

Expert Reflection

Extremism Online | Essay Series

By [Bharath Ganesh](#), [Cindy Ma](#), [Daniel Karell](#), [David Nemer](#), [Deana A. Rohlinger](#), [Fenwick McKelvey](#) · July 28, 2021

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Extremism Online

In this [essay series](#) from *Items*, the SSRC's digital forum, researchers examine how right-wing extremism ideologies multiply through digital spaces rising in popularity in the West.

In order to effectively confront right-wing extremism, we must first understand how it operates in a world in which communication increasingly happens online, and in which the [affordances](#) of various digital platforms shape how extremism is manifested and spread within and across media. It is in this context that the Media & Democracy program at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) convened a remote

series of [interdisciplinary research development workshops](#) in the summer of 2020. The essays gathered here emerged from those workshops and represent a range of perspectives on the growth of white supremacy and right-wing extremism in the United States and abroad, their intersections, and the role that media and technology play in connecting and amplifying hate.

We Cannot Just Moderate Extremism Away

By Deana A. Rohlinger

In the wake of the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, the role of [social media](#) in propagating extremism was once again under scrutiny. However, as Deana Rohlinger's research demonstrates, stronger moderation policies alone would fail to account for the many ways that users express political beliefs through online forums. Instead, she argues that additional direct interventions like political bias training are necessary to both protect against extremism and encourage democratic participation

Platform Racism: How Minimizing Racism Privileges Far Right Extremism

By Bharath Ganesh

In recent years, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have taken steps to constrain the ability of users to share or amplify racist discourse on their platforms. However, Bharath Ganesh argues, by limiting the focus of their efforts to only the most egregious forms of racist discourse, the platforms may embolden broader networks of extremists to levy less obvious, but equally pernicious forms of racist discourse.

Mainstreaming Resentment: YouTube Celebrities and the Rhetoric of White Supremacy

By Cindy Ma

In her contribution to the "Extremism Online" series, Cindy Ma unpacks the rhetorical strategies used by right-wing YouTube microcelebrities to insert increasingly racist and white supremacist tropes into popular discourse while shielding themselves from accusations of extremism.

Online Extremism and Offline Harm

By Daniel Karell

It is often assumed that while extremist content online may result in offline violent behavior, the actual instances of such events are rare. However, in the latest essay from our "Extremism Online" series, Daniel Karell argues that this assumption is wrong, and reflects a misunderstanding of the mechanisms by which extremist content online shapes offline behavior. Indeed, new evidence suggests that online extremism, particularly from the right wing in the United States and Western Europe, results in offline,

physical violence far more often than we think.

The Human Infrastructure of Fake News in Brazil

By David Nemer

The role of algorithms in promoting disinformation has received a great deal of attention in recent years, due in large part to the centrality of Facebook in the 2016 US presidential election and the UK Brexit campaign. However, David Nemer argues that in countries such as Brazil, where peer-to-peer messaging apps like WhatsApp are popular, more attention needs to be paid to the “human infrastructure” of coordinated disinformation campaigns.

Toward Contextualizing Not Just Containing Right-Wing Extremisms on Social Media: The Limits of Walled Strategies

By Fenwick McKelvey

Fenwick McKelvey argues that the way we frame social problems, such as online extremism, shapes how we respond to them. The impulse to combat extremism through flawed content moderation strategies reflects a tendency to treat extremism as primarily a content problem. But in order to tackle online extremism, we must first understand and address how it is intertwined with the deep roots of bigotry and hate in our history and social structures.