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How fascism runs rampant in the playgrounds of today's algorithms

Exploring the notion of 'algorithmic fascism' by Forum for Democracy on Twitter.

Abstract

Historians say that the current era facilitates new forms of fascism. Fascist techniques correspond to the operation of social media algorithms: reinforcing fears, spreading 'alternative truths' and the logic of numbers (the fact that many people say it, makes it true). Therefore, a new perspective on fascism is needed because, in their view, digital fascism is built primarily on digital (hate) cultures. That is why this paper introduces a new concept: algorithmic fascism. This is explained using the tweets posted from January to November 2022 by Forum for Democracy's MPs and by that party's account. Those tweets are analyzed through social media critical discourse analysis, split into content and usage analysis. The content analysis looks at what is written, said or seen in a post, a usage analysis looks at how a medium and its affordances are used. The analysis shows that the content of the tweets and the way the medium is used by the six accounts studied together, show great similarities to how experts describe modern (digital) fascism. However, this is not the case for the accounts separately: each account exhibits some of the characteristics. This is what makes the term algorithmic fascism relevant, because through the platform's algorithms, not all accounts have to exhibit every element to show users the overall picture. When Twitter accounts work together, for example by regularly mentioning, retweeting or responding to each other, an algorithm places them in the same group, which means users do not have to follow all accounts to still receive every element. This study therefore recommends that when examining the far right and fascism on social media, groups or networks should be examined rather than individual accounts. It is important to consider that this study did not include all accounts of all Forum for Democracy representatives: thus, the conclusions are also not representative of the party as a whole. This could be expanded in follow-up research. A comparison with other parties is also interesting, as is the use of other social media platforms, in order to make a broader statement about algorithmic fascism.

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“The ‘new populism’ in power today is closer to fascism than ever before, and this fact should be a wake-up call for all of us - especially for those who remain silent.”

- Federico Finchelstein, november 2019¹

¹ Federico Finchelstein, “Preface to the Paperback Edition” in *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxviii.

Introduction

“The biggest misunderstanding about fascism is that it is a historically closed phenomenon that ended in the 1930s and 1940”, writes historian and fascism-expert Daniel Knegt. “Depending on time and place, fascism can occur in different ways,” he says.¹ This paper researches fascism in a very specific time and place: the Twitter accounts of Dutch politicians in 2022.

Geoff Eley, a historian specializing in Nazism and fascism, sees that the current era facilitates new forms of fascism. “The classical public sphere has disappeared,” he writes. “It has moved to the Internet, which offers much greater and more massive possibilities than the communication we saw in the 1930s and 1940s.” Organization of revolt and causing unrest can therefore be done in very different ways, and moreover, access to these channels of communication is much broader and easier than it was back then.² An important catalyst in this organization is that today algorithms of the platforms used play a crucial role in the construction and modus operandi of these kinds of communities.³

This kind of interaction between algorithms and political movements has been described previously by cultural scientist Ico Maly. He researched populism and how it is shaped in the current, digital age. Social media force us to look not only at the input, he says, but also at the

framework in which the message is disseminated. It is no longer just the intermediary, but causes the message to be rearranged and reorganized.⁴ Additionally, changes in the media field have effects on how populism is shaped, Maly argues. A populist without followers is impossible in this day and age, according to him. Politicians, especially populists, need a large audience to be able to make the claim to speak on behalf of the public. This audience must interact with the populist’s content so that the algorithms make it relevant⁵: they select and prioritize content by algorithmically translating activity on a post into relevant or ‘trending’ topics.⁶ The populist on social media is therefore dependent on likes, retweets and comments, which makes these affordances in themselves a political statement.⁷ Maly therefore introduces the term ‘algorithmic populism’, another, new form of populism, facilitated and fueled by the existence and use of algorithms. And although populism is not the same as fascism, the two do have important similarities - but also some crucial differences. Historian Federico Finchelstein explains that modern populism finds its starting point in the fascism of the early twentieth century. Vice versa, various forms of populism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries laid the foundation for fascism. Populism and fascism are thus historically linked.⁸ I will elaborate later on what the specific similarities and differences entail, but if populism

¹ Daniel Knegt, *Fascisme* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2022).

² Geoff Eley, “What Is Fascism and Where Does It Come from?” *History Workshop Journal* 91, no. 1 (January 2021): pp. 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbab003>.

³ Claudia Flores-Saviaga, Brian Keegan, and Saiph Savage, “Mobilizing the Trump Train: Understanding Collective Action in a Political Trolling Community,” *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 12, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v12i1.15024>.

⁴ Zeynep Tufekci, “Facebook Said Its Algorithms Do Help Form Echo Chambers, And The Tech Press Missed It”, *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2015): 9-12, doi:10.1111/npqu.11519.

⁵ Ico Maly, “Algorithmic Populism And Algorithmic Activism”, *Diggit Magazine*, 2019, <https://www.diggitmagazine.com/articles/algorithmic-populism-activism>.

⁶ José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell, “Understanding Social Media Logic”, *Media And Communication* 1, no. 1 (2013): 2-14, doi:10.17645/mac.v1i1.70.

⁷ Ico Maly, “Algorithmic Populism And Algorithmic Activism”, *Diggit Magazine*, 2019, <https://www.diggitmagazine.com/articles/algorithmic-populism-activism>.

⁸ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland: University of California press, 2019).

and fascism are so closely related, would there be such a thing as algorithmic fascism? As described earlier, Geoff Eley sees that the current era facilitates other forms of fascism, and the Internet, social media and its algorithms play an important role in this. Violence, one of the main differences between populism and fascism, has taken on a different meaning, he believes - no longer exclusively physical, but also online, violence can be used.⁹ In this paper, I use Maly's description of algorithmic populism to define a new concept: algorithmic fascism.¹⁰

According to Fielitz and Marcks, fascism is rampant on social media - or rather, thanks to social media. They say fascist techniques correspond to the operation of social media algorithms: reinforcing fears, spreading 'alternative truths' and the logic of numbers (the fact that many people say it, makes it true). They argue that a new perspective on fascism is needed because, in their view, digital fascism is built primarily on digital (hate) cultures and to a lesser extent on classical party structures.¹¹ This worldwide online movement of right-wing extremists also worries the Dutch intelligence service the AIVD: right-wing extremist groups were gaining more followers, and according to them this was mainly caused by conspiracy thinking. Right-wing extremists try to make their worldview appear normal to a wider audience, and if they succeed, it threatens to undermine the democratic rule of law.¹² Research by Leiden University shows that Forum for Democracy politicians

promote accounts on social media that spread anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and hate messages. In doing so, they increase the reach of these accounts and ensure that more people come into contact with the messages, thus spreading these ideologies more widely.¹³ In addition, research has shown that the term algorithmic populism certainly applies to the way FvD and its parliamentarians use social media.¹⁴

Existing research on digital fascism is based on certain (extreme) right-wing groups on social media but not on the expressions on social media of political parties. Expressions by elected politicians that rub against fascism normalize such ideology to a greater extent than when 'normal' people make the same expressions, previous research by Marcks shows. Therefore, it is academically relevant to examine expressions of a political party for algorithmic fascism, as it contributes to the normalization of such discourse.¹⁵ Because there has been a long-standing debate in the Netherlands about what to do with Forum for Democracy, by other parties, the government and journalists, I want to offer a small piece of that new perspective with this study. If democracy is to be prevented from being undermined by certain fascist messages from this party, understanding the purpose and dissemination of those messages is crucial. The concept of algorithmic fascism, I believe, contributes to that understanding.

I will construct this concept using a case study of the tweets from the

⁹ Geoff Eley, "What Is Fascism and Where Does It Come from?" *History Workshop Journal* 91, no. 1 (January 2021): pp. 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbab003>.

¹⁰ Ico Maly, "Populism As A Mediatized Communicative Relation: The Birth Of Algorithmic Populism", Tilburg University, 2021, 1-21.

¹¹ Maik Fielitz and Holger Marcks, "Digital Fascism: Challenges for the Open Society in Times of Social Media," UC Berkeley: Center for Right-Wing Studies., July 16, 2019.

¹² Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, "Jaarverslag 2021: Nationale Dreigingen," AIVD (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, April 26, 2022), <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/jaarverslagen/jaarverslag-2021/nationale-dreigingen>.

¹³ Burger, Peter, Elizabeth Cappon, and Gijs Van Beek. "Hoe Forum-Politici Antisemitisme Versterken Op Twitter." Leiden: Textgain en Nieuwscheckers, May 20, 2022.

¹⁴ Anoeck van Raalte, Pieter Maesele and Sean Phelan, "Twitter As A Right-Wing Populist's Playground: The Algorithmic Populism Of Dutch Political Party 'Forum Voor Democratie' And Leader Thierry Baudet During Their Political Rise", *Discourse, Context & Media* 44 (2021): 100549, doi:10.1016/j.dcm.2021.100549.

¹⁵ Holger Marcks, "Don't Call Me Right!," *Edition Politik*, 2016, pp. 65-72, <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839437209-008>.

party account of Forum for Democracy and its parliamentarians in the House of Representatives. Their ideology is populist to say the least and, according to American logic, would fall under alt-right or alt-light. Problem with those umbrella terms is that they cover quite a lot: populism shares that umbrella with fascism and even Nazism, which by no means implies that the three are thus the same.¹⁶ The suggestion is often made, though: ‘Yeşilgöz concerned about growing anti-Semitism, refers to Forum for Democracy’¹⁷ and ‘Are there fascists in the Dutch parliament?’¹⁸ are just two headlines about the party in 2022. They have not been idle this year, to say the least. The entire cabinet walked out of parliament because they refused to listen to Baudet suggesting that the finance minister is a foreign spy.¹⁹ Baudet proclaims that the world is ruled by reptiles,²⁰ MP Pepijn van Houwelingen threatens other MPs with tribunals,²¹ and party colleague Gideon van Meijeren has proceeded to directly intimidate journalists in the Dutch parliament²² and speculates about having the government overthrown - violently or not.²³ Threats, violence, disruption of the democratic process and the expression of well-known, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories: it seems straight out of the fascism handbook. Anyone who would suggest that we have

a party in Dutch parliament that exhibits fascist characteristics earlier than, say, 2020 was vilified: that word referred to the war and that had been eradicated by now.²⁴ But more and more scholars argue that this label indeed fits them.²⁵ This makes the party the center of a public debate about to what extent their actions should still be tolerated. They have 5 seats in the House of Representatives, 1 in the Senate, it is the largest member party in the Netherlands and their party leader has one of the largest online presences of all party leaders.²⁶ Their influence is therefore not negligible. Given the discussion of whether the party can be called populist or fascist, it is relevant to consider whether the term algorithmic fascism can then be applied to them, too. Populism, in fact, can have a place in a democracy; fascism absolutely cannot. So exhibiting algorithmic fascism has far more serious implications than exhibiting algorithmic populism.

To construct the term algorithmic fascism, this article begins with an overview of the differences and similarities between populism and fascism. For this I will use Federico Finchelstein’s book, *From Fascism to Populism in History*.²⁷ Based on these characteristics, I will describe

¹⁶ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018). p. 138

¹⁷ Telegraaf, “Yeşilgöz Bezorgd over Groeiend Antisemitisme, Verwijst Naar FVD,” *Telegraaf.nl* (De Telegraaf, October 30, 2022), <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/393894538/yesilgoz-bezorgd-over-groeidend-antisemitisme-verwijst-naar-fvd>.

¹⁸ Wendelmoet Boersema, “De Zin En Onzin Van De Jaren-30-Vergelijking: Zitten Er Fascisten in De Tweede Kamer?,” *Trouw*, February 2, 2022, <https://www.trouw.nl/politiek/de-zin-en-onzin-van-de-jaren-30-vergelijking-zitten-er-fascisten-in-de-tweede-kamer~b5947a1a/>.

¹⁹ “Kabinet Loopt Weg Bij Speech Thierry Baudet,” *RTL Nieuws*, September 21, 2022, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/video/video/5334773/baudet-politiek-tweede-kamer-kabinet-fvd-sigrid-kaag-debat>

²⁰ Redactie Panorama, “Baudet Onthult Zijn Theorie: ‘We Worden Bestuurd Door Kwaadaardige Reptielen,’” *Panorama* (Panorama, October 18, 2022), <https://panorama.nl/artikel/487062/baudet-onthult-we-worden-bestuurd-door-kwaadaardige-reptielen>.

²¹ “Van Houwelingen (FvD) Dreigt Sjoerdsma (D66) Met Tribunalen,” *NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen* (NOS Nieuws, November 17, 2021), <https://nos.nl/artikel/2406005-van-houwelingen-fvd-dreigt-sjoerdsma-d66-met-tribunalen>.

²² “Fvd-Kamerlid Gideon Van Meijeren Intimideert SBS6-Verslaggever Merel Ek Met Video,” *BM*, October 24, 2022, <https://www.broadcastmagazine.nl/radio-televisie/televisie/fvd-kamerlid-gideon-van-meijeren-intimideert-sbs6-verslaggever-merel-ek-met-video/>.

²³ “Uitlatingen Kamerlid Van Meijeren Leiden Tot Scherpe Veroordelingen, Om Kijkt Ernaar,” *NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen* (NOS Nieuws, November 14, 2022), <https://nos.nl/artikel/2452300-uitlatingen-kamerlid-van-meijeren-leiden-tot-scherpe-veroordelingen-om-kijkt-ernaar>.

²⁴ Bram Ieven, “Waarom Thierry Baudet Een Fascist Is,” *Over de Muur*, February 19, 2020, <https://overdemuur.org/waarom-thierry-baudet-een-fascist-is/>.

²⁵ Gerrit-Jan Kleinjan, “Historicus Robin Te Slaa: ‘Forum Vertoont Verschillende Kenmerken Van Het Fascisme,’” *Trouw*, October 11, 2022, <https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/historicus-robin-te-slaa-forum-vertoot-verschillende-kenmerken-van-het-fascisme~b3172023/>.

²⁶ Wouter Van Atteveldt et al. “VU Verkiezingsonderzoek 2021.” (Amsterdam, February 10, 2021).

how they are expressed in modern times, using partly the same book and partly the book *New Right* by Ico Maly.²⁸ I then describe the interplay between the new right (which populism and fascism are both subsumed under) and the affordances of digital media. I also briefly discuss the working of algorithms, the platform Twitter and its role in the various degrees of populism to the far right and fascism. Next, I'll explain the choices regarding method, data collection and analysis. In my analysis I compare tweets from Forum for Democracy to these concepts that fit both populism and fascism and see to what extent those are recognizable in their expressions and in their use of Twitter. The tweets I will use are those posted during 2022 by FvD and its members in the parliament.

The empirical results are presented first for the way the various Twitter accounts from Forum voor Democratie's parliamentarians are used and then for the discourse in their tweets. Finally, I discuss how these accounts convey a transgressive fascist identity, and clarify how the concept of algorithmic fascism can enrich the understanding of fascist media strategies.

²⁷ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019).

²⁸ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018).

Theoretical framework

From populism to fascism

I list the main similarities and differences between populism and fascism, in historical and present context, as described by both Frederico Finchelstein and Ico Maly. I want to emphasize at the outset that there is a huge variety of definitions of populism and fascism and the relationship between them. Scholars can hardly agree among themselves on this, so I do not claim to have the wisdom here and have found the definition. The reason I chose these two writers as my guide is because Ico Maly introduced the notion of algorithmic populism, on which I base my research.²⁹ Thus, his larger research on this concept is also relevant to my research. Moreover, he puts these concepts in a modern context - a lot of research has been done by historians and so is mostly about what populism and fascism meant, while I am looking at what it means today. Finchelstein also looks at the present, obviously in comparison to the past, and does another interesting thing that I haven't encountered in other research: he looks at fascism and populism on a global level, so for example also in South America, where he himself is from. This offers different insights for me because he shows that fascism and populism do not have one fixed form, but depend heavily on the conditions in which they grow.

Similarities

Anti-communist, anti-enlightenment, anti-liberalist

If you read this header, it seems that both movements are mostly anti-other movements. In the case of communism, enlightenment and liberalism, this is certainly true. Populism and fascism like Mussolini's both arose as anti-communist movements. Fascism was seen as protection against the expansion of the Soviet Union. Fascism and communism are seen as the opposing extremes of the political spectrum.³⁰ Consider, for example, the communist-sounding phrase "You'll own nothing and you'll be happy," once uttered by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and source of countless conspiracy theories espoused by well-known populists and fascists.³¹ The WEF is an annual gathering of the CEOs of the world's largest companies, international politicians, lobbyists and journalists.³²

In addition, both movements fall under the umbrella term 'anti-enlightenment'. The Enlightenment was a period around the eighteenth century that gave rise to the modernization of society, in which, for example, emancipation and feminism play an important role. Many of our current human rights find their roots there, as do movements such as classical liberalism, for example. Underlying populism and fascism is

²⁹ Ico Maly, "Populism As A Mediatized Communicative Relation: The Birth Of Algorithmic Populism", Tilburg University, 2021, 1-21.

³⁰ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland: University of California press, 2019).

³¹ Brecht Castel, "Factcheck: Nee, Het World Economic Forum Wil Het Eigendomsrecht Niet Afschaffen," Knack, April 12, 2022, <https://www.knack.be/factcheck/factcheck-nee-het-world-economic-forum-wil-het-eigendomsrecht-niet-afschaffen/>.

³² Aäron Loupatty, "Dit Is Het Geheimzinnige World Economic Forum," bnr.nl (BNR Nieuwsradio, January 15, 2023), <https://www.bnr.nl/nieuws/internationaal/10500574/dit-is-het-geheimzinnige-world-economic-forum>.

a deep aversion to the enlightenment. Both criticize human rights and universalism. Moreover, they both see democracy as ‘the voice of the majority must rule,’ and if minorities or international treaties must be pushed aside to do so, so be it.³³

Also, both movements oppose liberalism - an ideology that stems from the Enlightenment. Liberalism takes many forms, but its basic premise boils down to ‘as much freedom for the individual as possible, as long as it does not restrict the freedom of others.’ Civil rights protect the individual, state power is limited and there is a constitution and a free market. Both populism and fascism involve a moral condemnation of the liberal order of things (the principle of equality). Moreover, they both demand a mass response from strong leaders in the name of the people. Liberalism represents the elite, and that is what they oppose.³⁴

People - Nation - Leader

According to Finchelstein, populism and fascism find their main similarities in the trio of people-nation-leader. Both embrace a homogeneous people, intolerance against and exclusion of ‘the other’. Political relations are defined by the binary ‘people’ and ‘anti-people’. Followers belong to the people, political opponents are automatically enemies and traitors of the nation. In both cases, the charismatic leader is the representative of the people and the nation. Both ideologies believe in personification as representation. This means that the will of the people is entirely in the hands of the leader. They believe that the leader is the

people and must make all decisions on behalf of the people, and that the people speak with one voice. In this person, the nation and the people should finally be able to recognize themselves in politics; after all, the citizens are the leader and decisions are made on their behalf. However, ‘the people’ in this are only his or her followers and voters - not the full people. Thus, the people, the nation and the leader are actually the same concepts according to both movements. In fascism, this does not require democratic elections.³⁵

Democracy and the ‘truth’

Populism and fascism see their own position as the only and true form of political legitimacy. Both see the opposition as an entity acting against the will of the people, and accuse that opposition of tyranny, conspiracy and anti-democracy.³⁶ Consequently, they see no legitimate political place for an opposition, even though it is widely considered an essential part of a healthy democracy. Yet it is striking that it is actually populists who say their enemies are anti-democratic, not themselves. According to Maly, populists from left to right, from Argentina to France to Germany, say they are protecting the people from tyranny and dictatorship. Everything they disagree with are lies from the media and conspiracies against the people. In this there is a clear similarity to fascism, which also peremptorily refuses to establish the truth empirically.³⁷ In fascist regimes, history and that which was empirically established as ‘the truth’ was replaced by political myths.³⁸ Further down, I explain what exactly the function of that is.

³³ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018)

³⁴ Federico Finchelstein, “Preface to the Paperback Edition” in *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxxiii.

³⁵ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxxv-xxvi-253.

³⁶ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. 5.

³⁷ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxvii.

³⁸ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. 15.

Differences

Violence

Crucial difference between populism and fascism is the use of violence, which belongs to fascism, but not to populism. The key is the conception and its use. In fascism, violence and aggression are seen as the ultimate expression of power and masculinity. Violence is therefore necessary to achieve one's goal, fascists believe. Physical violence, on the other hand, is not part of populism: there, it often sticks to something Finchelstein calls 'discursive demonization', the delegitimization and elimination of your opponent with words, not physical actions.³⁹

Homogenization

In populism, the homogenization of the people is meant rhetorically; in fascism, the 'anti-people' are eliminated - in the literal sense of the word. Fascists see a people not only as a nation (a country and its inhabitants), but also as an ethnically equal group of people. Thus, the other groups are automatically the anti-people, who are physically attacked, persecuted or banned by fascists. This is radically different from populists, where there is also a people and an anti-people, but in their case the 'people' means the people who support them. If you do not stand behind them, you are automatically the anti-people. But in this, you could still cross over, which of course you cannot do with ethnicity. Also, with populists, the rights of the anti-people are not destroyed: they are allowed to exist, they are allowed to lose elections. They are tolerated.⁴⁰

³⁹ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. 42.

⁴⁰ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxv.

⁴¹ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. 15.

⁴² Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxviii.

⁴³ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxviii.

Press

Populists scorn the independent press, fascists silence them completely. Free press is part of a healthy democracy, but it can criticize the leader and therefore criticizes the will of the people. This automatically makes it an enemy of the people, which must be eliminated. This is again done rhetorically in populism, for example by questioning their legitimacy or saying that they spread lies, and in fascism in a literal sense: the free press is simply shut down.⁴¹

Democratic values

Populism weakens and redefines the separation of powers, the independence and legitimacy of a free press and the rule of law. In populism, democracy is challenged but not destroyed, as is the case with fascism.⁴² Populists will play the democratic game, where fascists reject democracy altogether. Populists link their claim of representation of the people to electoral representation - and you need votes for that. In this it differs from the fascist form of dictatorship. What is interesting about Finchelstein's explanation here is that he says "populists eventually cede power after losing an election," as opposed to fascists, who do not consider that election legitimate in the first place.⁴³ To this claim, I should mention that this book was written in 2019, before the 2020 U.S. presidential election and the storming of the Capitol by supporters of President Trump. Where those events and that president's denial of the election results fit between populism and fascism, I dare not say.

Modern fascism and populism

Modern fascism and modern populism both fall under the umbrella term ‘alt-right’, but that does not make them the same ideology. However, because they are both subsumed under such an umbrella term, they are difficult to distinguish. Finchelstein writes in his book, “The world is undergoing a historic transformation: populism meets fascism again.”⁴⁴ He explains that all over the world populist leaders, who in his view are not fascists, are activating fascist acts by following exactly the fascist roadmap. Here he cites a number of countries as examples, including the Netherlands, but does not say which leaders he is referring to specifically.⁴⁵ Yet he also says that we are not looking at a return of fascism as it existed in the 20th century.⁴⁶ Ico Maly agrees: he says that the present time offers a different context than fascism. Digital media, he argues, are the new salons of the 18th century or the great halls of the 19th- and 20th-century mass movements.⁴⁷ Using the terms I have used in the above to identify similarities and differences, I will explain here how those terms are reflected in today’s alt-right.

Anti-communist, anti-enlightenment, anti-liberalist

Alt-right is on a collision course with democratic ideology. But rejecting democracy is anti hegemonic - it is basically impossible in our time. Therefore, what the alt-right is doing is redefining the concept of democracy. The link with human rights and enlightenment theory is broken

and gives way to a nationalistic meaning: that the people speak with one voice and a clear will, and that the majority decides. Minorities no longer matter in this, and democracy is not meant to protect them. According to Maly, this message resembles Mussolini’s, albeit packaged differently.⁴⁸

According to the modern-day alt-right, the liberal order includes classical democrats, journalists, cultural Marxists and anti-fascists. That order is run by ‘the Cathedral’ or “the media academic complex,” and it controls people’s minds. If you step out of ‘the Cathedral,’ you see the reality. Which, according to the alt-right, is not pleasant, but it is real. By stepping out you automatically join the alt-right and thus reject the democratic order. This includes, according to them, the anti-liberal idea that there are different races and two genders, which are not equal to each other.⁴⁹

People-nation-leader

The discursive mechanisms for constructing ‘the people’ come straight from Populism for Dummies. There are four, Maly describes: 1. ‘The people’ have an innate dignity. 2. The nation’s ‘diseases’ have an external cause. 3. A symbolic rebirth must bring about future progress and improvement. 4. Class differences are explained by a non-economic explanation for what are in fact economic problems.⁵⁰ These people play an important role in the digital world to make the populist’s voice

⁴⁴ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xvii.

⁴⁵ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxiv.

⁴⁶ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxxi.

⁴⁷ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 221.

⁴⁸ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 143-144.

⁴⁹ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 124-125.

⁵⁰ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 78.

popular, by actively circulating that voice.⁵¹ They are constructed in databases: people who have never had anything to do with each other, but have similar interests or friends, end up in a large bin and are mobilized through emails and social media.⁵²

A common enemy is also created in today's alt-right: the 'cosmopolitan elite', who have allowed globalism to flourish. According to the alt-right, they made bad trade agreements and let in 'dangerous migrants', thereby destroying the people and the nation. Destroying those elites ensures a symbolic rebirth of the nation: a new, great, homogenous and economically prosperous country. For that, the country must be made healthy again, and there is only one leader (per country) who can do that.⁵³ You can clearly see here the discursive mechanisms I described above.

Democracy and press

Today's public sphere is no longer only under the control of politicians and journalists; citizens and activists have also been given a clear voice by social media. That sounds very democratic, but it is not so, because those social media are dominated by players like Facebook, Twitter and Google. They determine which voices are boosted or blocked, and thereby sit in the judge's seat, which in itself is anti-democratic. That blocking does not even have to be done literally; algorithms can also cause a voice to be suppressed. As described earlier, algorithms favor

big players and famous people, so those who have a lot of followers can reach a large audience. And those who have money for click farms and ads can do just that too.⁵⁴

This fact is closely intertwined with the anti-democratic nature of the alt-right. Consequently, they gratefully employ the affordances of social media to undermine democracy. According to Maly, they use the following 5 foundations to do so:

1. Networked audiences, echo chambers and metapolitics

Social media's algorithms keep us scrolling, posting and following. It is built so that we want to see and get more of the same: this is called echo chambers (your own worldview is confirmed). The alt-right capitalizes on this by making sure their messages are shareable and likable. As a result, those messages spread quickly through a network and eventually beyond, breaking and expanding bubbles.⁵⁵

2. Micromedia and the dismantling of the fourth power (press)

A politician himself can reach his audience and no longer needs the mainstream media to make his sound heard. With that, the filter and critical note falls away and they sound authentic and unfiltered to audiences because they are different from other politicians. The fact that they no longer need traditional media also makes it easier to attack them, which happens frequently.⁵⁶ Moreover, with these attacks, they also achieve that they regain attention from that very mainstream media.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 68.

⁵² Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 40-41.

⁵³ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 82-83.

⁵⁴ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 40-41.

⁵⁵ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 268.

⁵⁶ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 270.

⁵⁷ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 46.

3. Data subjects

Bubbles on social media mean that there is no longer a guarantee that we have a shared reality: we no longer see the same things because we live in different online worlds, created by our algorithmic identity. That bubble partially creates your view of the world and is highly influential by the users within it, because the consumer simultaneously acts as a producer. Active users can thus influence the worldview of those in the same bubble.⁵⁸

4. Trolls

Through massive online harassment campaigns, trolls digitally pillory people. Such actions undermine democracy because they create censorship, fear and hatred.⁵⁹ Previous research in the Netherlands shows that Dutch MPs sometimes keep their views to themselves because of threats or intimidation, or stop posting their opinions on social media. As the biggest catalyst in this, Forum for Democracy is mentioned most often, according to the research.⁶⁰ These troll campaigns, according to Maly, mainly target journalists, professors, politicians and feminists.⁶¹

5. Media and the destruction of 'the walls' and the art of separation

Within the alt-right, attacking judges is a popular concept and with it, democracy is seriously undermined. The image on social media causes people to believe that the judiciary, the media and the opposition need

to be cleaned up. As a result, calls follow for someone to do just that, leaving an authoritarian leader who uses his digital storm troopers to stifle criticism.⁶²

The 'truth'

Fake news and alt-right go hand in hand these days and are barely distinguishable from each other. For them, it is not about what is the truth, but what goes viral. It does not even matter if it is patently fake and easily refuted: as long as it has political impact, it is functional. This is an old fascist tool described early on by the philosopher George Sorel, by whom Mussolini was strongly influenced.⁶³ Myths are crucial to mobilizing a people, he says.⁶⁴ They respond to people's emotions and thus have the power to direct people and movements.⁶⁵ Thus, they do not necessarily have to be true or factual to have any actual power in a society. Maly cites Pizzagate as an example here (the story that the U.S. Democratic party allegedly ran a pedon network from the basement of a pizza joint). That particular story has been extensively debunked, but it has not debunked the myth that Democrats are morally derailed and destroying the nation. Fake news activates the people against the enemy, whether a story is true or not.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 273-274.

⁵⁹ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 275.

⁶⁰ Jorn Jonker and Hugo van der Parre, "Onderzoek Nos: Kamerleden Voelen Zich Geïntimideerd, Houden Mening Soms Voor Zich," NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen (NOS Nieuws, November 20, 2022), <https://nos.nl/artikel/2453170-onderzoek-nos-kamerleden-voelen-zich-geintimideerd-houden-mening-soms-voor-zich>

⁶¹ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 221.

⁶² Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 276-277.

⁶³ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p.126

⁶⁴ George Sorel, *Reflections on violence* (Dover: Mineola & New York, 2004), p. 42.

⁶⁵ George Sorel, *Fascism viewed from the right* (London: Arktos, 2013), p. 30.

⁶⁶ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p.126-129.

Violence

According to Finchelstein, contemporary populism normalizes violence. By legitimizing violence against anti-fascists and other opponents, a populist does not have to use violence himself but can cause and enable it. This creates a gray area in what constitutes ‘using violence’.⁶⁷ Also, the concept of violence has changed from what we know from ‘earlier’ fascism, Geoff Eley believes. He explains that violence in the present context no longer just means physically injuring and killing opponents, as it did in the interwar period. “It also means violently overruling democratic civilization and its constitutional guarantees. It is no longer based on street fights, confrontations on the ground, imposing displays of paramilitary force and the spectacle of a uniformed mass. Rather, it operates through trolling, doxxing, shitposting, threatening, hacking and instantly produced and transmitted visual incitements and all the other virtual means of displaced but no less brutal attack.”⁶⁸

Homogenisation

Contemporary right-wing populism as we see it in many European countries and in the U.S. regularly conceives of ‘the people’ as an ethnic group, in line with classical fascism. This while classical populism opposed precisely this kind of fascism.⁶⁹ This, according to Finchelstein, is also partly why today’s populism sounds much more fascist than the ‘original’ populism. Still, he says, because the anti-people are not lite-

rally persecuted or eliminated, it is not fascism in practice.⁷⁰ Yet the alt-right’s racism is suspiciously similar to self-proclaimed superfascist Julius Evola’s theory that biological data are only important in relation to social and cultural data. He thus combines racial theory (that there are different human races) with cultural racism: each people, each community may differ from the other, but that does not fit into the same nation, because cultures are not compatible.⁷¹

Algorithms

To understand algorithmic fascism, we must also clearly outline what algorithms are. Algorithms today not only play a crucial role in software, says Andrew Goffey, they also have a social, cultural and political role. But what is an algorithm? You can most easily explain an algorithm, according to Goffey, as a description of the method by which a task should be performed. But actually that’s too easy, he says, because algorithms, he says, are indeed intrinsically linked to the real world. That’s because algorithms have a practical purpose and relevant input, because otherwise they have no relevant task to perform. This makes the output of the algorithm, and thus its existence, tangible to the user.⁷² This description is hugely generic, of course, but it does apply to all algorithms: in fact, they are otherwise different in just about everything else. Even social media algorithms vary enormously among themselves, changing with the whims of headquarters (for example, Facebook recently had

⁶⁷ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xviii.

⁶⁸ Geoff Eley, “What Is Fascism and Where Does It Come from?,” *History Workshop Journal* 91, no. 1 (January 2021): pp. 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbab003>.

⁶⁹ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xvi.

⁷⁰ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xxvi-xxvii.

⁷¹ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p.103

⁷² Andrew Goffey, “Algorithm,” *Software Studies*, 2008, pp. 14-20, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262062749.003.0002>.

to become more like Tiktok to regain its popularity).⁷³ Therefore, in this article we will base ourselves on Twitter's algorithm and what is known about it. You should keep in mind that Twitter will never give full disclosure about how their algorithm works, but what is certain is that a user must produce a lot of content to be boosted by the algorithm: the user creates the platform, and without content, advertisers stop investing money in the platform. This content must also generate a lot of interaction, so a tweet must be liked, retweeted and responded to often. The more popular a user is, that is, the more often he is liked, retweeted and reposted, the more he is favored by the algorithm. So much for relative open doors: research has also been done on the content that tweets must have to be boosted by Twitter's algorithm. And that's where it gets interesting. According to Goldenberg et al., social media is generally positive, but news organization content is an exception. Their study argues that negative news content generates more user engagement and therefore negativity spreads faster on Twitter.⁷⁴ They explain this by the negativity bias: the fact that negative information has more impact on attention than positive information.⁷⁵ Moreover, negative emotions affect other users. Previous research by Goldenberg called this digital emotion contamination.⁷⁶ Thus, negative news creates a negative spiral

for users, which is good for Twitter's algorithm.⁷⁷ Additional research shows that even with positive news, the negative comments to it spread faster and generate more engagement than the positive comments.⁷⁸ All of this, by the way, applies to both left- and right-leaning news platforms.⁷⁹

Algorithmic populism

These algorithms, together with the affordances of digital media, reshape populism, Ico Maly argues. In this digital age it no longer holds up to just look at the input of social media in researching populism, we also need to analyse the digital frame in which it is posed.⁸⁰ This is because the frame, the digital medium that distributes the message, is not just an intermediary anymore. Digital media and social media reshape and reorganize the message.⁸¹ These platforms are like schoolyards: the principle of popularity applies. You become more valuable the more contacts you have and make, which makes more people think you are popular, which makes more people want to connect with you. So being a populist without online followers is actually pretty much impossible, Maly says. Politicians, especially populists, need a large audience to say

⁷³ Jeroen de Boer, "De Grote Verandering Op Facebook Betekent Het Einde Van 'Oude' Sociale Media: Iedereen Zit in De Tiktok-Wereld," Business Insider Nederland, July 26, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.nl/facebook-veranderingen-ontwerp-sociale-media/>.

⁷⁴ Andrea K. Bellovary, Nathaniel A. Young, and Amit Goldenberg, "Left- and Right-Leaning News Organizations Use Negative Emotional Content and Elicit User Engagement Similarly," *Affective Science* 2, no. 4 (2021): pp. 391-396, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-021-00046-w>.

⁷⁵ Amrisha Vaish, Tobias Grossmann, and Amanda Woodward, "Not All Emotions Are Created Equal: The Negativity Bias in Social-Emotional Development.," *Psychological Bulletin* 134, no. 3 (2008): pp. 383-403, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.3.383>.

⁷⁶ Amit Goldenberg and James J. Gross, "Digital Emotion Contagion," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 24, no. 4 (2020): pp. 316-328, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2020.01.009>.

⁷⁷ Andrea K. Bellovary, Nathaniel A. Young, and Amit Goldenberg, "Left- and Right-Leaning News Organizations Use Negative Emotional Content and Elicit User Engagement Similarly," *Affective Science* 2, no. 4 (2021): pp. 391-396, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-021-00046-w>.

⁷⁸ Jonas Paul Schöne, Brian Parkinson, and Amit Goldenberg, "Negativity Spreads More than Positivity on Twitter after Both Positive and Negative Political Situations," *Affective Science* 2, no. 4 (December 2021): pp. 379-390, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-021-00057-7>.

⁷⁹ Andrea K. Bellovary, Nathaniel A. Young, and Amit Goldenberg, "Left- and Right-Leaning News Organizations Use Negative Emotional Content and Elicit User Engagement Similarly," *Affective Science* 2, no. 4 (2021): pp. 391-396, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-021-00046-w>.

⁸⁰ Ico Maly, "Populism As A Mediatized Communicative Relation: The Birth Of Algorithmic Populism", Tilburg University, 2021, 1-21.

⁸¹ Zeynep Tufekci, "Facebook Said Its Algorithms Do Help Form Echo Chambers, And The Tech Press Missed It", *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2015): 9-12, doi:10.1111/npqu.11519.

they are speaking on behalf of the people - the whole principle of being a populist.⁸² Their posts need support and interaction in the form of likes, retweets and comments to make it relevant to the algorithms and thus reach even more people.⁸³ So it is up to populists to create viral tweets - the content is not even just relevant, you have to have knowledge of the medium to make sure the algorithms prioritize your post and make it 'trending'.⁸⁴ That, in turn, creates more exposure (like in Twitter Highlights), more comments and more followers. In addition, Maly says, that ensures journalists pick it up as well, giving you attention and following beyond social media.⁸⁵ An extensive study by Flores-Saviaga, Keegan and Savage showed that political movements eagerly exploit this: they saw how a popular troll community in 16 million comments used various discursive strategies to mobilize participants and bots were employed to create a shared identity and maintain engagements - all to endorse President Trump. Following Maly's research, Van Raalte, Maesele and Phelan examined the extent to which the term algorithmic populism applies to Forum for Democracy's utterances on Twitter. Their research shows that stylistic figures that typify populism (alienation, heartland, leadership, conspiracy theories) recur regularly in the Twitter discourse of FvD and leader Thierry Baudet.⁸⁶

Twitter

In this study we also focus on the platform Twitter, its usage and its al-

gorithms. By early 2022, nearly 3.5 million Dutch people had a Twitter account, about 1.5 million of whom use the platform daily.⁸⁷ A network analysis by the Utrecht Data School into the hundred most visible accounts in the Netherlands on Twitter, shows that the Dutch Twitter debate consists of a number of categories:

- A group interested in police and soccer messages;
- Influencers with a YouTube account;
- Left-progressive Twitter users and activists;
- Mainstream (news-interested citizens, journalists, politicians and opinion makers);
- Right-wing nationalists.

This last group is not the largest in absolute numbers, but in the amount of content they publish, they do dominate the platform. According to the study, this is not very surprising, as a platform like Twitter thrives on commotion, debate and interaction. The group of right-wing nationalists retweet, like and respond to each other the most. Those who provoke many responses are rewarded by the algorithm. For example, new users who indicate an interest in politics are suggested by Twitter to follow people from this group.⁸⁸ Twitter has been using this personalization algorithm since 2016. They select and organize content on a user's timeline based on those algorithms. As a result, certain content is consistently placed higher and other content becomes less visible. A

⁸² Ico Maly, "Populism As A Mediatized Communicative Relation: The Birth Of Algorithmic Populism", Tilburg University, 2021, 1-21.

⁸³ Zeynep Tufekci, "Facebook Said Its Algorithms Do Help Form Echo Chambers, And The Tech Press Missed It", *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2015): 9-12, doi:10.1111/npqu.11519.

⁸⁴ José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell, "Understanding Social Media Logic", *Media And Communication* 1, no. 1 (2013): 2-14, doi:10.17645/mac.v1i1.70.

⁸⁵ Ico Maly, "Populism As A Mediatized Communicative Relation: The Birth Of Algorithmic Populism", Tilburg University, 2021, 1-21.

⁸⁶ Anoeck van Raalte, Pieter Maesele and Sean Phelan, "Twitter As A Right-Wing Populist's Playground: The Algorithmic Populism Of Dutch Political Party 'Forum Voor Democratie' And Leader Thierry Baudet During Their Political Rise", *Discourse, Context & Media* 44 (2021): 100549, doi:10.1016/j.dcm.2021.100549.

⁸⁷ Danny Oosterveer, "Social Media in Nederland 2022: WhatsApp Minder Intensief Gebruikt, Opmars Tiktok Zet Door," *Marketingfacts*, January 29, 2022, <https://www.marketingfacts.nl/berichten/social-media-in-nederland-2022/>.

⁸⁸ Thomas Boeschoten and Coen van de Ven, "Hoe Alt-Right En 'Alt-Light' Het Nederlandse Twitter Domineren," *De Groene Amsterdammer* (De Groene Amsterdammer, August 28, 2019), <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/je-gaat-me-toch-niet-als-genuanceerd-wegzetten-he>.

very extensive 2021 study of this Twitter algorithm system and its effects on political content found that the political right is amplified more than the political left. They also saw that right-leaning news sources were favored over middle- or left-leaning sources. However, this study did not show that moderate voices automatically received less attention than the extremes on either side.⁸⁹ Just because it is not done automatically by the algorithm does not mean it does not happen. Research into the Twitter use of followers of the German right-wing populist party shows that they actively polarize debates by ‘hijacking’ hashtags: this is called ‘hashjacking’. That research also shows that a relatively small group of followers is responsible for a large proportion of retweets, likes and comments: actions that in turn are rewarded by the algorithm with further distribution of the content.⁹⁰ Other than the studies that have been done on the Twitter algorithm, the company itself has also shared tips for spreading your content on the platform over the years. These are their main tips:

- Take advantage of current events. Keep an eye on trending topics and engage in them.⁹¹
- Use hashtags for that, so people who don’t follow you can find your tweets. Use no more than two hashtags per tweet.⁹²
- Post regularly. They themselves recommend a minimum of 1-2 times and a maximum of 3-5 times a day.⁹³

- Use media in tweets: photos, videos and gifs.⁹⁴

Forum for Democracy

Forum for Democracy began as a think tank in 2015 and actively opposed the Ukraine referendum on a trade treaty between the Netherlands and Ukraine. In 2017, the party participated in elections for the first time, the Lower House elections, and gained two seats. Two years later, in the Provincial Council elections, the party became the largest in the Netherlands, defeating established parties such as the radical-right, populist Party for Freedom and the party of the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, the liberal VVD, which was the largest in the previous Provincial Council, Municipal Council and Lower House elections. During the party’s rise, between 2017 and 2019, FvD manifested itself as an anti-immigration and anti-establishment party. Some portrayed the party as ‘the reasonable alternative to the PVV’.⁹⁵ During that period, the party experienced stormy growth, until they even became the largest party in the country in the 2019 Provincial Council elections.⁹⁶ But since then, so much has changed in the party that it can almost be called a new party. A wave of internal riots caused almost all leaders and officials to leave or split from the party, leaving practically only Thierry Baudet.⁹⁷ Under the influence of the Covid pandemic, the party’s focus has also shifted: by vehemently opposing pandemic control, FvD attrac-

⁸⁹ Ferenc Huszár et al., “Algorithmic Amplification of Politics on Twitter,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 1 (December 21, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2025334119>.

⁹⁰ Philipp Darius and Fabian Stephany, “How the Far-Right Polarises Twitter: ‘Highjacking’ Hashtags in Times of Covid-19,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, October 13, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3709988>.

⁹¹ Savannah Badalich, “Topics: Behind the Tweets,” *Twitter* (Twitter, January 30, 2020), https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/product/2020/topics-behind-the-tweets.

⁹² Hayley Dorney, “The Do’s and Don’ts of Hashtags,” *Twitter* (Twitter), accessed December 2, 2022, <https://business.twitter.com/en/blog/the-dos-and-donts-of-hashtags.html>.

⁹³ Stacey McLachlan, “How Often to Post to Social Media in 2022,” *Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard*, November 23, 2022, https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-often-to-post-on-social-media/#How_ofTEN_to_post_on_Twitter.

⁹⁴ Niamh Keenan, “Guide: Free Twitter Marketing Strategies for Small Businesses,” *Twitter* (Twitter), accessed December 2, 2022, <https://business.twitter.com/en/blog/marketing-strategies-for-small-business.html>.

⁹⁵ Eline Schaart, “5 Things to Know about Dutch Far Right’s New Figurehead,” *Politico.eu*, March 25, 2019, <https://www-politico.eu.proxy.library.uu.nl/article/thierry-baudet-forum-for-democracy-+netherlands-5-things-to-know-about-dutch-far-rights-new-figurehead/>.

⁹⁶ Redactie NOS, “Forum Grote Winnaar Verkiezingen #PS19, Blijft VVD Net Voor,” *NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen*, March 21, 2019, <https://nos.nl/liveblog/2276895-forum-grote-winnaar-verkiezingen-ps19-blijft-vvd-net-voor>.

⁹⁷ Wilma Kieskamp, “Forum Valt Uiteen, Maar Het Broeide Al Veel Langer,” *Trouw*, November 26, 2020, <https://www.trouw.nl/politiek/forum-valt-uiteen-maar-het-broeide-al-veel-langer~b023ab88/>.

ted a large group of new voters in the 2021 parliamentary elections, compared to previous elections. This while the group of previous voters shrank sharply, in large part because of the internal riots and scandals the party was involved in.⁹⁸ Moreover, especially in 2022, it was regularly claimed that ‘FvD has now really crossed a line,’ ‘the low point has really been reached now,’ and ‘we shouldn’t accept this anymore’.⁹⁹ Think of the condoning and even encouraging of threats against fellow parliamentarians by Gideon van Meijeren,¹⁰⁰ the threat of tribunals by Pepijn van Houwelingen and the suspicion of (the already threatened) minister Sigrid Kaag by Thierry Baudet, after which the entire cabinet left the Lower House for the first time in history because they refused to listen.¹⁰¹ Ministers and MPs were also threatened by open supporters of the party and journalists were called ‘sewer rats’ by Gideon van Meijeren.¹⁰² Thierry Baudet proclaimed that he believes in conspiracy theories, including that we were ruled by reptiles.¹⁰³ Moreover, over the years, the party has repeatedly been associated with far-right, controversial parties and figures such as Erkenbrand,¹⁰⁴ Arend Glas, Voorpost¹⁰⁵ and David Icke.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ Jeroen Kester, “FVD-Kiezers Willen Net Als Baudet Alle Coronamaatregelen per Direct Opheffen: ‘Accepteren Dat Er Mensen Doodgaan,’” EenVandaag, March 13, 2021, <https://eenvandaag.avrotros.nl/item/fvd-kiezers-willen-net-als-baudet-alle-coronamaatregelen-per-direct-opheffen-accepteren-dat-er-mensen-doodgaan/>.

⁹⁹ Redactie Telegraaf, “Kaag: ‘Een Enorme Grens Overschreden’ - Telegraaf.nl,” De Telegraaf, September 22, 2022, <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/966187697/kaag-een-enorme-grens-overschreden>.

¹⁰⁰ Redactie BNNVARA, “Forum Juicht Haatmails Voor Gündogan (Volt) Toe, Bedreigt Sjoerdsma (D66) - Joop - Bnnvara,” Joop (BNNVARA, November 17, 2021), <https://www.bnnvara.nl/joop/artikelen/forum-juicht-haatmails-voor-nilufer-gundogan-volt-toe>.

¹⁰¹ “Kabinet Loopt Weg Bij Speech Thierry Baudet,” RTL Nieuws, September 21, 2022, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/video/video/5334773/audet-politiek-tweede-kamer-kabinet-fvd-sigrid-kaag-debat>

¹⁰² “Fvd-Kamerlid Gideon Van Meijeren Intimideert SBS6-Verslaggever Merel Ek Met Video,” BM, October 24, 2022, <https://www.broadcastmagazine.nl/radio-televisie/televisie/fvd-kamerlid-gideon-van-meijeren-intimideert-sbs6-verslaggever-merel-ek-met-video/>.

¹⁰³ Tobias Den Hartog, “Baudet Gooit Schroom Van Zich Af En Verklaart Zich Complotaanhanger,” AD.nl (DPG Media, October 18, 2022), <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/audet-gooit-schroom-van-zich-af-en-verklaart-zich-complotaanhanger-a9668d7a/>.

¹⁰⁴ Wendelmoet Boersema and Bart Zuidervart, “Dit Zijn De Denkbeelden Van Freek Jansen, Van De in Opspraak Geraakte Jeugdbeweging Van Forum,” Trouw, November 23, 2020, <https://www.trouw.nl/politiek/dit-zijn-de-denkbeelden-van-freek-jansen-van-de-in-opspraak-geraakte-jeugdbeweging-van-forum-b64c432a/>.

¹⁰⁵ de Kanttekening, “Illegale FvD-Kerstmarkt Blijkt Uitvalsbasis Extreemrechtse Activisten,” de Kanttekening, December 21, 2021, <https://dekanttekening.nl/nieuws/illegale-fvd-kerstmarkt-blijkt-uitvalsbasis-extreemrechtse-activisten2/>.

¹⁰⁶ Redactie NOS, “Kabinet Stuurt Uitgesproken Brief Naar Complotdenker Icke over Gevaar,” NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen (NOS Nieuws, November 3, 2022), <https://nos.nl/artikel/2450979-kabinet-stuurt-uitgesproken-brief-naar-complotdenker-icke-over-gevaar>.

Method

Digital methods

For this research, all tweets and retweets from 2022 from Forum for Democracy's Twitter accounts and the party's five parliamentarians will be collected. To collect these, I am using the site Apify, which offers scrapers for large websites. Since the number of tweets I need will be at most a few thousand, I can use the tool for free - you get a small credit when you sign up and when that runs out you have to pay extra. This tool is suitable for this research because I also need the metadata of the tweets, e.g. images, likes, retweets et cetera, and this tool provides that in a clear excel file. Moreover, this tool is accepted by the Twitter API. Twitter does not want you to scrape external content because it causes a lot of traffic on the website, so they sometimes block scrapers. With this tool, that chance is virtually zero. Limitations in this method of data collection is that I collect retrospectively, so already deleted content cannot be added to the research. This is especially problematic with Forum for Democracy, because in 2017 it appeared that this very party deletes its tweets most often.¹⁰⁷ At the time, this research was done by Politwoops, which tracks which tweets politicians delete. Therefore, I requested the deleted tweets of 2022 from them as well, so that I can include these in the dataset as well and thus paint a more complete picture of FvDy's Twitter usage. In addition, only tweets that are public can be seen using a scraper, so if one of the users retweets a tweet from an account that has shielded its profile, this tool cannot see it. The same

goes for Twitter Circle, where a user can post content for a selected audience without immediately shielding his entire account.

Qualitative analysis – (Social Media) Critical Discourse Analysis

I split the results into content and usage analysis, following the example of Wieringa, de Winkel and Lewis. The content analysis looks at what is written, said or seen in a post, a usage analysis looks at how a medium and its affordances are used.¹⁰⁸ Examples include posting photos or videos, using hashtags or retweeting other users. For those analyses, this study will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the tweets from various Forum for Democracy accounts. The quantitative data is mainly needed to test the theory mentioned above: in both Twitter's algorithms and in populism and fascism, (large) numbers are crucial, so we cannot avoid mentioning those numbers as well. Moreover, it is important for usage analysis to quantify how often Twitter's affordances were used. Furthermore, I also use this data to support my subjective findings in the content and usage analysis with objective data. To do this, I will quantify the following:

- The number of own posts;
- The number of retweets;
- The number of posts with media in them (photos/videos);
- Likes and comments;

¹⁰⁷ Eveline Meijer, "Forum Voor Democratie Verwijdert Tweets Het Vaakst," AD, 2017, <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/forum-voor-democratie-verwijdert-tweets-het-vaakst~a57d9079/>.

¹⁰⁸ Wieringa, M., De Winkel, T. and Lewis, C., *Wie is de waakhond op sociale media?* (Utrecht: Utrecht Data School, 2017), 1-78

- Hashtags;
- Mentions of other accounts;
- Links to external websites or other media;
- Persons depicted or mentioned.

Wieringa, De Winkel and Lewis do argue, with this method, context and semantic information must be kept in mind when analyzing such massive sets. “If you look at the map of a city, you don’t yet know its inhabitants,” they state.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it also requires a qualitative analysis.

I will do that through critical discourse analysis (CDA), as described by Van Dijk. CDA, according to him, is not so much a method per se as ‘ordinary’ discourse analysis ‘with an attitude’.¹¹⁰ Ordinary discourse analysis mainly describes discourse, he explains, and CDA attempts to explain discourse by means of social structures. According to Van Dijk, CDA focuses on social and political issues, which makes it an appropriate method for this particular study. Critical discourse analysis examines the way certain structures in discourse influence, confirm, legitimize, reproduce or challenge the abuse of power or dominance in society.¹¹¹ An appropriate method for examining a precarious political and social issue such as fascism. Moreover, discourse analysis is relevant in this study because the far-right often uses memes and so-called dog whistles (I will discuss this further below).¹¹² These are both textual methods of packaging a message so that not everyone understands what is meant: it depends on context and interpretation. Memes in particular, accor-

ding to Ico Maly, are forms of ‘pathic’ communication: seemingly empty, innocuous messages. These are not necessarily intended to convey information, but primarily to communicate a particular ‘group membership’. In doing so, it structures groups; if you catch, like and share the message you become part of this group.¹¹³ This social and contextual aspect makes discourse analysis an appropriate method. To further focus this method on the chosen topic, the method of Majid KhosraviNik is observed. He developed, building on Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Media Critical Discourse Analysis. On social media, he says, mass communication is fluidly combined with interpersonal communication. Discourse-in-action, is how he describes it. This method examines concrete action and communication that people perform in order to belong to a specific group, subject to the prevailing affordances of the platform.¹¹⁴

Specifically, this means that I will parse the tweets for signal words or phrases that theoretically fit certain characteristics that match either fascism or populism. I will also interpret the sentiment of a tweet (positive, negative or neutral), as it is important for the algorithm’s favoring. Here it is important to keep in mind that messages can be understood differently for different people. A good example of this are so-called dog whistles, words or phrases that are only (or mainly) understood by a select group. They are veiled allusions, often with a negative connotation -think racism, xenophobia or anti-Semitism, for example. that make a group of people understand that you ‘belong’ to them, share the same

109 Wieringa, M., De Winkel, T. and Lewis, C., *Wie is de waakhond op sociale media?* (Utrecht: Utrecht Data School, 2017), 1-78

110 Teun A. Van Dijk, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, *The Handbook Of Discourse Analysis*, 2015, p. 466.

111 Teun A. Van Dijk, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, *The Handbook Of Discourse Analysis*, 2015, 466-485, doi:10.1002/9781118584194.ch22.

112 Prashanth Bhat and Ofra Klein, “Covert Hate Speech: White Nationalists and Dog Whistle Communication on Twitter,” *Twitter, the Public Sphere, and the Chaos of Online Deliberation*, July 30, 2020, pp. 151-172, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41421-4_7.

113 Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018). p. 193-194

114 Majid KhosraviNik, “Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS)”, in *The Routledge Handbook Of Critical Discourse Studies*, 2019.

view as them, while other groups do not receive the message. Hiding in plain sight, basically. This is a proven tactic of the far right, so an important element to keep an eye on in this study.¹¹⁵ This will probably keep me from catching all the messages. I use the research of Baht and Klein, *Covert Hate Speech: White Nationalists and Dog Whistle Communication on Twitter*, in which they analyze several known dog whistles from the far right on Twitter.¹¹⁶ Of course, this research is also incomplete, so with the combination of this research and my own knowledge of dog whistles, I try to understand as many hidden messages as possible.

Corpus

For this study, I collect all tweets and retweets from both Forum for Democracy's Twitter account and the five parliamentarians who represent the party in the Lower House, from January 1st, 2022 until November 8th, 2022. There is also a parliamentarian for the party in the Senate, but he is so rarely in the news that I do not include him in this analysis. For the first part of the quantitative analysis, I will use all the tweets: there are around 7,000 of them. I do this to paint a fair picture of how these accounts use Twitter and to test the hypothesis that certain uses of affordances make the platform make posts more popular than others. For the second part of the quantitative analysis and for the qualitative analysis, only the 100 most popular posts from all six accounts are analyzed. I deliberately choose the most popular posts here and not a random selection, because these posts are apparently (according to theory) favored most favorably by the algorithm. So in theory that's

600 tweets, but since the six accounts also retweet each other regularly, some messages will also double, so in practice it will be a bit less. Collecting this data will pose few ethical problems because Twitter is an open, public environment. When politicians post something there, it is intended to reach the widest possible audience.¹¹⁷

In my theoretical framework, I identified key characteristics and differences of fascism and populism and described how they are expressed in modern times. I label the tweets if they meet any of these characteristics in order to categorize the tweets for analysis. I will also include the label 'dog whistle'. I am not going to assign a score, or create a measuring stick from populism to fascism: that is not my intention of this research. I will only indicate whether certain expressions fit what is theoretically populism and fascism, and place that next to the usage analysis to see how the algorithms treat these kinds of expressions.

¹¹⁵ Gabriel Weimann and Ari Ben Am, "Digital Dog Whistles: The New Online Language of Extremism," *International Journal of Security Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020).

¹¹⁶ Prashanth Bhat and Ofra Klein, "Covert Hate Speech: White Nationalists and Dog Whistle Communication on Twitter," *Twitter, the Public Sphere, and the Chaos of Online Deliberation*, July 30, 2020, pp. 151-172, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41421-4_7.

¹¹⁷ Graham Meikle and Christian Meikle, "Dear Mr. Neo-Nazi, Can You Please Give Me Your Informed Consent So That I Can Quote Your Fascist Tweet?": Questions of Social Media Research Ethics in Online Ideology Critique," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Activism* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 385-394.

Analysis

Usage analysis

As described in the theoretical framework, a number of points are known about how the Twitter algorithm works. To commemorate, I briefly sum up what, according to research and according to Twitter itself, works to boost content and explain the extent to which Forum for Democracy's accounts conform to it.

“Media on the right side of the spectrum are distributed farther and faster than media on the left side of the spectrum.”¹¹⁸

Of course, for a party on the (far) right side of the political spectrum, it is not surprising that news media on the right side of the spectrum is regularly shared - after all, this fits their ideology better. But since it has been proven that this content spreads faster, it is also beneficial to actively share it. All FvD-accounts very regularly share articles from news media - established and alternative (see Table 1). They do this by sharing links, tagging the accounts or hashtagging the name. The most frequently mentioned medium in account tags and hashtags is Ongehoord Nederland, a broadcaster with a clear right-wing signature. Media such as the Telegraaf (center-right), De Dagelijkse Standaard (right) and De Blauwe Tijger (far right) are also in the top five most-tagged accounts (see Figure 1 for examples). The NOS (center) is at number two. Of the 17 accounts tagged more than 5 times by Forum for Democracy and its members, more than half (9 accounts) can be placed to the right of

center, with outliers to the far right. For example, Blue Tiger was once mentioned in the Terrorism Threat Assessment by the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), calling the publisher “a conduit of anti-government propaganda, fake news and conspiracy theories.”¹¹⁹

News media	Tagged account	Total	Hashtag	Total
	ongehoordnedtv	76	ongehoordnieuws	16
	NOS	32	Nieuwsuur	4
	telegraaf	23	nrc	4
	DDStandaard	17	NOSjournaal	3
	DeBlauweTijger	15	WNL	2
	volkskrant	15	Zembla	2
	AndereKrant	13	Op1	2
	Nieuwsuur	11	BNR	2
	ADnl	9	WNLopzondag	1
	nrc	9	denhaagfm	1
	RTLnieuws	9	DPGmedia	1
	GBNEWS	9		
	blckbxnews	8		
	twimmercom	7		
	op1npo	6		
	_GezondVerstand	5		

Table 1.

¹¹⁸ Ferenc Huszár et al., “Algorithmic Amplification of Politics on Twitter,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 119, no. 1 (December 21, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2025334119>.

¹¹⁹ Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, “Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 53” (Den Haag, October 2020), p. 33-34.

Figure 1.

Gideon van Meijeren heeft gerepost
Ongehoord Nederland TV
 @ongehoordnedtv

"#NCTV komt steeds met analyses en adviezen die precies passen in het plaatje van de regering," zegt @GideonMeijeren over spionage door deze overheidsdienst. #ongehoordnieuws

Kijk de hele uitzending:
ongehoordnederland.tv/2022/06/02/tv-...



3:09 p.m. · 2 jun. 2022

Retweeted by Gideon van Meijeren (@GideonMeijeren). Translation: "#NCTV always comes up with analyses and opinions that exactly fit the government's picture," says @GideonMeijeren about spying by this government agency. #unheardnews Watch the whole broadcast:"

Frederik Jansen
 @frederikfdv

De VVD is de meest neppe partij van NL. Al vanaf 2010 onafgebroken aan de macht. In die 12 jaar hebben ze 130.000 sociale huurwoningen met voorrang weggeven aan asielzoekers in plaats van NLers. Telegraaf speelt het spelletje mee: "VVD gaat er met gestrekt been in". Ja hoor #FVD

10:04 a.m. · 3 jun. 2022

205 Retweets 7 Geciteerde Tweets 759 Vind-ik-leuks

Posted by Frederik Jansen (@frederikfdv). Translation: "The VVD is the most phony party in NL. In power continuously since 2010. In those 12 years they have given away 130,000 social housing with priority to asylum seekers instead of NLers. Telegraaf plays along with the game: "VVD goes in with full steam. Yeah right #FVD"

Pepijn van Houwelingen
 @PvanHouwelingen

Een uur lang gesproken over allerlei onderwerpen met Tom Zwitser, uitgever van het mooiste tijdschrift van ons land, Epoque en tal van interessante boeken! @DeBlauweTijger

10:18 p.m. · 22 apr. 2022

Posted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "Spent an hour talking about all sorts of topics with Tom Zwitser, publisher of our country's finest magazine, Epoque and numerous interesting books! @DeBlauweTijger"

Simone Kerseboom
 @SimoneKerseboom

Mijn eerste bijdrage voor @DDStandaard waarin ik absoluut geen historische vergelijkingen maak tussen de "dompas" en de #coronapas.

3:52 p.m. · 4 okt. 2021

33 Retweets 192 Vind-ik-leuks

Posted by Simone Kerseboom (@SimoneKerseboom). Translation: "My first contribution for @DDStandaard in which I make absolutely no historical comparisons between the "dompas" and the #coronapas"

Figure 2.

Shashi Roopram
 @ShashiRoopram

Waarom laat de @nos in het ochtendjournaal de beelden niet zien van de agent die op de boer schiet? Waarom andere beelden wel, maar deze beelden niet? #framing

8:13 a.m. · 6 jul. 2022

908 Retweets 51 Geciteerde Tweets 3.967 Vind-ik-leuks

Retweeted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "Why doesn't the @nos in the morning news show the footage of the cop shooting at the farmer? Why other images but not these images? #framing"

Simone Kerseboom heeft gerepost
Forum voor Democratie
 @fvdemocratie

U wordt voorgelogen door de @NOS. Ze posten een foto met heel weinig mensen. Zo doen ze voorkomen alsof er geen enkel verzet is tegen de #coronamaatregelen. Het tegenovergestelde is waar: Nederlanders kwamen MASSAAL naar het #Malieveld om te protesteren tegen de coronadictatuur!

2:14 p.m. · 7 nov. 2021

Posted by Forum voor Democratie (@fvdemocratie) and retweeted by Simone Kerseboom (@SimoneKerseboom). Translation: "You are being lied to by the @NOS. They post a picture with very few people. This way they pretend that there is no opposition to the #coronameasures. The opposite is true: Dutch people came MASSELY to the #Malieveld to protest against the coronadictature!"

Thierry Baudet
 @thierrybaudet

LOL "minimaal een maand" volgens de NOS. Ook de karteljournalistiek heeft er zin in zo te zien: het monddood maken van een oppositiepoliticus om totale controle te verkrijgen over zijn handel & wandel. Moet ik straks ook een stappenteller bij me dragen?

Maar Rutte's smsjes... 📱

6:15 p.m. · 21 jun. 2022

562 Retweets 44 Geciteerde Tweets 2.183 Vind-ik-leuks

Posted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: "LOL "at least a month" according to NOS. Cartel journalism is in the mood too it seems: gagging an opposition politician to gain total control over his comings & goings. Will I soon have to carry a pedometer too? But Rutte's text messages..."

Of the news websites the six accounts link to most often, NOS tops the list (Table 2). A sampling of those tweets shows that this is almost always accompanied by negative sentiment about the medium itself or the content of their articles. In Table 2 we also see the Telegraaf and the Dagelijkse Standaard, at position 2 and 3. Links to mainstream media are more frequent than to alternative media: the AD, RTL news, NU.nl, NRC and De Volkskrant all rank higher than alternatives such as BLCK-BX, NineforNews and De Andere Krant.

Domestic news media									
Website	Total	Website	Total	Website	Total	Website	Total	Website	Total
NOS.nl	82	deanderekrant.nl	4	tpo.nl	2	rtvnoord.nl	1	regio8.nl	1
Telegraaf.nl	56	hartvannederland.nl	4	2doc.nl	1	rtvutrecht.nl	1	revu.nl	1
Dagelijksestandaard.nl	52	nporadio1.nl	4	almeredezeweek.nl	1	frontnieuws.com	1	security.nl	1
AD.nl	38	cafeweltschmerz.nl	3	bnvara.nl	1	gld.nl	1	zaplog.pro	1
nieuwrechts.nl	28	groene.nl	3	dekanttekening.nl	1	harendekrant.nl	1		
RTLnieuws.nl	26	jensen.nl	3	delpher.nl	1	hoogeveenschecourant.nl	1		
nu.nl	21	indkgrf.nl	3	destentor.nl	1	indepn.nl	1		
nrc.nl	17	wnl.tv	3	dissident.one	1	lc.nl	1		
volkskrant.nl	16	gezondverstand.eu	3	dutchnews.nl	1	leidschdagblad.nl	1		
blickbx.tv	14	denhaagfm.nl	2	eenvandaag.nl	1	nieuwkoops.nl	1		
ninefornews.nl	10	gelderlander.nl	2	elsevierweekblad.nl	1	nieuweoogst.nl	1		
bnr.nl	5	maurice.nl	2	fd.nl	1	noordhollandsdagblad.nl	1		
parool.nl	5	nd.nl	2	vpro.nl	1	nporadio2.nl	1		
rd.nl	5	omroepwest.nl	2	vk.com	1	niw.nl	1		
trouw.nl	5	oogtv.nl	2	story.nl	1	ongehoordnederland.tv	1		
wyniasweek.nl	5	thefireonline.com	2	spreekbuis.nl	1	privacy-web.nl	1		

Table 2.

“Negative content spreads faster than positive content. Even about positive events.”¹²⁰

I labeled the 100 most popular tweets from each account as positive, negative or neutral. In this, I looked for signal words that give the content a certain connotation, because this is picked up by Twitter’s algorithm, but I also included sarcasm and irony because this cannot be picked up by the algorithm but can be picked up by users as a positive or negative sentiment. To give an example, the tweet in Figure 3 by

Frederik Jansen may be picked up by an algorithm as positive because it says ‘good for nature’. However, with a little background knowledge of Frederik Jansen’s views on climate policy and wind turbines, one can assume that this tweet is meant to sound negative.

Of the tweets analyzed, four tweets had their accounts deleted between the time of scraping and the time of analysis, so they could no longer be included. Of the remaining 591 tweets, 52 had a positive connotation, 234 were neutral and 305 tweets had a negative connotation. Although of the most popular tweets, only one in 12 had a positive sentiment, these tweets did evoke by far the most interaction: an average of over 68,000 likes, retweets and comments per tweet. For neutral tweets this was much lower, 11,552 per tweet, and for negative tweets it was even lower, a scant 6,800 per tweet. However, diving into those positive tweets to see where that high score came from, a retweet of a tweet by Elon Musk stands out (see Figure 4). This tweet generated over 3 million interactions, dramatically driving up the average per tweet:



Figure 3.

¹²⁰ Andrea K. Bellovary, Nathaniel A. Young, and Amit Goldenberg, “Left- and Right-Leaning News Organizations Use Negative Emotional Content and Elicit User Engagement Similarly,” *Affective Science* 2, no. 4 (2021): pp. 391-396, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-021-00046-w>.

excluding this tweet, the average number of interactions on tweets with positive sentiment is just over 8500 (Table 3). Even so, this is more interaction than on negative tweets. What is striking is that the most popular tweets with positive connotations are often calls for demonstrations against corona or nitrogen policies or photos/videos of those demonstrations. Research by the Utrecht Data School previously found that this type of demonstration attracts a large and diverse audience, whose common denominator is broad-based anti-establishment sentiment.¹²¹ Almost all tweets with a positive connotation (45 out of 52) contained a photo or video.



Figure 4.

“Take advantage of current events. Keep an eye on trending topics and engage in them.”¹²²

Many of the hashtags used in the dataset (Table 4) relate to current events: of the non-party related hashtags, nearly half (42%) are about

Numbers with Musk’s tweet included:

	Tweets	Interaction total	Interaction per tweet
Positive sentiment	52	3546586	68204
Negative sentiment	305	2069920	6787
Neutral sentiment	234	2703152	11552
From deleted accounts	4	147994	36999
Total	595	8467652	14231

Numbers with Musk’s tweet excluded:

	Tweets	Interaction total	Interaction per tweet
Positive sentiment	52	447045	8597
Negative sentiment	305	2069920	6787
Neutral sentiment	234	2703152	11552
From deleted accounts	4	147994	36999
Total	595	5368111	9022

Table 3.

current affairs. Of course, hashtags that fall under other categories may also be topical at the time, but these hashtags are specifically about issues that have been in the news a lot in 2022. Examples include the covid pandemic (14% of hashtags), the war in Ukraine and its energy crisis (8%) and farmers’ protests (9%). Other topical issues, such as municipal elections, Prinsjesdag (‘Budget Day’) and specific debates in the House of Representatives, are also common (12%).

“Use hashtags for that, so people who don’t follow you can find your tweets. Use no more than two hashtags per tweet.”¹²³

The accounts studied use hashtags to varying degrees (Table 5). Forum for Democracy’s party account uses them most often: an average of just over one per tweet. The two accounts that produce the most content, Pepijn van Houwelingen and Thierry Baudet, use the fewest hashtags on average: on average in 1 in 4 tweets. Gideon van Meijeren and Frederik Jansen use them in about half of their tweets and Simone Kerseboom in about a third. For each of them, #FVD is used most often: a total of 1426 times. This is followed by WEF (World Economic

Hashtags categories	Different hashtags	Total hashtags
Party-related	20	1535
Covid-related	60	228
Institutions	27	193
Other current affairs	43	189
Conspiracy theories	40	180
Farmers	20	153
Persons	36	81
Climate and energy	29	80
Media	25	56
Ukraine	17	43
Other political parties	10	26
Other	275	412

Table 4.

	Hashtags	Per tweet
@frederikfvd	63	0,53
@fvdemocratie	1407	1,10
@gideonmeijeren	291	0,44
@pvanhouwelingen	619	0,27
@simonekerseboom	260	0,33
@thierrybaudet	546	0,25

Table 5.

¹²¹ Jeroen Bakker et al., “Van scherm naar straat: Hoe sociale media-conversaties protest op straat mobiliseren” (Utrecht, March 19, 2021).

¹²² Savannah Badalich, “Topics: Behind the Tweets,” Twitter (Twitter, January 30, 2020), https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/product/2020/topics-behind-the-tweets.

¹²³ Hayley Dorney, “The Do’s and Don’ts of Hashtags,” Twitter (Twitter), accessed December 2, 2022, <https://business.twitter.com/en/blog/the-dos-and-donts-of-hashtags.html>.

Forum) and NEXIT (which refers to The Netherlands leaving the EU). When I break down the hashtags into categories, party-related hashtags are at the top (largely due to the use of #FVD). This is followed by COVID-related hashtags (e.g. #coronabedrog, which translates to corona scam. This is the title of a book published by Thierry Baudet in 2022) and institutions (which includes WEF and NEXIT). Also frequently used are hashtags about current events (like #algemenebeschouwingen, the most important debate of the year, about the financial plans of

Hashtag	Meaning	Total
FVD	Forum for Democracy	1426
WEF	World Economic Forum	76
NEXIT	Netherlands leave the EU	66
coronabedrog	COVID-scam	61
boeren	Farmers	52
GreatReset	Great Reset	51
Baudet	Thierry Baudet	32
stikstof	Nitrogen	30
referendum	Referendum	23
oversterfte	Excess deaths	21
Remkes	Johan Remkes	19
AlgemeneBeschouwingen	General political reflections	18
NSPublieksprijs	Contest for most popular book	18
Rutte	Mark Rutte	18
energierekening	Energy bill	17
mediakartel	Media cartel	17
boerenopstand	Farmers uprising	15
coronadebat	COVID debate	15

the government) and related to conspiracy theories (like #GreatReset and #omvolking, which means ‘repopulation’).

Table 6.

“Post regularly. They themselves recommend a minimum of 1-2 times and a maximum of 3-5 times a day.”¹²⁴

There is a big difference in the number of tweets posted by the different accounts. Frederik Jansen posts a tweet every other day on average, while Pepijn van Houwelingen and Thierry Baudet post or retweet over 7 daily. There are days when they even post or retweet more than 50 tweets. The other accounts do not have such large outliers, but also have days when they produce a remarkable amount of content. For example, Freek Jansen posted 9 tweets or retweets on April 21, 7 of which related to a debate that day, about the accommodation of refugees in the Netherlands.¹²⁵ Simone Kersseboom posted 10 tweets on Feb. 24: the day Russia invaded Ukraine.¹²⁶ 9 of the 10 tweets were about this topic, mainly about the Ukraine referendum that marked the beginning of Forum for Democracy in 2016. Gideon van Meijeren posted a remarkable number of tweets on July 3. Of these, 8 tweets are a so-called ‘thread’ (follow-up tweets) about the threats to another MP by farmers, which had previously prevented Van Meijeren from speaking in the House of Representatives.¹²⁷ FvD’s party account had two periods when much content was posted: from June 22 to early July, when massive farmers’ protests took place in the Netherlands¹²⁸, and on Sept. 21 and 22. On September 21, the General Consultations took place and the entire cabinet walked out during Thierry Baudet’s input.¹²⁹ Virtually all the tweets posted on these two days by this account dealt with this issue.

¹²⁴ Stacey McLachlan, “How Often to Post to Social Media in 2022,” Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard, November 23, 2022, https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-often-to-post-on-social-media/#How_often_to_post_on_Twitter.

¹²⁵ Tweede Kamer, “Debat over De Opvang Van Oekraïense Vluchtelingen,” Debat over de opvang van Oekraïense vluchtelingen | Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, accessed January 14, 2023, https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/plenaire_vergaderingen/details/activiteit?id=2022A02814.

¹²⁶ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, “Rusland Valt Oekraïne Aan: Reactie Van Minister Hoekstra,” Nieuwsbericht | Rijksoverheid.nl (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, February 24, 2022), <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/russische-inval-in-oekraïne/nieuws/2022/02/24/rusland-valt-oekraïne-aan-reactie-hoekstra-nieuws>.

¹²⁷ Gideon van Meijeren, “Tweet Door Gideon Van Meijeren,” Twitter (Twitter, July 4, 2022), <https://twitter.com/gideonvmeijeren/status/1543922449993146370>.

¹²⁸ M. Luesink et al., “Boerenprotesten in de zomer van 2022” (Arnhem, September 8, 2022).

¹²⁹ “Kabinet Loopt Weg Bij Speech Thierry Baudet,” RTL Nieuws, September 21, 2022, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/video/video/5334773/audet-politiek-tweede-kamer-kabinet-fvd-sigrid-kaag-debat>

Figure 5.1



Posted by Frederik Jansen (frederikfvd). Translation: "Today debate on Ukrainian refugees. Fleeing is very bad but the Netherlands cannot cope. Already students are being evicted from their homes to make room. Already we have a housing shortage of 300,000. #FVD pleads for shelter in the region."

Figure 5.2



Tweeted by Erik Keereweer (@erikkeereweer) and retweeted by Simone Kersseboom (@SimoneKersseboom). Translation: "Baudet warned us back in 2016. Hence, he also campaigned fiercely for the Ukraine referendum. #messiah #Baudet #Ukraine #UkraineCrisis #baudetisright #forumvoordemocratie."

In both the accounts of Thierry Baudet and Pepijn van Houwelingen, it is noticeable that they suddenly started producing much more content in October than in the months before. Thierry Baudet posted 626 tweets in that month, nearly 29 percent of his total number of tweets posted in 2022. Pepijn van Houwelingen posted 797 tweets in October, more than 34 percent of his total number of tweets posted in 2022. It seems no coincidence that they produced so much content in October in particular, as that month also saw a number of events in the news surrounding Forum for Democracy. First, Thierry Baudet was suspended by the House of Representatives for refusing to declare his side income.¹³⁰ He himself believed that this was used as an excuse to 'silence' him. Then, Gideon van Meijeren published a video in which he called journalists 'sewer rats' and 'confronted' a journalist with the camera running.¹³¹ Not much later, Thierry Baudet called for his book 'Het Coronabedrog' to be nominated for the NS publieksprijs, the prize for the best book of the year according to readers, and it turned out that there was voting fraud which prevented the awarding of the prize. Again, Baudet felt that the course of events was unfair; he believed that he had received the most votes, but that the NS did not want to award him the prize.¹³² Finally, the NPO (Nederlandse Publieke Omroep) decided to impose a financial penalty on the broadcaster Ongehoord Nederland! for violating the journalistic code. In September, the broadcaster showed videos of black people beating up white people, saying that this would happen

Figure 5.3



Tweeted by Gideon van Meijeren (@GideonvMeijeren). Translation: "No one has yet contradicted that @DerkBoswijk was actually visited by an elderly lady of 70, rather than by angry farmers. One would expect that, if it were not true. So it has every indication that it is indeed true. 1/"

Figure 5.4



Tweeted by Forum voor Democratie (fvdemocratie). Translation: "Yesterday, the Cabinet scandalized the House by walking away, over alleged 'insinuations. Outrageous and unprecedented. Right after, Sigrid Kaag herself came up with a strong insinuation: #FVD would speak 'on behalf of a dictator. @frederikfvd demands explanation. #GeneralReflections"

¹³⁰ Tweede Kamer, "Kamerlid Thierry Baudet (Fvd) Geschorst," Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, October 19, 2022, <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/nieuws/kamernieuws/kamerlid-thierry-baudet-fvd-geschorst>.

¹³¹ "Fvd-Kamerlid Gideon Van Meijeren Intimideert SBS6-Verslaggever Merel Ek Met Video," BM, October 24, 2022, <https://www.broadcastmagazine.nl/radio-televisie/televisie/fvd-kamerlid-gideon-van-meijeren-intimideert-sbs6-verslaggever-merel-ek-met-video/>.

¹³² Redactie NOS, "NS Publieksprijs Niet Uitgereikt Vanwege Manipulatie," NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen (NOS Nieuws, October 26, 2022), <https://nos.nl/artikel/2449832-ns-publieksprijs-niet-uitgereikt-vanwege-manipulatie>.

‘on a large scale’ in the Netherlands.¹³³ Politicians from FvD regularly engage with this broadcaster and it is the most frequently mentioned medium on Twitter by the six politicians surveyed. All of these events dominated the tweets of both Thierry Baudet and Pepijn van Houwelingen in October.

“Use media in tweets: photos, videos and gifs.”¹³⁴

Only Forum voor Democratie’s party account uses a lot of media in its tweets: more than half of its tweets contain a photo, video or gif (see Table 7). Gideon van Meijeren and Pepijn van Houwelingen use media in about one in five tweets, Frederik Jansen and Thierry Baudet in about one in seven tweets, and Simone Kersseboom in one in twenty tweets. For all accounts, it is clear that the content they post with media creates a lot more interaction than the content without media. In the case of Thierry Baudet, the use of media even causes tweets to generate 4.5 times more interaction.

Table 7.

Twitter-account	Tweets with media	% tweets with media	Total interactions	Average interaction per tweet	Total interactions with media	Average interaction per tweet with media
@frederikfvd	18	15%	80298	680	19781	1099
@fvdemocratie	663	52%	1399322	1090	977161	1474
@gideonmeijeren	146	22%	1069555	1628	425552	2915
@pvanhouwelingen	502	22%	3177167	1372	1507318	3003
@simonekerseboom	38	5%	356889	446	26340	693
@thierrybaudet	295	13%	7780600	3554	4794584	16253

¹³³ Showredactie, “NPO Wil Ongehoord Nederland Tweede Sanctie Opleggen,” AD.nl, October 25, 2022, <https://www.ad.nl/show/npo-wil-ongehoord-nederland-tweede-sanctie-opleggen~a44ae765/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>.

¹³⁴ Niamh Keenan, “Guide: Free Twitter Marketing Strategies for Small Businesses,” Twitter (Twitter), accessed December 2, 2022, <https://business.twitter.com/en/blog/marketing-strategies-for-small-business.html>.

¹³⁵ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019).

¹³⁶ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018).

¹³⁷ Reuters Fact Check, “Fact Check-Climate Change Is Not a Ploy for Communism; A Greta Thunberg Meme Has Been Digitally Altered,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, August 18, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-climate-greta-idUSL1N2PP0YK>.

Content analysis

The Twitter content of the different accounts will be analyzed using Finchelstein’s¹³⁵ and Maly’s¹³⁶ descriptions of modern fascism and populism.

Anti-communist

The anti-communist nature of Forum for Democracy’s tweets expresses itself mainly against the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the measures taken to solve the nitrogen crisis in the Netherlands. Although there is no evidence that the nitrogen measures have anything to do with communism, the far right regularly links them together. According to them, climate change would be a fabrication to implement communism worldwide.¹³⁷ FvD MP Simone Kersseboom retweeted a tweet by well-known Swedish conspiracy theorist Peter Imanuelsen during the farmers’ protests in the Netherlands in July, in which he called the Dutch nitrogen policy ‘climate communism’ (Figure 6.1). The World Economic Forum is also regularly associated with communism. A tweet from FvD’s party account claimed, “The ideology behind the WEF is

neo-communist thinking in which private property is increasingly abolished.” (Figure 6.2)

In the hashtags often used by FvD, this annual gathering is also often found. #WEF is the second most used hashtag in the analyzed tweets. The Great Reset comes up often, too. This refers to the WEF’s proposal to sustainably rebuild the global economy after the covid pandemic.¹³⁸ Davos (the location of the WEF) and Klaus Schwab (the founder of the WEF) are also frequently mentioned in tweets.

Figure 6.1



Figure 6.2



Table 8.

Hashtag	Number of uses
WEF	76
GreatReset	51
WEFpapers	9
TheGreatReset	6
WEFpuppets	6
WEFGate	4
wef22	3
Davos2022	2
WEFkabinet	2
Davos	1
Schwabinet	1
WEFpenetration	1
WEFteing	1

Anti-liberalist and anti-enlightenment

The tweets also clearly reflect the anti-liberal idea of two genders and different races. Forum for Democracy vehemently opposed the new transgender law, which no longer requires an expert statement to change gender in your passport.¹³⁹ In a tweet, FvD called genders ‘the foundations of our society’. In the same tweet, they say that ‘men cannot become women and vice versa’, and that the transgender law is a ‘total denial of human nature’. In other tweets, they imply that gender transition is a ‘mental disorder’ that people should ‘get help with,’ and that the transgender law is ‘life-threatening for real women’.

Forum for Democracy is also vehemently anti-abortion rights. According to the United Nations¹⁴⁰ and the European Union¹⁴¹, abortion is a human right, but FvD considers it ‘a tragedy’ that ‘should be discouraged as much as possible,’ they say in a tweet (Figure 6).

The anti-liberal mindset that, according to Finchelstein, fits the ‘New Right’, is mainly directed against ‘the elite’. That word is regularly used in tweets by FvD members: to describe, for example, other members of parliament and ministers, but in many cases it is used as an entity, of which it is not made clear exactly who or what it refers to.



Figure 7.

¹³⁸ World Economic Forum, “The Great Reset,” World Economic Forum, 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/great-reset/>.

¹³⁹ NOS Nieuws, “Wat Houdt De Nieuwe Transgenderwet in? Vijf Vragen En Antwoorden,” NOS.nl (NOS Nieuws, September 27, 2022), <https://nos.nl/artikel/2446147-wat-houdt-de-nieuwe-transgenderwet-in-vijf-vragen-en-antwoorden>.

¹⁴⁰ Justin Goldberg, “UN Human Rights Committee Asserts That Access to Abortion and Prevention of Maternal Mortality Are Human Rights,” Center for Reproductive Rights, January 26, 2021, <https://reproductiverights.org/un-human-rights-committee-asserts-that-access-to-abortion-and-prevention-of-maternal-mortality-are-human-rights/>.

¹⁴¹ Maïa de La Baume, “European Parliament Declares Abortion Access a Human Right,” POLITICO (POLITICO, June 24, 2021), <https://www.politico.eu/article/meps-adopt-divisive-text-on-abortion/>.

Figure 8.

The figure displays three tweets. The first tweet is from Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet) dated 7:12 p.m. on 22 apr. 2022. The text of the tweet is: "Braafheid. Domheid. Kortzichtigheid. Naïviteit over de veronderstelde goedheid / onbaatzuchtigheid van de boven-hen-gestelden. Gemakzucht. En ongeloof: het je gewoon niet kunnen vóórstellen dat de wereldelites dit monsterlijke Great Reset-plan DAADWERKELIJK gaan uitvoeren. twitter.com/SBergsma/statu...". Below the tweet is a translation box: "Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: 'Obediency. Stupidity. Shortsightedness. Naivety about the supposed goodness/unsel-fishness of the above-them. Laziness. And disbelief: simply being unable to imagine that the world elites are going to ACTUALLY implement this monstrous Great Reset plan.'".

The second tweet is from Forum voor Democratie (@fvdemocratie) dated 9:24 p.m. on 21 mrt. 2022. The text of the tweet is: "Typerend voor klimaatelites: ze pronken met hun lage energierekening terwijl de gemiddelde NLER - die geen peperdure warmtepomp kan aanschaffen - recordprijzen betaalt. Alle NLERs hebben recht op een warm huis; daarom wil #FVD de gasbelasting verlagen." Below the tweet is a photo of Laura Bromet and a translation box: "Tweeted by Forum voor Democratie (@fvdemocratie) and retweeted by Frederik Jansen (@frederikfvd). Translation: 'Typical of climate elites: they flaunt their low energy bills while the average Dutch people - who cannot buy a very expensive heat pump - pays record prices. All Dutch people have the right to a warm house; that's why #FVD wants to lower the gas tax.'".

The third tweet is from Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet) dated 5:25 p.m. on 24 sep. 2022. The text of the tweet is: "Daarom zegt deep state agent @SigridKaag ook dat 'we' (en daarmee bedoelt ze de globalistische elites) de oorlog in Oekraïne 'koste wat kost' moeten winnen. We zijn getuige van de eindstrijd van het Amerikaanse imperium. Kat in 't nauw. Wees voorbereid op rare sprongen." Below the tweet is a translation box: "Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: 'This is also why deep state agent @SigridKaag says that 'we' (and by that she means the globalist elites) must win the war in Ukraine 'at all costs.' We are witnessing the final battle of the American empire. Cat in a tight corner. Be prepared for strange leaps.'".

People-nation-leader

That 'elite' is the common enemy within alt-right. Through bad trade agreements and 'dangerous migrants,' they are said to have destroyed the people and the nation.¹⁴² This discourse is also reflected in the studied tweets (Figure 9). 'Giving homes to immigrants while our people are homeless', 'bringing in immigrants means the systematic dismantling of our country', 'the complete havoc caused by 12 years of immigration under Rutte', 'farmers or mass immigration': this discourse makes

a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them'. 'They' are the immigrants let in by the 'elite' (the VVD, Rutte, the cabinet: see Figure 8) and 'they' get houses, money and land at the expense of 'our people'. This destroys the Netherlands, according to them. The bad trade deal in this case is usually the EU membership, which FvD fiercely opposes: not surprisingly, one of their most-used hashtags is #NEXIT (66 times), referring to Brexit, Britain's withdrawal from the EU. FvD believes the Netherlands should also leave the EU. This, according to Maly, is a typical discursive mechanism for the modern-day alt-right.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Ico Maly, Nieuw Rechts (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 82-83.

¹⁴³ Ico Maly, Nieuw Rechts (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 78.

Figure 9.



Hoe kunnen we nou MILJARDEN geven aan Oekraïne terwijl mensen in Nederland niet eens hun boodschappen en energierekening kunnen betalen?

Waarom geven we huizen aan immigranten terwijl onze eigen mensen dakloos zijn?

Dit kabinet werkt echt niet voor Nederland en de Nederlanders!

11:52 a.m. · 3 okt. 2022

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: "How can we give BILLIONS to Ukraine while people in the Netherlands can't even pay their groceries and energy bills? Why are we giving houses to immigrants while our own people are homeless? This government is really not working for the Netherlands and the Dutch people!"



Nepnieuws van RTL. Hoe kun je het moedwillig naar Nederland halen van miljoenen immigranten door de Kabinetten Rutte - en nu het idee om "Franse jongeren" uit de banlieues (lees Afrikanen) naar NL te halen - anders beschouwen dan de systematische #ontmanteling van ons land? #FVD

Geen tegenwicht

Presentatoren van ON! vroegen zelden door als gasten ongefundeerde of niet-feitelijke uitspraken deden. Zo stelde Forum voor Democratie-parlementariër Freek Jansen dat het kabinet 'ons land wil ontmantelen' door 'het criminele Afrikaanse gebeuren' uit Franse voorsteden naar Nederland te halen als arbeidsmigrant. De presentatoren gaven na deze opmerking geen tegenwicht en vroegen niet door.

4:34 p.m. · 7 jul. 2022

Tweeted by Frederik Jansen (@frederikfd). Translation: "Fake news from RTL. How can you consider the intentional immigration of millions of immigrants to the Netherlands by the Rutte Cabinets - and now the idea of bringing "French youth" from the banlieues (i.e. Africans) to NL - any different than the systematic #dismantling of our country? #FVD



In het migratiedebat gaat het voortdurend over de belangen van immigranten. Niet over de overlast, niet over de kosten en niet over de complete ravage die 12 jaar immigratie onder Rutte hebben aangericht. En het gaat maar door. Dat moet stoppen. Genoeg is genoeg. Vol is vol. #FVD



3:55 p.m. · 30 jun. 2022

Tweeted by Forum voor Democratie (@fvdemocratie) and retweeted by Frederik Jansen (@frederikfd). Translation: "The migration debate is constantly about the interests of immigrants. Not about the disruption, not about the costs and not about the complete havoc 12 years of immigration under Rutte have wreaked. And it goes on and on. It has to stop. Enough is enough. Full is full. #FVD"



Het is overduidelijk waarom #boeren worden onteigend: ze moeten ruimte maken voor immigranten. Waarom zou je dat nu nog ontkennen? Het staat zwart-op-wit. De keuze is simpel: boeren of massale immigratie. #FVD kiest voor het eerste. #stikstofcrisis



11:07 a.m. · 11 jul. 2022

Tweeted by Forum voor Democratie (@fvdemocratie). Translation: "It's abundantly clear why #farmers are being expropriated: they need to make room for immigrants. Why deny that now? It's written in black on white. The choice is simple: farmers or mass immigration. #FVD chooses the former. #nitrogencrisis"

Figure 10.



Democratic values and press

In the Netherlands, the Trias Politica applies: the separation of powers, i.e. the legislative, executive and judicial powers. This is the basis for our democracy.¹⁴⁴ Populists are eager to question this separation and within the modern alt-right, (online) attacks on judges are a common practice, says Maly.¹⁴⁵ Forum voor Democratie also openly doubts the

independence of Dutch judges, saying they act at the behest of the government (Figure 10.). They say they are censored by judges and that judges are biased in court cases, for example in COVID policy cases. Pepijn van Houwelingen claims in one of his tweets that the Netherlands is a dikastocracy: a term from political philosophy that implies that supreme power lies with judges.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ De Nederlandse Grondwet, "De Trias Politica in De Nederlandse Grondwet," Nederlandse Grondwet (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties), accessed January 27, 2023, https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/vknd-m7nuwdwh/de_trias_politica_in_de_nederlandse.

¹⁴⁵ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 276-277.

¹⁴⁶ Marijke Malsch, "Hoezo Dikastocratie? Weghalen Taken Bij Rechter Leidt Tot Afkalven Rechtsbescherming Burger," *NJB (Nederlands Juristenblad, May 12, 2020)*, <https://www.njb.nl/blogs/hoezo-dikastocratie/>.

Figure 11.

Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet) · 12 jul. 2022
 #BBB is controlled opposition. Zo simpel is het. Daarom wordt @lientje1967 ook zo gepushed in de media. [twitter.com/JoostNiemoller...](https://twitter.com/JoostNiemoller)

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: “#BBB is controlled opposition. It’s as simple as that. That’s why @lientje1967 is being pushed so much in the media. [https://twitter.com/JoostNiemoller...](https://twitter.com/JoostNiemoller)”

Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet) · 5 okt. 2022
 Exactly. Dat noemen we “systeemoppositie” oftewel “controlled opposition”. JA21 behoort daar ook toe — en soms vrees ik dat de PVV er ook toebehoort.

Het kartel creëert z’n eigen “uitlaatkleppen” voor de volkswede.

Alleen #FVD staat lijnrecht tegenover het regime. Steun ons!

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: “Exactly. We call that “system opposition” or “controlled opposition.” JA21 belongs to it - and sometimes I fear the PVV also belongs to them. The cartel creates its own “outlets” for the people’s anger. Only #FVD is directly opposed to the regime. Support us!”

Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet) · 19 jun. 2022
 Op een dag maak je de keuze tussen controlled opposition (BBB, JA21, BVNL, etc.) of échte oppositie. SPOILER: daarna is er geen weg meer terug. #FVD

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: “One day you will make the choice between controlled opposition (BBB, JA21, BVNL, etc.) or real opposition. SPOILER: after that there is no turning back. #FVD”

Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet) · 22 apr. 2022
 Caroline krijgt complimentjes van het kartel. Dan weet je dat je iets gruwelijk fout doet. Maar in plaats daarvan begint ze te glunderen van trots en wordt ze bijna emotioneel. Zo veelzeggend. Ze wordt zó gewaardeerd; nog even en ze mag ‘erbij horen!’ #controlledOpposition

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: “Caroline gets compliments from the cartel. That’s when you know you’re doing something horribly wrong. But instead, she starts beaming with pride and gets almost emotional. So telling. She is so appreciated; just a little longer and she can ‘fit in’! #controlledOpposition”

Moreover, both populists and fascists believe that there is no place for an opposition, even though, according to many, it is an essential part of a healthy democracy and the Trias Politica (legislative power).¹⁴⁷ Party leader Thierry Baudet regularly talks about ‘controlled opposition’ (Figure 11.): a conspiracy theory in which the opposition parties actually just cooperate with the government. He mainly classifies parties close to FVD in the political spectrum under this term; other opposition par-

ties belong to ‘the cartel’. He also says that FVD is the only party that is truly opposed to the government: they are, he says, the only alternative to ‘save’ the country.¹⁴⁸

The free press, also called ‘the fourth power,’ is an enemy of the people for populists and fascists. Nowadays, they do not need the press to reach their audience anymore, which makes it even easier to attack them, which therefore happens regularly.¹⁴⁹ Forum for Democracy uses

¹⁴⁷ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 82-83.

¹⁴⁹ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 270.

hashtags like #saneerdeNPO (‘dissolve the Dutch Public Broadcasting Corporation’), #staatsomroep and #regimepers (implying that media are controlled by the government) and #mediakartel (implying that all media collaborate/collude). The newspaper NRC Handelsblad was also frequently targeted: FVD politicians use hashtags like #NRChetzeblad, #NSBhandelsblad and #NSBhetzeblad (see Table 9.) and say the newspaper uses Stasi techniques (Figure 12.) In doing so, they draw comparisons to the Nazis in World War II and say the newspaper is conducting a smear campaign about them and about the broadcaster Ongehoord Nederland. They also call journalists ‘sewer rats’ who need to be ‘exposed’ and regularly accuse various media outlets of fake news. They also regularly refer to alternative news media that spread reports that are factually incorrect or contain conspiracy theories. They refer by far most often to Ongehoord Nieuws (16 times in hashtags, 76 times the account, see Table 10.), which is known to violate the NPO’s journalistic code and spread fake news.¹⁵⁰

Hashtag	Number of uses
saneerdeNPO	7
riooljournalistiek	2
Rioleratten	2
nsbhandelsblad	2
staatsomroep	1
regimepers	1
RiolerattenOntmaskerd	1
nrcchetzeblad	1
nsbhetzeblad	1

Table 9.

Media	Number of mentions
ongehoordnedtv	76
NOS	32
telegraaf	23
DDStandaard	17
DeBlauweTijger	15
volkskrant	15
AndereKrant	13
Nieuwsuur	11
ADnl	9
nrc	9
RTLnieuws	9
GBNEWS	9
blckbxnews	8
twimmercom	7
op1npo	6
_GezondVerstand	5

Table 10.

¹⁵⁰ Nienke Schipper, “Experts: Ongehoord Nederland Verspreidt Schadelijk Nepnieuws,” Trouw, March 16, 2022, <https://www.trouw.nl/cultuur-media/experts-ongehoord-nederland-verspreidt-schadelijk-nepnieuws~b4359f40>

Figure 12.

Forum voor Democratie @fvdemocratie

Nepnieuws door Eenvandaag: vrijwilliger is ineens 'partijprominent'. Lasterlijke framing, ze proberen te doen alsof FVD hier iets mee te maken heeft. Onzin! FVD wil niks te maken hebben met mensen die andere politici bedreigen. 1/2 #FVD



Prominente politici van Forum voor Democratie blijken lid of zelfs beheerder te zijn van een Telegram-groep waar adressen van bijvoorbeeld Hugo de Jonge gedeeld worden. "Platforms die dit toestaan, moeten beter worden gereguleerd - of zelfs verboden."

8:01 p.m. · 22 jan. 2022

Tweeted by Forum voor Democratie (@fvdemocratie). Translation: "Fake news by Eenvandaag: volunteer is suddenly "party prominent. Blasphemous framing, they try to pretend FVD has something to do with this. Nonsense! FVD wants nothing to do with people threatening other politicians. 1/2 #FVD"

Pepijn van Houwelingen @PvanHouwelingen

NOS=nepnieuws #Propaganda #mediakartel #desinformatie

KarikatuurVanMezelf @10beethoven · 16 okt. 2020
Als antwoord op @patricksavalle @PanderRoskam en 2 anderen
Ik zal alvast een voorzet geven Patrick: #nosjournaal met Poetin over de #mh17:
youtube.com/watch?v=fBY-oQ...

4:29 p.m. · 8 jun. 2022

Tweeted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "NOS= fake news #Propaganda #mediakartel #desinformation"

Pepijn van Houwelingen @PvanHouwelingen

Bleef het maar bij selectief verzwijgen, we worden ook bedreigd en wel vanwege nepnieuws, desinformatie en haat gefabriceerd door het mediakartel, dag in dag uit.
twitter.com/KAFKA_Dev/stat...



00:00 5G

121

Anonymousemail
Aan: P. van Houwelingen > Gisteren

nazis nog niet uitgeroeid

Powered by Anonymousemail → Join Us!

En daar hoor jij en die kudde kankerboeren ook bij.

Plagen moeten worden uitgeroeid. Adolf wist dat. Helaas mag het niet meer, anders hadden we nu een stuk minder boeren en een paar zichzelf politici noende debielen minder gehad

12:19 a.m. · 30 jul. 2022

Tweeted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "If only selective concealment were enough, we are also under threat and this is because of fake news, disinformation and hate fabricated by the media cartel, day in and day out. https://twitter.com/KAFKA_Dev/stat..."

Pepijn van Houwelingen @PvanHouwelingen

Gelijk maar even in de herhaling dit stuk over de Stasi-technieken van de NRC: fvd.nl/de-stasi-techn... ... Enjoy!

Thierry Baudet @thierrybaudet · 20 mei 2022
Ik schreef een essay over @tomjanmeeus. #FVD fvd.nl/tom-jan-meeus-... via @fvdemocratie

10:06 a.m. · 21 mei 2022

Tweeted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "Straight away on repeat this piece on the NRC's Stasi techniques: <https://fvd.nl/de-stasi-technieken-van-nrc>. Enjoy!"

The 'truth'

Fake news activates the people against the enemy, whether a story is true or not.¹⁵¹ Forum for Democracy spreads fake news on Twitter in many ways: in the form of conspiracy theories, by referring to accounts and websites that often feature fake news and by questioning stories about COVID, nitrogen, climate change and the Ukraine war, for example. These topics are often referred to with the word 'hoax', which means 'intentionally disseminated false news' (Figure 13.)

Many of the conspiracy theories shared by FVD are related to the WEF, but the well-known fascist conspiracy theory about repopulation is also often mentioned: that hashtag has been used 9 times. Repopulation is said to be a deliberate plan to 'replace' the population with non-Western migrants.¹⁵² The purpose of COVID vaccination and the use of mouth caps is also attributed to a government plan 'to control the population', according to FVD.

Figure 13.

Thierry Baudet @thierrybaudet · 22 okt. 2022
BESTEL NU de #1 bestseller die ze niet hebben gerecenseerd, die de boekhandels niet wilden aanbieden — het boek dat ALLE LEUGENS blootlegt en de oorlog in Oekraïne voorspelt: Het Coronabedrog. De Great Reset & de Globalistische Machtsgreep: amsterdambooks.nl/products/thier...

AD Politiek @ADPolitiek · 22 okt. 2022
De stemming voor de NS Publieksprijs is stilgelegd. Aanleiding zijn klachten van Kamerleden dat hun mailadres is gebruikt om te stemmen op het boek van Thierry Baudet ad.nl/politiek/stemm...

3:24 p.m. · 22 okt. 2022

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: "ORDER NOW the #1 bestseller they didn't review, that the bookstores didn't want to offer - the book that exposes ALL THE LIES and predicts war in Ukraine: The Corona Deception. The Great Reset & the Globalist Seizure of Power: amsterdambooks.nl/products..."

Pepijn van Houwelingen @PvanHouwelingen · 3 jun. 2022
Idiotie plan van het kabinet is de veestapel in ons land tot wel 70% tot 80% gedwongen (!) te reduceren vanwege de zogenaamde "stikstofhoax". Nu kan Nederland nog in zijn eigen voedsel voorzien dankzij onze geweldige boeren. Straks zijn we hiervoor overgeleverd aan de globalisten.

8:19 p.m. · 3 jun. 2022

Tweeted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "Idiotic plan of the cabinet is to reduce the livestock population in our country to as much as 70% to 80% by force (!) because of the so-called "nitrogen hoax." Now the Netherlands can still provide its own food thanks to our great farmers. Soon we will be at the mercy of the globalists for this."

Pepijn van Houwelingen @PvanHouwelingen · 3 jul. 2022
Heb zo ontzettend veel zin in de parlementaire enquête over Corona want als dit soort onthullingen over de grote Coronahoax en de misdadigheid van het zogenaamde "Coronabeleid" blijven komen zou die commissie zomaar eens t.z.t. een soort "tribunaal" kunnen worden, we zullen zien.

Dr. P.J.W. van Uffort @VanUffort · 2 jul. 2022
Daar ga je dan met je extreme #lockdowns en #Coromamaatregelen. Onnodige doden op het geweten van deze premiers. @corona twitter.com/DrEilDavid/sta...

11:37 p.m. · 3 jul. 2022

Tweeted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "Am so looking forward to the parliamentary inquiry on Covid because if these kinds of revelations about the great corona hoax and the criminality of the so-called Covid policy" keep coming, that commission might just become a kind of "tribunal" in due course, we'll see."

¹⁵¹ Ico Maly, Nieuw Rechts (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p.126-129.

¹⁵² Sjoerd de Jong, "De Fantasiewetenschap Van De Omvolkers," NRC (NRC, June 3, 2022), <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/06/03/de-fantasiewetenschap-van-de-omvolkers-a4132176>.

Violence

By legitimizing violence against opponents, a modern-day populist need not use violence himself, but can cause or enable it, Finchelstein says.¹⁵³ Eley adds that trolling, doxxing, shitposting, threatening, hacking are forms of online violence no less brutal than physical violence.¹⁵⁴ In the Forum for Democracy tweets analyzed (see Figure 14. for examples), it is striking that of the politicians from other parties who are frequently tagged, half are threatened by, they say, far-right trolls (Table 11.) A number of them point directly to Forum for Democracy as the instigator of these threats. GroenLinks MP and COVID-spokesperson Lisa Westerveld has said in interviews that her inbox floods with threats whenever she has had a confrontation (online or offline) with Forum for Democracy MPs.¹⁵⁵ D66 MP Sjoerd Sjoerdsma also pointed to FvD MP Pepijn van Houwelingen: after Van Houwelingen made his tribunal statement in the House of Representatives, Sjoerdsma was “inundated with death threats,” he said in a lawsuit over one of those threats.¹⁵⁶ Not only politicians, but other persons regularly tagged by FvD are also threatened from the far-right: for example, virologists Marion Koopmans¹⁵⁷ and Marc Bonten.¹⁵⁸ The NCTV warns against these kinds of personal attacks. They say this could lead to an increase in radicalization and

extremism and an increase in extra-legal actions, public disorder and threats against politicians and journalists, among others. According to the service, these types of personal attacks have direct consequences for the security of the person attacked.¹⁵⁹

In addition, a number of accounts regularly compare journalists to ‘sewer rats’. Research by Pfundmair et al. shows that dehumanizing groups makes it easier to commit violence against them. By portraying a group as non-human, as animals, even as pests, it is easier to convince people that it is morally right to beat that group with violence; after all, we do the same with pests like cockroaches and rats, according to Pfundmair et al.¹⁶⁰

Moreover, in the frequently used hashtags of the accounts studied, a number of terms can be found that link to violence: #farmerswar, #netherlandsfightback and regularly #tribunals. The AIVD warned about the use of the word tribunals in its annual report. Several Forum for Democracy MPs threatened tribunals “for those responsible for corona policy”. According to the AIVD, this legitimizes the use of violence against politicians and scientists: “They make it sound as if it is understandable or even right if people would use violence in response.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵³ Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019), p. xviii.

¹⁵⁴ Geoff Eley, “What Is Fascism and Where Does It Come from?” *History Workshop Journal* 91, no. 1 (January 2021): pp. 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbab003>.

¹⁵⁵ Nynke de Zoeten and Anke Truijten, “Tweede Kamerleden over Toename Dreigementen: ‘Dit Is Spelen Met Vuur,’” *NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen* (Nieuwsuur, February 5, 2022), <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2415876-tweede-kamerleden-over-toename-dreigementen-dit-is-spelen-met-vuur>.

¹⁵⁶ Sebastiaan Quekel, “D66’er Sjoerdsma in Rechtbank: ‘Met Dood Bedreigd Na Tribunalen-Uitspraak Van Houwelingen (FvD),” *AD.nl* (DPG Media, September 16, 2022), <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/d66-er-sjoerdsma-in-rechtbank-met-dood-bedreigd-na-tribunalen-uitspraak-van-houwelingen-fvd~a3fdeacc/>.

¹⁵⁷ Sebastiaan Quekel, “Topviroloog Koopmans Deelt Schokkende Mail, Erasmus MC Doet Aangifte Van ‘Ernstige Bedreiging,” *AD.nl* (DPG Media, December 14, 2021), <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/topviroloog-koopmans-deelt-schokkende-mail-erasmus-mc-doet-aangifte-van-ernstige-bedreiging~a1b93d3b/>.

¹⁵⁸ Job van der Plicht, “OMT-Leden Letten Door Onderduiken Vlaamse Viroloog Extra OP Mediaoptredens,” *Coronavirus | NU.nl*, May 28, 2021, <https://www.nu.nl/coronavirus/6135901/omt-leden-letten-door-onderduiken-vlaamse-viroloog-extra-op-mediaoptredens.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid (NCTV), “Fenomeenanalyse ‘De verschillende gezichten van de coronaprotesten” (Den Haag, April 2021).

¹⁶⁰ Michaela Pfundmair et al., “Pathways toward Jihadism in Western Europe: An Empirical Exploration of a Comprehensive Model of Terrorist Radicalization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 1 (2019): pp. 48-70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1663828>.

¹⁶¹ Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, “Jaarverslag 2021: Nationale Dreigingen,” AIVD (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, April 26, 2022), <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/jaarverslagen/jaarverslag-2021/nationale-dreigingen>.

Figure 14.

Pepijn van Houwelingen
@PvanHouwelingen

Een maand geleden bracht FVD bij de behandeling van de VWS begroting al in dat er op het ministerie een "Capo di tutti Capi" cultuur heerste onder leiding van Hugo de Jonge. Dat blijkt nu weer. Lees onze bijdrage hieronder! #hugodejonge #Sywertdeal

Van het goedkeuren van de VWS begroting van een land (NEDERLAND) is het mogelijk om te spreken over de manier waarop het land wordt bestuurd. Het kan worden in de begrotingen die daarom nodig zijn.

VWS EN RECHTEN
Deze tekst is een samenvatting van de VWS begroting van 2022. Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022. Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022. Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022.

Wat is de aanpak van de VWS begroting van 2022? Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022. Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022. Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022.

Wat is de aanpak van de VWS begroting van 2022? Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022. Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022. Het is een samenvatting van de begroting van 2022.

AD.nl @ADnl · 18 jul. 2022
VWS weigert openheid van zaken te geven over de Sywert-deal en kiest voor het betalen van de dwangsom ad.nl/politiek/minis...

8:15 p.m. · 18 jul. 2022

Tweeted by Pepijn van Houwelingen (@PvanHouwelingen). Translation: "A month ago, when discussing the Health Care budget, FVD already brought up that there was a "Capo di tutti Capi" culture at the ministry led by Hugo de Jonge. This is now evident once again. Read our contribution below! #hugodejonge #Sywertdeal"

Forum voor Democratie
@fvdemocratie

De Nord Stream-pijpleidingen zouden door Rusland zijn gesaboteerd. Maar waarom? Er is geen enkel motief voor de Russen om hun eigen gasleidingen te vernielen. Ook D66-oorlogshitser @swsjoerdsma kan er geen één bedenken. @pvanhouwelingen confronteert hem met de feiten. #FVD



1:19 p.m. · 19 okt. 2022

Tweeted by Forum voor Democratie (@fvdemocratie). Translation: "The Nord Stream pipelines were allegedly sabotaged by Russia. But why? There is no motive for the Russians to destroy their own gas pipelines. Even D66 warmonger @swsjoerdsma can't think of one. @pvanhouwelingen confronts him with the facts. #FVD"

Gideon van Meijeren
@GideonvMeijeren

Het coronabeleid is tiranniek en misdadig. Wie echter te goeder trouw is, is logischerwijs niet strafbaar en hoeft zich niet bedreigd te voelen. Geen straf zonder schuld.

Als @LisaWesterveld vindt dat ik haar bedreigd heb, staat het haar vrij om aangifte tegen mij doen.

Lisa Westerveld @Lisawesterveld · 5 feb. 2022
Als een Kamerlid oproept tot het "opspreken, vervolgen en opsluiten" van andere politici, dan is dat geen "mening". Dat is een bedreiging. #Nieuwsuur twitter.com/Nieuwsuur/stat...

11:26 p.m. · 5 feb. 2022

Tweeted by Gideon van Meijeren (@GideonvMeijeren). Translation: "The corona policy is tyrannical and criminal. However, those in good faith are logically not punishable and need not feel threatened. No punishment without guilt. If @LisaWesterveld feels I have threatened her, she is free to press charges against me."

Gideon van Meijeren
@GideonvMeijeren

Deze boeren hebben vandaag hun doodvonnis te horen gekregen. Hun levenswerk en toekomst worden doelbewust kapot gemaakt.

Ze reageren met een vreedzame actie, binnen de grenzen van de wet.

Toch kiest @lientje1967 ervoor om ze nog een trap na te geven. Veelzeggend. Zeg dan niks.

Caroline van der Plas @lientje1967 · 10 jun. 2022
Stop daar mee. Je zoekt mensen NIET thuis op. Hoe boos je ook bent. Grootste deel van onze boeren in NL staat hier ook niet achter en baalt enorm dat dit soort acties afstraalt ook op hen. twitter.com/tonfvandijk/st...

11:20 p.m. · 10 jun. 2022

Tweeted by Gideon van Meijeren (@GideonvMeijeren). Translation: "These farmers have been told their death sentence today. Their life's work and future are being deliberately destroyed. They respond with peaceful action, within the limits of the law. Yet @lientje1967 chooses to kick them one more time. Telling. Then don't say anything."

Table 11.

Other politicians tagged	Total
	23
	347
lientje1976	55
SigridKaag	33
Vera_Bergkamp	30
MinPres	24
Lisawesterveld	15
WybrenvanHaga	15
PieterOmtzigt	14
swsjoerdsma	14
eerdman	13
gertjansegers	13
jesseklaver	13
Martinbosma_pvv	13
Rob_Roos	12
geertwilderspvv	12
DilanYesilgoz	11
realMartinBos	10
hugodejonge	9
THiddema	9
DerkBoswijk	8
tdenooijer	8
RenskeLeijten	6
JudithTielenVVD	5
ministerVWS	5

Accounts marked green were reported to have been threatened by the far right. Sources:

@lientje1976 (Caroline van der Plas, BBB): RTL Nieuws, Redactie. “BBB-Leider Caroline Van Der Plas Tijdelijk Niet in Media Na Ernstige Bedreigingen.” RTL Nieuws, July 28, 2022. <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/politiek/artikel/5323715/caroline-van-der-plas-bdreigingen-stapje-terug-bbb-doodsbedreiging>.

@SigridKaag (Sigrid Kaag, D66): Hartog, Tobias den. “Kaag Haalt Uit: ‘Mijn Gezin En Ik Moeten Beveiligd Worden Wegens Haat Die Forum Aanjaagt.’” Het Parool, September 8, 2022. <https://www.parool.nl/nederland/kaag-haalt-uit-mijn-gezin-en-ik-moeten-beveiligd-worden-wegens-haat-die-forum-aanjaagt~bfe9fbb2/>

@MinPres (Mark Rutte, VVD): Belleman, Saskia. “Fabio I. En Steven V. Terecht Voor Bedreigen Rutte: Rechts-Extremistische Verdachten ‘Eenzame Twintigers Met Autistische Stoornis.’” De Limburger. limburg.nl, November 12, 2021. https://www.limburger.nl/cnt/dmf20211112_95560814.

@Lisawesterveld (Lisa Westerveld, GroenLinks): Zoeten, Nynke de, and Anke Truijen. “Tweede Kamerleden over Toename Dreigementen: ‘Dit Is Spelen Met Vuur.’” NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen. Nieuwsuur, February 5, 2022. <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2415876-tweede-kamerleden-over-toename-dreigementen-dit-is-spielen-met-vuur>.

@PieterOmtzigt (Pieter Omtzigt, partyless):

@swsjoerdsma (Sjoerd Sjoerdsma, D66): Quekel, Sebastiaan. “D66’er Sjoerdsma in Rechtbank: ‘Met Dood Bedreigd Na Tribunalen-Uitspraak Van Houwelingen (FvD).’” AD.nl. DPG Media, September 16, 2022. <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/d66-er-sjoerdsma-in-rechtbank-met-dood-bdreigd-na-tribunalen-uitspraak-van-houwelingen-fvd~a3fdeacc/>.

@jesseklaver (Jesse Klaver, Groenlinks): Redactie. “Texelse Boer ‘Bedreigt’ Jesse Klaver: ‘Boeren Met Een Missie, Klaver in Een Kissie!’” NH Nieuws, October 16, 2019. <https://www.nhnieuws.nl/nieuws/254897/texelse-boer-bdreigt-jesse-klaver-boeren-met-een-missie-klaver-in-een-kissie>.

@DilanYesilgoz (Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius, VVD): Van Klinken, Pieter. “Rijenaar Bedreigt Minister Yesilgöz Met ‘Spuitje’ En Biedt 50.000 Euro Als Ze Zijn Strafzaak Staakt.” AD.nl. DPG Media, November 4, 2022. <https://www.ad.nl/breda/rijenaar-bdreigt-minister-yesilgoz-met-spuitje-en-biedt-50-000-euro-als-ze-zijn-strafzaak-staakt~ae9f2316/>.

@hugodejonge (Hugo de Jonge, CDA): RTL Nieuws, Redactie. “Minister De Jonge over Bedreigingen: Afgelopen Tijd Elke Dag Een Incident.” RTL Nieuws, January 6, 2022. <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/politiek/artikel/5279308/de-jonge-over-bdreiging-afgelopen-tijd-elke-dag-een-incident>.

@DerkBoswijk (Derk Boswijk, CDA): Redactie. “Gezin CDA-Kamerlid Derk Boswijk Met Dood Bedreigd Door Dorpsgenote.” NPO Radio 1. NPO Radio 1, July 4, 2022. <https://www.nporadio1.nl/nieuws/politiek/62fa32fb-58dd-4860-8225-601dded536cb/gezin-cda-kamerlid-derk-boswijk-met-dood-bdreigd-door-dorpsgenote>.

@ministerVWS (Ernst Kuipers, D66): Hartog, Tobias den. “FvD’er Beheerde Onlinegroep Waarin Adressen Ministers Werden Gedeeld En Bedreigingen Zijn Geuit.” Het Parool, January 22, 2022. <https://www.parool.nl/nederland/fvd-er-beheerde-online-groep-waarin-adressen-ministers-werden-gedeeld-en-bdreigingen-zijn-geuit~b7651a49/>.

Figure 15.



Ik lees dat de "omvolkingstheorie" problematisch zou zijn omdat die opzet achter het beleid veronderstelt. Dus de massa-immigratie gebeurt ZONDER dat de politiek (en de media die het supporten) hebben nagedacht over wat dat met de samenleving doet? Dat is nog veel ernstiger!

8:41 a.m. · 21 mei 2022

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: "I read that the "repopulation theory" would be problematic because it assumes intent behind policy. So mass immigration is happening WITHOUT politicians (and the media supporting it) having thought about what that does to society? That's even more of a problem!"



VVD'er @ericvanderburg wil gemeenten zakken met geld geven om hen over te halen hun gemeente - tegen de wil van de lokale bevolking in - vol te proppen met asielzoekers. Nederlanders zijn hier klaar mee. #FVD wil per direct een immigratiestop en inzetten op remigratie. #omvolking



Nieuw asielplan: bonus voor gemeenten die meer asielzoekers opnemen

6:09 p.m. · 12 okt. 2022

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: "VVD'er @ericvanderburg wants to give municipalities bags of money to persuade them to stuff their municipality - against the will of the local population - with asylum seekers. Dutch people are done with this. #FVD wants an immediate immigration halt and to focus on remigration. #repopulation"



Dat zullen de kartelpolitici nooit zeggen want hun opdracht is de vernietiging van de natiestaten - via supranationalisme, massa-immigratie en, doordat de economie er volkomen stuk door gaat en we afhankelijk worden van Bill Gates, Monsanto, etc: de energie- en klimaat-transitie. twitter.com/JoostNiemoller...

Joost Niemoller @JoostNiemoller · 28 jul. 2022
Wanneer zeggen we nu eindelijk eens genoeg is genoeg, vol is vol. #Omvolking

10:14 a.m. · 28 jul. 2022

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: "The cartel politicians will never say that because their mission is the destruction of nation-states - via supranationalism, mass immigration and, because it completely destroys the economy and makes us dependent on Bill Gates, Monsanto, etc: the energy and climate transition. <https://twitter.com/JoostNiemoller...>"



Nog nooit zijn er in zo'n korte tijd zo veel migranten naar Nederland gekomen: dit jaar al 160.000. Dat betekent een ongekennde druk op onze woningmarkt, verzorgingsstaat en bovenal onze cultuur. #FVD wil onze grenzen sluiten en de #omvolking stoppen.



telegraaf.nl
Nederland stevent af op immigratierecord: 'Dit is ongekennd'
Terwijl minister Hugo de Jonge vorige week duidelijk maakte dat de bevolkingsgroei in Nederland moet worden afgeremd, laten de meest recente...

8:30 a.m. · 3 okt. 2022

Tweeted by Thierry Baudet (@thierrybaudet). Translation: "Never before have so many migrants arrived in the Netherlands in such a short time: already 160,000 this year. That means unprecedented pressure on our housing market, welfare state and, above all, our culture. #FVD wants to close our borders and stop the #repopulation."

Homogenisation

In fascism and modern populism, 'the people' is an ethnically homogeneous group that must be protected. It assumes that there are different human races and combines this with cultural racism: different cultures cannot coexist and would not fit into one country.¹⁶² This mainly focuses on immigration, which is said to be intentionally caused by

governments and threatens Dutch culture. This also fits the previously discussed conspiracy theory of repopulation: that term is regularly associated with immigration, or 'mass immigration,' as FvD members often call it, in the tweets examined. They also frequently use the term 'remigration': a call to send immigrants all back to their country of origin.

¹⁶² Ico Maly, Nieuw Rechts (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p.103

Conclusion

This paper has sought to describe the concept of algorithmic fascism. This concept contributes to a better understanding and comprehension of modern-fascist media strategies, which Fielitz and Marcks argue is much needed. They showed that fascist techniques work well with the operation of social media algorithms and that digital fascism is built on online (hate) cultures.¹⁶³ Moreover, according to Dutch intelligence service the AIVD, far-right extremists use social media to normalize their worldview for a wider audience.¹⁶⁴ Research by Leiden University found that Forum for Democracy contributes to this by promoting accounts that spread anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and hate messages.¹⁶⁵ In this way, the reach of these accounts becomes much broader. Moreover, those messages are more quickly considered “normal” when elected politicians spread them than when “ordinary” people do, previous research by Marcks showed.¹⁶⁶

To show what algorithmic fascism is, a case study of the Twitter accounts of Forum for Democracy and that party’s members of parliament was done through content and usage analysis. This case study shows that algorithmic fascism is an interaction between the use of the affordances of social media and the content discourse in the posts posted. By taking

advantage of the affordances provided by, in this case, Twitter, an account can put itself in the spotlight with a larger audience. This is done by producing a lot of content, making extensive use of media in Tweets and using hashtags to capitalize on current events, thereby bringing tweets to more people than just their followers. Tagging other accounts can either make one’s own network larger (promoting accounts) or provoke discussion (which can tap into a different audience). When it comes to algorithmic fascism, tagging those accounts has a third function: to “send out digital shock troops,” as Geoff Eley calls it.¹⁶⁷ This case study of Forum for Democracy shows that accounts they frequently tag can count on an inbox full of threats, a form of digital violence that undermines democracy, as MPs say they “think twice before engaging in discussion with FvD”.¹⁶⁸ Negativity and provocation provoke commotion, debate and interaction, and research by the Utrecht Data School showed that Twitter’s algorithm rewards this by recommending these accounts to new users, for example.¹⁶⁹ The case study partially confirms this picture: of the most popular tweets of all accounts, most have a negative connotation. However, the popular tweets with a positive connotation generate on average more interaction than negative tweets. What is striking about the content of these tweets is that they are often

¹⁶³ Maik Fielitz and Holger Marcks, “Digital Fascism: Challenges for the Open Society in Times of Social Media,” UC Berkeley: Center for Right-Wing Studies., July 16, 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, “Jaarverslag 2021: Nationale Dreigingen,” AIVD (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, April 26, 2022), <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/jaarverslagen/jaarverslag-2021/nationale-dreigingen>.

¹⁶⁵ Burger, P., Cappon, E. and Van Beek, G. (2022) “Hoe Forum-politici antisemitisme versterken op Twitter.” Leiden: Textgain en Nieuwscheckers.

¹⁶⁶ Holger Marcks, “Don’t Call Me Right!,” Edition Politik, 2016, pp. 65-72, <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839437209-008>.

¹⁶⁷ Geoff Eley, “What Is Fascism and Where Does It Come from?” History Workshop Journal 91, no. 1 (January 2021): pp. 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbab003>.

¹⁶⁸ Nynke de Zoeten and Anke Truijten, “Tweede Kamerleden over Toename Dreigementen: ‘Dit Is Spelen Met Vuur,’” NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen (Nieuwsuur, February 5, 2022), <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2415876-tweede-kamerleden-over-toename-dreigementen-dit-is-spielen-met-vuur>.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas Boeschoten and Coen van de Ven, “Hoe Alt-Right En ‘Alt-Light’ Het Nederlandse Twitter Domineren,” De Groene Amsterdammer (De Groene Amsterdammer, August 28, 2019), <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/je-gaat-me-toch-niet-als-genuanceerd-wegzetten-he>.

about demonstrations against corona policy or nitrogen policy, and almost all of them contain media, with, for example, calls to participate in such demonstrations or videos of those demonstrations. These kinds of demonstrations attract a broad anti-establishment audience, as other research by the Utrecht Data School shows, and are thus an appropriate vehicle for increasing online reach.¹⁷⁰ As a result, other content, such as the anti-Semitism mentioned above that Leiden University researched, is also viewed by a wider audience.

In terms of content, algorithmic fascism is a sum of elements as described by Maly¹⁷¹ and Finchelstein¹⁷². Separately, attacks on democratic values such as press, rule of law and opposition are not harmless, but neither do they directly qualify as fascism. However, when combined with the other elements, such as anti-communism, anti-enlightenment and anti-liberalism, a pattern begins to emerge. When truth is also questioned and fake news and conspiracy theories are spread, and calls for violence are made in a disguised way, we can speak of fascism. Here it is important to consider that modern fascism looks different in a number of ways from the fascism we know from the 1930s and 1940s, for example, in terms of violence and mobilizing supporters.¹⁷³

The case study shows that all elements can be found when examining different accounts, but not all elements can be seen in all accounts. Therefore, when examining algorithmic fascism, it is important to examine not only individual elements, but also groups and networks: in

this case, a number of representatives of a political party. Because of the way Twitter algorithms construct networks,¹⁷⁴ and with the knowledge that the far right constitutes the most active network on Twitter,¹⁷⁵ the tweets from a single account need not contain all facets of fascism. Multiple accounts combined can, however, cause one person's timeline (with all accounts followed and suggested) to contain all facets of fascism: then we speak of algorithmic fascism.

It is important to keep in mind that this study examined a selection of Forum for Democracy's elected politicians: only the House of Representatives and the party account. The party also has elected politicians at other levels of government (Upper House, Provincial Councils and Municipalities); these were not included in this study. Thus, there is no way to tell whether the way these six accounts use Twitter is representative of the party as a whole. Moreover, it is important to note that the content was not collected in real time but after the fact, so deleted content was not included in the dataset.

For follow-up research, it is advisable to conduct a comparative study between different parties in the Netherlands on the same side of the political spectrum as Forum for Democracy, to examine the differences and similarities in discourse. It may also be interesting to examine this concept on multiple social media platforms simultaneously, to make a broader statement about algorithmic fascism.

¹⁷⁰ Jeroen Bakker et al., "Van scherm naar straat: Hoe sociale media-conversations protest op straat mobiliseren" (Utrecht, March 19, 2021).

¹⁷¹ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018).

¹⁷² Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2019).

¹⁷³ Daniel Knegt, *Fascisme* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2022).

¹⁷⁴ Ico Maly, *Nieuw Rechts* (Berchem: EPO, 2018), p. 268.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Boeschoten and Coen van de Ven, "Hoe Alt-Right En 'Alt-Light' Het Nederlandse Twitter Domineren," *De Groene Amsterdammer* (De Groene Amsterdammer, August 28, 2019), <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/je-gaat-me-toch-niet-als-genuanceerd-wegzetten-he>.

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