

# ARENAS

ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES  
TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

## SENSITIVE SOURCES IN POLARIZED ENVIRONMENTS

Guidelines

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(ed.)



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University of  
Helsinki



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101094731

**The ARENAS project** looks at extremist narratives that affect political and social life in Europe. It examines the nature of these narratives and seeks to understand the discourses they impact, particularly about science, gender and the nation. By understanding how these narratives work, ARENAS will empower people to resist them. To foster a spirit of people living together in harmony across Europe, policy recommendations will be made as to how to prevent such narratives from taking hold in the future.

The **ARENAS Analysis of and Responses to Extremist Narratives project** is funded by the **EU Horizon Programme**, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027), and is coordinated by **Julien Longhi** and his team in **CY Cergy Paris Université**, France. It brings together a multidisciplinary consortium of nine Universities, one NGO, two SMEs as well as three associated impact partners comprised of an International Association, a National Association and an NGO.

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# About the Document

## **Name: D6.2 Challenges of accessing sources in politically polarized research environments**

General guidelines for researchers working in politically challenging environments and with sensitive data.

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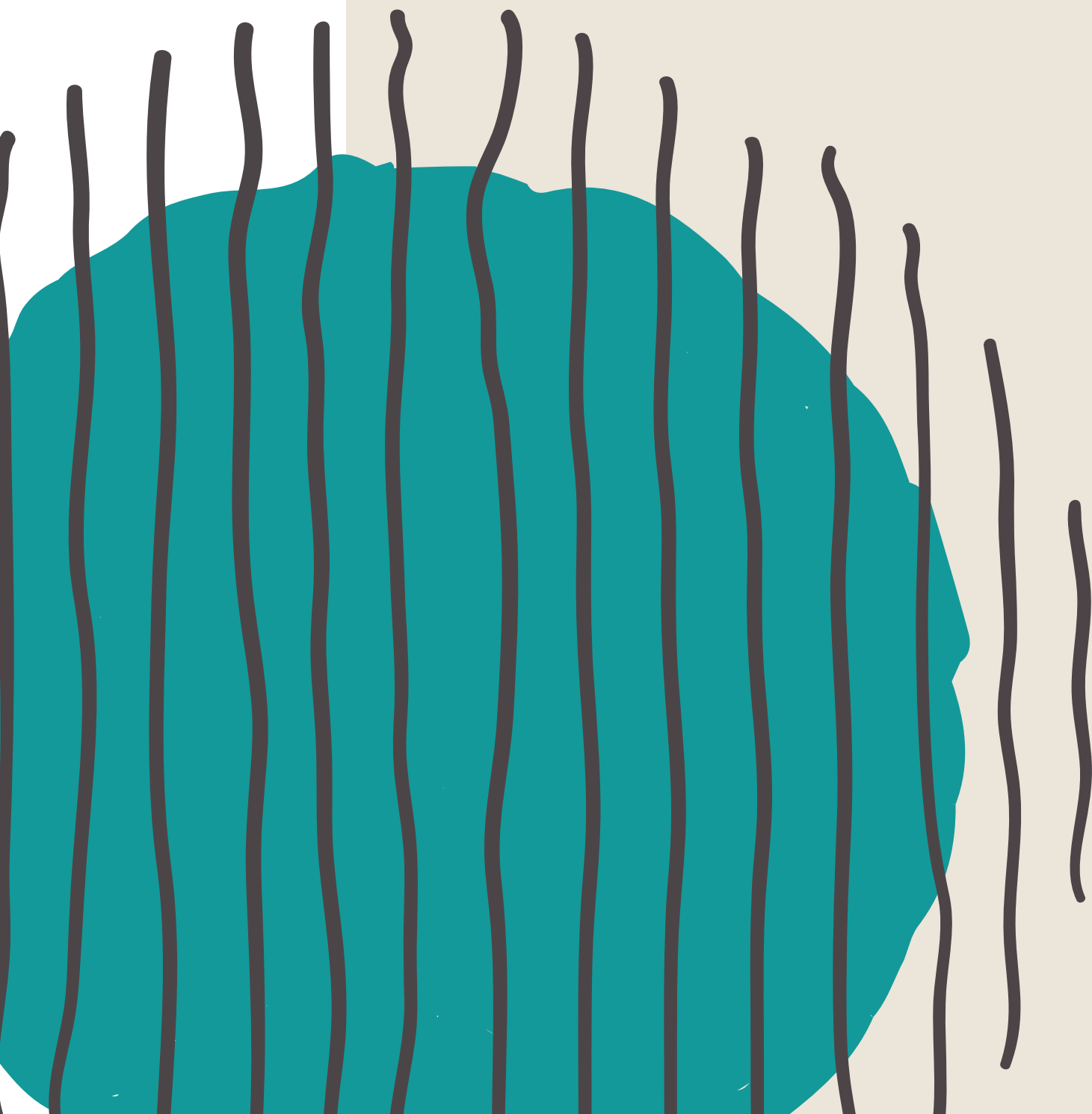
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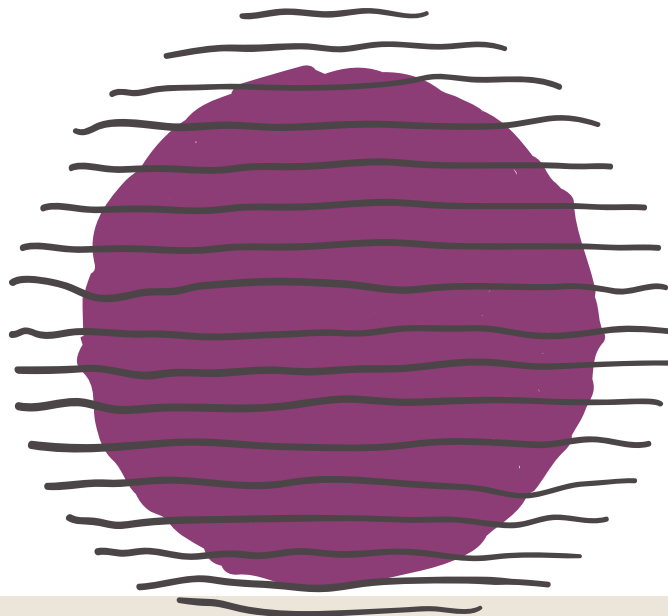
# 1

## INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

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Academics around the world are facing the consequences of a “post-truth” world, characterized by conspiracy theories, disinformation and fake news. New prospects of digitalization with the extensive use of artificial intelligence, mounting hybrid threats based on first and foremost the flood of disinformation have a profound impact on the production and perception of knowledge (Conrad et al. 2024). This development carries serious consequences on the scientific inquiry. What sources can we rely on, so in the end what can we argue knowing with confidence and certainty? In addition, researchers of political extremism must deal with the increasing tensions coming from the polarizing societies, questioning scholarly interpretations, targeting individual scholars, their institutions, or their disciplines. Confrontations and polarization, however, are emerging also within the scholarly environment where students, academics and departments take political stand and resist diverging ideas (Revers and Traunmüller 2020; Alonso 2023; Norris 2023; Lund 2023). What is the role of the data that researchers work on, in all these situations mentioned above?

One of the most sensitive phases of scholarship, one that conditions the entire research process, is the period of gathering all types of source material, conducting interviews, carrying out (n)ethnographic research or extracting data from various platforms. The success of this phase bares relevance on the power of interpretation and the reliability of research results. It is therefore imperative to address the main challenges of accessing data but in its wider meaning: covering not only the actual gaining of source material but also the special concerns in dealing with the accessed material. In other words, it is equally important to reflect on how the collected data affect the researcher and, on the other hand, how the researcher might manipulate the data.

The purpose of this contribution is to provide some

**general guidelines** for researchers to help them to avoid major pitfalls or shortcomings in accessing research materials. The paper highlights the most common difficulties arising from researchers working in increasingly polarizing environments, those where hate speech and extremist narrative become mainstream. We offer collected information based on the interviews with researchers of the ARENAS-consortium who shared their experiences on the challenges they encountered regarding the availability of sources, as well as their impressions of the gained sensitive data. To deepen the analysis, we also consulted the ever-growing scholarly literature.

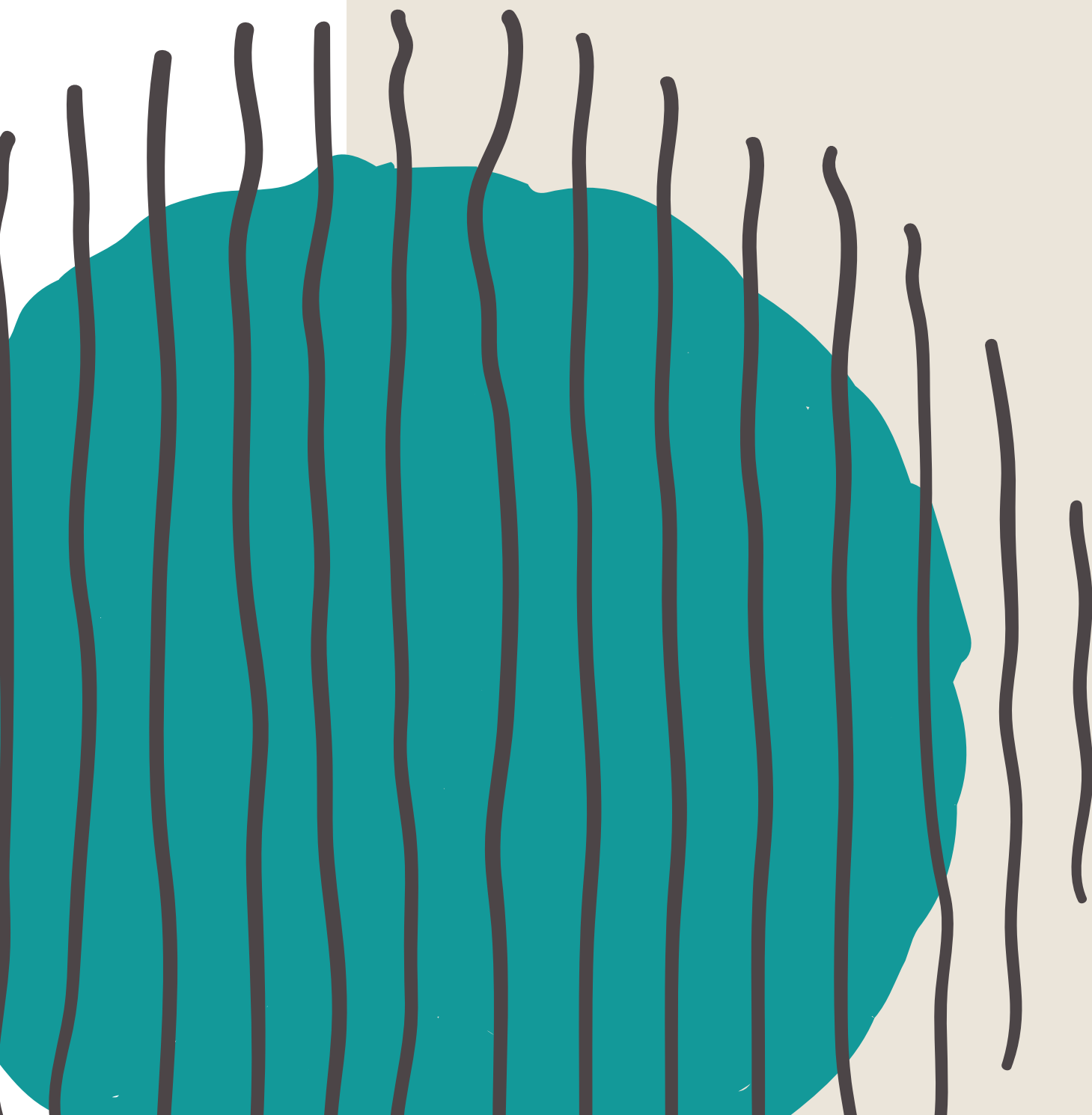
Special emphasis is on the discussion of the sorts of risks related to sources that

- a) can be perceived as politically sensitive,
- b) are difficult to access,
- c) tend to become the subject of researchers' influence, or
- d) are dangerous for the scholars themselves.

This investigation started with some meta-questions regarding the challenges of academic work per se. It was vital to know how widespread these issues are and whether we could pinpoint some country-related special problems. Or in contrast, is there a European common development pattern recognizable?

# 2

## WHAT IS *SENSITIVE* IN DATA?





Data can be, for example, text, numbers, images, symbols and sound. In other words, in this study we are using the term ‘data’ in a broad meaning, referring to different types of source materials. Data can be structured, unstructured or partially structured. In practice, data can be very comprehensively things that can be analysed and contain some sort of information. When this information is cross-examined with a temporal, spatial or textual context, and interpreted by using a methodological and theoretical toolkit, it results in academic knowledge that can be disseminated to various audiences. By dissemination, the produced knowledge is recontextualized and translated into a new form, a process by which also the significance of the data alters.

One guide to defining how to understand ‘sensitivity’ is whether it is subjected to strict regulation. The European Union created the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to be integrated and applied in all member states since 25 May 2018 (EUR-Lex 2018). The regulation indicates that the sensitivity of the data should be understood in its widest form, referring to data that are the most intrusive in a person's private life, relating to people's health, gender, sex life, age, political opinions, religious beliefs, but sensitive data is also legal proceedings or criminal convictions (see also Conseil d'État 2019; ARENAS 2023). In addition, there are precise codes on how to access, process, store and refer to personal information (European Commission 2016a and 2016b).

Sensitivity can relate to **incidental findings** in a project like ARENAS, which is dealing with extremist narratives and extremist actors. Incidental findings – that can be either ‘anticipatable’ or un-anticipatable’ – present a range of ethical, legal, and practical challenges, for researchers, the participants of the research setting (such as for example informants, groups of ethnographic study), through dissemination the targeted audience. An

anticipatable incidental finding is one that is associated with a research procedure, and where the gathered information is outside the original purpose of the preliminarily designed research questions. This may likely appear because the concept of extremism is constantly changing so the information discovered while carrying out the different phases of scholarly investigation might go beyond the aims of the study. Un-anticipatable incidental findings include findings that could not have been anticipated given the current state of scientific knowledge. Researchers cannot plan for these types of findings specifically but can consider in advance what they might do if a particular kind of unexpected finding arises. This kind of situation may emerge, for example, in case of the sudden political change with a vital impact and dramatic consequences on the research environment where interviews are conducted. Researchers can however prepare for these situations by evaluating in advance the possibilities of discovering incidental findings in order to be able to identify them (see more on the subject in Longhi and Miklóssy 2023/2025).

Sensitivity, however, can be perceived also as a **space and agency**, at the same time. Spatiality refers to the locality of the data, situated in the national or transnational contexts and on a special thematical arena, in an archive, a media, a dataset, online source, just to mention a few examples. Furthermore, due to the ARENAS-project's main agenda, extremism and extremist narratives signify always a special location that constitutes an alert requiring careful scholarly approach.

This type of spatiality can be pinpointed in dealing with

- extremist networks
- vulnerable populations
- sites of archival materials, documents, or storages of oral histories, letters, diaries, photographs, or government documents
- informants in politically sensitive environments.

Spatiality, nevertheless, is closely interlinked with agency, in other words, with actors, their behaviour patterns, the formal and informal rules, and the resources they act upon. The researchers within the ARENAS-project defined the relevance of this aspect mostly as how extracting information from various sites can endanger the actors providing that information. The most often mentioned examples related to space and agency becoming sensitive because of the politicalness, and legal implications attached to the topic of extremism, and consequently the variety of negative impact on the actors involved.

In this context several dimensions were identified as sensitive materials:

- Data on members of extremist groups could endanger their members or interfere with counter-extremism actions. This can bring legal implications for the group-participants but also for the researchers.
- Testimonies from vulnerable populations affected by extremism can lead to protracted traumatising.
- Data related to political activism that can endanger activists' safety therefore resulting in

the alteration of their actions or a more profound change in their *modus operandi*.

- Data on voters' suppression or irregularities, records of individuals or groups being monitored by the state, especially in challenging political contexts, also within the European Union.
- For fear of political intimidation, informants can provide limited or calibrated information as a reaction to their perceptions of the researchers' political, institutional, gender or age background.

Both space and agency are conditioned by the angles that ARENAS set as the main lenses to investigate extremist narratives and phenomena, through three major angles: nation – gender – science. These three topics are inevitably highly sensitive in the current world affairs in general, and in the European sphere in particular.

# 3

## SENSITIVITY AND THE RELEVANCE OF NATION – GENDER – SCIENCE



## 3.1. Articulation of National Interest

Accessing source material while studying extremism or any other politically sensitive subjects vary in relation to the national context where the investigation takes place. That is why the gradually increasing societal polarization is dangerous also for the academic conduct because it has a direct influence not only on the limitation of accessing data, but also on the political bias of the data and therefore on the information value of the source materials. In this respect, the biggest problem is that in fact we don't know what data is trustworthy because there is no way of verifying them.

In the name of national interest, in countries where there is an emerging concentration of power relying on extended control over society, institutions holding data that the government perceive as sensitive for its authority, might deny or restrict access to researchers viewed as politically opposed to their stance. Furthermore, by rechannelling state funding from institutions preserving research materials that may contain uncomfortable information for state authorities or the political elite, the government can effectively undermine these institutions' operational conditions and jeopardize the maintenance of the data. Government organizations managing sensitive data may deliberately restrict access to researchers associated with opposition parties and activist organisations. For instance, political contexts in Hungary and Poland have affected both the scope and safety of social science research. In some cases, authorities can actively hamper research on contentious topics such as gender studies, immigration, corruption or minority issues. In such environments, researchers must often navigate legal and bureaucratic hurdles to access information.

In Poland, during the period when Law and Justice party was in power (2015–2023), the power elite has emphasised a conservative-nationalist vision. The party's control over academic institutions has

led to tensions between researchers and government officials. Scholars critical of government policies, especially regarding the judiciary and media freedom, have experienced obstacles in securing research funding and accessing public sector data. In Poland but also in other European countries, data on hate crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals and ethnic minorities is often inconsistently reported or inaccessible. Researchers have noted that local authorities under-report incidents or fail to provide records, citing administrative limitations, which can significantly hinder research into extremism, and far-right activities (Palmer and Kutedze 2022; Hawdon and Costello 2024).

Under Viktor Orbán's consecutive governments (2010– ), Hungary has witnessed systematic efforts to curtail academic independence. Researchers with political views that align with the opposition or civil society movements may find it difficult to get access to government-held source materials, or information that the government moves into the category of strategic national interest. Subjects of this type can range from government spending to migration or inequality. The data that is available but maintained by state funded institutions, such as for example statistical data or documents of state administration, may be altered due to the political interest invested in them. In addition, state officials, or party-loyal actors deny requests to be interviewed by researchers non-aligned with their political agenda. On the other hand, informants, who are employed or otherwise dependent on state power, are in a delicate position and thus unwilling to contribute to independent research.

In France, data related to state surveillance and counter-extremism programmes is tightly controlled. Researchers examining the impact of these policies on civil liberties, particularly within Muslim communities, face significant hurdles in accessing official records (Ragazzi 2022). This is often justified in the name of national security, but it can lead to the creation of a highly controlled environment for researchers. Sensitive materials related to state surveillance and the broader "war on terror" remain difficult to access due to their classification as state secrets. Also, data on state-run de-radicalisation programmes is another area where access can remain difficult. France has established various programmes to monitor and de-radicalise individuals perceived as being at risk of engaging in extremist violence, that have primarily focused on Islamist radicalisation. While Islamist extremism dominates France's counter-extremism agenda, other threats like far-right radicalisation are also acknowledged. However, far-right extremism receives less attention in high-profile measures and media coverage. Data on these programs, including success rates or evaluations of their effectiveness, is not publicly available. Official evaluations of these programs are often conducted internally by the French government or affiliated bodies but are rarely made available to the public. In some cases, only high-level summaries or non-detailed overviews are accessible to researchers. The absence of consistent, publicly available impact assessments from third-party evaluations makes it challenging for researchers to form conclusions about the true effectiveness of these policies.

## 3.2 Gender as an obstacle

In general, the culture of science and knowledge production is still male dominated and affects female researchers' scientific work as well as their ability to access data. Furthermore, studying the far-right milieu as a woman often involves navigating complex gender dynamics. Women researchers have to use different strategies to obtain data: downplay femininity in their clothing and behaviour or even tolerate sexist or misogynistic language and behaviours in order to avoid disrupting data collection during fieldwork (Gelashvili 2024).

When researching populations that may be sensitive or vulnerable (such as survivors of violence, marginalized groups, or populations with strict cultural boundaries), gender can impact the accessibility to participants. Female researchers may have easier access or rapport with female participants in certain cultures, but they may also face challenges or restrictions when dealing with male participants or culturally conservative communities. Conversely, male researchers might encounter issues accessing female participants due to cultural or social norms, particularly in contexts where gender segregation is prominent.

In addition, there are also some countries where gender as an object of scholarly investigation and access to data related to this subject can be a nationally regulated off-limits issue. In Hungary for example in 2018, gender studies were discontinued by political decision throughout the country's higher education institutions (Magyar Közlöny 2018).

In Poland under the Law and Justice administration, gender studies at the academia and the question of the LGBTQ rights were employed as convenient subjects of public debate enabling further polarization of society and rallying support. In election campaigns of 2018, 2019 and 2020 the gender theory and LGBTQ rights were used as scaremongering examples of liberal attempts at

corrupting the moral health of traditional conservative society represented by the ruling party. In view of many observers those issues replaced the immigration threat that enabled the victory of Law and Justice in 2015. The issue became central in 2020 presidential election when incumbent president Duda presented himself as defender of traditional values and protector of the rights of families as opposed to the dangers presented by the new-fashioned ideologies rooted in Marxist thought. It turned out to be less effective than the anti-immigration stands in the midst of the migration crisis of 2015 but resulted in important shift in social attitude to the sexual minorities associating defence of their rights with the opposition to Jarosław Kaczyński's rule. After 2020 it became constant element of the opposition agenda. In 2023 parliamentary elections promises of regulations recognizing rights of LGBTQ community and liberalization of abortion rights become one of the core arguments for the mobilization of the opposition (Górska 2020).



## 3.3 Debated Science

Polarization can be detected also in the gradually advancing politicization of academia and academic knowledge. Especially in humanities and social sciences, the often-close relation between universities and political decision-making has a bearing on the evaluation of research content and on the assessment of data research is based on. Being useful for the state administration by tackling social challenges, research brings attention to the long-standing dichotomy between the pursuit of academic freedom, on the one hand, and the will of serving the common interests, on the other hand (Schmid-Petri et al., 2022). What is the common interest, however, and how 'well' it is served by research results is defined by the political elite and their ever-changing value-based emphases. In the European academic environment this liaison is translated to the dependence on funding by the (often state) authorities with a political purpose. Research running against the prevailing ideological foundations and day-to-day aims of political power is frequently marginalized or even politically attacked. Furthermore, in the crises-stricken world, there are frequently situations that demand swift reactions from political powerholders, with equally rapid changes in the evaluation of what is 'useful' science (Brüggemann et al., 2020; Gustafson and Rice 2020).

Increasing political engagement of universities and ongoing centralisation efforts in various university environments effect not only the institutional level but often disciplines, academic communities and research settings. State control over academic institutions is carried out through administrative frameworks by the chancellors or supervisory boards of non-academics, who are given broad powers to decide on budgetary issues and thus on personnel policy, i.e., who could teach and what was worth teaching and researching (Miklóssy 2024).

In addition, different institutions in Europe have different frameworks for legal compliance, data security, and collaboration policies. Researchers may face limitations on sharing data with international collaborators, particularly if the data involves politically sensitive topics such as migration, minorities, gender or civil rights.

Self-censorship and institutional censorship are present in some EU-countries. Academic institutions follow the comments made by their employees on their own profiles on social media. Often also students need to pay attention to what kind of protests they participate in, because, for example, if they can be identifiable in officially produced drone footages or by national broadcast company, they may lose scholarships or grants.

The Orbán government has limited the publication of migration-related statistics to control public narratives. For instance, data on asylum applications and refugee integration programs is either withheld or heavily sanitised before being made public.

In Poland, consecutive reforms of academia were key priorities of the Law and Justice government (2015-2023). Controversial regulations concerned the evaluation of scientific achievements and academic autonomy (Constitution for Science Act 2018), with consequences on the selection of research subjects, data and interpretations. This accelerated not only conflicts between the government and universities but also introduced a polarization between government loyal academic institutions and politically non-aligned ones.

This situation led to new amendments called 'Academic Freedom Act (2021) to promote and privilege conservative leaning in some parts of the academic society. It limited for instance the power of university rectors over academic staff advocating illiberal values and made internal institutional investigations difficult. The administration established the Copernicus Academy (Act 2022/1459) to weaken the too independent Polish Academy of Science and elevated over subsidized disciplines by non-transparent rules, and with a membership chosen by their political connections rather than on scientific merit. The change of power in 2023 did not, however, reverse the institutional concentration of science under the Ministry of Science but strengthened instead the politicisation and consequently also the polarisation of academia. The new government lead by Donald Tusk, conducted sweeping audits and investigations searching for misdemeanours of the previous administration, dismantling of its favourite projects and carried out a political carousel of appointments. Yet, despite all liberal rhetoric, many of its actions took advantage of the administrative tools left by Law and Justice government for its own advantage and continued the process of Academia's subjugation to the will of the powerholders.

Research material on political humour is a sensitive data because it depends on how the research environment define what qualifies as 'humour'. It is closely related to freedom of expression and its relation to the limits on political humour and who is embedded with authority to decide about the restrictions. Research environments in the European area vary a great deal regarding the national and academic institutional contexts. This spatiality

indicates a fluctuating attitude concerning what can be called a 'censorship' culture, in other words the permissiveness or acceptability of the conception of political humour. Moreover, censorship can provoke a certain attraction and magnify its relevance in extremist groups. Humour also constitutes temporally anchored data reacting to a societal or political situation in a moment of time. This temporality might alter the selection of the data and/or the interpretations, the analysis and research outcomes.

# 4

## SPECIAL SITES OF SOURCES



Observing the special sites where the various types of the data can be found reveal also the close connection between location and agency. The different spaces of data are regulated by actors regarding a) the selection principle of sources to be retained; b) the rules of storage (i.e., who is responsible for systematization, or updating of the dataset); and c) who decides about the access to the material. Agency, besides the actors involved, refers also the resources by which these warehouses or platforms of data are maintained and the practices of usage characteristic to a dataset. In this section, we discuss the most relevant sources in the study of extremism.

## 4.1 Legal Materials

Main legal sources, such as laws, state regulations and government statutes are in the European context digitalized and operate on an open access principle, hence are easily accessible. Yet, there are other considerations that affect the collection of this type of sources. We tend to treat legal sources such as laws, court rulings, government regulations, and statutes as if they were 'exact' or 'true' documents, that are applicable to any context and hence self-evidently and subjects of interpretation. Legislation and any other additional government practice of contributing to the legal framework is however dependent on the national context. From this perspective, legal documents can be politically biased as a production of political will and, in the European legal context, the parliamentary legislative cultures and the balance of power (Sunstein 2018, 185-225; Pesti 2018; Waldron 2023). Therefore, legal documents are always politically sensitive and cannot be understood, nor interpreted without reflection on the national political environment and special characteristics of legal culture the document were produced in. This creates often a great challenge particularly for researchers aiming at a comparative analysis. Furthermore, any legal document is also a part of a larger body of national law in a country. Therefore, by singling out a particular legal section from a comprehensive entity may affect the ability of interpreting the content without understanding its situatedness in the legal context.

Often the real significance of a law or regulation can be perceived by exploring of their implementation in practice. This provides an invaluable information of the interpretation of laws in a national context that can reveal also for example, the freedom of judiciary or political influence on the judges, the social atmosphere and media publicity, particularly in connection with

extremist crimes. The implementation of laws can be detected by analysing court decisions. In court rulings the sensitivity of data becomes often interlinked with ethical considerations regarding personal information and identification of people involved, including the employees of the courts. The exception from compulsory anonymization of the data is when the court decisions concern public figures followed and reported by the media.

## 4.2. Informants

Regarding the ethical principles of data collection in the cases of interviews and surveys (see below the next chapter), it is important that people can easily understand what kind of data is being collected about them and how it will possibly be used. In this situation, 1) the more personal the data is, 2) the more surprising topic the data collection concerns, and 3) the more efficiently it can be utilized, it is vital be clear that such data is being collected and how it is intended to be used.

The relation between interviewer and interviewee is always delicate. The interview's settings must be taken into consideration, but it is equally important to reflect on the broader social and temporal context of the researched phenomenon (Riessman 2002, 231-234). The standard approach to the ethics of doing interviews is to balance potential harm that can be caused to the interviewees or their community and the potential benefits the research can bring them (Murphy and Dingwall 2007, 339; Longhi and Miklóssy 2023). There are basically three main issues regarding interviews: a) fragility of informants; b) the danger for the researchers themselves carrying out interviews, and c) the information value of the interviews.

In studying extremist narratives and actors, **vulnerability of informants** and research subjects is likely to emerge. Victims of violent extremism, on the one hand, and members of violent extremist groups, former members, victims of extremist groups, and activists, on the other hand, are similarly in a highly sensitive position. Informants from extremist parties can be seen as traitors in their own party: the community is small for example in Cyprus and knowledge of given interviews can circulate in the in-group. Therefore, maintaining confidentiality is difficult. Another highly sensitive group of informants are prisoners. In prison interviews the most important principles concern, on the one hand, the safeguarding the researchers' personal data at all costs. Equally

important, on the other hand, is to take extra care in creating a discreet and safe environment, and secure anonymity for informants living in a closed milieu.

Finding far-right informants / respondents can be especially challenging as they might not want to talk to researchers or to be exposed. **Hostility**, aggressivity towards researchers of certain political (liberal, left-wing) background or gender may also occur. In countries where core patterns of extremist narratives are mainstreamed in public discourse (such as in Hungary and in many parts of Poland), access to informants of political parties can be impossible. Equally challenging are situations where politically biased groups are 'feeding' disinformation to scholars with purpose.

The **contextuality** of interviews is of special importance when the interviews are taking place during parliamentary and/or local elections. Elections create often a politically more tense atmosphere and the suspicion that the interviewers' research carries some hidden political agenda or agitation, may occur. This situation might alter the informants' contribution or even raise hostility. Similarly, finding informants of political parties or state officials can be difficult because these actors don't trust researchers who rely on academic freedom to interpret their message. There are also some extremist parties or movements that talk to scholars with a special purpose: manipulating and misleading the researcher by passing fake information and trying to persuade the publication of an intended information. Another example is when the politicians don't reflect on the questions of the interview but want to derail the topic to their own benefit.



## 4.3 Surveys

Surveys on sensitive issues can be perceived as a risk for the individual responder, which is why particularly in more centrally controlled, semi-authoritarian countries the willingness to participate may be limited as compared to more democratic countries with stronger civic consciousness. In addition, the responses may vary according to what the respondents feel is safe or politically correct in their context. Sensitive questions about the citizens' relations to authorities, political parties or the government may result in falsified replies due to the respondents' fear of consequences. This also correlates, as Tannenberg argues, with trust of the informants in the interviewers' assumed political background, the actual situation and timing of the query and purposes of research and dissemination (Tannenberg 2017).

In addition, there is a factor that influence the respondents answers to queries, called the "social desirability bias". It is a limitation of what is suitable or permitted to say or think according to strong societal norms that can alter the information value or truthfulness of the data (Jann et al 2019). The informants' position in their communities, networks, workplaces, extended families and the spread of information about participating in a query can activate a self-censorship with crucial influence on the data. There is however no way to know which informants in a group would exercise self-censorship.

There are also specific limitations: for instance, in France, the collection of ethnic data is highly restricted due to the country's legal framework. Some research institutions may conduct surveys on diversity, discrimination, or migration, but they must use **self-identification** or indirect indicators such as nationality or birthplace rather than explicit racial/ethnic categories. This makes studying racial inequalities, discrimination, and minority experiences more difficult compared to countries

like the US or UK, where racial data is routinely collected in surveys, censuses and employment statistics (Simon 2015; Sabbagh and Peer 2008).

Social pressure may be a central element to consider especially in conducting queries amongst minors. Young people may fear experiencing exclusion or bullying as real and paramount threat in a classroom environment (Ólafsson, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2013: 68). Therefore, it is highly important to apply the strictest ethical standards in this respect, constantly evaluate the balance between risks and benefits, and encourage openness through participatory or creative means (UNICEF, 2025).

From an ethical point of view, when conducting research, young participants are also considered a vulnerable audience and special measures need to be taken, especially when dealing with topics that may be perceived as uncomfortable, harmful or violent (as such sensitive). It is vital to obtain consent from both participants and parents or carers (McInroy, 2016 :92); explaining the research protocol and data management in a way that minors can understand; ensuring them about strict confidentiality and privacy; explicitly stating their rights, especially the right to withdraw without consequences. (UNICEF, 2025). Especially in dealing with young participants, the survey design must be carefully prepared to avoid questions or words that may be perceived as offensive (e.g. avoid strong words). Therefore, when approaching sensitive content, it is advisable to use simple and descriptive language, defining terms where necessary, and rely on careful contextualisation.

For example, when the team – working on Mediations and remediations for extremist narratives (in WP5 of the ARENAS project) – conducted a survey on gender awareness among secondary school students, the researchers took care to avoid formulating questions in a way that might make students feel compelled to answer in a certain way. So, the team approached sensitive issues in a creative way by applying a role-play situation to ask about their reaction to a discriminatory or violent event. The sensitivity of the research was not only about the topic, but also about the public and the need for caution.

Based on the above-mentioned aspects of carrying out queries, the main challenge is that survey data is used frequently in comparative research despite the significant differences emerging in the national, local or other spatial contexts.

When designing surveys, special care and multidisciplinary collaboration are required in order to best anticipate the context in which the survey will be received (completed) and thus also the possible sensitive and even dangerous situations that may arise. Very often, surveys leave behind strange, confusing, misleading questions that are difficult to answer because piloting (which involves as many perspectives as possible) has not been completed. Equally important is the way the surveys are carried out. It has been noticed by straw polling agencies that surveys conducted by phone or in person result different answers especially in politically sensitive issues as the surveys by internet – due to anonymity assumption and trust of the respondents in the survey organizers.

## 4.4 Visual Material

Visual sources are special types of materials characterized by a potential of creating emotional reactions in the audience in a more powerful way than any textual or numeral data. Due to this feature visual materials are particularly prone to become subjected to political manipulation because by editing, the message can be easily altered. In addition, since mediatization of our time is highly dependent on the transmission and circulation of images, political actors are taking advantage of this trick. By zooming in to a carefully chosen detail of a political demonstration can turn public opinion against the demonstrators.

These are especially significant ways to modify visual contents in countries where mainstream public media is politicized and polarized. In Hungary, videoclips manufactured from interviews or political speeches is a common means of discrediting and denigrating political opponents by the governing party in various media platforms. (Bódi-Polyák-Urbán 2022; Kiss et al. 2023; Miklóssy 2024). News footages in national broadcast can be deceptive. Old pictures of migration were used to raise alert of the people by accentuating the narrative of an imminent threat of mass-migration (Solti 2023). Similarly, according to editorial instructions, the narrative was carefully created by pictures about aggressive migrants to be shown in daily television, following by a magnified number of migrants on their way in the Balkan-route (Keller-Alánt 2020). Another typical example is when completely foreign visual material illustrates a propaganda message, constituting fake news. This was the case when a footage of a football match celebration in a pub in Belfast was used to give an impression that it was the Ukrainians who were rejoicing the destruction of the Kerch bridge in the Crimea area during the war in 2023 (Belfastlive 2023). The undoubted potential of a national broadcasting company

with airing capacity over the whole country is that it can send a powerful and falsified message supported by manufactured pictures.

Billboards and giant posters are influential means of manipulation. These are set in public spaces and by busy roads spreading simplified messages about a political enemy, caricatured or represented as the enemy of the nation (Thorpe 2017). Extremist parties can also falsify the content of a giant poster by using an already exhibited placard's visuality but inserting a distorting message than the original one (Vörös 2024). Especially contemporary billboards can be difficult to study because most often these are not stored or collected in archives.

Visual, textual and auditory contents often work in parallel or overlap in the same data constituting multimodality. In Poland under the administration of Law and Justice, the iconic example of political manipulation in state controlled public media can be seen in famous “fur Deutschland” soundbite of Donald Tusk. The clip comes from a speech of Tusk, then president of the EPP, gave in German at the CDU conference in January 2021. In the speech Tusk prizes the cooperation between the EPP and the CDU as well as expresses gratitude for Germany leadership in tackling the pandemic and other recent crises (Tusk 2021).

When shortly later Tusk decided to come back to Poland and became the leader of the opposition, public TV started to use short clips of Tusk speaking in German in its coverage of the opposition activities. In the following years up until opposition victory in the 2023, the 2 second long soundbites in which Tusk says “[fur Deutschland](#)” along another with words “[danke fur alles](#)” and manipulated pictures of former PM presented in red light with devil horns and sniper scope on chest, became a constant reminder of Tusk’s treacherous connections with Germany for the TV viewers (Fakt 2021). In that period of time those notorious clips were used almost on a daily basis, sometimes more than once in a news bulletin program. The use of that soundbite was so often and predictable that soon it turned into subject of jokes and memes targeted at Law and Justice regime, at the end it became one of the most recognizable symbols of heavy handling of political propaganda in the public media controlled by Jarosław Kaczyński.

## 4.5 Archived Documents

Archives are centrally important places and spaces to find research material when studying the historical roots of extremism. In most countries researchers have to acquire a permission to study materials, maintained by a national institution. It depends on the country whether the authorization to work in an archive is an easy and simple bureaucratic process or a more complex procedure often linked to a political consideration in relation to the information value of a certain type of archived material. Most historical archives have a temporal limitation (from 10 to even 50 years) regarding the time gap set between the date a document was created and when it becomes available for research. It is also important to remember that all archives are founded on a careful selection of what kind of material is worth saving and protecting by an institutional framework. This perspective is always dependent on the political will.

In addition, there are also worrisome examples how the access to materials can change quickly depending on the changes in the political power. In Hungary, the 1956 Institute conducted primary research since 1989 on the opposition to the communist regime. The original task was pioneering work in collecting unique source materials, combined into the Oral History archive. However, in spite of the institute's scientific merits and international reputation, its scholarly interpretations were considered by the powerholder Fidesz-elite as "too liberal", so the Institute was closed in 2019. The Oral History archive was transferred to a government-loyal institute, Veritas ('Truth' in English), established to tell the historical truth without prepossession (Blinken OSA).

In Poland, academic institutions faced scrutiny over their curricula and research outputs, with government bodies promoting a form of historical revisionism. This included promoting the Institute

of National Remembrance (IPN), which has been accused of suppressing or skewing archival material to align with the government's perspective. Historical data collection was also goal oriented and had legal consequences, as in the case of the Institute of National Remembrance, which has focused on the research of World War II, the communist period and patriotic traditions. The Institute had a legal department to act upon historians' data, and prosecuted people that were claimed guilty of crimes against the Polish people (Nalepa 58–96, 206–229; Act 1998; see also the Institute's website)

From the perspective of cultural studies, and especially cultural criticism, the basic challenge is not only to gain but also to maintain access to the archive. In most cases that means private archives of the people involved in cultural production in different roles, with usual hierarchical premium on the access to the archives. This access usually depends on personal or social relations, the individual will to share and the established trust between creator and the researcher. Even when it is the question of gaining access to the archives of the cultural institutions, such as internal records of theatres, art galleries or festival offices for example, still opening of those resources for individual researcher usually depends on personal will and consent of some specific person in charge. Transfer of those materials to some form of open access institutions happens only after quite long period of time and, of course, only in case of previously selected and appreciated works. Therefore, most often access to sources depends heavily on interpersonal relations of researcher, that can affect the ability to maintain access for further evaluation of the sources and to follow cultural projects and their development.

In Spain, accessing archives related to Spain's Franco-era dictatorship is still difficult. Despite the passing of historical memory laws meant to facilitate transparency, researchers have faced bureaucratic delays when requesting sensitive materials. The 2022 Law of Democratic Memory aimed to strengthen access to archives and facilitate the identification of victims from the Civil War and dictatorship periods. It mandates digitisation and public access to some records and includes provisions for restitution of seized property. However, implementation varies regionally, as Spain's decentralised political system allows local governments to control much of this process. Political dynamics in regions led by conservative parties like the People's Party and Vox, who oppose memory laws, have further complicated research efforts.

In France, the access to sensitive historical archives – particularly those related to the Algerian War (1954-1962) – has been a contentious issue for decades. In 2021, the French government took a significant step by declassifying judicial archives related to the Algerian War. However, researchers and families still face bureaucratic hurdles, such as delays in declassification and the need for specific authorization to access sensitive files (Manceron and Morin 2024).



## 4.6 Media

### *a. Traditional Media*

Most of the traditional print media companies, both public and private enterprises, have acquired also digital space and work often with parallel contents. In the age of ‘fake news’ (Mourão and Robertson 2019). The reliability of the mediated information depends, in most cases, on the degree of polarization of the media landscape in a country. The free flow of information is at the heart of democracy, and conversely, media control is the most effective way to influence the kind of information citizens rely on to make their political choices. It is not just a question of manipulating political perspectives during elections. Much more important is the gradual and consistent modification of the nation's worldview and values. In its simplest form, it means that even if alternative information about the state of the country and the wider world is available via the internet, it is not believed and is no longer even sought out. When the main state channels have been broadcasting the same truth-telling interpretation for years, its core message is hammered into the minds of ordinary citizens who do not actively follow politics (Miklóssy 2024). So, from the researchers’ point of view there is a big difference as to what kind of media they are exploring and how the selected media platform relates to the whole spectrum of media environment.

## ***b. Social media: online hurdles***

In past couple of years, major online platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok have tightened access to their data reducing the amount and type of data researchers can retrieve.

The take-over of X, former Twitter, by Elon Musk in late 2022 has severely curtailed the access of data for researchers, especially due to paid API plans introduced in 2023. The free tier provides very minimal functionality, often insufficient for meaningful research, while higher tiers are prohibitively expensive. Costs can be up to \$42,000/month which are exorbitant for most university-funded research, cutting off many projects from real-time and historical Twitter data. Even at higher API levels, the volume of tweets retrievable is restricted, impacting studies requiring large datasets. Also, open access to historical tweets has been curtailed, making diachronic studies or event analysis harder. This has a direct impact on researchers' work: for instance, misinformation tracking tools cannot function properly anymore due to API restrictions, compromising studies on hate speech and extremist content. These restrictions – as well as the overall climate on the platform – also pushed away the scientific community, especially from social sciences (Blakey, 2024), from X, impacting the academic online ecosystem (Bisbee and Munger 2025, Bauvois et al. 2023).

Facebook also employs measures like CAPTCHAs, dynamic content loading, and rate limiting to prevent web scraping. Facebook has restricted public access to personal and group data following high-profile scandals (e.g., Cambridge Analytica). Content from private groups and user profiles is no longer accessible unless explicitly shared by the users. Information like detailed user demographics, group

memberships, or posts has been removed from accessible APIs unless users have provided consent. This means that researchers should ask consent when collecting data in private groups but when researchers know they will not receive consent – like from an extremist group – then we face an ethical dilemma. Should we jeopardise the whole research to respect the user's consent? Or work in a grey ethical area to obtain data anyway when knowing that extremist content will not be featured in public pages and profiles.

TikTok has also been limiting the range of accessible data, particularly sensitive metrics such as user demographics or behavioural analytics. API rate limits restrict the number of queries researchers can make in any given period. For large-scale research projects requiring substantial amounts of data, these limits necessitate significant workarounds or slower data collection processes, undermining research efficiency. Researchers also need to apply for access to TikTok's APIs by detailing the intended use of the data which is subject to TikTok's stringent approval process. This means that researchers must share the whole research design with TikTok which obviously poses ethical and privacy issues. Seeking approval can delay projects or result in outright denial if TikTok deems the research aim misaligned with their guidelines. Researchers often must refrain from seeking the platform's approval to avoid jeopardising, slowing down and/or compromising their studies. This can lead again to operating in a grey ethical area.

To access certain exclusive social media communities, researchers often may create a false identity to get access to conversations on the site. Besides that, these practices may raise ethical concerns (violating the principles of informed consent and privacy), problems of extrapolating agency on those sites also emerge. Discussions that are carried out by pseudonyms make it difficult to deduce gender- or age-related information of the participants. In addition, social media communities have a history, and the different layers of past topics might be familiar to the members but not necessarily for the researcher with ad hoc presence.

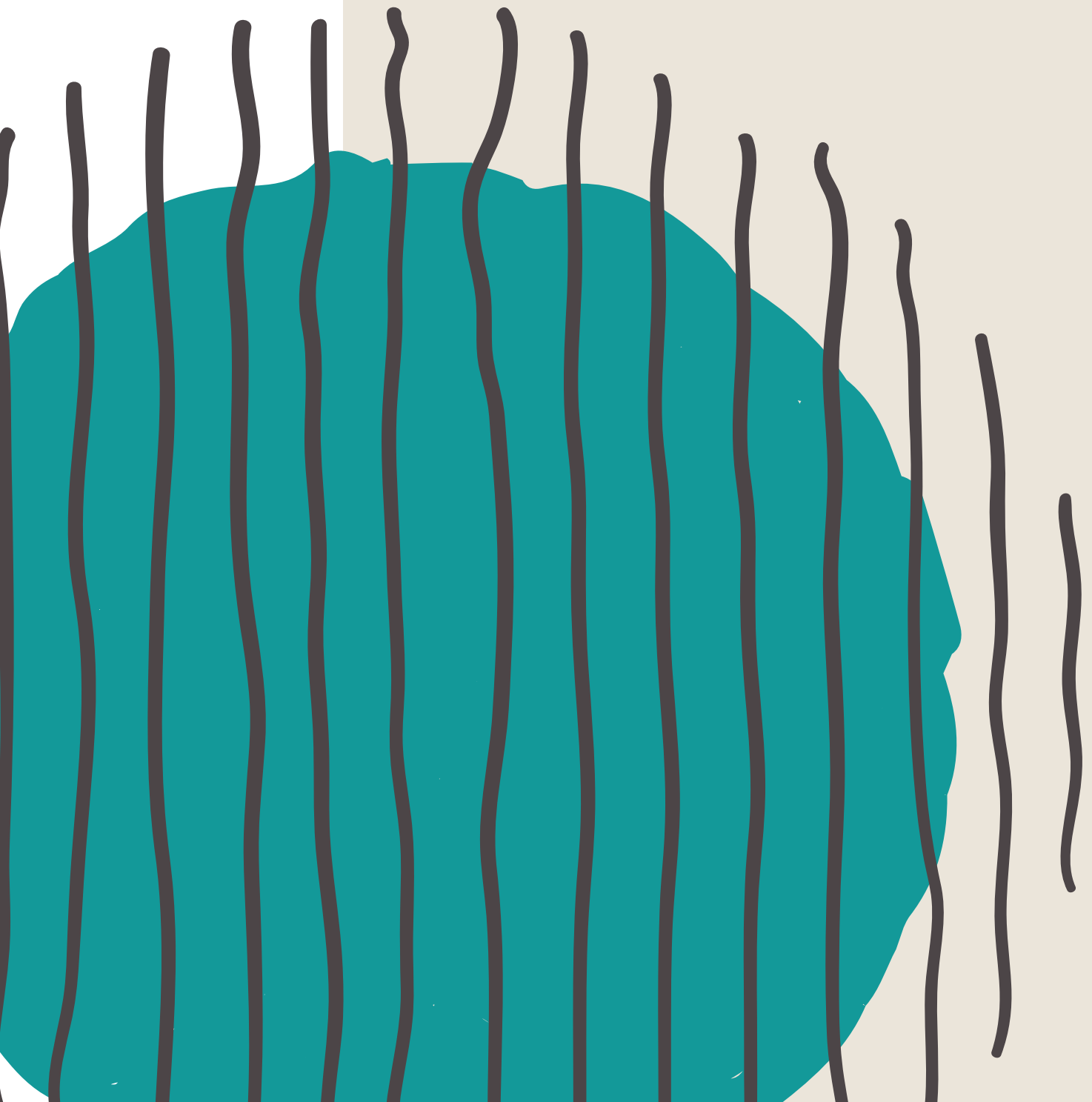
In online ethnographic research, a special problem can occur in connection with internet locations containing politically highly sensitive information. Particular groups that want to maintain exclusivity and secrecy often implement effective moderation, and as a result sites can disappear quickly and versatile data with them.

Digital discourse analysis on corpus datasets is a special fieldwork applying the same criteria as online ethnography, that is, taking into consideration the representativity of a complex data-entity. The iterations between sequences of data collection allow researchers to adjust the scope of their fieldwork according to any questions that may arise from the data already gained. Computational processing analysing social media data, provides a special angle to this type of methodology (Longhi 2018).

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a growing threat on the information value of digital sources. The increasing use of generative AI enable especially small radical groups to manufacture more contents, multiply propaganda with better formal qualities. Large databases allow extremist groups to easily infiltrate different sites by feeding specific values, events, or representations. Therefore, it is a double challenge for researchers working on online interactions: dealing with the amount of these messages and facing an ever-improving quality of these contents. The problem is that generic AI tools don't give information about the origins of the data or how these are collected. Hence, critical work on AI-generated extremist accounts needs to introduce, according to Rastier, the concept of corpora, which would give an advantage to understand the idea of the representation of data in a deeper and more complex way. In addition, by learning to use of AI efficiently would help to prevent threats and build counter narratives on the same topics, with a perhaps higher impact (Rastier 2021).

# 5

## Relation between the researcher and the data



## 5.1 Data's Impact on the Researcher

Analysing extremist movements, hate speech and denigrating narratives influence the researchers themselves. The scholars of the ARENAS project often recorded distress and uneasiness particularly with gender-related issues. These examples tend to emerge in cases of social media related online communities where the discussions are carried out under the shelter of anonymity. Especially, regarding visual images, memes and video clips can create powerful emotions and disgust that may limit the duration and willingness to access such source material, or the enthusiasm of analysing the gained material.

Dealing with mass data of this kind can gradually entail a special sensitivity that may affect the researcher's aspiration for objectivity. Furthermore, exposure to hateful data can produce a special alertness later when studying other or new topics and may affect the selection of data. On the other hand, massive hate data can also create a desensitization of the researcher where the threshold of being alert gets higher. In this case, the researcher might not perceive as sensitively as before what might be considered as extremist narrative, since when dealing with such sources, hate can become too ordinary and normal.

Researchers working with sensitive data such as data related to extremism not only face hurdles in accessing the data they need, but scholars can face online harassment and even be the target of direct threats. Again, the gender dimension must be acknowledged as female researchers working on far-right extremism and

topics related to gender, racism and immigration are more often the target of harassment. As a result, some researchers might decide to stop working on these topics to protect themselves from harassment.

## 5.2 Researchers' Impact on the Data

Researchers action can modify the content of the data in two ways. On the one hand, this situation can appear when the scholar is using mass-data, especially analysing hate speech or other extremist narratives. The range of perceiving and spotting what 'hate' means for an individual researcher, for instance, may change over time by the usage. Secondly, source material is always originated in a temporal and spatial context. Overlooking the contextuality of data in the annotating process can change the content of the material with serious consequences on the outcomes of analysis.

There is also a question of just tagging an account, an actor or source material as extremist, even before analysing the content. This situation brings to the fore the researchers' assumptions and even prejudice of what constitutes extremist, based on political positioning. The assessment of this type becomes significant when the data is used for comparative analysis with a purpose of overarching knowledge about a wider multinational European context. The challenge here is that the notion of extremism is fluid and changing by time, therefore, the research community has to maintain a continuous discussion of basic concepts, central for studying the subject.

In the type of data we process, there is a further consequence: sometimes by transmitting the results of our analysis, we change the behaviour of the users who produce the data. For example, they may want to keep sending hidden messages, so they change the way they communicate, or they may manipulate the data by using keywords in a false way to divert the data collection.

Postmodern ethnography reminds us about the special role of representation within ethnographic

research by underlining the need for reflexivity. It comprises being open about the data production and its circumstances and realizing the ethnographer's participation in the social world he/she seeks to analyse. The challenges are concerning the constant fluctuation of how informants interpret and reinterpret their realities, and how changing meanings are ascribed to events, situations, circumstances. Taking into consideration of temporality, as a 'lived experience of time' has an impact on the content of data (Brewer 2000; Madison 2005; Scott 2014a and 2014b).

In altering the content of visual sources semiotization is a central means. Semiotization is the process by which specific meanings are assigned to symbols, signs or cultural elements, and these are used to communicate ideas or values within a social or cultural context. In this way, by placing an image the researchers are already giving a complete message. (Fuentes 2024).

An important concern is how researchers deal with online extremist communities that safeguard their accessibility and control their membership to maintain a free flow of exchange of ideas. When conducting online ethnography incognito, for example on hate speech or extremist narratives, the question is about respecting **the right to be forgotten**, especially when the researcher has no direct contact in the target community. The question is about how scholars can avoid damaging the reputation of the members of the target community when dealing with politically sensitive data (Thompson et al. 2021; Lester 2020).

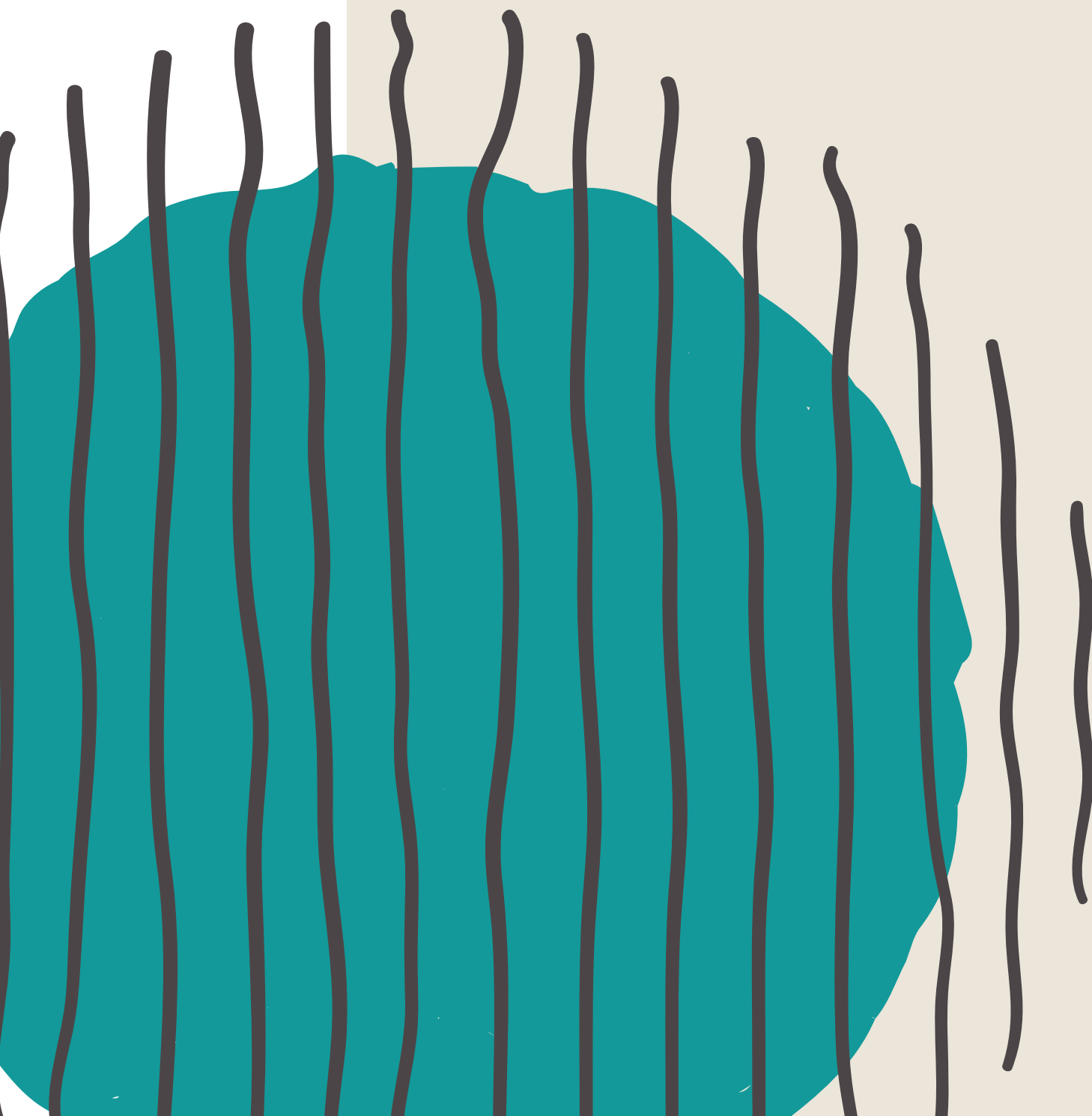


The 'right to be forgotten', also known as the 'right to erasure' or the 'right to dereference', is a legal principle that has been introduced by the European Union to be implemented in its member states since 2018 (EUR-Lex 2018). The regulation addresses the dangers of stigmatization and misuse of identifiable information found through search engines of Internet. The right to vanish observes the temporality of human action since it indicates the individual's prerogative to revisit previous opinions. This is the case also with a method often used by scholars carrying out research on social media: by copying word-to-word comments retrieved from a site, those writers can be exposed, not to mention that it is basically a violation of the General Data Protection Regulation signposted by the EU.

Research in the humanities and social sciences is not always repeatable, but the scientific community should have the possibility, if necessary, to verify research findings from the data analysed in a study. Openness is a key characteristic of science and a precondition for testing the validity of scientific information, critically evaluating information and advancing science. Data that are carefully archived for secondary research reduce the need to collect research data containing identifiers. Archiving also reduces the research pressure on small population groups. It is particularly important to archive secondary research data that have cultural, historical, and/or scientific value. Hence, it is important to respect the FAIR principles, which include Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse (see <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>).

# 6

## RISKS OF DISSEMINATION



Publishing research results based on sensitive data is always closely linked with ethical consideration and the researcher needs to think about the wider impact of their data. One of the most difficult questions researchers are struggling with is: for whom and for what purposes is the research for? It is also crucial to reflect on the way how the findings are communicated to the different audiences whether it is academic peers, the 'general public,' the state, law enforcement authorities, funding bodies, and/or anti-fascist and anti-racist organizations (Askanius, 2019).

Publishing for the academic community is important for one's academic career and the scrutiny of new outcomes is dependent on the way the data is interpreted. Polarisation visible in society, however, reaches also academia. It is becoming increasingly apparent in how academics behave towards their colleagues, in their impatience with and rigidity towards interpretations of diverse schools of thought, distinct methodologies or theories. Dividing lines within epistemic communities can emerge based on the researchers' assumed or real worldviews, political activism, age or even gender.

In addition, there are also ad hoc topics that create frictions in the university environment. These types of subjects can concern day-to-day political views or identity-related sentiments. Such an example occurred in Spanish academia regarding last years most heated issue of Catalan independence. Similarly, in a national context where the communist past can re-emerge in public discourse, the academic reception of historical research can be highly debated. Scientific interpretations can be challenged or even undermined by questioning the data or methodology of analysis in a biased atmosphere of the community. This can lead to a

careful deliberation of which academic journals would be 'politically' more fitting or open to different approaches and interpretations.

Universities and research institutes encourage researchers to share their results to the media and on social media – to be micro-scientific 'influencers' of a sort – but this public exposure does not come without problems and without risks. Researchers who are exposed by their publications may face real dangers. One of our informants described how for example, in Cyprus, scholars studying the far-right neo-Nazi organization Golden Dawn and ELAM were intimidated in their personal lives and received death threats. Researchers may even consider perilous for their safety to disseminate research results based on court decisions that are otherwise publicly available.

Researchers working on politically sensitive topics like human rights, freedom of speech, or protests might decide to publish their findings in international journals to avoid local censorship. The Hungarian government has used legal mechanisms to enforce its agenda, restructured academic funding and university governance to prioritise research aligning more with state-approved narratives. By administrative measures institutions' personnel have been pressured to implement self-censorship on topics critical of national policy, such as issues related to migration, LGBTQ+ rights, gender, the rule of law or national history.

Disseminating research results can be restricted due to the identity-building project of a state. This is the case for example in Poland, where the Law and Justice party (PiS) issued a law in 2018, defending the reputation of the Polish Republic and people, against certain interpretations of the past. According to the code, those who violate the law would be subject of penalty (up to three years in prison). The legislator did not specify categorically which expressions were illegal, but all references that could link for example Nazi crimes to the Polish state or people were prohibited. A vague definition of this type is dangerous because it places too much weight on interpretation, which can then be politically manipulated. Under international pressure, the Polish government agreed that historians can reach different research results without punishment. However, they were not allowed to participate in public debate or popularize their scientific findings because then they would be subject to legal liability under Polish law, whether they are Polish or not (Soroka and KrawtzeK 2019).

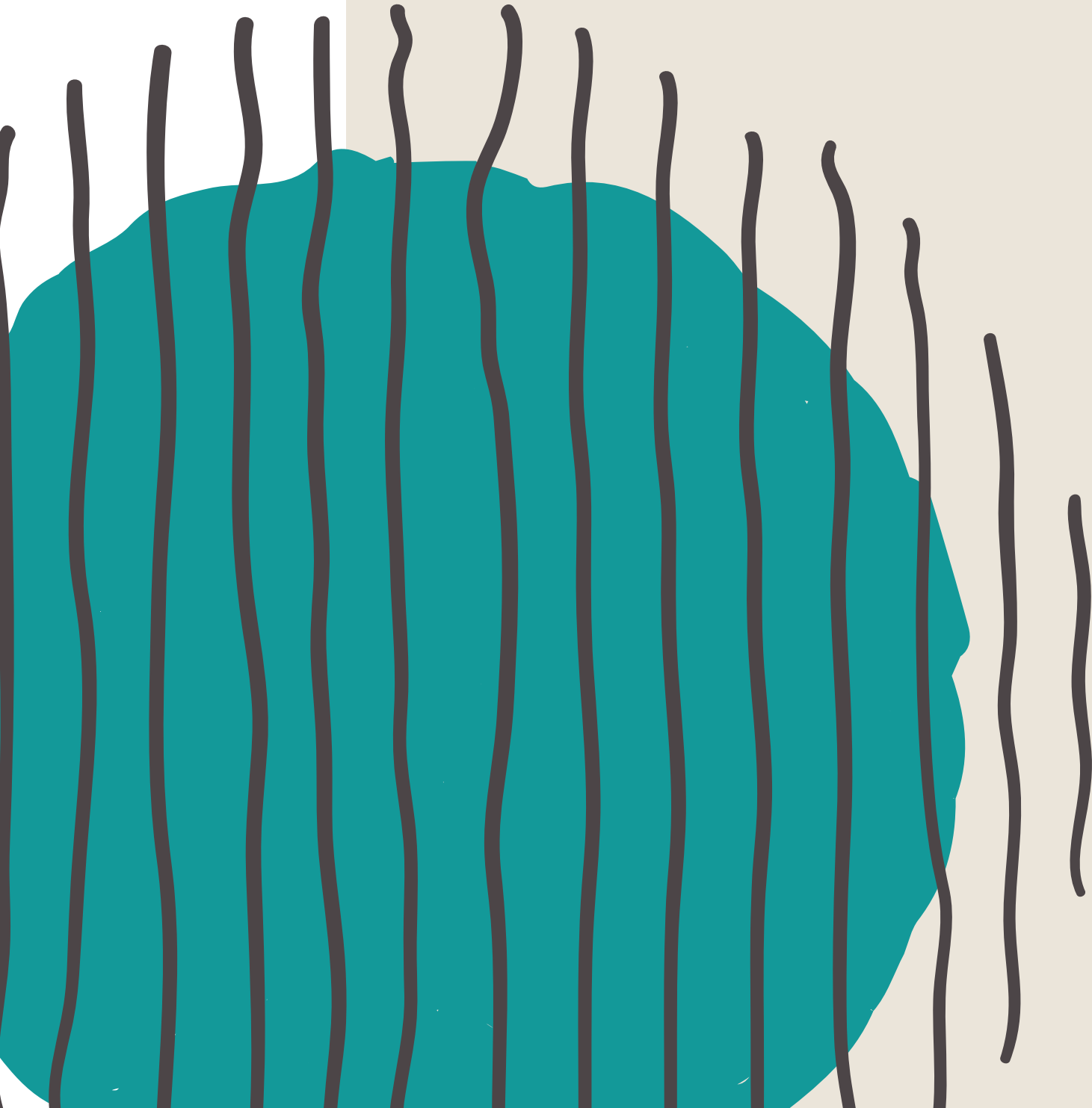
In many European countries there are lists of highly valued scientific journals where the scholars are expected to publish. In Finland these lists are updated in collaboration with some representatives of the academic community, but the selection criteria are much debated subject in different disciplines. Yet, these established categories effect the evaluation of scientific performance, funding opportunities and employment prospects. The audiences of the officially valued journals may not be the targeted academic public for politically sensitive issues.

In Poland, there are annual updates of the ministerial ranking list, and therefore the listing is always also a political decision. Publications in journals on the ranking list directly influence the evaluation of scholars and the institutions to which they belong journal and play a crucial role in financially securing and raising the prestige of the university. The Minister of Science can manipulate the evaluation of scientific achievements and therefore affect carriers of individual academics as well as position of the whole institutions.

Researchers become visible by science communication in the public sphere, for example by giving expert interviews for the media or of public talks by participating in public events or writing public articles to popularize scientific results. Visibility brings increasingly exposure to hostility, concrete threats and insults. If there are signs that a threat can materialize and produces a real physical danger that require immediate response, the researchers must notify their universities, and the university security services as well as contacting local authorities.

# 7

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The success of research depends on its first stage of scholarly conduct, that is gaining the source material to work with. Therefore, the significance of addressing the problems embedded in the data cannot be emphasised enough.

This exercise showed that there are a variety of experiences in the European context - regarding the individual countries' unique political environments. Some of these examples were more problematic (such as in the cases of Hungary and Poland) than others. Yet, what was particularly interesting and striking was that the problems mentioned by the scholars did not depend entirely on their national, institutional or research setting but represented a transnational phenomena, recognizable Europe-wide. This finding provided an important information of the amounting limitations of current academic work in Europe today.

After exploring this topic, we realize that this must be, after all, a 'living document' that need to be revisited periodically, based on the constant monitoring of its subject matter. In other words, we expect modifications to this text by amending new reflections on researchers' experiences with thus far unforeseeable challenges. The authors of this report however acknowledge that due to the potentially fast changing political

environment there may occur new limitations on the access of research material. The ultimate aim is to publish a new edition of collected experiences in an open access volume by 2027.

# Recommendations

## Regarding researchers' activities

- Collaborative problem-solving and critical reflection on why we are in the current situation and what could be done. In this respect, it is of paramount importance to continuously develop, update and reflect upon the incidental findings/risks policy in research projects. The researchers should evaluate in advance the possibility of discovering incidental findings, as well as the extent of such possibility and the consequences.
- One key area is collegial support and the need to count on the expertise of experienced researchers on the topic of extremism. This should be taken into consideration especially in researchers' training, both at doctoral and post-doctoral levels where the senior scholars could share their experiences to the younger generation of researchers.
- There should be zero tolerance regarding threats against researchers and thus it is highly recommendable to contact university security services always. Therefore, it is important that all researchers find out what academic channels are available in the national and local context where they can get prompt help and support. Documenting these situations are necessary.
- It would be important to raise public awareness of the fragility of researcher working with extremism and politically sensitive data.
- Researchers should reach out to collaborating with Trusted Third Parties (e.g., former extremists, journalists, or NGOs) who already have access to and knowledge of these spaces.
- Researchers should be aware of the new EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation, which has been recently launched (former RAN that was a mere network of practitioners). It is now a centralized EU-led initiative that brings together policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. Thematic panels are the main platform for experts to network, discuss, and brainstorm. More about it: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/eu-knowledge-hub-prevention-radicalisation/about-eu-knowledge-hub-prevention-radicalisation\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/eu-knowledge-hub-prevention-radicalisation/about-eu-knowledge-hub-prevention-radicalisation_en)



# Recommendations

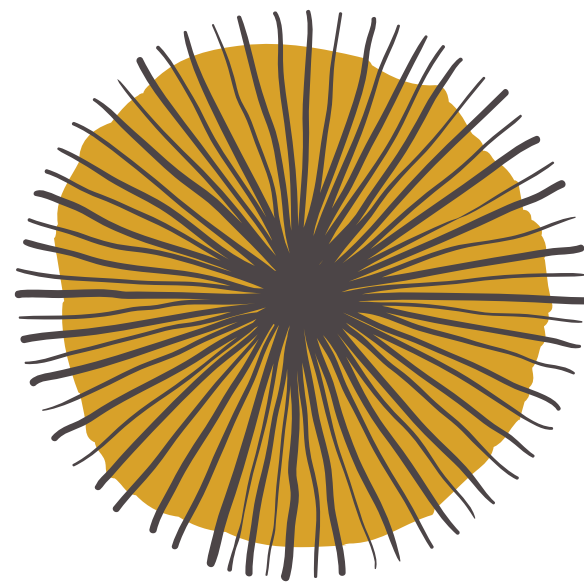
## Regarding universities' and research institutes' responsibilities

- European universities and research institutes should implement clear safeguards for researchers handling sensitive data / topics and offer institutional support if the researcher's safety
- Universities and research institutes should create specific ethical guidelines for scholars researching extremist groups and
- Universities and research institutes should ensure that ethics committees have expertise in digital research, extremism studies, and can identify cybersecurity risks.
- Researchers studying extremist content may face legal risks and universities should offer legal guidance to help them navigate these challenges, and legal support to facilitate research.
- The universities and research institutes should seek out collaboration with local organizations to help to protect and support researchers.

# Recommendations

## Regarding the decision-making bodies of the European Union

- The EU should regulate social media platforms' API policies to ensure researchers have a fair and free access to data for research purposes and can conduct their work properly.
- Social media platforms should be made accountable by the European Union institutions for the role they play in spreading extremist narratives and curtailing research on the topic.
- The EU should ensure that GDPR regulations would allow researchers to study publicly available extremist content while protecting user privacy.



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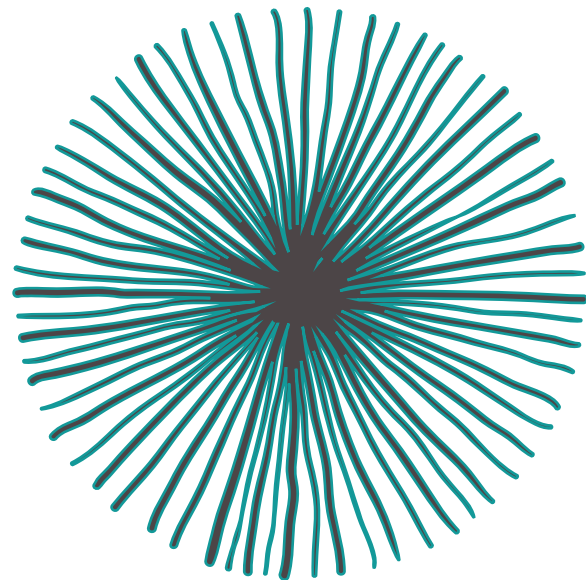
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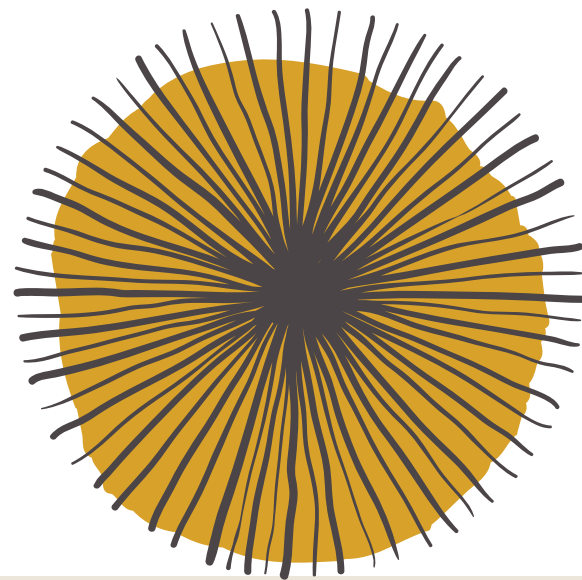
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