

International Communication and the Extremist Right

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The extremist right is defined as constituted in multiple, sometimes overlapping currents – racist, religious, nationalist, militia, homophobic, nazi. Racism is a frequent area of overlap. There are also forms of ideological interchange and overlap between these currents and some mainstream conservative organizations, and between these currents and certain legislators and state employees.

The article will provide an initial mapping of these international information activities, and then address the question of how much influence, and which kinds of influence, may reasonably be attributed to this zone of global information flow. The presumption that the Internet lends automatic power to these messages will be critiqued, but at the same time attention will be focused on some leading social implications of these applications of information technology. Empirically, the article focuses particularly on the USA, Canada, and Europe.

There are many perfervid pollyannas hymning information technology, and many crusty cassyndras denouncing it. This article is intended to avoid both those traps. At the same time, its subject-matter – the use of information technologies by the extremist right – poses some significant questions for a considerable number of assumptions currently conventional in media and information studies.

I will first offer a definition of what I mean by the extremist right, and then provide a brief overview of current extremist right uses of

two information technologies, one old – shortwave radio – and one relatively new, the Internet. I will then address the quite complex and under-researched question of the audience, the users of this information.

Defining the Extremist Right

Researchers define the extremist right differently. Berlet (1998, pp. 250-251), a leading American researcher, proposes we categorize the extremist right into the secular conservative right, the theocratic right and the “hard right.” Effectively, the secular conservative right would cover groups with strongly reactionary views but normally working electorally and without recourse to terrorism. Within the U.S. this would signify a spectrum from the Heritage Foundation to the John Birch Society. In France it would cover the *Front National*, in Italy the *Alleanza Nazionale*, in Germany the *Republikaner*, in Austria the Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*), in Britain the British National Party, in Russia Zhirinovsky’s *Liberal’naia Demokraticheskaiia Partia*, and *One Nation* in Australia.

The theocratic right – a particularly though not exclusively U.S. phenomenon – also works within the system, and covers a spectrum in the USA from the Christian Coalition to Focus on the Family and National Empowerment Television.

The “hard right” covers white supremacists, anti-Semitic activists, the militias, and signifies their readiness, even eagerness, to work