

# From Isolation to Radicalization: Anti-Muslim Hostility and Support for ISIS in the West

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# Extremists use social media extensively

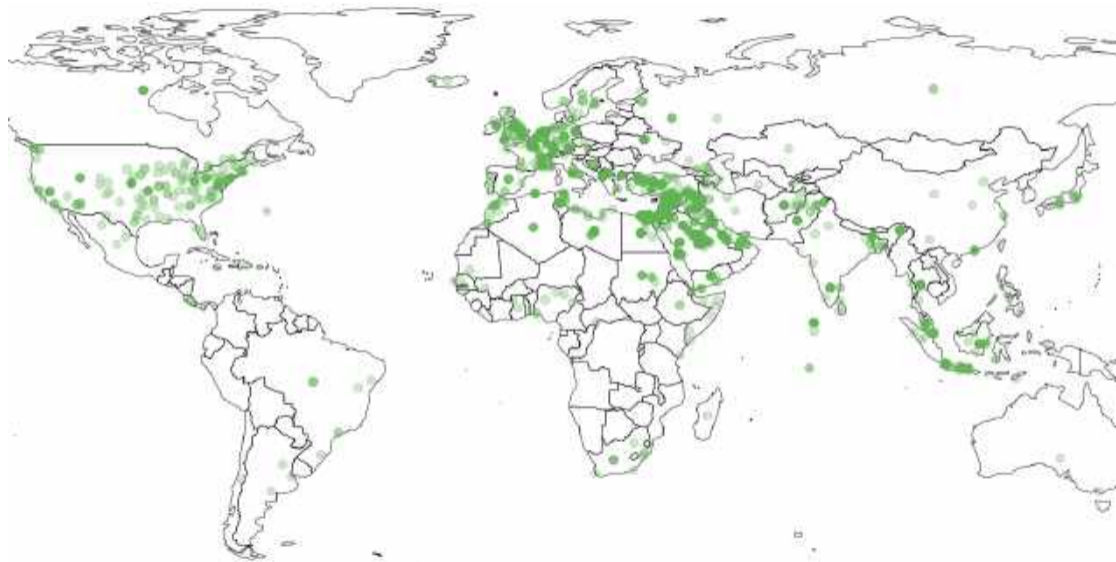
- Groups using online platforms range from jihadists to white nationalists to neo-Nazi supporters
- Many use the Internet and social media to
  - Interact with other supporters
  - Consume and spread violent, extremist content
  - Organize violent activity



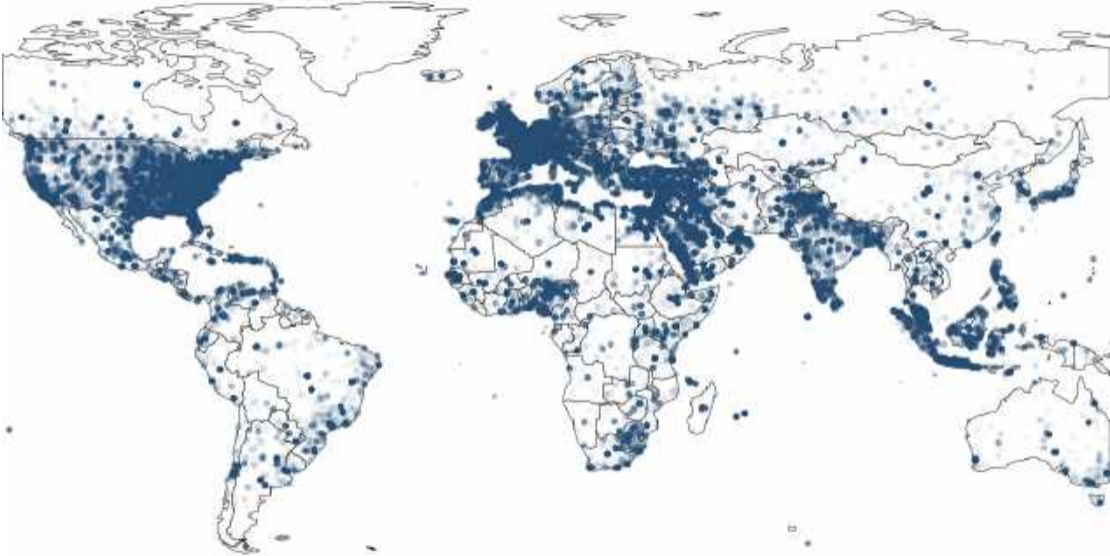
Today, on the Internet, huge amounts of public data on extremists' online behavior



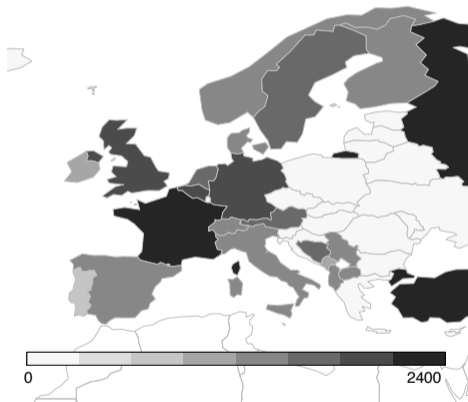
## Locations of propaganda-disseminating Twitter accounts, 2014-2016



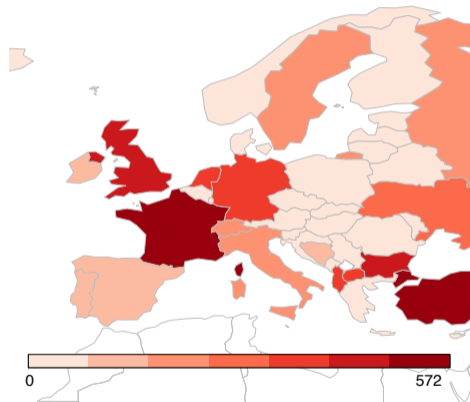
# Locations ISIS followers on Twitter, 2014-2016



# Pro-ISIS activity on Twitter correlates with the number of foreign fighters in Europe



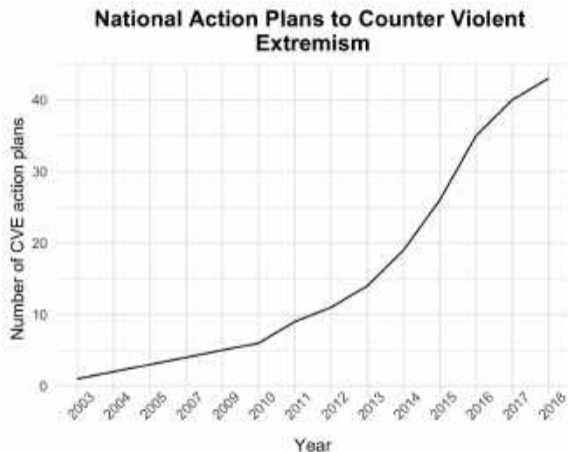
# foreign fighters



# flagged as ISIS activists

# How social media facilitates violent extremism: A central policy question

- Growing interest in the policy world to address radicalization through social media
- Increasing number of counter-radicalization interventions
- Many initiatives in the tech industry



# My research draws on rich social media data to shed light on the drivers of violent extremism in the digital age

Propaganda and  
Radicalization in an  
Internet Age

From Isolation to  
Radicalization: Anti-  
Muslim Hostility and  
Support for ISIS in the  
West

Countering Violent  
Extremism and Radical  
Rhetoric

Terrorism as a Stage for  
Far-Right Mobilization

Mapping White  
Supremacist Social  
Networks on  
Alternative Online  
Platforms



# Today I'll focus on radicalization in Western Europe

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# ISIS networks on Twitter

- New geo-located data on the behavior of ISIS supporters on Twitter
- Over 1.6M accounts linked to ISIS on Twitter
- Panel data (2007 – 2017)
- Content and behavioral measures of radicalization

Year	# tweets
2007	849
2008	4,740
2009	42,667
2010	113,625
2011	376,627
2012	1,299,006
2013	3,285,090
2014	6,552,219
2015	17,887,290
2016	69,900,477
2017	4,903,609

# Tracking in real time crowd-sourced lists of ISIS-affiliated accounts

The screenshot displays the Twitter profile for CtrlSec (@CtrlSec). The profile header shows 76.4K tweets, 14.5K following, 19.8K followers, and 1,298 likes. The profile picture is a red eye icon. The bio area contains three images: a black square with a red eye and the text 'CONTROL THE ACTION', a green sign with the word 'Priorities', and a white document with a blue header. The main content area shows two tweets from CtrlSec. Both tweets are titled 'Targeted IS accounts' and contain three links to 'twitter.com/intent/user?us...' and three hashtags: '#targets #iceisis #opiceisis'. The top tweet has 41 retweets and 35 likes, while the bottom tweet has 1 retweet and 1 like.

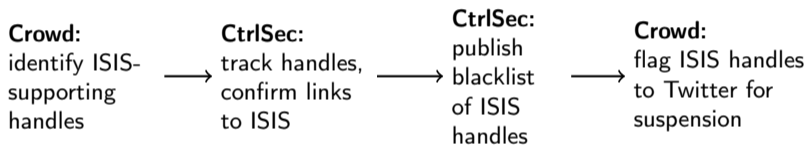
**CtrlSec** @CtrlSec

TWEETS 76.4K FOLLOWING 14.5K FOLLOWERS 19.8K LIKES 1,298

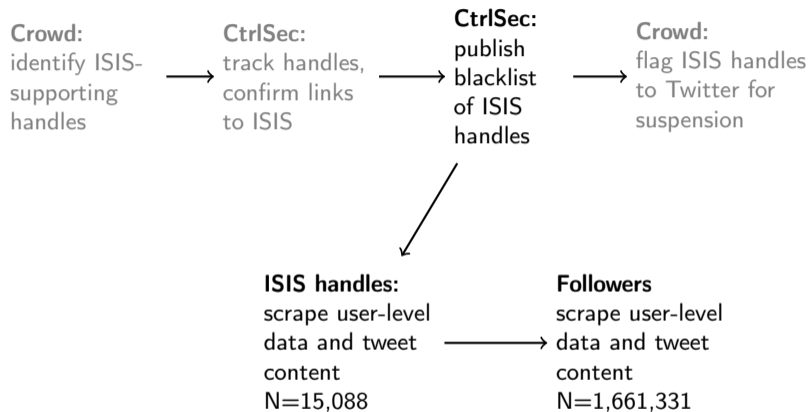
Targeted IS accounts  
[twitter.com/intent/user?us...](https://twitter.com/intent/user?us...)  
[twitter.com/intent/user?us...](https://twitter.com/intent/user?us...)  
[twitter.com/intent/user?us...](https://twitter.com/intent/user?us...)  
#targets #iceisis #opiceisis

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[twitter.com/intent/user?us...](https://twitter.com/intent/user?us...)  
#targets #iceisis #opiceisis

## How an account gets flagged by @CtrlSec



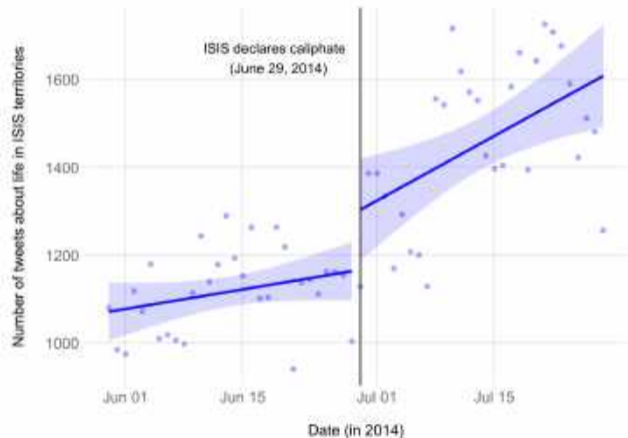
# Scraping ISIS accounts



*Number of Twitter users as of 1/30/2017*

# Supervised machine learning to classify tweets in English, Arabic, French, and German

- Sympathy with ISIS
- Travel to Syria / foreign fighters
- Life in ISIS territories
- Anti-West sentiment
- Syrian war



# Why did individuals living in Western countries began to support groups like the Islamic State?

- Between 2011 – 2016, about 30,000 foreign fighters joined ISIS
- In Europe, over 70% came from France, the UK, Germany, and Belgium

## Foreign Fighters from Western Europe

Almost 3,700 of the total 5,000+ European foreign fighters come from just four countries: France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium.



Image source: The Soufan Group, 2015

# Anti-Muslim hostility was driving pro-ISIS radicalization in Western Europe

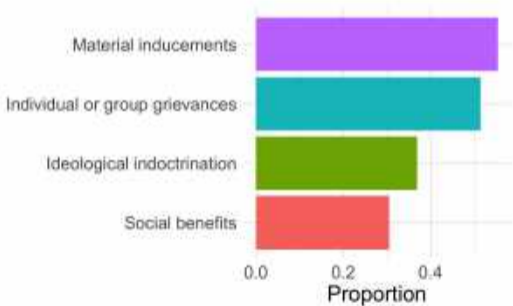
- Experiencing discrimination can lead to radicalization
- Anti-immigrant hostility inhibits integration, increases social isolation
- ISIS activists exploited anti-Muslim hostility by providing alternative 'virtual community' on social media platforms





# ISIS propaganda contained a large number of themes appealing to individuals in Western countries

**Content Distribution in ISIS Propaganda  
2015-2016**



# The link between 'offline' hostility and 'online' radicalization

- I use new geo-referenced data on the online behavior of thousands of Islamic State sympathizers in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium
- I study whether the intensity of anti-Muslim hostility in the 'offline world' is linked to 'online' pro-ISIS radicalization on Twitter



# In Europe: Anti-Muslim hostility prevalent where far-right parties are popular

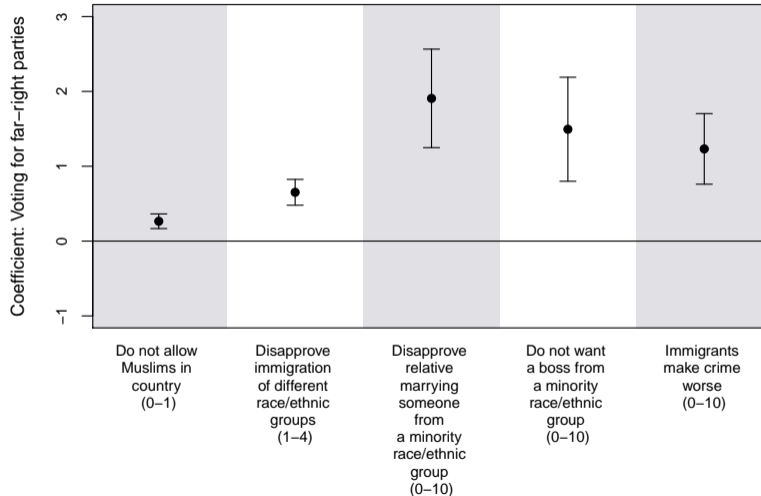
Popularity of far-right parties driven by:

- Waves of immigration from Muslim-majority countries
- Terrorist attacks by Islamist perpetrators

Voting for the far-right strongly correlates with anti-Muslim attitudes



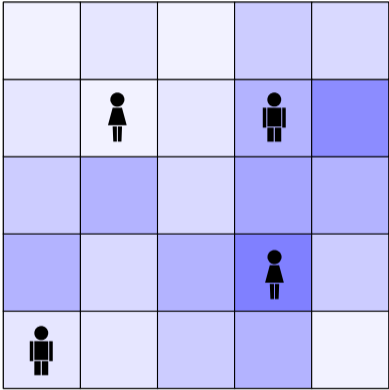
# Far-right voting and anti-Muslim attitudes in Europe



In this study, I examine whether individuals are more likely to show signs of radicalization in areas with greater far-right support



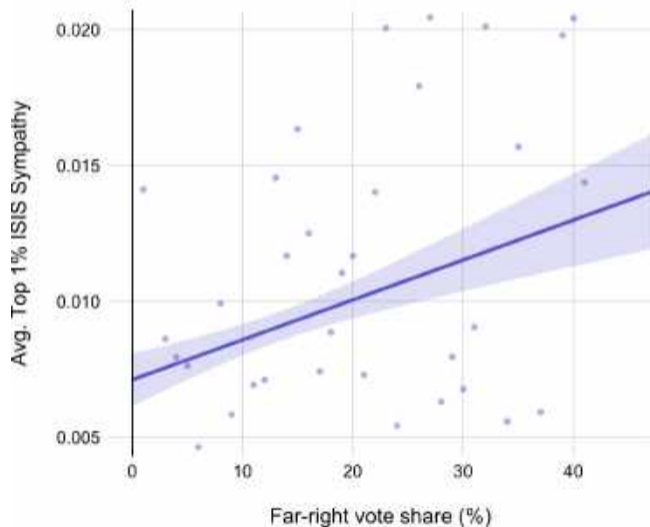
France



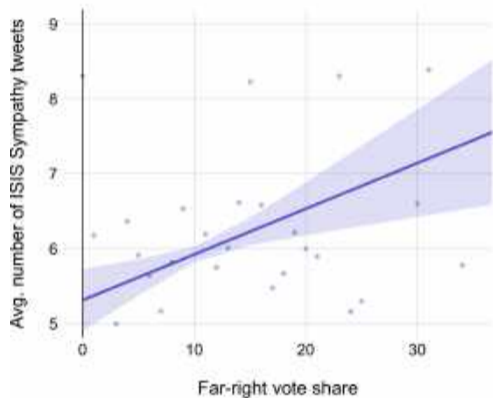
Illustration

Darker shades reflect higher vote share for the Front National party

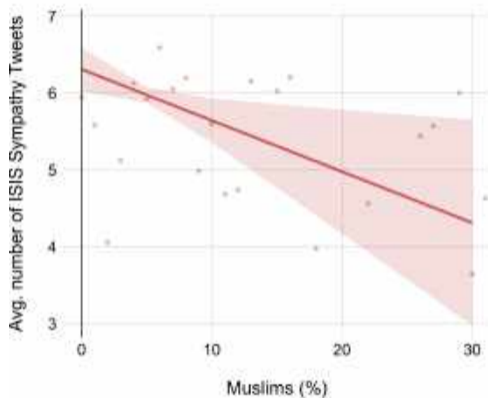
## Far-right vote share and support for ISIS on Twitter



## Results when controlling for minority populations (UK)

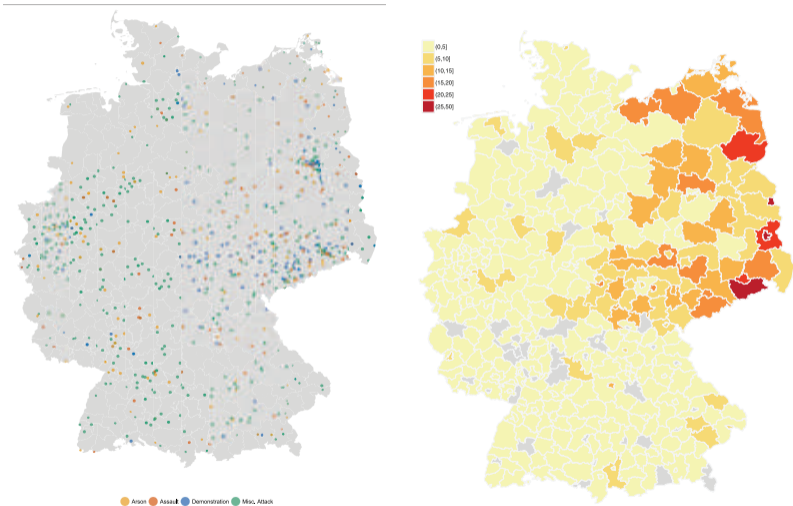


Far-right vote share



Muslim population

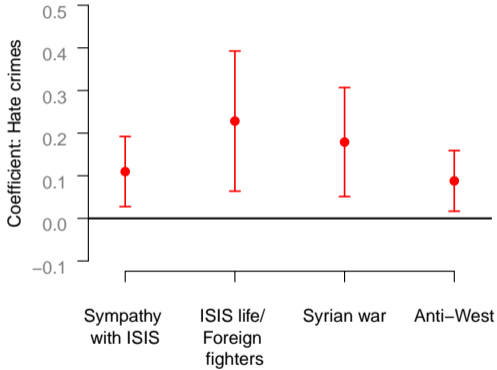
# Another measure for hostility: Anti-immigrant hate crimes in Europe



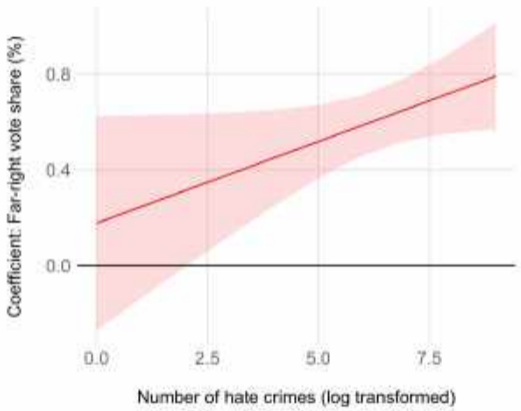
Anti-Refugee Violence and Social Unrest in Germany (ARVIG) dataset



# Hate crimes and support for ISIS on Twitter (UK)

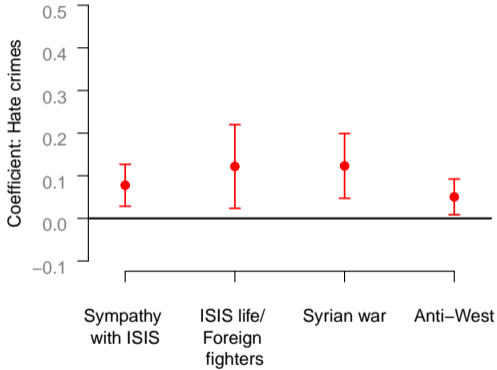


Hate crimes and pro-ISIS rhetoric

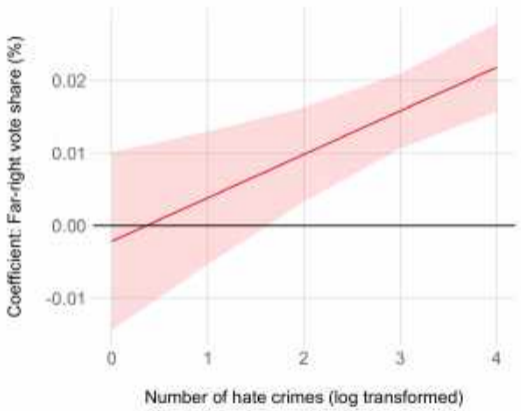


Far-right vote share × hate crimes

# Hate crimes and support for ISIS on Twitter (Germany)



Hate crimes and pro-ISIS rhetoric



Far-right vote share × hate crimes

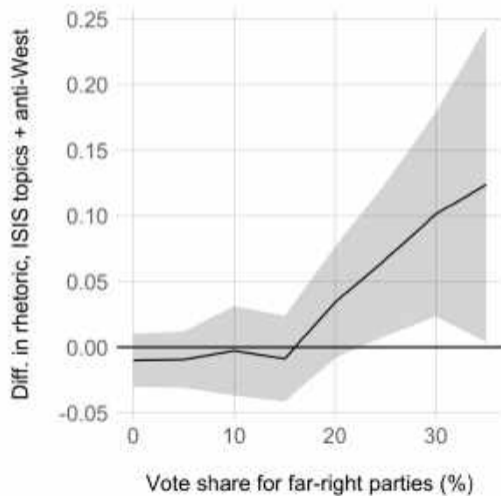
# Greater levels of pro-ISIS content after the PEGIDA marches (2/6/2016) in areas with high support for far-right parties



Figure: Anti-Muslim marches organized by PEGIDA across Europe

Photo credit: Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (2016) and Malm (2015)

## PEGIDA marches and pro-ISIS content



## Main takeaways

- This study shows that local-level measures of anti-Muslim animosity correlate significantly and substantively with indicators of online radicalization
- Events stirring anti-Muslim hostility in Europe increase pro-ISIS rhetoric on Twitter, especially in areas where hostility is high
- First project to establish these patterns at a large scale, using new granular social media data on online radicalization

# Extremism and social media: A promising research frontier, but with limitations

- Radicalization on social media is likely to grow in importance as extremist groups continue to misuse online platforms
- Untapped potential in combining 'online' and 'offline' data
- However, social media data does not capture all offline behaviors
  - Still hard to predict when online hate will result in offline violence

# Thank you!

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