limited to public figures, with users calling for the **end of free speech**, jailing of pro-Palestine protestors, and **closing of universities**. Commenters also regularly speculated on the identity of the shooter, of whom little was known at the time, and engaged in anti-minority rhetoric based on that speculative identity. These themes were commonly paired with classic antisemitic tropes, such as the Jewish aim of societal disintegration: “*Diversity is our strength, goyim*” (US-WA-X-07[20250522]).

= *the Legacy of Barack Obama and the Academic/Industrial Complex.*” (US-WA-YT-14[20250522]). Users also expounded on the need to **cancel liberal news programs**, **close universities**, and jail figures deemed as responsible for the attack. A sizable portion of users engaged in **anti-Islamic rhetoric**, despite there being no evidence nor mention of the shooter being a Muslim. Meanwhile on X, discourse was more contentious, with much debate on who was to blame for the attack. Some users blamed establishments, though there were many who preferred to engage in **antisemitic conspiracies**. Overall, in both threads, users had high levels of distrust for the left, the media, and universities. “*There needs to be a crackdown on the antisemitic bs happening on college campuses. These people need to be treated like Klansmen, tolerated but heavily restricted in their activities.*” (US-WA-X-16[20250522]). They characterized each of these groups as detrimental to democracy and society as a whole and often advocated for authoritarian action against them.

## \_\_\_\_\_Chaya Raichik (LibsofTikTok)

### Influencer Reframing

Known best by her username LibsofTikTok, Raichik is primarily a culture war figure who frames “woke” leftist ideology as a malevolent force designed to destroy democratic society. Raichik rose to significance by criticizing LGBTQ+ individuals and trends on TikTok, joining in debates about COVID-19, and by spreading conspiracies regarding the 2020 US presidential election. Since then she has become a major figure in right-wing culture conflict discourse. Her content regularly frames LGBTQ+ figures as abusive predators, as well as ‘great replacement theory’ rhetoric that posits immigration as a plot to replace white people as the dominant ethnic demographic in America. Similar to Pool, she also subscribes to ‘America first’ ideology and opposes any perceived foreign influence. Raichik made a number of posts on X regarding the embassy shooting, two of which have been selected. These posts both draw connections between Rodriguez and pro-Palestine/liberal politics.

### Pattern Summary: Pro-Israel Right-Wing Discourse

Certain standard illiberal themes remain consistent throughout these discursive arenas: the delegitimization of the left and distrust of traditional establishments. Beyond these standards, additional themes are inconsistent and vary according to the agenda of the subcommunity. The specific context of violence against a well-known conservative figure created a fairly limited selection of secondary themes, with the overwhelming majority of discourse being dedicated to blaming the left for political

### Audience Response

The theme selection in both threads is similar enough to analyze them together. Users consistently characterized the left as deleterious and malevolent, blaming them for the attack in specific, and the ills of society in general. “*We have a democrat problem in this country, they’re violant and are continually mur\*dering people.*” (US-WA-X-20[20250522]). Commenters regularly blamed universities and the media for corrupting Americans and enticing them to perceived radical left-wing circles. Advocacy for authoritarian crackdowns on free speech/protests, universities, and the media were common. “*Left-wing indoctrination is mixed with the woke mind virus. This kind of hate, racism and violence is being stoked by many Dems, the mainstream media, and woke universities.*” (US-WA-X-19[20250522]). Users also endorsed both authoritarian and extrajudicial execution of left-wing figures. As with Pool’s community, many automatically assumed the shooter was a Muslim and engaged in extreme Islamophobic vitriol.

violence as a whole and advocating for their destruction. The right-wing’s concept of “the left” is a broad umbrella term that includes a myriad of subgroups.

The particular focus of each community shapes the selection of specific subgroups as scapegoats or targets. Anti-establishment communities most frequently frame mainstream media and universities as figureheads of left-wing ideology. Right-wing faithful tend to focus on prominent liberal

politicians or large-scale left-leaning protest movements. Identity-focused culture warriors consistently fixate on pluralism, immigration, and minority groups as reliable scapegoats.

There is some variation regarding whether retribution against the left should be enacted by the state or by the public. Communities oriented toward authoritarianism tend to position the current Republican Party as a form of resistance against what they perceive

### Embassy Shooting Synthesis

Influencers and end-users alike deploy illiberal themes as a means of accomplishing several goals. Willingness to engage in extreme discourse acts as a signal of group membership and meters the level of radicalization within the group ideology. Communal agreement of these themes reinforces the group worldview and serves to drive moderate users further towards the more extreme versions of this worldview. The specific context of discourse within the realm of events related to Israel provides a unique snapshot of the utility and flexibility of illiberal themes in online political spheres. Each specific sphere utilizes the context in different ways for similar purposes.

Left-wing ideology holds moral superiority as an essential facet of discourse, with moral structure based on power imbalances. When applied to Israel, this discursive pattern reveals an ideal model of a perceived oppressor-victim relationship, allowing left-wing communities to reinforce and radicalize users by positing the moral absolutism of Israeli immorality and Palestinian morality. The anti-Israel right-wing is based on conspiratorial worldviews, almost universally centered on Israeli/Jewish influence. In Israel-centered discursive spaces, users frequently reframe events as confirmation of conspiratorial event models. Again, repetition

as the erosion of traditional conservatism, thereby endorsing an authoritarian establishment while continuing to deploy anti-establishment discursive themes. By contrast, communities for which anti-establishment framing is central tend to reject state-centered enforcement, instead promoting individualized, “lone wolf” or grassroots acts of violence that require no formal coordination and no intervention by government institutions.

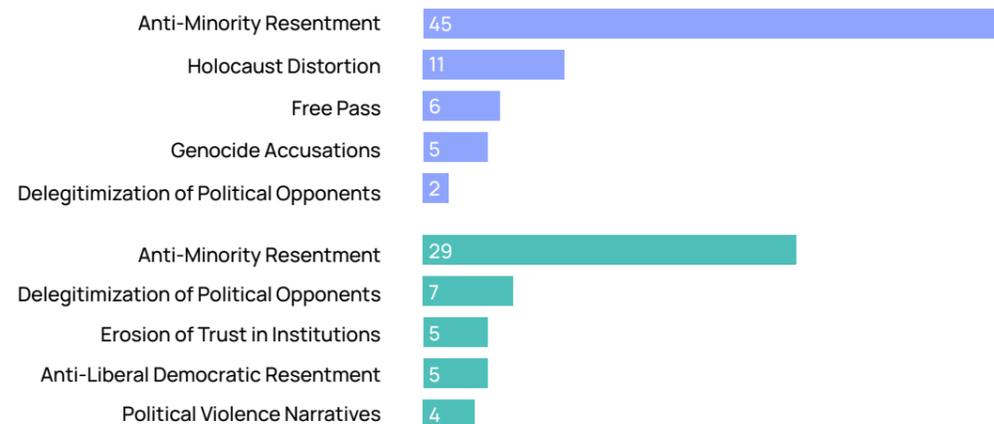
of these illiberal themes serves to reinforce and radicalize collective worldviews. Pro-Israel right-wing individuals tend to hold contrastive ideologies, mapping their worldview as a reaction to opposing worldviews. Rather than explicitly engaging in Israel-related illiberality, groups in this sphere use the opportunity as an example of the inherent immorality and illegitimacy of opposing political groups. In other words, these groups point to the left-wing’s perceived immoral stance on the event as evidence of their inherent illegitimacy.

## 6.3 Case Study 3

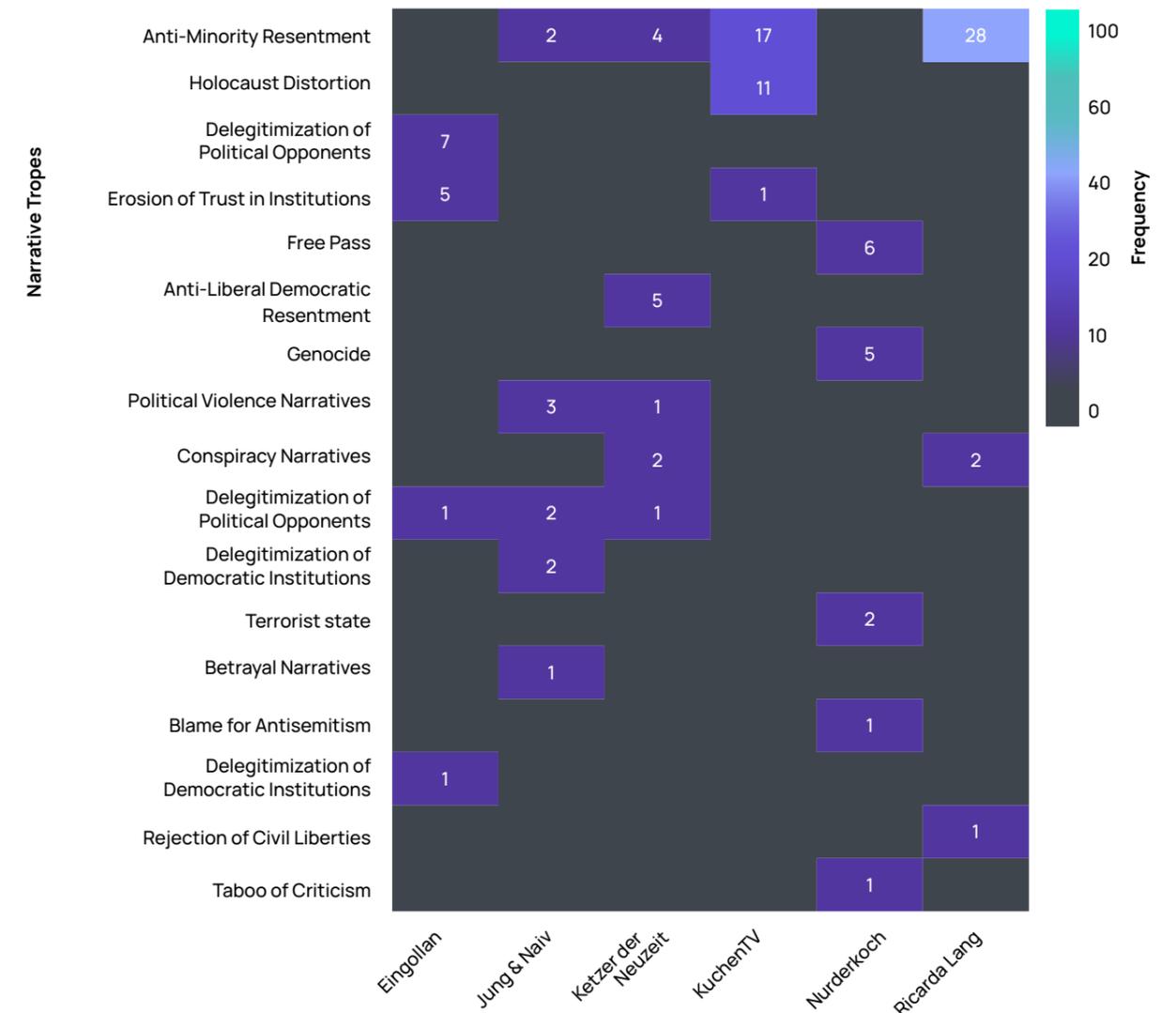
### Frankfurt Cityscape Controversy (Germany)

The discourse event examined here is the public controversy surrounding Friedrich Merz's statement that Germany had made progress in migration policy but continued to face "a problem in the cityscape," appearing to link visible urban disorder to migration and the presence of people without residence status. Although the statement itself was brief, it triggered a broad and polarized debate across German-language social media platforms, in which the notion of *Stadtbild* became a symbolic shorthand for questions of migration, security, belonging, and national identity.

#### Quantitative Overview



#### Heatmap – Dominant Tropes by Influencer



The corpus consists of **11 individual threads** published on **YouTube** and **Instagram**, associated with posts by politically relevant German-language influencers from across the ideological spectrum. In total, **1,949 user comments** were analyzed. The material includes long-form commentary, short-form video clips, and reposted media excerpts, enabling observation of discourse dynamics across different platform formats.

The corpus is politically asymmetrical. While left-leaning influencers are present (Nurderkoch, Jung & Naiv, Ricarda Lang), the **highest narrative density and escalation potential** is found in **right-wing or right-adjacent influencer spaces** (eingollan, KuchenTV). Across the dataset, Merz's statement is rarely discussed as a narrowly policy-oriented remark. Instead, it functions as a **discursive trigger**, activating broader interpretive frames related to migration, national decline, elite betrayal, and cultural threat.

## Left-Wing Discourse Spheres

### \_\_\_\_Nurderkoch

#### Influencer Reframing

Nurderkoch is a left-leaning political content creator whose communication style relies on irony, critical deconstruction, and media commentary. Within the cityscape debate, he positions himself explicitly against ethnicized and culturalized interpretations of urban disorder. His framing challenges Merz's statement not by denying social problems, but by questioning the analytical and moral implications of linking "the cityscape" to migration in a generalized manner.

In videos such as "Stadtbild, Paschas, Zahnarzttermine" (GER-CS-IG-07[20251016]) and "Ein Journalist fragt Merz" (GER-CS-IG-08[20251020]), Nurderkoch frames Merz's remark as a rhetorical maneuver that shifts responsibility away from policy and toward visible minorities. His tone remains critical but bounded, emphasizing democratic disagreement and discursive accountability rather than moral panic or enemy construction.

### \_\_\_\_Jung & Naiv (Tilo Jung)

#### Influencer Reframing

Jung & Naiv is a journalistically oriented, left-liberal format that emphasizes critical questioning and procedural rationality. In the relevant thread, Merz's statement appears within a broader press conference context, including discussions on foreign policy and Israel. The format itself does not amplify the *Stadtbild* frame but embeds it within a multiperspectival, institutional setting.

#### Audience Response

The comment sections under Nurderkoch's posts are fragmented and reactive. Illiberal or exclusionary statements do appear, but they overwhelmingly originate from users explicitly opposing Nurderkoch's framing. Typical examples include "He's just describing reality—what every normal citizen sees but isn't allowed to say" (GER-CS-IG-07[20251016]) or "He says what the majority has always thought." (GER-CS-IG-07[20251016]). These comments construct public discourse as censored and implicitly **delegitimize media and political institutions**.

However, such statements remain isolated and are rarely expanded into sustained narratives. They often encounter pushback or ironic dismissal and do not coalesce into a coherent interpretive framework. As a result, the discourse space remains narratively weak in illiberal terms.

#### Audience Response

The comment section diverges significantly from the influencer's restrained framing. While illiberal statements in the narrow sense are rare, **antisemitic narratives emerge prominently due to the broader thematic context**. Comments such as "Israel gets away with everything because of our history" (GER-CS-YT-09[20251020]) or accusations that Germany's rhetoric on Gaza is morally

corrupt construct state actors as ethically illegitimate.

These statements do not directly target Merz's cityscape remark but illustrate how **institutional criticism can slide**

### \_\_\_\_Ricarda Lang

#### Influencer Reframing

Ricarda Lang, a leading Green Party politician, addresses the cityscape debate explicitly and normatively. Across several Instagram posts, she rejects Merz's framing as discriminatory and misleading, emphasizing social cohesion, women's safety without ethnicization, and the dangers of stigmatizing rhetoric. Her positioning is clearly progressive and party-political, aiming to reframe the debate in terms of inclusion and democratic responsibility.

#### Audience Response

Despite this framing, Lang's comment sections consistently contain exclusionary statements, albeit at low density. A recurring pattern involves **rhetorical distancing**

## Right-Wing Discourse Spheres

### \_\_\_\_Michelle Gollan (eingollan)

#### Influencer Reframing

Michelle Gollan is a right-wing conservative influencer with ideological proximity to the AfD. Her content centers on migration, media distrust, and perceived left-wing domination of institutions. In her cityscape-related

**into conspiratorial and antisemitic interpretations**. Importantly, these narratives are not consolidated or reinforced by the influencer framing and remain episodic rather than generative.

**combined with partial agreement**, such as "I can't stand Merz, but for once he's right" (GER-CS-IG-13[20251021]) or "I'm a mother and daughter, and the cityscape really does bother me." (GER-CS-IG-13[20251021]). These comments implicitly adopt Merz's problem definition while rejecting his political persona.

In some cases, the rhetoric sharpens, for example when users refer to "migrant men from certain countries" who allegedly "destroy the country." (GER-CS-IG-15[20251023]). While these statements rarely escalate into explicit violence or institutional delegitimization, they **reproduce anti-minority resentment** in tension with the influencer's framing. Overall, the discourse remains fragmented and lacks cumulative radicalization.

videos, Gollan frames Merz's statement as a long-overdue articulation of suppressed truth, emphasizing courage and realism.

#### Audience Response

The comment sections show strong alignment with this framing. Users frequently **delegitimize media and**

**political institutions**, for example by labeling public broadcasting a “*dumbing-down and propaganda machine*” (GER-CS-YT-01[20251026]) or referring to established parties as “*cartel parties*.” (GER-CS-YT-01[20251026]). Merz’s statement is used as a springboard for broader narratives of national decline and elite betrayal.

### Leonard Jäger (Ketzer der Neuzeit)

#### Influencer Reframing

Leonard Jäger operates within a right-wing extremist and partially fundamentalist milieu. His framing of the cityscape debate is openly confrontational and historically loaded. Merz’s statement is not problematized but radicalized, serving as an entry point into broader narratives of ethnic threat and national rebirth.

#### Audience Response

The comment sections display the **highest level of discursive escalation**. Alongside **anti-minority resentment**, explicit calls

### Tim Heldt (KuchenTV)

#### Influencer Reframing

Tim Heldt, known as KuchenTV, occupies an intermediary position. While not overtly extremist, he regularly normalizes migration-critical positions and addresses a younger, entertainment-oriented audience. His engagement with the cityscape debate is pragmatic rather than ideological, framing Merz’s remark as common sense.

Extreme comments openly endorse the AfD and construct **political opponents as existential enemies**, e.g. claims that all other parties are “left-wing extremists destroying Germany.” Although numerically limited, these comments are embedded in a coherent narrative environment that normalizes exclusionary and authoritarian interpretations.

**for violence** appear, such as demands that Merkel be “*publicly hanged*” (GER-CS-YT-03[20251031]) or that migrants be removed “*by crusade if not peacefully*.” (GER-CS-YT-03[20251031]). **References to the Nazi era** and the “*completion of the German Reich*” (GER-CS-YT-03[20251031]) further indicate a normalization of extremist symbolism.

Although these comments constitute a minority, their explicitness marks a clear boundary shift: violence is not merely implied but articulated as a legitimate political instrument.

#### Audience Response

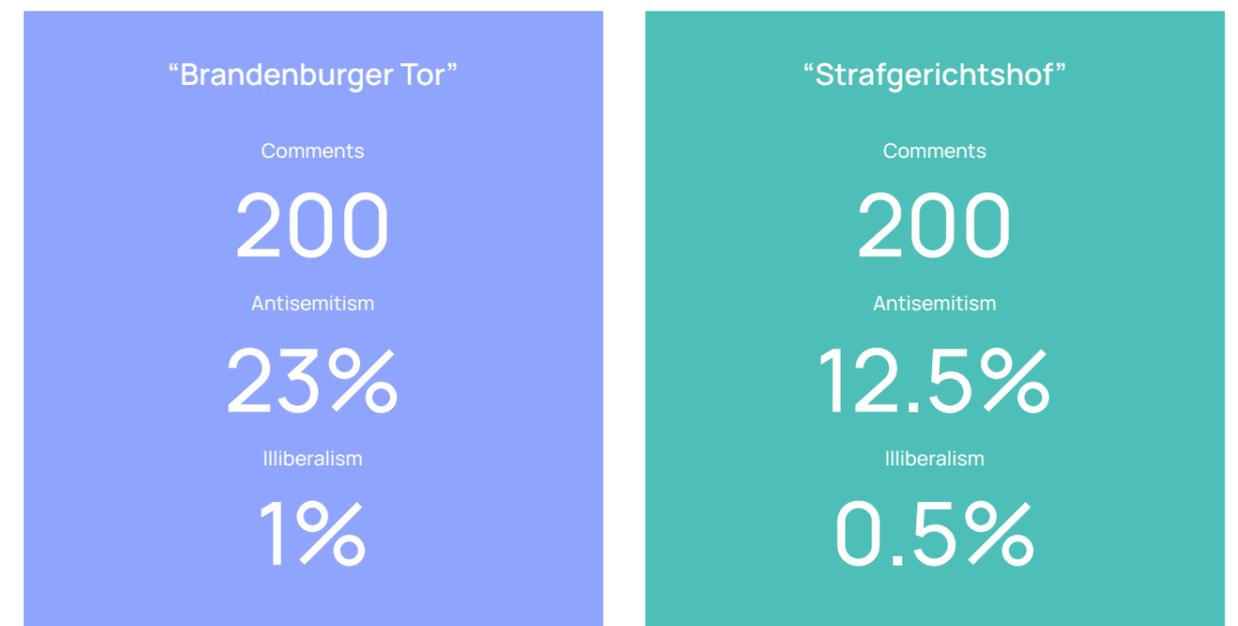
Users translate this framing into everyday **exclusionary language**, for example claims that “*there are Moroccans on every corner of the main station*” (GER-CS-YT-06[20251024]) or that women no longer feel safe. Coded references such as “*61 based*” (GER-CS-YT-06[20251024]) introduce **authoritarian symbolism** in an ironic register, lowering the threshold for extremist interpretation without overt radicalization.

## 6.4 Case Study 4

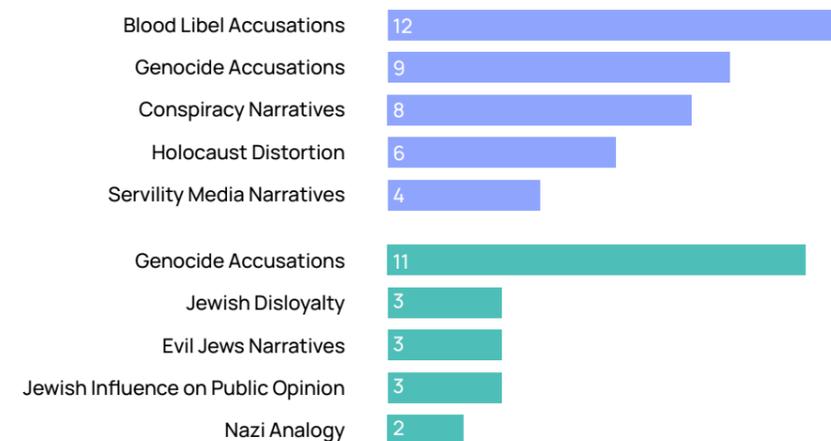
### Micro-Level Analysis of Left-Wing Online Discourse in Germany

The discourse event examined in this section concerns reactions to two Instagram posts by Tarek Baé addressing Israel’s military actions in Gaza and Germany’s political relationship with Israel. The first post “*Brandenburger Tor*” (GER-BAE-IG-01[20251007]) responds to the two-year commemoration of October 7 in Berlin. The second post “*Strafgerichtshof*” (GER-BAE-IG-02[20251031]) comments on the German education minister’s visit to Israel and the role of international legal institutions.

#### Quantitative Overview



#### Top Narrative Tropes by Discourse Environment (Absolute Frequencies)



The corpus consists of **2 Instagram threads**, each with **200 analyzed comments**, resulting in a total of **400 comments**. Within this corpus, **71 antisemitic comments** were identified (**46 in the first thread, 25 in the second**). Other forms of illiberal discourse appear only marginally.

Unlike the Charlie Kirk and cityscape corpora, this dataset is **thematically narrow and highly concentrated**. Antisemitic expressions are not distributed across unrelated political topics, but emerge almost exclusively in direct connection to Israel, Zionism, and Germany's historical responsibility.

### Influencer Reframing

Tarek Baé is a left-leaning activist influencer whose content focuses on anti-imperialism, anti-racism, and criticism of Western foreign policy, particularly with regard to Israel and the Middle East. His communication style is emotionally charged and morally accusatory, relying heavily on symbolic language, historical analogy, and normative claims about justice and accountability.

In the “*Brandenburger Tor*” post, Baé responds to the illumination of the Brandenburger Tor with the colors of the Israeli flag - a commemoration of the two-year anniversary of October 7, 2023 - with a tendentious post that presents as factual statistics disavowed by the organization that presented them, reframe Israel's actions in Gaza explicitly as a genocide, and situates Germany as morally complicit.

In the “*Strafgerichtshof*” post, Baé shifts the focus to Germany's political elite and international institutions. The visit of the German education minister to Israel is framed as evidence of moral hypocrisy and institutional failure. Baé does not explicitly

make antisemitic statements, though does present several misleading or incorrect claims; his framing also establishes a moral absolutism in which Israel is positioned as unequivocally genocidal and Germany as structurally complicit, leaving little interpretive space for differentiation or contestation.

### Audience Response

The comment sections under Baé's posts display a **high density of antisemitic interpretations**, which consistently build upon and radicalize the influencer's framing. Importantly, these narratives are not random or decontextualized; they are explicitly anchored in the themes introduced by the posts—Gaza, genocide, German responsibility, and Israel's international role.

A dominant pattern is the **collectivization and moral essentialization of Israel and Jews**. Comments such as “*We must slowly realize that they will never learn from their history*” (GER-BAE-IG-01[20251007]) portray Israel, or perhaps Jews, as inherently incapable of moral development, implicitly extending culpability across generations. This logic shifts from political critique to essentialist condemnation.

Another recurring narrative is the **delegitimization of Israel through extreme moral comparison and inversion**, exemplified by statements like “*This country is the worst country in history, along with Israhell*.” (GER-BAE-IG-01[20251007]). Here, **Israel** is linguistically transformed into a **uniquely evil entity**, positioned alongside or beyond historically recognized perpetrators of mass violence.

**Conspiratorial antisemitism** becomes particularly salient in comments asserting global Jewish control, for example: “*The*

*world believes GAZA is occupied by Israel, but the truth is that the world is occupied by Israel...except for GAZA.*” (GER-BAE-IG-01[20251007]). Such statements move beyond criticism of Israeli policy and articulate a classic antisemitic worldview in which Jews or Israel are imagined as omnipresent, hidden rulers of global affairs.

In the second thread, antisemitism is further personalized and nationalized. The German education minister is rejected explicitly on the basis of her Jewish identity, as in comments claiming that “*Germany is ruled by Zionists*” (GER-BAE-IG-02[20251031]), that her actions can be explained “*because she's Jewish, nobody knows that. Who knows how many Jews are still in office*” (GER-BAE-IG-02[20251031]), or because of “*Jewish Zionists exploiting the German people for Israhell*.” (GER-BAE-IG-02[20251031]). These statements combine **Jewish loyalty tropes** with institutional delegitimization, suggesting that Jewish actors cannot represent national interests and are inherently disloyal.

Notably, these narratives often frame antisemitism as political critique or moral courage. Statements such as “*If you don't support Israel, you don't get a position*” (GER-BAE-IG-02[20251031]) or labeling the Ministry of Education a “*Ministry of Genocide*” (GER-BAE-IG-02[20251031]) repackage antisemitic assumptions as whistleblowing against an allegedly corrupt system. The antisemitic content is thus presented not as hatred, but as truth-telling against taboo.

## Synthesis

The user discourse under Tarek Baé's posts demonstrates how antisemitic interpretations can emerge through **gradual discursive shifts rather than explicit rupture**. Criticism of Israeli state actions is repeatedly expanded into essentialized judgments about Israel and, in some cases, Jews as a collective. In this process, political responsibility is transformed into moral and ontological blame.

**Conspiratorial narratives** play a stabilizing role by attributing complex political dynamics to hidden Jewish or Zionist influence, particularly within German institutions. These interpretations offer a simplified explanatory framework that resolves ambiguity by personalizing and collectivizing responsibility.

Notably, antisemitic content is often articulated through self-legitimizing frames such as truth-telling or moral courage, which allow it to circulate as principled political critique rather than overt prejudice. The analytical significance of the corpus thus lies less in the volume of antisemitic statements than in the **discursive mechanisms that render them plausible and morally justified within an ostensibly political debate**.

## 6.5 Cross-Case Synthesis: Reinforcing Dynamics of Discursive Escalation and Normalization

### United States: Transgressive Eliminationism and Multi-Directional Polarization

U.S. comment sections show a **highly polarized, transgressive, and violence-oriented illiberalism**. Compared to Germany, it is more extreme, more explicitly eliminationist, and more entwined with racialized and religious worldviews. Antisemitism is far more overt and mainstreamed.

#### 1 Explicit Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence

Far more common than in Germany:

- Celebrating assassinations
- Endorsing future killings (politicians, political opponents, Jews, Muslims, trans people)
- Calls for crackdowns, mass arrests, or executions
- Embracing revolution, civil war, or authoritarian "law and order"

**Violence is not just justified—it's frequently celebrated or demanded** as a political instrument.

#### 2 Delegitimization of Political Opponents

Both left and right deploy this, although right-wing discourse is more eliminationist:

- Left-wingers framed as terrorists, demons, invaders
- Right-wingers framed as fascists and Nazis
- Both sides call each other existential threats requiring suppression

**Political pluralism is depicted as impossible; coexistence is rejected** in favor of total victory.

#### 3 Authoritarian Law-and-Order Narratives

Massive demand for:

- Banning political opponents from public life
- Shutting down universities
- Deporting entire communities
- Banning protests
- Suspending civil liberties

**Illiberalism** is articulated not only as critique but as a **governance imaginary, accompanied by concrete policy demands**.

#### 4 Conspiracy Narratives (Non-Antisemitic + Antisemitic, Highly Intensified)

U.S. threads are saturated with conspiratorial reasoning:

- False flag (Israel, FBI, "deep state," CIA, Mossad)
- ZOG / "Jewluminati" / globalist control
- Government staging shootings to pass laws
- Ideological infiltration of institutions

**Conspiracy becomes a default explanatory framework** applied to virtually all political events.

#### 5 Anti-Minority Resentment & Hierarchies of Belonging

This includes:

- Anti-Jewish conspiracism
- Anti-Muslim and Islamophobic narratives
- Anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ demonization
- Racialized arguments about crime and citizenship

**Communities are constructed as threats whose rights should be curtailed** or who deserve violence.

#### 6 Erosion of Trust in Institutions (Hyperpolarized)

Discourses often assert:

- Government = tyrannical
- Media = lying, traitorous, Jewish-controlled, leftist-controlled, or capitalist-corrupted
- Universities = indoctrination hubs
- Elections = rigged
- Justice system = corrupt / political

**Narratives of systemic collapse make authoritarian remedies seem legitimate** and even necessary.

#### 7 Schadenfreude, Mockery, and Dehumanization

Far more pronounced than in the German corpus:

- Ridiculing victims of shootings
- Celebrating the deaths of political opponents
- Using racialized, religious, and sexualized dehumanization

**Violence is normalized by stripping victims of humanity** and treating their suffering as entertainment or justice.

## Germany: Apocalyptic Moralism and Anti-Left Enemy Construction

German comment sections exhibit a **right-wing, anti-left, anti-institutional illiberalism** centered on enemy construction, delegitimization, and apocalyptic moralization. The patterns are ideologically coherent across the different influencers analyzed.

### 1 Enemy Construction & Demonization of "the Left"

The dominant illiberal mechanism is the portrayal of the political left as:

- Violent attackers
- Infiltrators of institutions
- Destroyers of democracy
- Existential enemies of "the people"

**The left becomes a quasi-mythical antagonist** against which conservative Germans must defend themselves.

### 2 Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions

German comment threads repeatedly claim:

- Germany is no longer a democracy
- Courts and the justice system are "left-wing" and "corrupt"
- Elections no longer reflect the will of the people
- State protection is unavailable for conservatives

**Institutional trust collapses; democracy is framed as a façade** controlled by hostile forces.

### 3 Conspiracy Narratives (Non-Antisemitic + Antisemitic)

Frequent conspiratorial constructions include:

- The state or "the left" staging events
- Media as part of a left-wing propaganda machine
- Hitler and the Nazis being "left-wing" (revisionist reframing)
- "Infiltration" by leftists in all societal spheres

**A conspiratorial worldview supports a narrative of victimization and imminent threat**, justifying defensive mobilization.

### 4 Holocaust Distortion / Inversion

Key patterns:

- Labeling the left as "fascist"
- Claiming that 1933 is "repeating" itself
- Equating left-wing institutions with Nazi methods
- Reframing Nazis as "left-wing"

**This enables right-wing actors to claim moral superiority and justify defensive aggression** by positioning themselves as victims of a new totalitarianism.

### 5 Moralized Calls for Violence and Self-Defense

Expressions include:

- "We must fight the left"
- Christian-nationalist appeals to "an eye for an eye"
- Preparing for violent resistance
- Fantasies of armed self-defense

**Violence becomes framed as protective, moral, and necessary** rather than aggressive or extremist.

## Comparative Analysis: How Context Shapes Illiberal Discourse

Discursive Feature	United States	Germany
Intensity of violence endorsement	Explicit, frequent, often celebrated	Present but subdued; framed as reluctant self-defense
Target of illiberalism	Multiple out-groups (leftists, Jews, Muslims, LGBTQ+, immigrants)	"The Left" as an ideological enemy
Holocaust distortion	Nazi analogies used in both pro- and anti-Israel discourse	Rewriting Nazis as left-wing; equivalence to today's left
Conspiracy intensity	Much broader: ZOG, Mossad, Deep State, globalist elites	High but mostly political (left-wing infiltration)
Institutional delegitimization	Institutions framed as tyrannical, corrupt, or foreign-controlled	Democracy framed as broken or captured by the left
Affective tone	Aggressive, transgressive, eliminationist, often sadistic	Apocalyptic, moralized, Christian-nationalist
Discursive structure	More fragmented, multi-polar, driven by both left & right extremes	More coherent, ideologically homogeneous

# Part Four

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## Computational Extensions, Implications, and Conclusions

## 7. LLM-Enhanced Methods and the Future of Digital Hate Research

### 7.1 Introduction and Scope

This chapter presents an exploratory computational analysis of the Washington Embassy (WA) and Charlie Kirk (CA) discourse corpora. The analyses build directly on the annotation work conducted within the Decoding Antisemitism (DA) project and are intended to complement the qualitative and interpretive findings presented in earlier chapters.

Accordingly, the computational analysis reported here operates on DA-coded ideation labels and should be read in continuity with the project's annotation framework.

The chapter pursues two analytical perspectives. First, unsupervised clustering methods are used to explore dominant lexical and rhetorical structures in the data without reference to labels/codes. These analyses aim to identify overarching discourse regimes and assess whether meaningful variation emerges at the surface-text level. Second, supervised learning is applied exclusively at the ideation level, which represents the most prevalent and consistently annotated layer across both datasets.

In this chapter, large language models are not used as end-to-end classifiers of antisemitism, but as components within a broader supervised and interpretive pipeline, primarily in support of feature representation, contextualization, and analytical interpretation.

Rather than optimizing classification performance, the focus of this chapter lies on identifying systematic patterns, boundary cases, and limitations of computational approaches when applied to DA-coded discourse data. In doing so, the chapter contributes to an understanding of which aspects of the DA coding scheme are amenable to automation, where automated methods reliably reproduce expert distinctions, and where interpretive ambiguity persists.

This chapter does not aim to advance detection accuracy beyond existing benchmarks. Instead, it examines how expert-informed interpretive distinctions—spanning antisemitism, illiberalism, and anti-democratic resentment—behave under computational abstraction, and how supervised, unsupervised, and LLM-assisted methods can be combined into an analytical infrastructure that **scales discourse analysis while remaining grounded in expert judgement.**

## 7.2 Unsupervised Approaches

### 7.2.1 Analytical Framing

Unsupervised methods were applied to both corpora to explore whether dominant lexical and rhetorical structures emerge without reference to predefined categories. In the context of DA-coded discourse data, such methods are not expected to recover ideation categories directly. Instead, they serve as exploratory tools for identifying dominant discourse regimes and assessing the degree to which surface-level textual similarity reflects meaningful variation.

Three clustering approaches were evaluated for both datasets: K-Means clustering, agglomerative clustering using cosine distance and average linkage, and DBSCAN. Model selection was guided primarily by cosine silhouette scores, complemented by inspection of cluster size distributions and noise proportions.

Method	Parameters	Clusters(k)	Noise(%)	Largest cluster(%)	Silhouette (cosine)
KMeans	cosine distance, k = 10	10	0.00	63.07	0.8657
Agglomerative	cosine distance, average linkage, k = 10	10	0.00	63.07	0.8529
DBSCAN	cosine distance, eps = 0.1, min_samples = 10	20	5.31	66.60	1.0000

Overall, the WA results indicate that unsupervised methods reliably detect dominant lexical regimes but tend to collapse heterogeneous ideation into a small number of large clusters. High internal separation metrics, therefore, should not be interpreted as evidence of fine-grained conceptual differentiation.

### 7.2.2 Washington Embassy (WA)

The WA corpus comprises 2,280 comments. For both K-Means and agglomerative clustering, the strongest internal separation was observed at k = 10, yielding high silhouette scores (0.866 and 0.853, respectively). Despite these values, cluster size distributions were highly uneven. In both cases, the largest cluster contained approximately 63% of all comments, while the smallest clusters comprised fewer than twenty items.

DBSCAN was evaluated across a grid of parameter settings. The selected configuration (eps = 0.1, min\_samples = 10) produced twenty clusters with a low noise proportion (approximately 5%). While this configuration yielded near-perfect internal metrics, these results primarily reflect density structure in high-dimensional TF-IDF space and do not necessarily correspond to interpretable or ideationally distinct discourse categories.

### 7.2.3 Charlie Kirk (CK)

The CK corpus comprises 2,814 comments and exhibits even stronger dominance effects. As in WA, both K-Means and agglomerative clustering performed best at k = 10, achieving silhouette scores of 0.933 in both cases. Here, the largest cluster accounted for approximately 75% of all comments, indicating an exceptionally dominant discourse mode following the event.

DBSCAN (eps = 0.1, min\_samples = 10) identified seventeen clusters with minimal noise (approximately 1.6%). As in the WA analysis, the strong internal metrics associated with DBSCAN primarily reflect density-based separation rather than ideational interpretability.

Method	Parameters	Clusters(k)	Noise(%)	Largest cluster(%)	Silhouette (cosine)
KMeans	cosine distance, k = 10	10	0.00	75.20	0.9328
Agglomerative	cosine distance, average linkage, k = 10	10	0.00	75.20	0.9327
DBSCAN	cosine distance, eps = 0.1, min_samples = 10	17	1.56	76.39	1.0000

The CK results reinforce the pattern observed in WA: unsupervised clustering captures repetition and dominance in discourse but offers limited insight into ideation-level distinctions as defined by the DA framework.

### 7.2.4 Interpretation

Across both datasets, unsupervised methods consistently produced very high internal separation scores alongside extremely skewed cluster size distributions. Rather than indicating analytical success, these patterns underscore a key limitation of unsupervised approaches in this context. Surface-level similarity is often driven by repetition of phrases, narrative frames, or rhetorical motifs, while ideation-level distinctions depend on contextual interpretation and theoretical grounding.

Accordingly, unsupervised clustering is best understood as a diagnostic tool for identifying dominant discourse regimes and shifts in rhetorical emphasis, rather than as a substitute for expert-informed categorization.

## 7.3 Supervised Approaches (Ideation Level)

### 7.3.1 Scope and Methodological Considerations

Supervised learning was applied exclusively at the ideation level, which constitutes the most prevalent and consistently annotated layer of the DA coding scheme. Finer-grained codes, while theoretically informative, are sparsely populated and often context-dependent, making them unsuitable for reliable supervised modelling in the present setting.

All supervised models, therefore, learn to reproduce DA ideation labels, and their performance reflects both the strengths and conceptual boundaries of the underlying annotation framework.

Model	Feature representation	Precision (weighted)	Recall (weighted)	F1 (weighted)	Accuracy
TF-IDF + Logistic Regression	TF-IDF (n-grams)	0.656	0.629	0.641	0.629
TF-IDF + Linear SVM	TF-IDF (n-grams)	0.660	0.646	0.653	0.646
DistilBERT	Transformer embeddings	0.646	0.666	0.651	0.666

Per-class analysis shows that performance was driven primarily by the dominant ideation categories. Logistic regression achieved strong results for Not Antisemitic and moderate performance for *Contextual Antisemitism* and *Illiberalism*, while *Counter-Speech* and *Unclear* exhibited zero recall due to extremely limited class support.

Three models were evaluated for both corpora: TF-IDF-based logistic regression, TF-IDF-based linear SVM, and a fine-tuned DistilBERT model.

### 7.3.2 Washington Embassy (WA)

In the WA corpus, overall accuracy ranged from 0.629 to 0.666 across models. DistilBERT achieved the highest accuracy, while the linear SVM yielded the strongest weighted F1 score. Macro F1 values remained low for all models, reflecting persistent difficulty in learning minority ideation categories.

Error analysis indicates that misclassifications occurred predominantly along conceptual boundaries defined within the DA scheme. In particular, *Contextual Antisemitism* and *Illiberalism* were mutually confused in nineteen cases. Additional confusions were observed between *Not Antisemitic* and adjacent ideation categories. These patterns reflect known interpretive tensions rather than isolated model errors.

## Charlie Kirk (CK)

In the CK corpus, DistilBERT substantially outperformed linear models, achieving an accuracy of 0.735 and a weighted F1 score of 0.698. This improvement is likely related to the greater lexical and rhetorical homogeneity of CK discourse, which favors sequence-based modelling.

Model	Feature representation	Precision (weighted)	Recall (weighted)	F1 (weighted)	Accuracy
TF-IDF + Logistic Regression	TF-IDF (n-grams)	0.665	0.622	0.641	0.622
TF-IDF + Linear SVM	TF-IDF (n-grams)	0.659	0.652	0.649	0.652
DistilBERT	Transformer embeddings	0.700	0.735	0.698	0.735

Nevertheless, macro F1 values remained modest, and minority ideation categories again exhibited poor recall. Boundary confusions between *Contextual Antisemitism* and *Illiberalism* persisted, mirroring the pattern observed in the WA corpus.

### 7.3.3 Interpretation

Across both corpora, supervised models reliably recover coarse ideation structure but consistently struggle with class imbalance, sparsely populated categories, and conceptual boundaries inherent to the DA coding scheme. Transformer-based models improve overall accuracy in settings characterized by greater discourse homogeneity but do not resolve these structural challenges.

Importantly, many observed errors occur in cases where human annotators themselves must rely on contextual judgement, underscoring the limits of automated ideation classification.

## 7.4 Implications and Outlook for Future Research

Read in the context of the report's broader argument, these findings illustrate how computational methods can function as components within a larger analytical ecosystem—one oriented toward early identification of discursive escalation rather than prediction or enforcement.

The analyses presented in this chapter highlight several implications for the use of computational methods in research on antisemitism, hate speech, illiberalism, and related forms of anti-democratic resentment. Across both corpora, the results underscore the central role of annotation frameworks: automated models primarily learn the structure, assumptions, and ambiguities of expert-defined categories rather than detecting harmful discourse independently. Computational outputs must therefore be interpreted as reflections of annotation practices and theoretical decisions, not as standalone indicators of toxicity or extremism.

A second implication concerns the role of unsupervised methods. Clustering approaches proved effective in capturing dominant and repetitive discourse patterns but offered limited insight into ideation-level distinctions and boundary cases. This suggests that unsupervised methods are most useful for exploratory analyses and for identifying broad discourse regimes or shifts in thematic emphasis, while remaining insufficient for reproducing the finer-grained distinctions that emerge through expert qualitative analysis.

Supervised approaches, by contrast, appear most viable at comparatively coarse levels of abstraction. In this chapter, supervised learning was restricted to the ideation level due to its strong annotation coverage and relatively stable class structure. This restriction reflects the exploratory scope of the analysis rather than a principled limitation. As annotation coverage expands and class imbalance is addressed, supervised methods could be extended to additional DA-informed labels, including more fine-grained ideational or rhetorical categories. Multi-label classification represents a particularly relevant direction, given that antisemitic, illiberal, and anti-democratic expressions frequently overlap within individual comments.

Looking ahead, the findings of this chapter also point toward the gradual emergence of modular analytical pipelines for monitoring toxic and anti-democratic discourse. Within such pipelines, supervised models trained on expert-coded data may serve as relatively stable reference layers, while unsupervised and LLM-assisted components support the exploration of emerging narratives, shifts in rhetorical framing, or changes in discourse intensity. Rather than producing fixed or final outputs, these components would operate iteratively, allowing analysts to move between aggregated signals and close qualitative inspection as discourse evolves across events, platforms, and time.

In this sense, future early-warning infrastructures are best understood not as singular or closed systems, but as evolving assemblages of data, models, and expert practices. Their effectiveness depends less on the performance of any individual algorithm than on the coherence of the pipeline as a whole, including how new data streams are integrated, how annotation frameworks are revised in response to emerging discourse patterns, and how insights circulate between computational components and interpretive analysis.

Within this framework, early warning refers to the structured and ongoing observation of discursive dynamics at scale. Rather than predicting individual behavior, violent outcomes, or identifying specific “extremist” actors, early-warning systems are oriented toward monitoring aggregate patterns of escalation and consolidation in online discourse. These include, for example, the increasing dominance of particular discourse regimes, shifts from plural or contested framing toward moral absolutism, and the growing density or normalization of antisemitic, illiberal, or anti-democratic repertoires following triggering events.

Computational methods contribute to early warning by surfacing such patterns across large volumes of data and by enabling comparative, longitudinal analysis across events, platforms, and time. The resulting signals are inherently probabilistic and aggregate in nature. They are not designed to trigger automated enforcement, but to inform expert assessment, prioritization, and preventive intervention by researchers, civil society actors, and policymakers. In this sense, early-warning infrastructures function as instruments for structuring attention, allowing human analysts to identify moments that warrant closer qualitative examination and contextual judgement.

Such pipelines would enable early-warning not by predicting individual instances of harmful speech, but by supporting the sustained observation of discursive dynamics. In doing so, they create the conditions under which shifts toward toxic, illiberal, or anti-democratic patterns can be identified early, contextualized by experts, and assessed in relation to broader political and social developments.

Overall, the results of this chapter indicate that computational methods are best understood as instruments for structuring attention and supporting expert analysis across large-scale discourse data. Within such a framework, the Decoding Antisemitism methodology serves not as a closed or exclusive model, but as a transferable starting point for examining a broader range of toxic, illiberal, and anti-democratic dynamics in online communication.

# 8. Ethics and Safety Considerations

This study involves the systematic analysis of extremist, antisemitic, and illiberal discourse circulating in public digital environments. Such research entails specific ethical, legal, and safety-related challenges. The following section outlines how these risks were identified and addressed and clarifies the ethical boundaries within which the study operates.

## 8.1 Use of Publicly Available Data

All data analyzed in this study were drawn exclusively from publicly accessible content on major social media platforms, including influencer posts and user comments visible without account membership or special access permissions. No private messages, closed groups, or restricted forums were accessed. The study does not collect, store, or analyze personal identifying information beyond publicly visible usernames, which are treated as non-identifying markers and are not analyzed as individual-level data.

In line with established ethical standards for digital discourse research, the analysis focuses on discursive patterns and collective dynamics, not on individual users. Quoted comments are used illustratively and are anonymized through internal reference codes. The study does not attempt to profile, track, or infer offline identities, motivations, or behaviors of individual users.

## 8.2 Harm Minimization and Responsible Quotation

Given the nature of the material, particular care was taken to minimize harm arising from the reproduction of extremist or violent content. Quotations are included only where analytically necessary to demonstrate specific discursive mechanisms. They are not reproduced for sensational purposes and are contextualized analytically to avoid inadvertent amplification or normalization of harmful narratives.

No graphic material is reproduced. Calls for violence, dehumanizing language, and explicit antisemitic expressions are cited selectively and framed descriptively rather than evaluatively. The study does not link to original posts or accounts and does not encourage further engagement with extremist sources.

## 8.3 Researcher Safety and Well-being

The sustained exposure to violent, hateful, or dehumanizing content poses psychological and emotional risks to researchers. To mitigate these risks, the research process was structured to limit prolonged exposure, distribute analysis tasks across team members, and allow for rotation between qualitative coding, synthesis, and non-exposure-related tasks.

Researchers worked within a team-based environment that allowed for regular debriefing and peer consultation. No individual researcher was required to analyze highly distressing material in isolation or without support. These measures align with best practices for researcher safety in the study of online extremism and hate speech.

## 8.4 Methodological Boundaries and Non-Intervention

This study is observational and analytical in nature. It does not engage in intervention, reporting, moderation, or law enforcement activity. The research team did not interact with users, influencers, or platforms in the course of data collection or analysis.

Similarly, while the study includes an exploratory AI-supported component, no automated moderation, predictive profiling, or real-time monitoring was conducted. The analysis does not produce actionable intelligence about specific individuals or

imminent threats and does not claim causal attribution between online discourse and offline violence.

By maintaining clear boundaries between analysis, interpretation, and intervention, the study adheres to established ethical standards for research on politically sensitive and potentially harmful digital content.

# 9. Significance and Policy Implications

This study demonstrates that contemporary illiberal and extremist discourse is best understood not as a marginal phenomenon confined to fringe actors, but as a structurally embedded feature of mainstream digital communication environments. The findings have direct implications for platform governance, counter-extremism policy, and democratic resilience strategies.

## 9.1 Implications for Platform Governance

The analysis shows that illiberal and antisemitic discourse frequently operates below the threshold of explicit rule violations. Much of the material identified in this study relies on indirect framing, insinuation, irony, and narrative alignment rather than overt hate speech or explicit calls for violence. As a result, moderation approaches that depend primarily on keyword detection or ideology-based classification are structurally insufficient.

Effective platform governance therefore requires:

- **Greater attention to discursive patterns and narrative constellations, rather than isolated expressions.**
- **Recognition that context-dependent meaning can produce cumulative harm even where individual posts appear formally compliant.**
- **Improved capacity to identify event-driven escalation, in which discourse intensifies rapidly following triggering incidents.**

These findings suggest that enforcement models focused exclusively on individual content items or user intent are unlikely to address the systemic dynamics through which illiberal discourse normalizes exclusion, delegitimization, and, in some cases, violence.

## 9.2 Implications for Counter-Extremism and Democratic Resilience

The study highlights antisemitism as a particularly salient indicator within broader illiberal ecosystems. Rather than functioning solely as a form of prejudice, antisemitic narratives often operate as a connective discursive grammar that links conspiracy thinking, institutional distrust, and the moral legitimization of hostility across ideological contexts.

From a policy perspective, this implies that:

- **Antisemitism monitoring should be treated as an early-warning signal for wider processes of democratic erosion.**
- **Counter-extremism strategies that address ideological silos in isolation risk overlooking cross-cutting narrative infrastructures that enable radicalization.**
- **Educational and prevention initiatives should focus not only on explicit hatred, but on the interpretive habits and narrative shortcuts through which illiberal meaning becomes normalized.**

By foregrounding discourse rather than individual radicalization trajectories, this approach complements security-focused analyses with insight into the communicative conditions that precede mobilization.

## 9.3 Implications for Regulation and Legal Frameworks

The cross-national comparison underscores that regulatory environments shape the form but not the function of illiberal discourse. Legal constraints influence how narratives are articulated—through coding, inversion, or euphemism—but do not eliminate their circulation.

This has two key implications:

1. **Regulatory success should not be measured solely by reductions in explicit violations, but by the persistence or displacement of harmful discourse into less visible forms.**
2. **Policy coordination across jurisdictions is essential, as discursive repertoires increasingly travel across borders and platforms, adapting to local legal conditions.**

Rather than assuming convergence toward a single regulatory solution, the findings support context-sensitive interventions grounded in shared structural indicators.

## 9.4 Implications for Research Infrastructure and Monitoring

Finally, the study demonstrates the value of integrating qualitative discourse analysis with exploratory computational methods. While automated systems are not yet capable of reliably detecting implicit, ironic, or context-dependent extremism, the alignment observed between expert coding and AI-assisted pattern recognition points toward future monitoring capacities.

Policy-relevant research infrastructure should therefore prioritize:

- **High-quality, theory-informed annotation standards.**
- **Transparent integration of human expertise and computational tools.**
- **Governance frameworks that address ethical, legal, and accountability concerns from the outset.**

Such infrastructure would support early-warning analysis, cross-platform comparison, and evidence-based policy development without conflating research with enforcement.

# 10. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how illiberal and extremist discourse circulates, escalates, and stabilizes within contemporary digital environments. Across platforms, discourse events, and national contexts, the findings demonstrate that **illiberalism—with antisemitism as one of its central and most mobilizing drivers—does not operate as a fixed ideology or a marginal phenomenon confined to extremist fringes.** Instead, it functions as a **flexible discursive toolkit:** a set of recurring repertoires that can be selectively activated, recombined, and adapted to local political, cultural, and regulatory conditions.

The comparative analysis of U.S. and German discourse environments illustrates this adaptability with particular clarity. While German-language discourse tends to exhibit more constrained and historically conditioned forms of expression shaped by legal regulation and Holocaust memory, U.S. discourse is characterized by more fragmented, transgressive, and multi-polar dynamics unfolding within a comparatively permissive regulatory environment. Despite these surface-level differences, both contexts rely on structurally identical illiberal repertoires, including enemy construction, delegitimization of democratic institutions, conspiratorial sense-making, and the normalization or justification of violence.

These divergent manifestations are shaped by interacting contextual factors. Legal regimes influence the degree of discursive coding and inversion; historical memory structures the moral vocabulary available to speakers; platform ecosystems affect visibility and migration patterns; and cultural frameworks shape how grievance and threat

are articulated. Taken together, these factors demonstrate that democratic constraints do not eliminate illiberal discourse, but instead shape its form, style, and modes of circulation.

Across cases, the analysis reveals a recurring escalation dynamic, here conceptualized as cascading radicalization. In this process, initially ambiguous or underdetermined framings are progressively reframed by influencers and intensified through audience participation. Meanings are sharpened, affect is amplified, and moral boundaries erode through participatory engagement—most visibly within comment sections.

**The analytical value of this pattern lies not in predicting individual outcomes, but in identifying where and how discursive escalation becomes normalized within mainstream digital environments.**

A central contribution of this study is its demonstration that the process of **radicalization is neither purely top-down nor purely bottom-up.** Influencer framings are not simply adopted by audiences; they are amplified, contested, radicalized, or reoriented through interaction. These audience-driven reinterpretations feed back into broader discourse ecosystems, shaping subsequent framing choices and stabilizing illiberal narratives over time. Radicalization thus emerges as a structurally interactive communicative process rather than the product of isolated actors or messages.

## 10.1 What This Report Contributes

On this basis, the report makes five core contributions to the study of online radicalization and democratic resilience:

- 1 A high-resolution mapping of illiberal and extremist repertoires across platforms and national contexts.**  
The analysis traces how demonization, dehumanization, conspiracy narratives—including antisemitic reframings—victim-blaming, and the normalization of violence circulate between influencer posts and audience comment fields, and how these repertoires escalate from attribution of blame to moral legitimation.
- 2 The first systematic cross-national comparison of how shared illiberal mechanisms manifest differently across democratic settings.**  
By holding analytical categories constant, the study shows how identical discursive mechanisms produce divergent surface forms under different legal regimes, historical memory cultures, and platform ecosystems.
- 3 An empirical model of reinforcing influencer–audience dynamics that co-produce radicalization.**  
Extending prior findings on “antisemitism influencers,” the report demonstrates how engagement economies reward conspiratorial, victim-blaming, and delegitimizing frames, and shows that similar dynamics operate across YouTube, X, TikTok, and Instagram in both the U.S. and Germany.
- 4 The identification of a recurring cascading radicalization pattern.**  
By isolating a recurring escalation sequence from elite ambiguity to participatory intensification, the study provides a framework for locating intervention points within radicalization pipelines without reducing the phenomenon to individual actors or isolated messages. Across all cases, antisemitism emerges as a particularly potent accelerator within this cascade, providing a moral and conspiratorial framework through which escalation is rendered coherent, justified, and durable across ideological contexts.
- 5 Methodological integration of qualitative discourse analysis with scalable monitoring approaches.**  
Integrating multimodal discourse analysis, structured qualitative coding, and exploratory AI-assisted pattern recognition, the project demonstrates how academic best practice can inform applied monitoring frameworks capable of identifying narrative escalation and discursive risk signals.

## 10.2 Anticipated Significance

By situating antisemitism as a structural driver within the broader ecology of illiberal discourse, this study clarifies how extremist narratives move through mainstream digital spaces and why certain conspiratorial frames acquire exceptional connective power. Antisemitic motifs emerge not only as a specific form of hatred, but as part of a wider discursive grammar that connects anti-democratic sentiment, conspiratorial thinking, misogyny, and anti-pluralism. Antisemitism’s significance in this process lies not only in its prevalence, but in its function as a discursive infrastructure that links otherwise disparate grievances into morally coherent worldviews.

The findings complement incident-level security and extremism analyses with fine-grained linguistic and interactional evidence on the communicative pipelines through which violence is legitimized, normalized, or retrospectively justified. At the same time, the cross-national design underscores that illiberalism adapts to democratic constraints rather than disappearing under them. Effective counter-strategies must therefore be context-specific, while still addressing the shared structural patterns that enable illiberal discourse to flourish across democratic societies.

Combined with the insights into the role of antisemitism outlined above, the present findings suggest that, moving forward, research on threats to liberal democracy should focus on:

- **“mainstream discourse” online, rather than only extremist spaces**
- **posts AND comment sections, not just single posts or actors**
- **illiberal discourse, not ideological orientation**
- **discursive closure, not ideological orientation**

The research undertaken in this report is situated within a broader project of defending liberal democracy. It does not merely observe discourse; it illuminates the conditions under which democratic language itself becomes distorted, hollowed out, or weaponized. Liberal democratic erosion does not occur

abruptly. It unfolds gradually—through the narratives that circulate unchecked, the frames that become familiar, and the boundaries that quietly shift until they are no longer recognized as boundaries at all.

## 10.3 Methodological Limitations

As with any complex empirical study, this research faces several constraints. Platform access and data availability—particularly following changes to X/Twitter’s API—limit coverage and completeness, requiring reliance on publicly accessible content across multiple platforms. Cross-national comparability is shaped by differences in platform visibility and ecosystem fragmentation, especially in the German case, which also constitutes an empirical insight into how illiberal discourse adapts to regulatory environments.

The study identifies correlations and recurrent discursive patterns rather than causal mechanisms. Claims about causation would require longitudinal tracking, experimental designs, or triangulation with behavioral data beyond the present scope; these are discussed in our second report, *Extremism and Threats to Liberal Democracy: Policy Implications & Applications*. As an exploratory analysis focused on specific high-profile influencers and discourse events, the findings are not statistically representative of all online extremism but are intended to illuminate mechanisms that generate testable hypotheses for future research.

Finally, while LLM-assisted methods enable scalability, they remain unreliable for irony, sarcasm, context-dependent meaning, and multimodal communication. All computational outputs are therefore interpreted as supportive analytical tools and validated against expert-coded ground truth.

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# Appendix

## Charlie Kirk

### USA

#### Overview

	Left-Wing		Anti-Israel Right-Wing		Pro-Israel Right-Wing		Total	
Comments	1400		600		1000		3000	
Antisemitism %	1.6%		29.2%		2.3%		7.3%	
Illiberalism %	16.1%		16.7%		35.6%		22.7%	
Trope 1	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims	76	Conspiracy Narratives	118	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	108	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	129
Trope 2	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence	51	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims	37	Political Violence Narratives	74	Political Violence Narratives	129
Trope 3	Political Violence Narratives	42	Political Violence Narratives	13	Anti-Minority Resentment	74	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims	116
Trope 4	Non-Antisemitic Conspiracy Narratives	21	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	13	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence	40	Conspiracy Narratives	114
Trope 5	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	15	Genocide Accusations	12	Authoritarian Law & Order	27	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence	95

#### Per Thread

	Comments	#1 Trope	#2 Trope	#3 Trope	#4 Trope	#5 Trope
US-CK-05 Guy Christensen	200	Schadenfreude & Ridicule 14	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 10	Dehumanization 3	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 2	Political Violence Narratives 1
US-CK-10 Hasan Piker	200	Schadenfreude & Ridicule 29	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 18	Genocide 3	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 1	Dehumanization 1

	Comments	#1 Trope	#2 Trope	#3 Trope	#4 Trope	#5 Trope
US-CK-12 Hasan Piker	200	Schadenfreude & Ridicule 12	Political Violence Narratives 9	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 7	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions 6	Holocaust Inversion 5
US-CK-13 Brian Tyler Cohen	200	Political Violence Narratives 11	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 5	Conspiracy Narratives (non-AS) 5	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 2	Erosion of Trust in Institutions 2
US-CK-15 Tim Pool	200	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 46	Political Violence Narratives 26	Anti-Minority Resentment 8	Conspiracy 3	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 2
US-CK-23 Candace Owens	200	Conspiracy 24	Conspiracy Narratives (AS) 10	Political Violence Narratives 9	Power/Influence on politics 6	The Devil 5
US-CK-25 Jackson Hinkle	200	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims 34	Conspiracy 12	CE6 Genocide 8	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions 6	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 6
US-CK-27 Jackson Hinkle	200	CN1 Conspiracy 65	Conspiracy Narratives (AS) 5	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions 4	The Devil 4	Child murder/ Blood libel 3
US-CK-29 Megyn Kelly	200	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 6	Political Violence Narratives 5	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 4	Erosion of Trust in Institutions 4	Conspiracy 3
US-CK-30 Megyn Kelly	200	Anti-Minority Resentment 38	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 14	Conspiracy Narratives (non-AS) 14	Political Violence Narratives 11	Dehumanization 7
US-CK-31 Matt Walsh	200	Anti-Minority Resentment 19	Political Violence Narratives 15	Authoritarian Law & Order 15	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 14	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 8
US-CK-32 Steven Crowder	200	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 28	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 23	Political Violence Narratives 19	Dehumanization 14	Anti-Minority Resentment 9
US-CK-35 Ian Kochinski	200	Political Violence Narratives 6	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions 3	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 2	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims 2	Dehumanization 1
US-CK-36 Majority Report	200	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims 14	Political Violence Narratives 8	Conspiracy Narratives (non-AS) 8	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 2	Holocaust Inversion / Historical Revisionism 2
US-CK-37 Cody Johnston	200	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 10	Political Violence Narratives 7	Holocaust Inversion / Historical Revisionism 6	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions 5	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims 4

## Illustrative Quotes

### Left-Wing

**“his morals were inhumane, I hold no sympathy for him or his family”**

*(US-CK-05[20250911])*

**“It’s the fascists who should be scared. Arm yourselves.”**

*(US-CK-10[20250911])*

**“It doesn’t matter anymore bro. They won. Its over. Revolution is the only path left.”**

*(US-CK-12[20250911])*

**“the hate is and always has been yours and your republican party of traitors.”**

*(US-CK-13[20250913])*

**“Man the far right was ready to start a war until they found out he was white smh”**

*(US-CK-35[20250912])*

**“There was no reason for anyone on the left to delete Charlie Kirk. Probably another staged shooting from the right. With that said, I celebrated what happened to him”**

*(US-CK-36[20250912])*

### Anti-Israel Right-Wing

**“I definitely promote violence because all we are dealt on the right or moderate or middle is violence from the left far left and all these other freakazoids that try to kill us and do kill us”**

*(US-CK-23[20250916])*

**“Prey for no one who supports the ILLEGAL OCCUPATION TERRORISTS ENTITY and the #Genocide it is committing.”**

*(US-CK-25[20250910])*

**“Mosaad agents live with dual citizenship in the US and many other countries. It’s easy to activate someone like that. It’s also possible that the Jewish-infiltrated CIA has a hand in it. We’ll see soon what lies they tell us about that!”**

*(US-CK-27[20250911])*

## Pro-Israel Right-Wing

“its not murder if he’s a fascist propagandist. its like putting down a rabid dog.”  
(US-CK-37[20251003])

“Yup. They live in another reality, this is why there can be no reconciliation until they are first destroyed it’s the only way to get them to step back into reality.”  
(US-CK-15[20250912])

“we need to demand all these Left so call reporters to be FIRED ..we have Black Fatigue , woke fatigue..LEFT liberal MEDIA FATIGUE ..we the people of America are sick of it!”  
(US-CK-29[20250911])

“THERE IS A DISTINCT CORRELATION BETWEEN TRANS EXTREMISTS AND OPEN HOSTILITY/ VIOLENCE. TAKE A VULNERABLE PERSON, ISOLATE THEM BY TELLING THEM THEY ARE HATED BY EVERYONE ELSE, ADD HORMONES AND MENTAL ILLNESS.... YOU GET A DEMONIC KILLER. IT’S JUST FACTS.”  
(US-CK-30[20250911])

“Anyone who believes that children should be mutilated is so far beyond rational thinking that murdering their opponents is not off the table for them.”  
(US-CK-31[20250916])

“white liberals and blk people need to be taken care of lve about doggone had it with these people!”  
(US-CK-32[20250916])

## Germany

### Overview

	Left-Wing		Right-Wing		Total	
Comments	400		3009		3409	
Antisemitism %	0%		1.9%		1.7%	
Illiberalism %	4.5%		7.6%		7.2%	
Trope 1	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	8	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	123	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	131
Trope 2	Promotion of Violence against Minorities	4	Political Violence Narratives	22	Political Violence Narratives	25
Trope 3	Political Violence Narratives	3	Holocaust Inversion	22	Holocaust Inversion	23
Trope 4	Holocaust Inversion	1	Conspiracy Narratives	20	Conspiracy Narratives	20
Trope 5	-	-	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	15	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	15

### Per Influencer

	Eingollan		Ketzler der Neuzeit		Naomi Seibt		KuchenTV		El Hotzo	
Comments	1000		1200		209		600		400	
Antisemitism %	3.5%		1.2%		0%		1.3%		0%	
Illiberalism %	11.4%		6.9%		1.9%		4.3%		4.5%	
Trope 1	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	51	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	53	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	2	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	18	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	8
Trope 2	Political Violence Narratives	13	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	7	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	1	Holocaust Inversion	5	Promotion of Violence against Minorities	4
Trope 3	Conspiracy Narratives	12	Conspiracy Narratives	7	Conspiracy Narratives	1	Political Violence Narratives	2	Political Violence Narratives	3
Trope 4	Holocaust Inversion	11	Political Violence Narrative	7	-	-	Conspiracy Narratives	1	Holocaust Inversion	1
Trope 5	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	6	Anti-Minority Resentment	7	-	-	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	1	-	-

# Washington

## Overview

	Left-Wing	Anti-Israel Right-Wing		Pro-Israel Right-Wing		Total		
Comments	798	370		1400		2568		
Antisemitism %	32.3%	32.0%		15.6%		23.3%		
Illiberalism %	15.9%	14.5%		31.1%		23.8%		
<b>Trope 1</b>	Conspiracy Narratives	99	Conspiracy Narratives	66	Political Violence Narratives	116	Conspiracy Narratives	254
<b>Trope 2</b>	Genocide Accusations	39	Political Violence Narratives	25	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	93	Political Violence Narratives	179
<b>Trope 3</b>	Political Violence Narratives	38	Genocide Accusations	17	Conspiracy Narratives	89	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	103
<b>Trope 4</b>	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims	32	Child murder/Blood libel	8	Authoritarian Law & Order	72	Genocide Accusations	78
<b>Trope 5</b>	Nazi Analogy	22	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	7	Erosion of Trust in Institutions	59	Authoritarian Law & Order	73

## Per Thread

	Comments	#1 Trope	#2 Trope	#3 Trope	#4 Trope	#5 Trope
US-WA-01 Guy Christensen	198	Conspiracy 19	Political Violence Narratives 10	Promotion or Glorification of Political Violence 9	Affirmation of antisemitism 5	Nazi Analogy 3
US-WA-03 Hasan Piker	200	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims 22	Conspiracy 12	Schadenfreude 12	Lack of empathy 12	Genocide 8
US-WA-04 Candace Owens	200	Political Violence Narratives 24	Conspiracy 8	Child murder/ Blood libel 6	Genocide 5	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions 5
US-WA-06 Tim Pool	200	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 49	Political Violence Narratives 24	Erosion of Trust in Institutions 18	Authoritarian Law & Order 13	Conspiracy 12
US-WA-07 Tim Pool	200	Conspiracy 25	Political Violence Narratives 21	Conspiracy Narratives (AS) 14	Authoritarian Law & Order 8	Conspiracy Narratives (non-AS) 8
US-WA-11 Ian Kochinski	200	Political Violence Narratives 20	Conspiracy 11	Schadenfreude & Ridicule of Victims 9	Nazi Analogy 7	CE6 Genocide 6
US-WA-12 Jackson Hinkle	170	Conspiracy 58	Genocide 12	Colonialism Analogies 4	Deceit 4	Conspiracy Narratives (AS) 3
US-WA-14 Megyn Kelly	200	Erosion of Trust in Institutions 9	Anti-Minority Resentment 7	Child murder/ Blood libel 4	Political Violence Narratives 4	Holocaust Inversion / Historical Revisionism 4
US-WA-16 Megyn Kelly	200	Conspiracy 18	Political Violence Narratives 14	Genocide 11	Privilege 11	Authoritarian Law & Order 8
US-WA-17 Ben Shapiro	200	Anti-Minority Resentment 8	Erosion of Trust in Institutions 7	Political Violence Narratives 6	Genocide 5	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 5
US-WA-19 Chaya Raichik	200	Authoritarian Law & Order 32	Conspiracy 24	Political Violence Narratives 22	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 12	Anti-Minority Resentment 8
US-WA-20 Chaya Raichik	200	Political Violence Narratives 25	Delegitimization of Political Opponents (Enemy Construction) 14	Erosion of Trust in Institutions 11	Authoritarian Law & Order 6	Conspiracy 6
US-WA-21 Medea Benjamin	200	Conspiracy 57	Genocide 23	Child murder/ Blood libel 11	Affirming, calling for, desiring violence (direct) 9	Israel's sole guilt in the conflict 8

## Illustrative Quotes

### Left-Wing

"I believe this is a false flag operation, staged by Israel to get the U.S. and Trump to focus on Israel and do everything possible to exonerate Netanyahu, an international fugitive wanted by the ICC and accused of genocide in Gaza, for crimes against humanity."

(US-WA-01[20250522])

"my point is that radicalism and extremism is not necessarily a bad thing by its nature. You need to be radical to stop a genocide. You need to be extreme to change the systems that kill and oppress innocent people. Of course."

(US-WA-03[20250524])

"Maybe dont be a Nazi diplomat. Im sorry if i dont shed a tear for the german Christian dude who mived to Israhell and converted because he likes genocide. Sorrows"

(US-WA-11[20250523])

"The killing of two Israelis will not bring peace to Palestinians, it's too little too late, let's make it millions."

(US-WA-21[20250522])

### Anti-Israel Right-Wing

"But was the Israeli embassy workers shooting a random "antisemitic" hate crime or a planned government psyop for pretext to pass new laws outlawing criticism of Israel and Jews?"

(US-WA-04[20250522])

"Israel killed German soldiers and blamed Hitler to gain international sympathy. Can't it kill its own Jewish employees? Israel crucified the Prophet Jesus and claimed to love him, but they say he's in hell?"

(US-WA-12[20250522])

### Pro-Israel Right-Wing

"The media spent years screaming about "right-wing extremism" while grooming an entire generation of violent leftist radicals. Now they're shooting up people at Jewish museums in the nations capital."

(US-WA-06[20250522])

"Diversity is our strength, goyim."

(US-WA-07[20250522])

"Racism & Anti-Semitism = the Legacy of Barack Obama and the Academic/Industrial Complex."

(US-WA-14[20250522])

"There needs to be a crackdown on the antisemitic bs happening on college campuses. These people need to be treated like Klansmen, tolerated but heavily restricted in their activities."

(US-WA-16[20250522])

"This is pure fascist Natzeeism, plain and simple. The Democrats, the progressives, the left, The New York Time, WaPo, LA Time and most of the media have all brought this on. They have become the fascists they called everyone else."

(US-WA-17[20250522])

"Get these fukking people out of our country!!!! They are barbaric murderers. They are not Americans! They are terrorists!!"

(US-WA-19[20250522])

"We have a democrat problem in this country, they're violant and are continually mur\*dering people. I bet you the murder rates would drop to over 90% if there were no democrats in America."

(US-WA-20[20250522])

# Frankfurt

## Overview

	Left-Wing		Right-Wing		Total	
Comments	1249		700		1949	
Antisemitism %	1.5%		0%		1%	
Illiberalism %	3.6%		8.7%		5.4%	
<b>Trope 1</b>	Anti-Minority Resentment	45	Anti-Minority Resentment	29	Anti-Minority Resentment	74
<b>Trope 2</b>	Holocaust Distortion	11	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	7	Holocaust Distortion	11
<b>Trope 3</b>	Free Pass	6	Erosion of Trust in Institutions	5	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	9
<b>Trope 4</b>	Genocide	5	Anti-Liberal Democratic Resentment	5	Free Pass	6
<b>Trope 5</b>	Delegitimization of Political Opponent	2	Political Violence Narratives	4	Anti-Liberal Democratic Resentment	5

## Per Influencer

	Eingollan		Ketzer der Neuzeit		KuchenTV		Nurderkoch		Jung & Naiv		Ricarda Lang	
Comments	200		300		200		249		200		800	
Antisemitism %	0%		0%		0%		2.4%		9.5%		0%	
Illiberalism %	7%		11%		7%		7.2%		0%		3.9%	
<b>Trope 1</b>	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	5	Anti-Minority Resentment	25	Anti-Liberal Democratic Resentment	5	Anti-Minority Resentment	17	Free Pass	6	Anti-Minority Resentment	28
<b>Trope 2</b>	Erosion of Trust in Institutions	5	Conspiracy Narratives	3	Anti-Minority Resentment	4	Holocaust Distortion	11	Genocide	5	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	2

	Eingollan	Ketzer der Neuzeit		KuchenTV	Nurderkoch	Jung & Naiv	Ricarda Lang					
<b>Trope 3</b>	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	2	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	2	Delegitimization of Political Opponents	2	Erosion of Trust in Institutions	1	Terrorist state	2	Rejection of Civil Liberties	1
<b>Trope 4</b>	Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions	1	Political Violence Narratives	2	Conspiracy Narratives	1	-	-	Taboo of Criticism	1	-	-
<b>Trope 5</b>	Political Violence Narratives	1	Betrayal Narratives	1	Political Violence Narratives	1	-	-	Blame for Antisemitism	1	-	-

## Micro-Level Analysis of Left-Wing Online Discourse in Germany

### Quantitative Overview

	"Brandenburger Tor"			"Strafgerichtshof"		
Comments	200			200		
Antisemitism %	23%			12.5%		
Illiberalism %	1%			0.5%		
<b>Trope 1</b>	Blood libel		12	Genocide		11
<b>Trope 2</b>	Genocide		9	Jewish Loyalty		3
<b>Trope 3</b>	Conspiracy Narratives		8	The Evil		3
<b>Trope 4</b>	Holocaust Distortion		6	Influence on Public Opinion		3
<b>Trope 5</b>	Servility Media		4	Nazi Analogy		2