

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.

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Our **partnership** consists of **12 organisations** from **9 countries**, each bringing unique experience, expertise and skills to the project.



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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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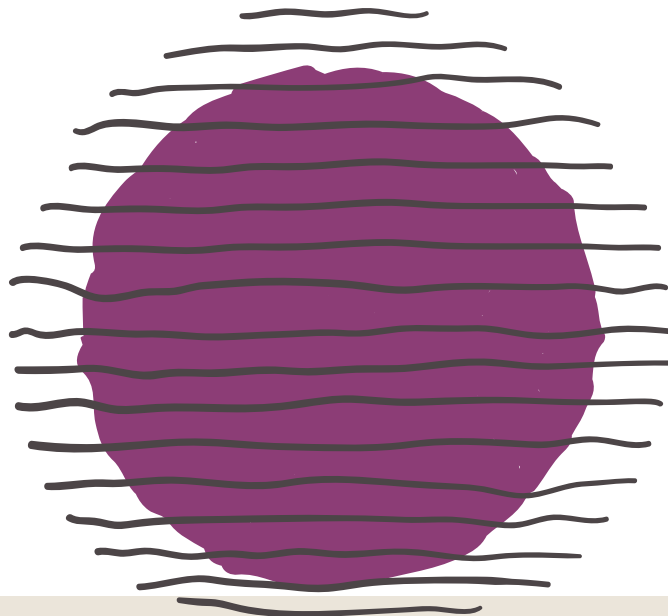
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01

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION



Academics around the world are facing the consequences of a “post-truth” world, characterised by conspiracy theories, disinformation and fake news. New prospects of digitalisation, with the extensive use of artificial intelligence, and mounting hybrid threats, based, first and foremost, on the flood of disinformation, have a profound impact on the production and perception of knowledge (Conrad et al. 2024). This development carries serious consequences for scientific inquiry. What sources can we rely on, and 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 polarising societies, questioning scholarly interpretations, targeting individual scholars, their institutions, or their disciplines. Confrontations and polarisation, however, are emerging also within the scholarly environment where students, academics and departments take political stands 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 bears 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 polarising environments, those where hate speech and extremist narratives become mainstream. We offer collected information based on interviews with researchers of the ARENAS consortium who shared their experiences of 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.

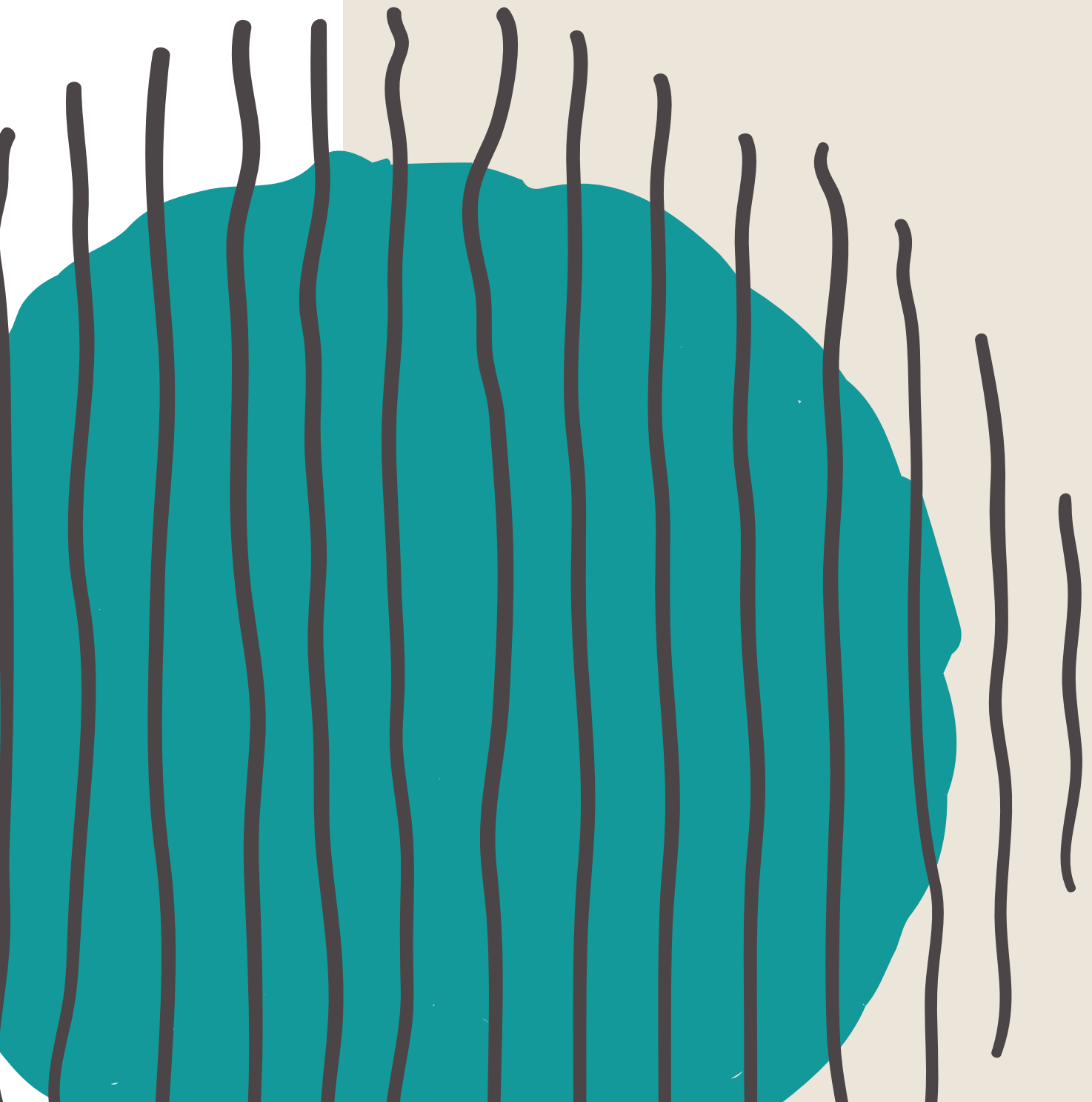
Special emphasis is on the discussion of the sorts of risks related to sources that

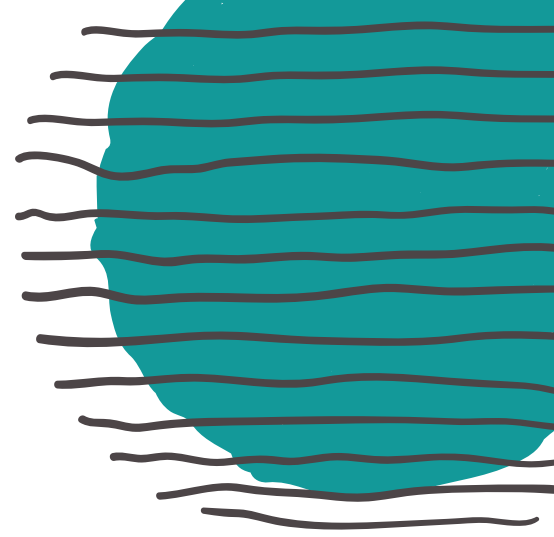
- a) can be perceived as politically sensitive,
- b) are difficult to access,
- c) tend to become the subject of researchers’ influence, or
- d) are dangerous for the scholars themselves.

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 common European development pattern recognisable?

02

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 comprehensive in terms of 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 using a methodological and theoretical toolkit, it results in academic knowledge that can be disseminated to various audiences. By dissemination, the produced knowledge is recontextualised and translated into a new form, a process by which the significance of the data also 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, and religious beliefs, but sensitive data is also includes 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. Unanticipatable 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 a 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 also be perceived as a **space and agency** at the same time. Spatiality refers to the locality of the data, situated in national or transnational contexts and on a special thematic arena, in an archive, a media, a dataset, an online source, just to mention a few examples. Furthermore, due to the ARENAS-project’s main agenda, extremism and extremist narratives always signify a special location that constitutes an alert requiring a careful scholarly approach.



This type of spatiality can be pinpointed when dealing with

- extremist networks
- vulnerable populations
- sites of archival materials, documents, or storage 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 political and legal implications attached to the topic of extremism, and consequently the variety of negative impacts 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

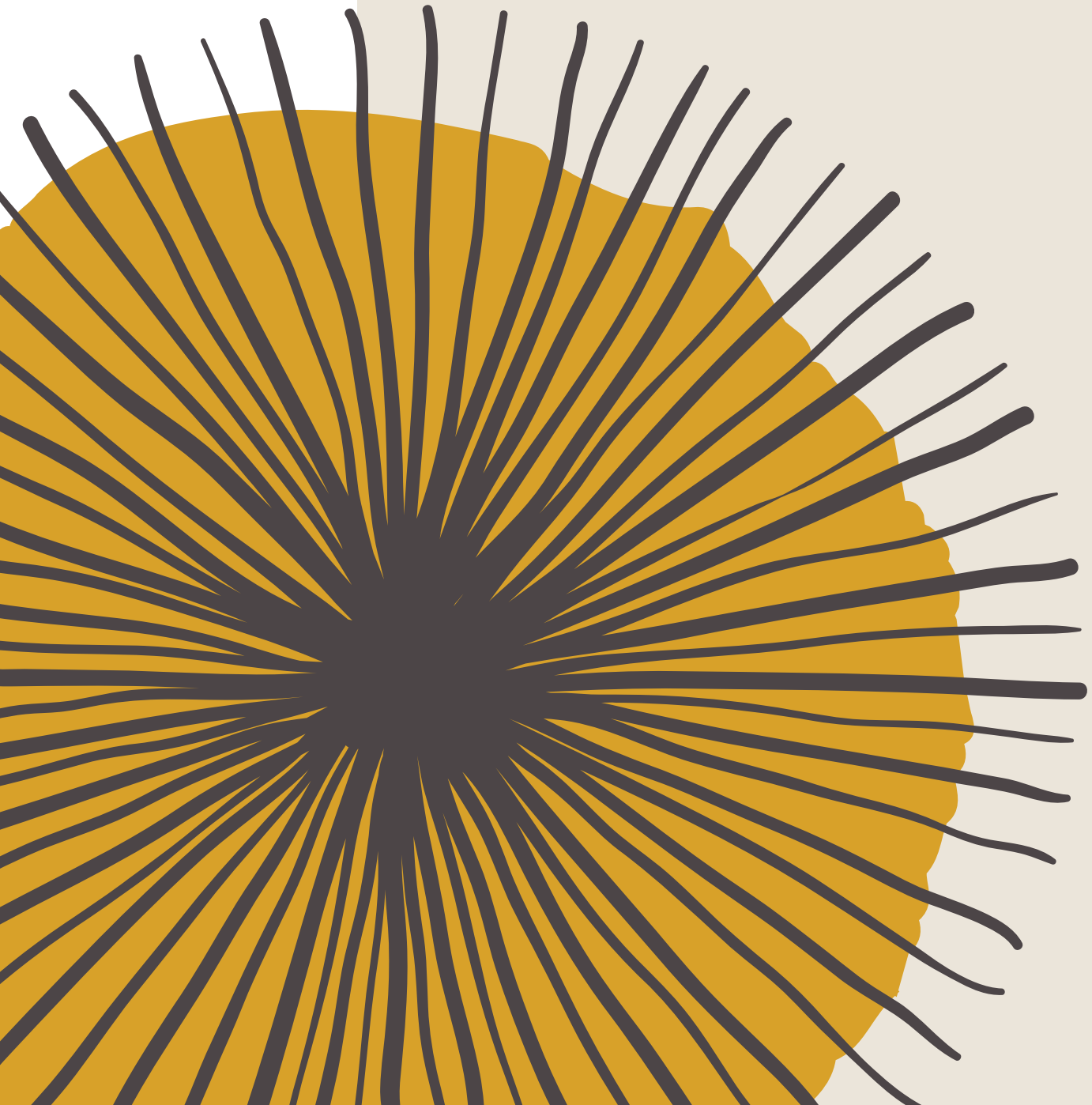
the alteration of their actions or a more profound change in their *modus operandi*.

- 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 sets 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 current world affairs in general, and in the European sphere in particular.

03

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 varies in relation to the national context where the investigation takes place. That is why the gradually increasing societal polarisation 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 it.

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 rechanneling 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 jeopardise the maintenance of the data. Government organisations 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 the Law and Justice party was in power (2015–2023), the power elite 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, as 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 Kutaedze 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 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, which 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, marginalised 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 in academia and the question of LGBTQ rights were employed as convenient subjects of public debate, enabling further polarisation of society and rallying support. In election campaigns of 2018, 2019 and 2020, 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 the 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 the 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 stance in the midst of the migration crisis of 2015, but resulted in an important shift in social attitudes toward sexual minorities, associating defence of their rights with the opposition to Jarosław Kaczyński's rule. After 2020, it became a constant element of the opposition agenda. In the 2023 parliamentary elections, promises of regulations recognising the rights of the LGBTQ community and liberalisation of abortion rights became one of the core arguments for the mobilisation of the opposition (Górska 2020).



3.3 Debated Science

Polarisation can also be detected in the gradually advancing politicisation of academia and academic knowledge. Especially in the 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 the data on which research is based. Being useful for 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 into 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 marginalised or even politically attacked. Furthermore, in the crisis-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 affect 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, students also need to pay attention to what kind of protests they participate in, because, for example, if they can be identified in officially produced drone footage or by a 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 for the selection of research subjects, data and interpretations. This accelerated not only conflicts between the government and universities but also introduced a polarisation between government-loyal academic institutions and politically non-aligned ones.



This situation led to new amendments called the 'Academic Freedom Act (2021) to promote and privilege conservative leanings 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 Sciences and elevated over-subsidised 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 the politicisation instead and consequently also the polarisation of academia. The new government led by Donald Tusk conducted sweeping audits and investigations searching for misdemeanours of the previous administration, dismantled 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 the 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 sensitive data because it depends on how the research environment defines what qualifies as 'humour'. It is closely related to freedom of expression and its relation to the limits on political humour and who is vested 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 in time. This temporality might alter the selection of the data and/or the interpretations, the analysis and research outcomes.

4

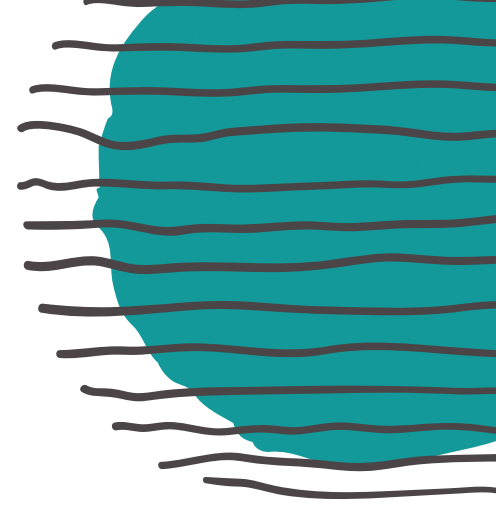
SPECIAL SITES OF SOURCES





Observing the special sites where the various types of data can be found also reveals 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 systematisation, or updating of the dataset); and c) who decides about access to the material. Agency, besides the actors involved, also refers to the resources by which these warehouses or platforms of data are maintained and the practices of usage characteristic of a dataset. In this section, we discuss the most relevant sources in the study of extremism.

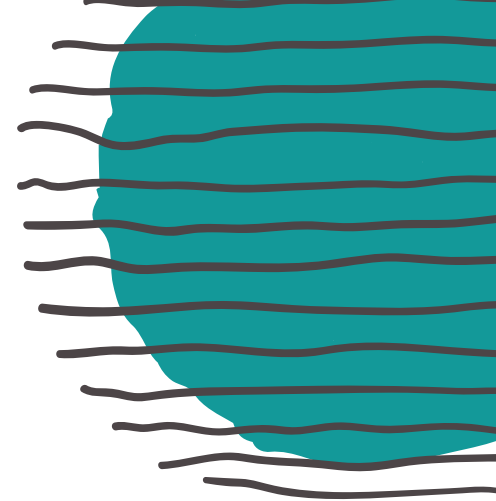
4.1 Legal Materials



Main legal sources, such as laws, state regulations and government statutes, are digitised in the European context and operate on an open access principle; hence, they 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-evident and subjects of interpretation. Legislation and any other additional government practice of contributing to the legal framework are, 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 or interpreted without reflection on the national political environment and special characteristics of the legal culture in which the document was produced. This often creates 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, singling out a particular legal section from a comprehensive entity may affect the ability to interpret the content without understanding its situatedness in the legal context.

Often the real significance of a law or regulation can be perceived by exploring its implementation in practice. This provides invaluable information about the interpretation of laws in a national context that can also reveal, for example, the freedom of the 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 is often interlinked with ethical considerations regarding personal information and the identification of people involved, including the employees of the courts. The exception to compulsory anonymisation 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 the next chapter below), 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 the topic the data collection concerns, and 3) the more efficiently it can be utilised, it is vital to 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.

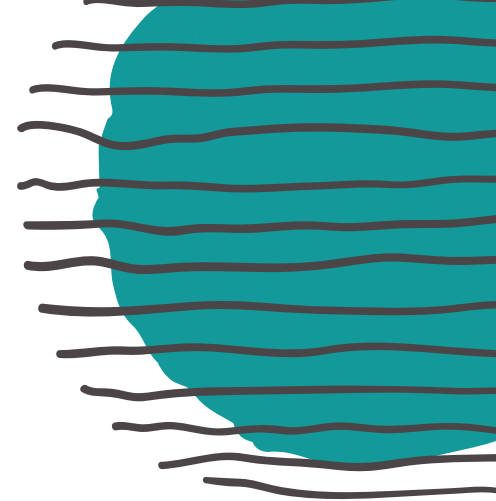
In studying extremist narratives and actors, the **vulnerability of informants** and research subjects is likely to emerge. Victims of violent extremism, on the one hand, and members of violent extremist groups, former members, victims of extremist groups, and activists, on the other hand, are similarly 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, 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 often create 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 intended information. Another example is when 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 respondent, 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 the purposes of research and dissemination (Tannenberg 2017).

In addition, there is a factor that influences 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 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 a 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; reassuring 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, define 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 characterised by the potential to create emotional reactions in the audience in a more powerful way than any textual or numerical data. Due to this feature, visual materials are particularly prone to being subjected to political manipulation because, through editing, the message can be easily altered. In addition, since the mediatization of our time is highly dependent on the transmission and circulation of images, political actors are taking advantage of this trick. Zooming in on a carefully chosen detail of a political demonstration can turn public opinion against the demonstrators.

These are especially significant ways to modify visual content in countries where mainstream public media is politicised and polarised. In Hungary, videoclips manufactured from interviews or political speeches are a common means of discrediting and denigrating political opponents by the governing party on various media platforms. (Bódi-Polyák-Urbán 2022; Kiss et al. 2023; Miklóssy 2024). News footage in national broadcasts can be deceptive. Old pictures of migration were used to raise the 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 of aggressive migrants to be shown on daily television, followed 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 footage of a football match celebration in a pub in Belfast was used to give the impression that it was the Ukrainians who were rejoicing at 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 more 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 content 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 the famous “für Deutschland” soundbite of Donald Tusk. The clip comes from a speech given by Tusk, then president of the EPP, in German at the CDU conference in January 2021. In the speech, Tusk praises the cooperation between the EPP and the CDU as well as expresses gratitude for Germany's 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 the opposition victory in 2023, the 2-second-long soundbites in which Tusk says “[fur Deutschland](#)” along with the words “[danke fur alles](#)” and manipulated pictures of the former PM presented in red light with devil horns and a sniper scope on his chest became a constant reminder of Tusk’s treacherous connections with Germany for the TV viewers (Fakt 2021). During 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 frequent and predictable that soon it turned into a subject of jokes and memes targeted at the Law and Justice regime; in the end, it became one of the most recognisable symbols of heavy-handed 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 permission to study materials maintained by a national institution. It depends on the country whether the authorisation 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 of how access to materials can change quickly depending on changes in 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 who 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 a usual hierarchical premium on access to the archives. This access usually depends on personal or social relations, the individual's will to share and the established trust between the creator and the researcher. Even when it is a question of gaining access to the archives of cultural institutions, such as internal records of theatres, art galleries or festival offices, for example, the opening of those resources for an individual researcher usually depends on personal will and the consent of some specific person in charge. Transfer of those materials to some form of open-access institutions happens only after quite a long period of time and, of course, only in the case of previously selected and appreciated works. Therefore, most often access to sources depends heavily on the researcher's interpersonal relations, which 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, 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 authorisation 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 also acquired digital space and often work with parallel content. In the age of ‘fake news’ (Mourão and Robertson 2019). The reliability of the mediated information depends, in most cases, on the degree of polarisation 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 in what kind of media they are exploring and how the selected media platform relates to the whole spectrum of the media environment.



b. Social media: online hurdles

In the 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 takeover of X, formerly Twitter, by Elon Musk in late 2022 has severely curtailed access to 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 the 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 for 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, 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 again lead to operating in a grey ethical area.



To access certain exclusive social media communities, researchers may often 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 to 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 take valuable 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 representativeness 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).

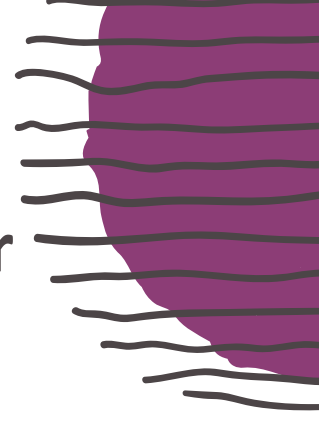
Artificial intelligence (AI) is a growing threat to the information value of digital sources. The increasing use of generative AI enables especially small radical groups to manufacture more content, multiply propaganda with better formal qualities. Large databases allow extremist groups to easily infiltrate 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 in understanding the idea of the representation of data in a deeper and more complex way. In addition, learning to use AI efficiently would help to prevent threats and build counter-narratives on the same topics, with a perhaps higher impact (Rastier 2021).

05

Relation between the researcher and the data



5.1 Data's Impact on the Researcher



Analysing extremist movements, hate speech, and denigrating narratives influences 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 for 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 desensitisation 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 an 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' actions 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 when 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 with usage. Secondly, source material always originates 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 about what constitutes extremism, 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 changes over time; therefore, the research community has to maintain a continuous discussion of basic concepts, central to studying the subject.

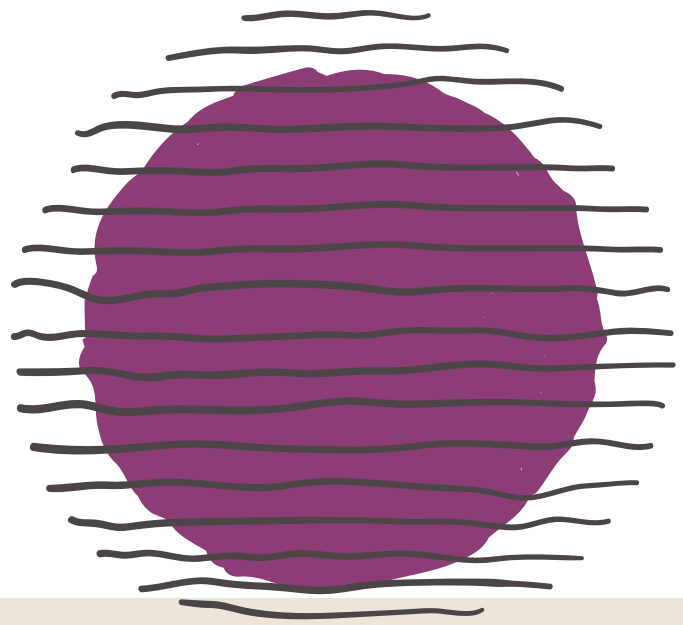
In the type of data we process, there is a further consequence: sometimes, by transmitting the results of our analysis, we change the behaviour of the users who produce the data. For example, they may want to keep sending hidden messages, so they change the way they communicate, or they may manipulate 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 realising the ethnographer's participation in the social world he/she seeks to analyse. The challenges concern the constant fluctuation of how informants interpret and reinterpret their realities, and how changing meanings are ascribed to events, situations, and circumstances. Taking into consideration 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 with 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).

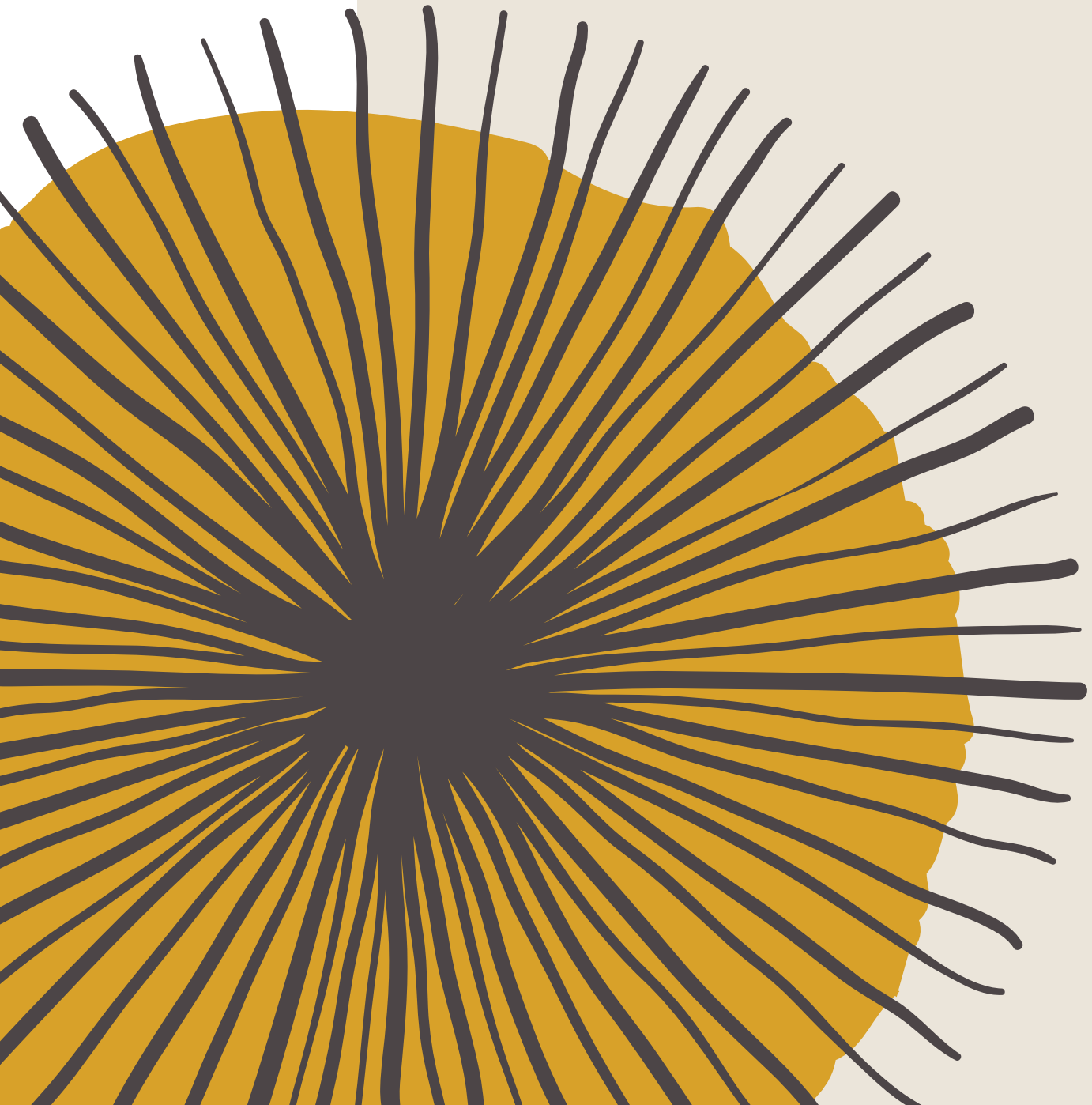


The 'right to be forgotten', also known as the 'right to erasure' or the 'right to dereference', is a legal principle that has been introduced by the European Union to be implemented in its member states since 2018 (EUR-Lex 2018). The regulation addresses the dangers of stigmatisation and misuse of identifiable information found through search engines on the Internet. The right to vanish observes the temporality of human action since it indicates the individual's prerogative to revisit previous opinions. This is also the case with a method often used by scholars carrying out research on social media: by copying word-for-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/>).

06

RISKS OF DISSEMINATION





Publishing research results based on sensitive data is always closely linked with ethical considerations, 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 intended? It is also crucial to reflect on the way 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 organisations (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, also reaches 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 friction 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 year's 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 within 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 organisation Golden Dawn and ELAM were intimidated in their personal lives and received death threats. Researchers may even consider it 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, restructuring academic funding and university governance to prioritise research aligning more with state-approved narratives. Through 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 a state's identity-building project. 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 to a 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 could reach different research results without punishment. However, they were not allowed to participate in public debate or popularise their scientific findings because then they would be subject to legal liability under Polish law, whether they are Polish or not (Soroka and Krawtzeck 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 a much-debated subject in different disciplines. Yet, these established categories affect 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.

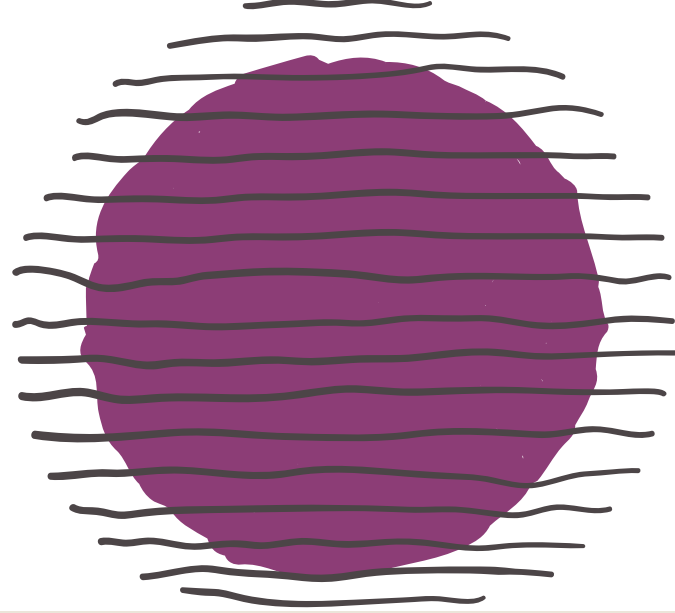
In Poland, there are annual updates of the ministerial ranking list, and therefore the listing is also a political decision. Publications in journals on the ranking list directly influence the evaluation of scholars and the institutions to which they belong and play a crucial role in financially securing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

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

07

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS





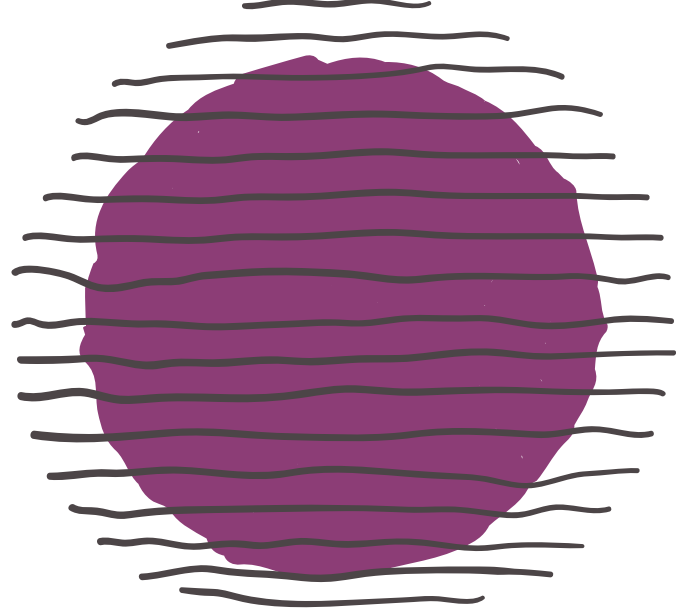
The success of research depends on its first stage of scholarly conduct, that is, gaining the source material to work with. Therefore, the significance of addressing the problems embedded in the data cannot be emphasised enough.

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 phenomenon, recognisable Europe-wide. This finding provided important information on the mounting limitations of current academic work in Europe today.

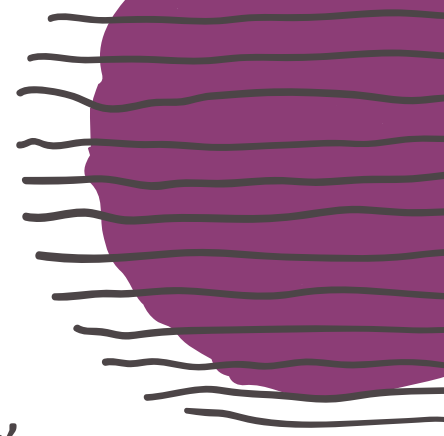
After exploring this topic, we realise that this must be, after all, a 'living document' that needs to be revisited periodically, based on the constant monitoring of its subject matter. In other words, we expect modifications to this text by amending new reflections on researchers' experiences with thus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



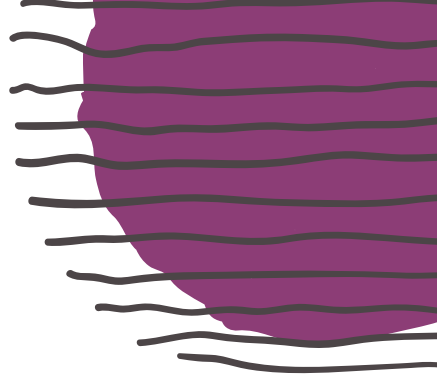
- Collaborative problem-solving and critical reflection on why we are in the current situation and what could be done. In this respect, it is of paramount importance to continuously develop, update and reflect upon the incidental findings/risks policy in research projects. The researchers should evaluate 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 recommended 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 is necessary.
- It would be important to raise public awareness of the fragility of researchers working with extremism and politically sensitive data.
- Researchers should reach out to collaborate 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 recently been launched (formerly RAN, which was a mere network of practitioners). It is now a centralised 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



Recommendations

Regarding universities' and research institutes' responsibilities

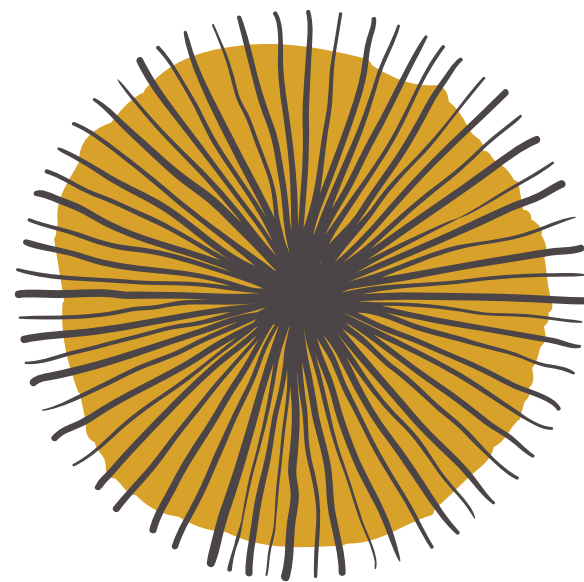
- European universities and research institutes should implement clear safeguards for researchers handling sensitive data/topics and offer institutional support if the researcher's safety
- Universities and research institutes should create specific ethical guidelines for scholars researching extremist 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.
- Universities and research institutes should seek out collaboration with local organisations 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 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 allow researchers to study publicly available extremist content while protecting user privacy.



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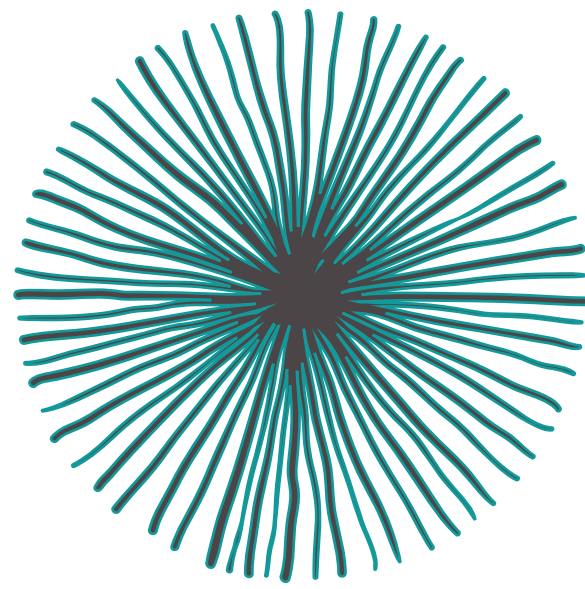
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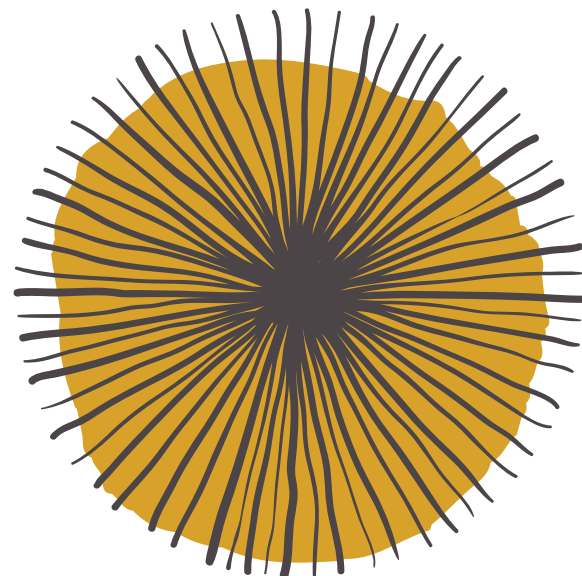
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