



FAR RIGHT NETWORKS OF DECEPTION

AVAAZ INVESTIGATION UNCOVERS FLOOD OF DISINFORMATION AND TRIGGERS
THE BIGGEST EVER PRE-EU ELECTIONS TAKEDOWN OF FACEBOOK PAGES

AVAAZ

FAR RIGHT NETWORKS OF DECEPTION

****Avaaz investigation uncovers flood of disinformation, triggering shutdown of Facebook pages with over 500 million views ahead of EU elections****

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Executive Summary

Ahead of the EU elections, Avaaz conducted a Europe-wide investigation into networks of disinformation on Facebook. This was the first investigation of its kind and uncovered that far-right and anti-EU groups are weaponizing social media at scale to spread false and hateful content. Our findings were shared with Facebook, and **resulted in an unprecedented shut down of Facebook pages** just before voters head to the polls.

Our findings show that:

- **Disinformation networks removed by Facebook as a result of this investigation posted content viewed an estimated half a billion (533M)** times over the last three months. This means that, on average, these networks produced content that was seen almost 6 million times per day.
- **In total, Avaaz reported over 500 suspect pages and groups to Facebook**, which were followed by nearly 32 million people and generated over 67 million “interactions” (comments, likes, shares) in the last three months alone.
- **Facebook has already taken down 77 of the pages and groups reported**, accounting for about 20% of all interactions across the reported networks.
- **Together, the pages removed had almost three times more followers (5.9 million) than the pages of the main European far-right and anti-EU parties**, League, AfD, VOX, Brexit Party, Rassemblement National and PiS, combined (2 million).

Our report focuses on **two main aspects of disinformation on Facebook**. Firstly, it exposes pages, accounts and groups that are spreading “**disinformation content**,” classified as false or purposefully misleading information. Secondly, it identifies networks that are using “**disinformation tactics**,” such as the systematic usage of fake accounts, misleading page name changes, or inauthentic coordination to amplify content in a way that appears to breach the social media platform's own policies. We then define “**disinformation networks**” as groups of pages either spreading “disinformation content,” using “disinformation tactics,” or doing both. All the pages were reported to Facebook between April and early May 2019.

After demonstrating the scope of these disinformation networks, this report showcases real world examples: from fake accounts amplifying AfD content in Germany to pages spreading disinformation and white supremacist content in France, to dozens of pages created with generic themes in Italy to attract followers which are then turned into pro-League and 5 Star fake-news sharing pages.

Key findings include:

- **In Germany**, fake accounts and pages were boosting the reach of the far-right AfD party and spreading disinformation on Facebook. We found an AfD politician who

appears to have been involved in running inauthentic multiple accounts to amplify the AfD message. We also found illegal content on Facebook, including swastikas and posts supporting Holocaust-deniers. Over 131 suspicious accounts reported and eight pages/groups have already been removed by Facebook.

- **In France**, 44 pages and groups were identified: one network spreading disinformation, and others posting dehumanizing, racist and white nationalist content, targeting migrants in particular. The main white nationalist page has already been removed by Facebook and three have been demoted for repeatedly spreading disinformation.
- **In Italy**, 14 networks were discovered, many supporting the League and 5 Star movement, which spread either false information or content with divisive anti-migration and hateful messages ahead of the EU elections. Facebook shut down 23 pages with over 2.46 million followers as a result of Avaaz's findings.
- **In the UK**, we identified three networks engaging in what Avaaz reported as suspect spam behavior to boost low-trust websites, and another set of pages and groups in open support of dangerous individuals and groups banned by Facebook, such as Tommy Robinson.¹ We also identified numerous duplicate and fake profiles operating on the latter. Facebook has already removed 132 posts, pages and groups reported to them.
- **In Poland**, three networks were found to be spreading, with great frequency and coordination, across almost 200 pages and groups, divisive content covering a range of anti-immigration and anti-EU topics as well as false and misleading information. Facebook has removed 27 Polish pages with 1.9 million followers.
- **In Spain**, three far-right networks were discovered spreading disinformation and hateful content. Most of the pages were supporting the far-right Vox party and were mainly managed by fake or duplicate accounts. Facebook removed 17 pages with 1.43 million followers days before Spain's national elections in April.

Recommendations:

Most users exposed to content spread by the networks uncovered in this report will probably never know that they were in many cases the victims of deliberate attempts to deceive them.

The single most important thing Facebook can do to protect our democracies is to counteract the influence of such coordinated disinformation campaigns by adopting "Correct the Record," which means that Facebook must:

- immediately issue corrections from verified fact-checkers to every single user who has seen or interacted with disinformation on the platform; and

¹<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/facebook-ban-edl-britain-first-bnp-far-right-racist-immigration-islamophobic-a8876036.html>

- inform followers of pages that have been taken down or demoted about the malign efforts of those pages.

At the same time, Facebook has allowed far too much suspicious activity and malicious content to spread. It needs to clean up its house **and immediately run a proactive and EU-wide scan for further suspicious activity on its platform**, like the mass use of fake and duplicate accounts to coordinate the spread of disinformation content, misleading page name changes, inauthentic behavior, or spamming techniques.

The Takedown: 500M Fewer Views of Disinformation

This report is the result of three months of investigation conducted in six European countries -- Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Poland and Spain -- to fight the spread of disinformation ahead of the EU elections. A team of investigative reporters, researchers and data analysts monitored disinformation operations across the continent, focusing on identifying fake news and hate speech, uncovering the networks driving them, and working with platforms and governments to take action against malign actors and issue corrections to false information.

The Networks of Deception Across the EU



Figure 1.1 - Number of profiles, pages and groups, plus total followers and interactions generated in the last three months by the pages and groups flagged to Facebook within the Avaaz investigation

Our investigation uncovered 550 pages and groups and 328 profiles that either managed these pages or were engaged in coordinated amplification of content in manners we suspected violated Facebook's policies. They were followed by about 32 million accounts and, during the last three months, they racked up more than 67 million interactions as shown

in Table 1.2. The table also includes networks, which we define as groups of pages posting and sharing content in coordination with each other.

THE FULL SCOPE OF AVAAZ'S INVESTIGATION

Country	Networks	Pages & Groups	Profiles	Followers	Interactions past 3 months
Spain	3	31	10	1,694,718	9,766,599
Italy	14	113	49	18,260,000	23,090,000
Poland	3	197	40	8,041,442	16,666,287
UK	3	46	19	1,347,997	11,826,130
France	3	44	6	1,748,674	3,889,682
Germany	11	119	204	898,918	2,203,344
TOTAL	37	550	328	31,991,749	67,442,042

Table 1.2 - Total number of suspect networks, pages, groups and profiles flagged to Facebook as part of the Avaaz investigation

After the results of the investigation were handed over to Facebook, the social media platform ran its own independent investigation and so far has taken down 77 pages and groups and 230 of the accounts reported, accounting for about 20% of all traffic across the networks reported, and suspended about 66% of the profiles as shown in Table 1.4.



Figure 1.3 - Number of profiles and total followers and interactions generated in the last three months by the pages and groups removed by Facebook after the Avaaz investigation

THE FACEBOOK DISINFORMATION TAKEDOWN

Country	Pages & Groups	Profiles removed or under investigation	Posts/Links removed	Followers	Interactions past 3 months	Percentage of Interactions prevented
Spain	17	8	0	1,439,332	9,700,373	99.32%
Italy	23	8	15	2,460,000	2,444,096	10.59%
Poland	27	43	0	1,929,686	975,314	5.85%
UK	1	37	132	4,551	43,600	0.37%
France	1	3	7	19,793	28,816	0.74%
Germany	8	131	0	57,124	196,555	8.92%
TOTAL	77	230	154	5,910,486	13,388,754	19.85%

Table 1.4 - Number of suspect pages, groups, profiles and posts removed by Facebook following the Avaaz investigation

Bigger Than All Far-Right Party Pages Combined

To understand the scale of the disinformation networks taken down by Facebook, we provide a comparison with the reach of the main EU far-right and anti-EU parties.

The results are overwhelming: the disinformation networks upon which Facebook acted had more interactions (13 million) in the past three months than the main party pages of the League, AfD, VOX, Brexit Party, Rassemblement National and PiS combined (9 million).

Although interactions is the figure that best illustrates the impact and reach of these networks, comparing the number of followers of the networks taken down reveals an even clearer image. The Facebook networks takedown had almost three times (5.9 million) the number of followers as AfD, VOX, Brexit Party, Rassemblement National and PiS's main Facebook pages combined (2 million).

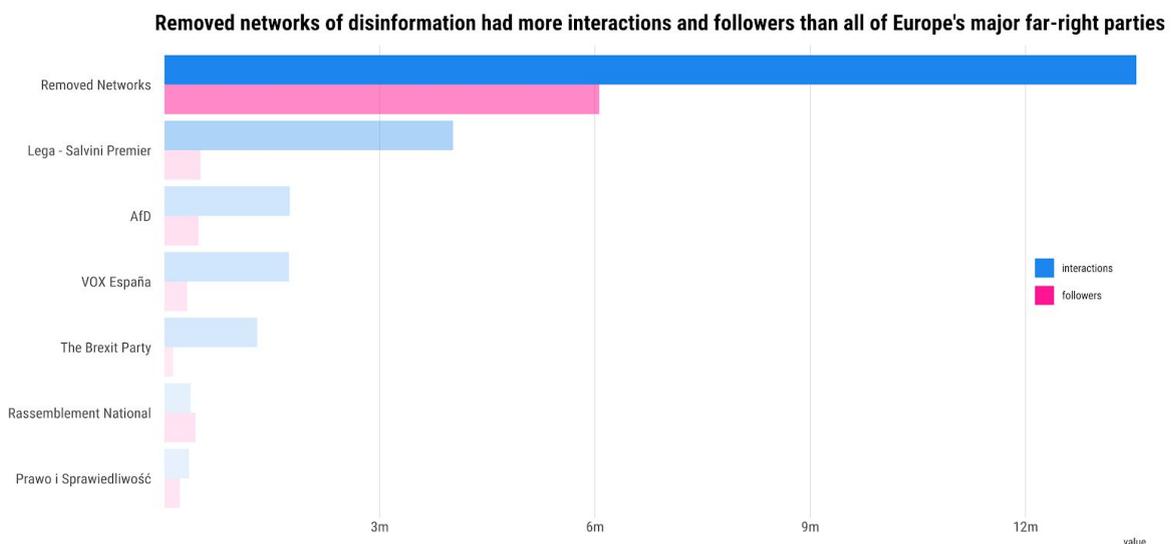


Figure 1.5 Followers and interactions of the main far-right and anti-EU parties pages compared with those of the disinformation networks removed by Facebook

Page Name	Total Interactions	Interaction Rate	Avg. Posts Per Day	Views on Owned Videos	Page Likes	Growth % and #
Average Total	1.59M	2.209%	17	7.29M	337,966	+243.51%
 Lega - Salvini Premier	4.04M	0.11%	81.4	3.14M	507,767	+2.81% +13,890
 AfD	1.75M	1.222%	3.52	2.29M	455,912	+1.87% +8,367
 VOX España	1.74M	2.209%	3.23	25.02M	291,683	+16.83% +42,015
 The Brexit Party	1.30M	9.188%	2.84	9.16M	104,066	+1,436.71% +97,294
 Rassemblement National	370,289	0.13%	6.93	1.20M	456,268	-0.19% -884
 Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	344,429	0.393%	4.66	2.95M	212,099	+3.03% +6,236

Figure 1.6 A screenshot from Facebook's monitoring site CrowdTangle, showing the number of followers, interactions and other key statistics of the main far-right and anti-EU parties

Far-Right Disinformation Tactics

The investigation was able to uncover similar patterns that these disinformation networks used across all countries, many of which violate social media policies. Here are the ones we identified as the most common:

- **Using fake and duplicate accounts:** The creation and use of several duplicate or fake accounts to either amplify content or manage groups and pages. Avaaz believes that some of the most common reasons for this behavior are: artificially boosting interactions with the content being shared by pages; hiding the real identity of the people managing groups and pages to avoid responsibility; and making sure that pages sharing “extreme” content can keep publishing even when some of the accounts are removed or suspended by Facebook for violating their policies.
- **Abnormal coordination and sharing of alternative outlets:** The second most common behavior we detected is abnormal coordinated behavior, in which pages and groups mostly share and post content in a highly coordinated manner from a handful of specific “alternative outlets,” with little or no editorial reputation. Many of those outlets highlighted in the report are publicly known in their countries for reporting fake news, disinformation and using clickbait tactics.
- **Recycling followers:** A key tactic used by many pages are deceptive name changes. For example, pages that were originally started as lifestyle groups, music communities or local associations are being turned into far-right or disinformation pages, “recycling followers” and serving them content completely different than what they had initially signed up for.
- **Bait and switch:** An example is when networks create pages with names that cover nearly the entire spectrum of popular interest: football, beauty, health, cooking and

jokes. Once the audience is built, the page admins appear to deliberately start boosting political or divisive agendas, often in a coordinated way, on pages that, at face value, should be completely unrelated to politics.

How the Investigation was Conducted

On January 16 2019, Avaaz launched a crowdfunding campaign to kickstart an unprecedented EU-wide anti-disinformation investigation, powered by social media analysts, investigative journalists, data researchers and our network of almost 20 million members across the EU. The vision was clear: to protect Europe's democracies from the proliferation of disinformation.

In just a few weeks, **over 47,000 Avaaz members donated to make this vision a reality:** 100% of the Avaaz budget for this project comes from small online donations, ensuring its editorial independence.

We hired a team of experts with the money we raised. These Avaaz researchers reviewed thousands of public pages, groups and websites identified by independent fact-checkers as spreading disinformation, or content that is hateful or inciting violence. They used the Facebook monitoring platform CrowdTangle to aggregate specific topics that are common targets of disinformation online, such as migration, political figures, vaccines, EU, public figures, unemployment and others.

At the same time, we recruited tens of thousands of volunteers all across Europe who flagged thousands of pieces of disinformation, fake news and hate speech through the website www.fake-watch.eu, WhatsApp and other channels.

Finally, our team drew up aggregated lists of thousands of suspect pages and, through data analysis, was able to identify the levels to which they were coordinating. We also identified key admins and individuals behind them. All the information in this investigation was retrieved with publicly available data.

The results of the investigation were then shared with Facebook, which conducted its own independent investigation before taking enforcement actions. Avaaz did not establish a formal partnership with Facebook at any point during this investigation.

Disinformation Networks Explained: Tactics & Content

In this section we provide summaries of the investigations Avaaz conducted into suspected disinformation networks and the pages connected to them in six EU countries, as well as the actions Facebook took as a result of these investigations.

1) Germany - Fake Accounts Boosting the AfD

The far-right party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) is by far the most successful German party on Facebook, with 85% of all shares from political parties across the country, according to a recent study, conducted by Georgetown University Professor Trevor Davis. According to Spiegel,² experts suggest that AfD's success might in part be relying on "dubious helpers" that appear to help it reach this high level of activity. Avaaz's investigation provides evidence to support these findings.

Our report now shows that the reach of AfD is actually boosted by fake and duplicate accounts, and that some AfD candidates themselves appear to have been involved in running inauthentic accounts to spread far-right content. As of May 20, 2019, Facebook took action against 131 fake and duplicate accounts and eight pages and groups, many of them sharing pro-AfD and far-right content. In total Avaaz reported 204 profiles and 119 pages. Facebook is still investigating for further violations.

Tactics Employed: The AfD's 'dubious helpers'

The Laleh Hadjimohamadvali accounts

Before we turn to the fake accounts, we present an example of multiple accounts (one of which has already been taken down by Facebook) of one person, AfD member Laleh Hadjimohamadvali. Hadjimohamadvali used these accounts to disseminate pro-AfD content.

Hadjimohamadvali was a candidate for the AfD in the elections for Landtag (state parliament) in Saarbrücken and Bundestag (federal parliament) in 2017. She is currently a candidate for the position of mayor in Saarbrücken.³ On May 13, we observed four accounts,⁴ each clearly showing Laleh Hadjimohamadvali's image on their profile. It is a breach of Facebook's

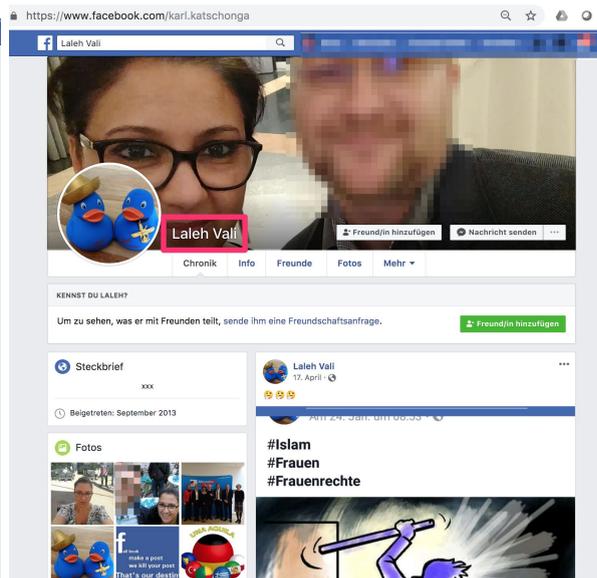
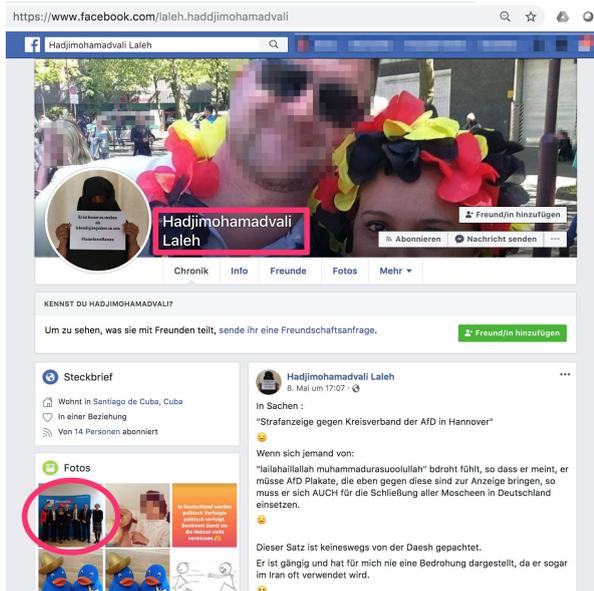
² <https://www.spiegel.de/plus/warum-die-afd-auf-facebook-so-erfolgreich-ist-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000163612064>

³ https://www.saarbruecker-zeitung.de/saarland/saarbruecken/saarbruecken/laleh-hadjimohamadvali-will-fuer-afd-oberbuergermeisterin-von-saarbruecken-werden_aid-37357121

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/laleh.walie> / <http://archive.is/eVmlC>; <https://www.facebook.com/steven.becker.75457/> / <http://archive.is/Ynfx9>; <https://www.facebook.com/laleh.hadjimohamadvali> / <http://archive.fo/vThpE>; <https://www.facebook.com/karl> / <http://archive.is/npArQ>

Community Standards on Misrepresentation to “maintain multiple accounts.”⁵ It is possible that an account was set up by another individual, using her name and photo. However, we found personal videos and photos of Hadjimohamadvali across all four accounts, and three of the four profiles are “friends” with each other.

On May 17, within 24 hours of being alerted to the accounts, Facebook removed one of them, the Laleh Mohamed⁶ account.

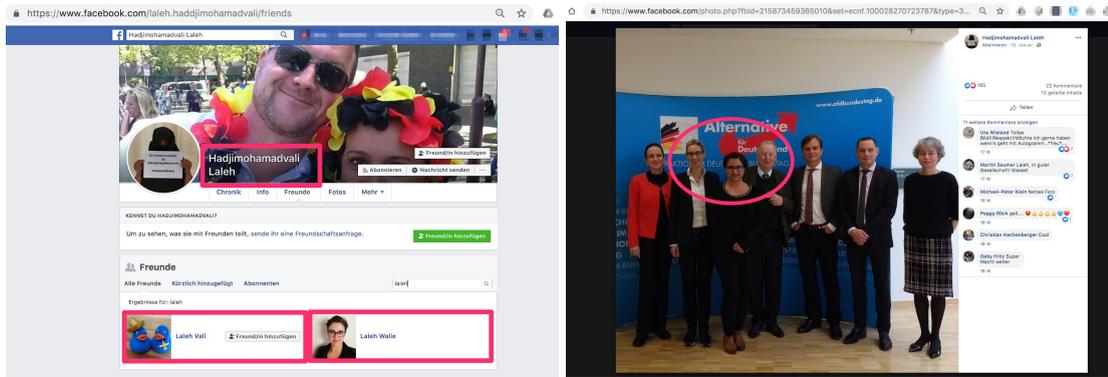


Caption: AfD politician Laleh Hadjimohamadvali⁷ has multiple profiles on Facebook. The one on the top right was taken down by Facebook following Avaaz’s investigation.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/misrepresentation/>

⁶ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/steven.becker.75457>

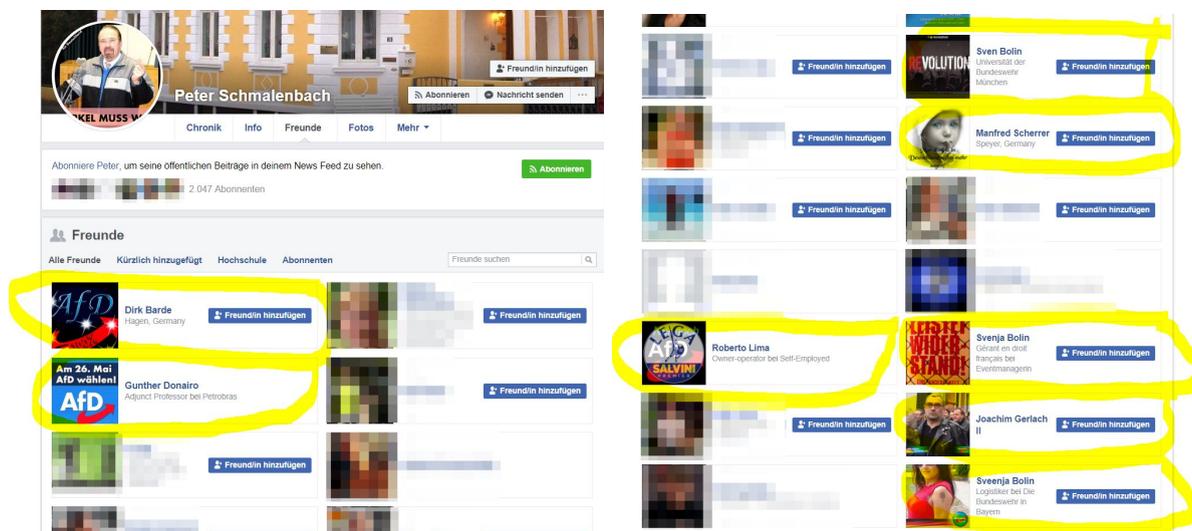
⁷ <https://www.afd.de/person/laleh-hadjimohamadvali/>



Caption: Three out of Hadjimohamadvali's four Facebook profiles are connected as "friends." On the right is a group picture showing Hadjimohamadvali, Alice Weidel and Alexander Gauland. This picture was used on Facebook by the accounts named Laleh Hadjimohamadvali and Laleh Vali.

The broader network of inauthentic AfD accounts

Other local AfD politicians, such as [Peter Schmalenbach](#)⁸, are friends with at least two of Hadjimohamadvali's multiple profiles, *Laleh Vali* and *Laleh Wallie*⁹. In total, we identified 22 possible fake and duplicate accounts directly connected to Schmalenbach. Of course it is possible that when Schmalenbach befriended these profiles he was not aware of them being inauthentic.¹⁰ We flagged all of these potential issues to Facebook. **As of May 20, 2019, seven out of the 22 profiles flagged to Facebook were shut down.**

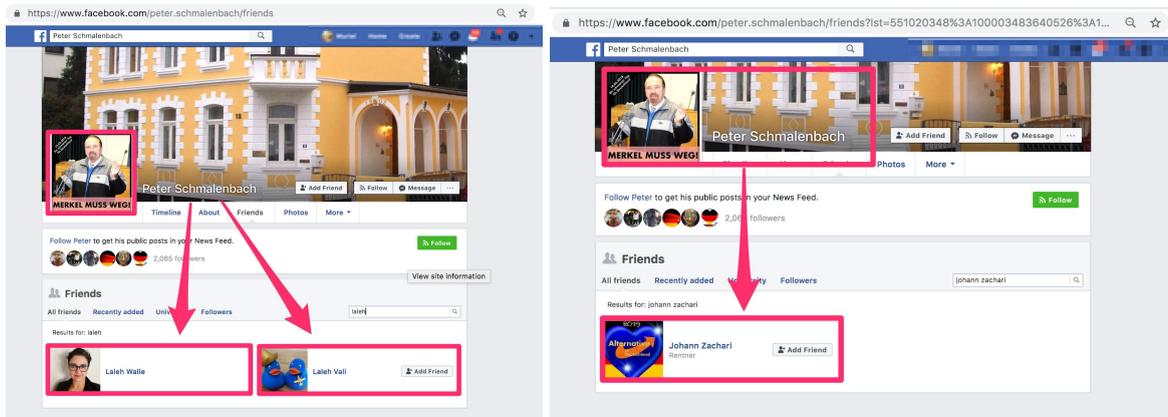


Caption: Screenshots of friends of the profile Peter Schmalenbach, showing likely fake and duplicate accounts (highlighted in yellow)

⁸ <http://archive.is/959dy> Archived friends list of Peter Schmalenbach: <http://archive.is/LKkpc>

⁹ Schmalenbach disseminated fake quotes of the vice-president of the EU commission F. Timmermans in the past on Facebook. Source: <https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/europa/2019/04/25/nein-der-vizepraesident-der-eu-kommission-fordert-nicht-die-ausradierung-monokultureller-staaten/>

¹⁰ <http://archive.is/LKkpc> (Peter Schmalenbach's friend list)



Caption: On the left we see that Peter Schmalenbach is friends with the duplicate profiles “Laleh Walie” and “Laleh Vali.” On the right, we see that Schmalenbach is friends with Johann Z. who manages several AfD fan pages/groups, as described below.

[Peter Schmalenbach](#) himself disseminated fake quotes¹¹ falsely attributed to the Vice-President of the EU commission, Frans Timmermans.¹²



Caption: Screenshot of the fake quote. Freely translated it says: “Monocultural states must be erased. The future of humanity is no longer based on single nations and cultures, but on a mixed superculture. The mass migration of Muslim men to Europe is required for this purpose. No country should be left out of this inevitable mixing of cultures - but migrants should

be induced to reach even the most remote places on this planet (Europe). All this to ensure that homogenous communities can remain nowhere.”

¹¹ While this quote is fictitious, its origins can apparently be traced back to a speech of Timmerman from October 1st, 2015: “Europe will be diverse, like all other parts of the world will be diverse. The only question is, how do we deal with that diversity? And my answer to that is, by ensuring that our values determine how we deal with diversity and not giving up our values to refuse diversity. That will bring us down as a society.” Source: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5754_en.htm

¹²

<https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/europa/2019/04/25/nein-der-vizepraesident-der-eu-kommission-fordert-nicht-die-ausradierung-monokultureller-staaten>



*Caption:
Screenshot containing same fake news.
Freely translated it says: The vice
president of the EU Commission wants
to “eradicate” European states and
replace them with “mixed
supercultures!”*

Amplification of AfD content

In addition to accounts, also AfD fan pages and groups like [AfD Demokratie Freunde “Gruppe.”](#)¹³ [AfD Deutschlands Gruppe](#)¹⁴ and [AfD Gruppe Bürgerpartei](#)¹⁵ were taken down by Facebook after we reported them. The five groups and seven pages¹⁶ of this network are closely coordinating their posting, and all of them publicly support the AfD party in Germany. Our evidence shows that these groups and pages are connected to each other and lead back to the profile of Johann Z., a self-described AfD supporter living in Germany.

¹³ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afddemokratiefreunde/>

¹⁴ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afddeutschlandgruppe>

¹⁵ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afdgruppebuergerpartei/>

¹⁶

[AfD-Gruppe Bundesweit#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdgruppebundesweit/) (public group) (4,805 members, n/a#), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdgruppebundesweit/>

[AfD Fanclub Deutschland#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdfanclubdeutschland/) (public group) (3,398 members, 1,522 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdfanclubdeutschland/>

[AfD Fanclub Deutschlandgroup#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afdfanclubdeutschlandgroup/) (page) (1,856 followers / 1,816 likes, 437 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afdfanclubdeutschlandgroup/>

[AfD Freunde Hagen#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdfreundehabenwestf/) (public group) (1,847 members, 11,790 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdfreundehabenwestf/>

[AfD Deutschland Gruppe#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afddeutschlandgruppe/) (public group) (1,123 members, 12,723 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afddeutschlandgruppe/>

[AfD Deutschlands Gruppe#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afddeutschlandsgruppe/) (page) (205 followers / 201 likes, 0 interaction), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afddeutschlandsgruppe/>

[AfD Die Volkspartei Gruppe#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/AfD-Die-VolksparteiGruppe-383086178765891/) (page) (1,368 followers / 1,342 likes, 170 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/AfD-Die-VolksparteiGruppe-383086178765891/>

[AfD Fanclub Bundesweit#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afdfanclubbundesweitgruppe/) (page) (168 followers / 163 likes, 19,999 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afdfanclubbundesweitgruppe/>

[AfD Demokratie Freunde “Gruppe”#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afddemokratiefreunde/) (page) (885 followers / 846 likes, 159 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afddemokratiefreunde/>

[AfD Fanclub Bundesweit Gruppe#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/1403884349757024/) (page) (883 followers / 845 likes, 2,323 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/1403884349757024/>

[AfD Gruppe Bürgerpartei#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afdgruppebuergerpartei/) (page) (246 followers / 243 likes, 0 interaction#), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/afdgruppebuergerpartei/>

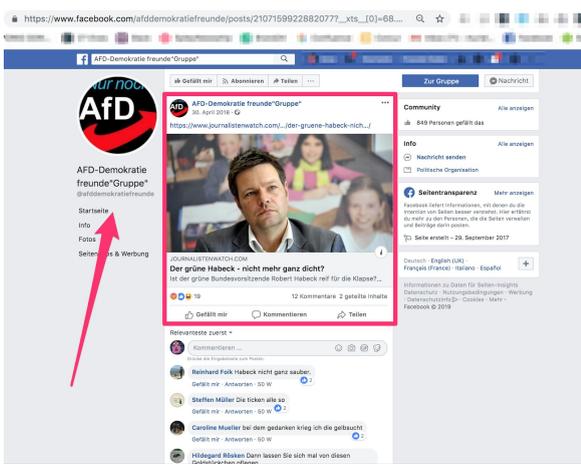
[AfD Meine Partei#](https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdfinepartei/) (public group) (308 members, 1,372 interactions), <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.facebook.com/groups/afdfinepartei/>



Caption: The screenshots in this image show that Johann Z. manages three groups on Facebook and that these groups - and Johann Z's profile - are administrators and moderators of several other groups and pages (AfD Deutschland "Gruppe," AfD Fanclub Bundesweit "Gruppe," AfD-Meine Partei "Gruppe," AfD Gruppe Bundesweit, AfD Fanclub Deutschland).

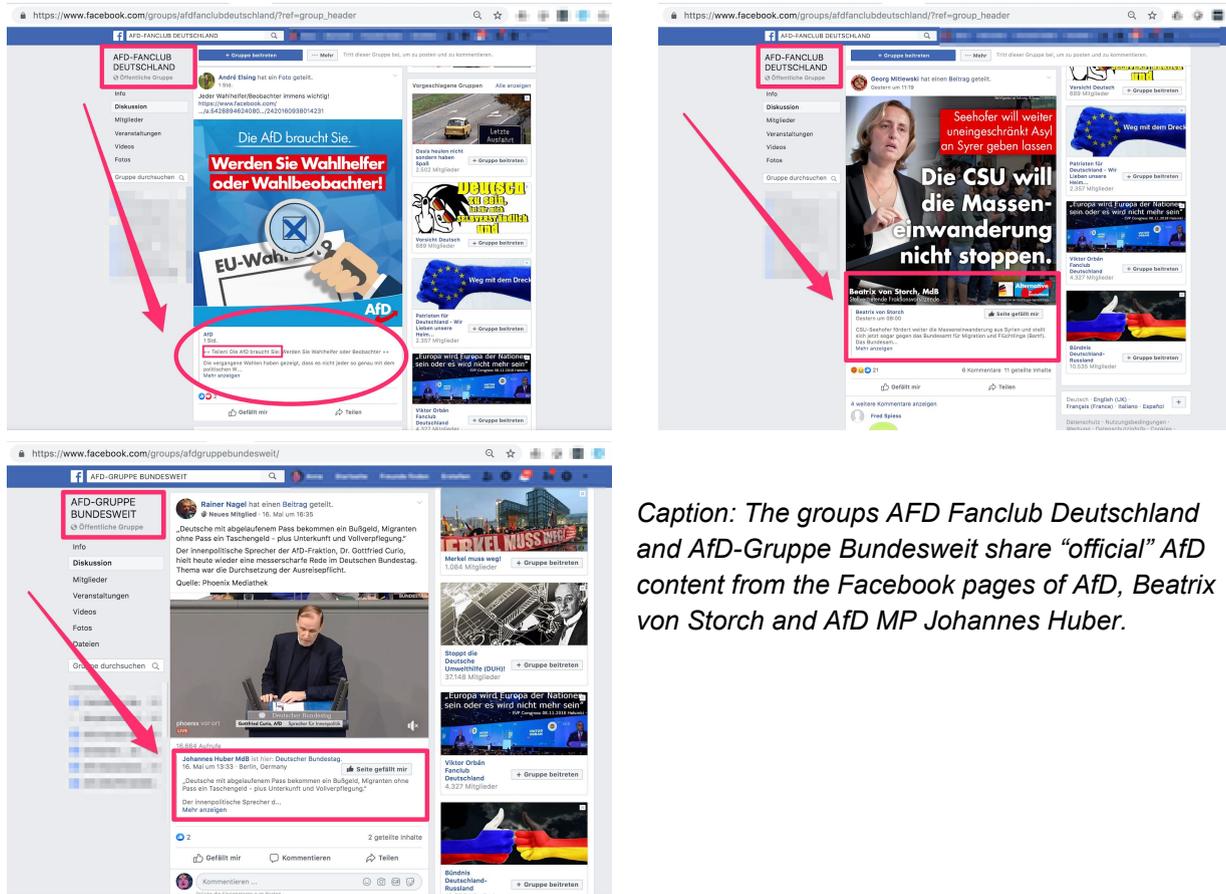
The following screenshots show how these pages and groups are used to spread content, sharing one article almost simultaneously,¹⁷ thereby boosting its apparent popularity on Facebook.

¹⁷ The pages AfD-Freunde Hagen"Gruppe," AfD-Fanclub Bundesweit"Gruppe," AfD-FANCLUB BUNDESWEIT "Gruppe" and AfD-Meine Partei "Gruppe" and AfD-Deutschland"Gruppe" all posted between 15:38 and 15:42 GMT.

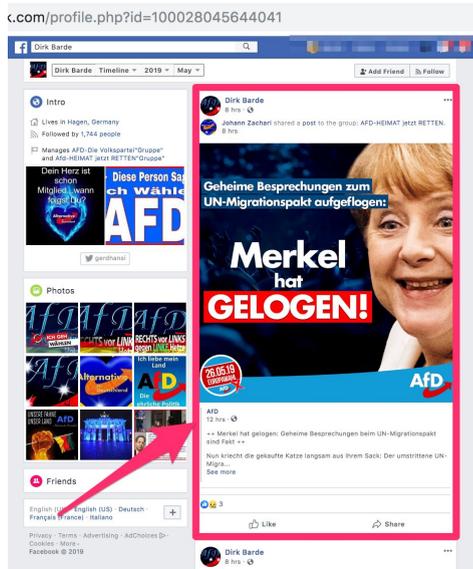


Content shared

Content being shared by the AfD fan pages, groups and profiles include posts from MP Beatrix von Storch and the main AfD page. The sharing of content in this way helps these “official AfD posts” reach more Facebook users.



Caption: The groups AfD Fanclub Deutschland and AfD-Gruppe Bundesweit share “official” AfD content from the Facebook pages of AfD, Beatrix von Storch and AfD MP Johannes Huber.



Caption: Screenshots showing how Johann Z., Peter Schmalenbach - and his "friends" and likely inauthentic accounts - Dirk B, and Geri A. are all sharing official AfD content.

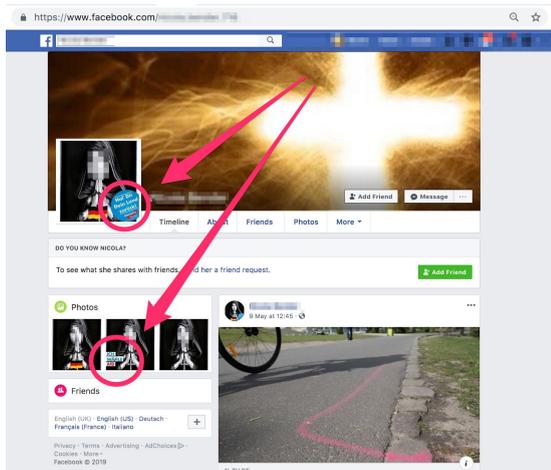
Potentially illegal content

Other accounts and pages found in the research, not connected to the pages above, share content on Facebook that appears to be in breach of German law. In Germany it is illegal to publicly use certain symbols associated with Nazi iconography, according to §86 and §130 of the German penal code.

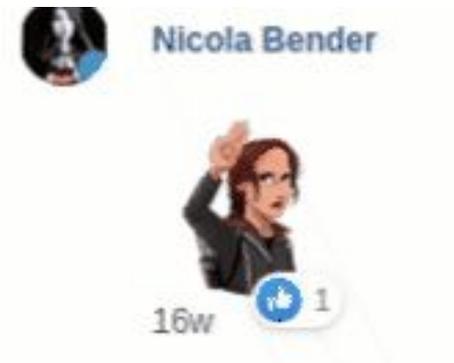
We believe the content described below is either illegal, or attempts to get around Germany's strict laws on the use of Nazi symbols.¹⁸

¹⁸ <http://archive.is/bSZOZ>

An individual¹⁹ who publicly declares to be an AfD voter²⁰ uses what looks like an animated Hitler salute (Hitlergruß) gif in a discussion on Facebook on January 16.²¹ Even though the original gif was not intended as a Nazi salute, in the context of this forum it is, in our view, clearly meant to reference that banned iconography.



22



23



Caption: The screenshot on the top left appears to show the profile of an AfD voter who uses what looks like an animated Hitler salute in a comment (top right). The screenshot on the bottom right shows the prohibited Swastika. Such imagery may only be shown in exceptional cases, i.e., in official educational material.



Caption: In Germany it is also illegal to deny the Holocaust happened. This violates §86 and §138 of the German penal code. In our research, we found content praising those who have denied the Holocaust. In this post on the left, the author claims that the convicted Holocaust denier [Ursula](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/heimatvdj/videos/993176124201471/>

[Haverbeck](#) is an example of a person “speaking the truth”.

2) UK - The Art of Amplifying Divisive Content

In the report Avaaz presented to Facebook on May 8, we identified 46 pages and groups that were in potential breach of the platform’s Community Standards and policies. We identified three networks engaging in what Avaaz reported as suspect spam behavior, and another set of **pages and groups** in open **support of individuals and groups banned by Facebook for repeatedly sharing hateful content** and inciting violence against Muslims and other groups.²⁴ We also identified numerous duplicate and fake profiles operating on the latter.

As of May 18, **Facebook** had **removed 132 out of 295** direct links mentioned in the report, including posts, profiles, pages and groups. Another **37 profiles** were either removed or under investigation. Facebook’s UK investigation is still ongoing.

Abnormal coordination to boost low-authority websites

We identified three “**alternative media**” networks engaging in what Avaaz reported as **containing elements of spam behavior** to boost three websites: [Political UK](#)²⁵, [UK Unity News Network](#)²⁶ and [The Daily Brexit](#)²⁷. Together, these networks have had **1.17 million followers**.

As part of our analysis we mapped 709 Facebook Pages in the UK and collected 190,745 posts they sent between February 3 and May 7, 2019. We observed that these “**alternative media**” all appeared in the **top 20** most shared websites in the UK, sometimes above The Guardian and BBC UK, despite being low-authority sites according to independent rankers²⁸, with one of these outlets, “The Daily Brexit,” having an ahref domain rating (a metric commonly used to detect spam links) of 0.4 in a scale from 0 to 100.

Together, these networks had nearly **5 million interactions** in the past three months.

²⁴<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/facebook-ban-edl-britain-first-bnp-far-right-racist-immigration-islamophobic-a8876036.html>

²⁵ <http://archive.fo/Unsom>

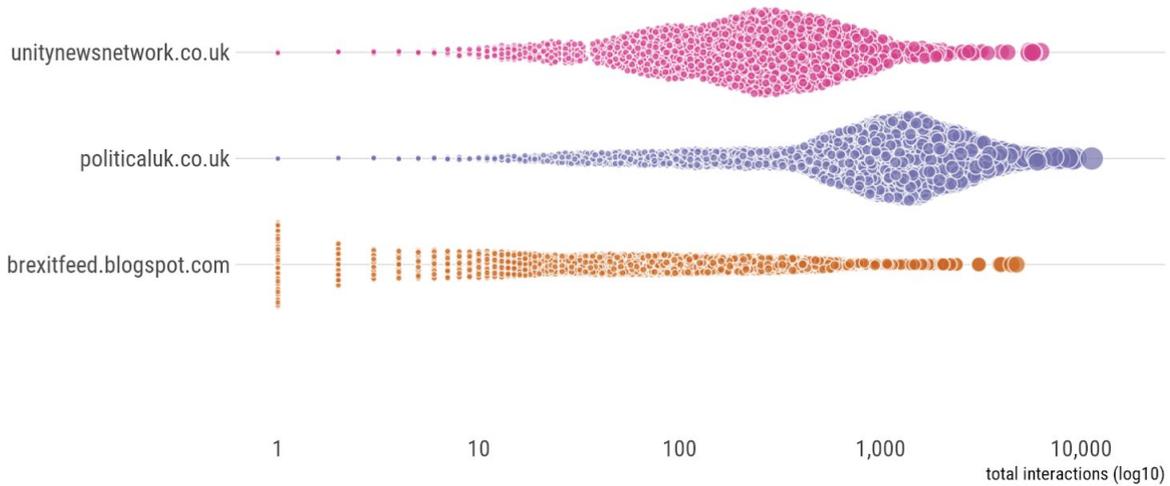
²⁶ <http://archive.fo/bJkQd>

²⁷ <http://archive.fo/TDMMp>

²⁸ We obtained the domain ratings by using ahref.com, a well-known SEO tool provider boasting the world's largest index of live backlinks that is updated with fresh data every 15-30 minutes. “Domain ratings” are a scale (1-100) which illustrate the quality of sites which link back to pages on another site. See [/moz.com/learn/seo/domain-authority](https://moz.com/learn/seo/domain-authority)

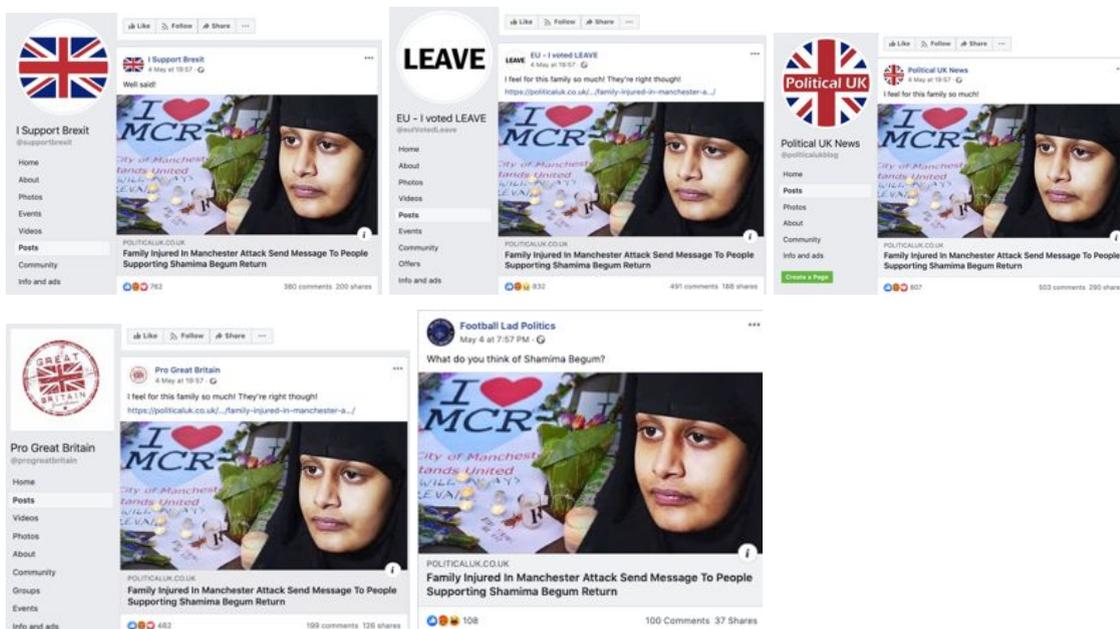
Distribution of interactions for posts linking to suspicious domains

19,714 posts: each circle is one post sized according to total interactions



Activity such as the same content being reposted multiple times by pages and groups, at almost the exact same time, seems to indicate either automated posting or coordination by a handful of individuals.

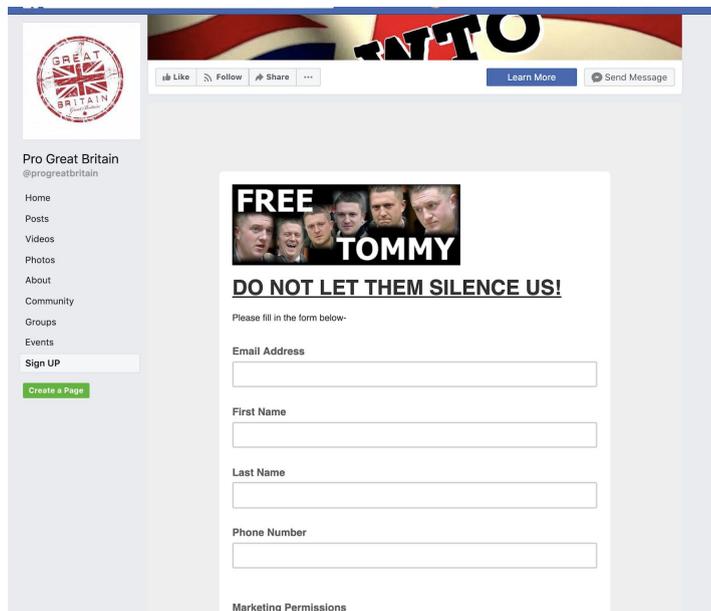
For the example below, we took screenshots of a post shared at the exact same time, on May 4, 2019, at 7:57pm, on pages that are part of the Political UK News network:



Support for banned individuals and groups

The Avaaz report also identified profiles and pages that **continue to show support and/or encourage users to follow banned figures** such as Tommy Robinson, who was banned from Facebook for having “repeatedly broken [community] standards, **posting material that uses dehumanizing language and calls for violence targeted at Muslims.**”²⁹

Facebook has detailed rules both about hate speech and about dangerous individuals who are organizing hate.³⁰ An example of one of these pages is the [Pro Great Britain](#) page, included in our report to Facebook, which is still operative and openly supports Robinson and his agenda:



Caption: Screenshot taken on May 18,

2019 at 3pm CET.³¹

Further examples provided in the report include the “**For Britain Movement,**” an official political party that grew out of UKIP; its party leader, **Ann Marie Waters**; pages within the **Football Lad Alliance (FLA)** or the **Democratic Football Lad Alliance (DFLA)**; and a page named the **Enoch Powell Institute**, which has been removed by Facebook.

²⁹ <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/02/removing-tommy-robinson/>

³⁰ https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/dangerous_individuals_organizations

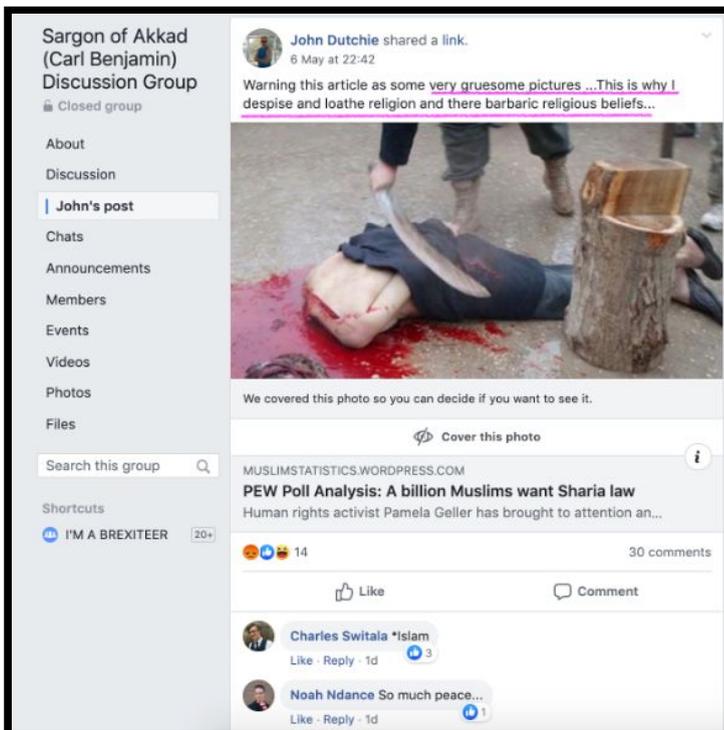
³¹ <http://archive.fo/B1sLT>



32 33
Caption: Posts by For Britain - North West and Enoch Powell Institute that show praise and/or support of banned figures and groups such as Tommy Robinson and Britain First

Content shared

In our investigation we found violent imagery spread via Facebook groups and pages. Below are two examples from the report:

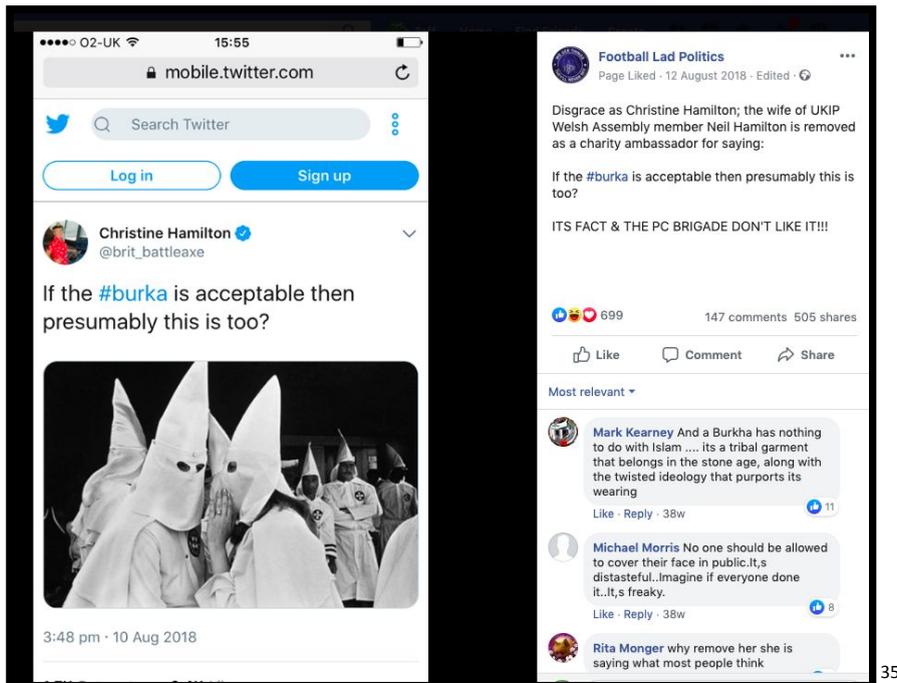


34
Caption: The screenshot above shows a post from the "Sargon of Akkad (Carl Benjamin) Discussion Group," linking to a (now removed) blog post claiming that "A billion Muslims want Sharia Law."

32 <http://archive.fo/ANQIM>

33 <http://archive.fo/ANQIM>

34 <http://archive.is/aH4C7>



Caption: Football Lad Politics reposted an image, originally in a tweet by Christine Hamilton, comparing the burka with the KKK-hoods.

3) France - Fake News, Dehumanizing and White Nationalist content

Avaaz identified and investigated three networks in France. One systematically spreads false news on a large scale, another shares mainly inflammatory, dehumanizing, politically divisive messages, targeting migrants and foreigners, in particular. Another network promoted white nationalism and “scientific racialism.” Together, these networks had a total reach of over **1.7million followers**.

After Avaaz submitted its findings, Facebook **demoted** the main **La Gauche M’a Tuer**³⁶ (LGMT) **official page**, as well as **La Révolte Des Vaches à Lait** and **Peuple de France réveille-toi** for their **repeated spread of fake news**, in line with its new “Reduce, Remove, Inform” strategy, which includes “reducing the reach of Facebook groups that repeatedly share misinformation.” Together, the three pages have 526,339 followers. They also **removed one of the main pages, “Suavelos,” promoting white nationalism**, as well as **three inauthentic profiles**.

Tactics Employed

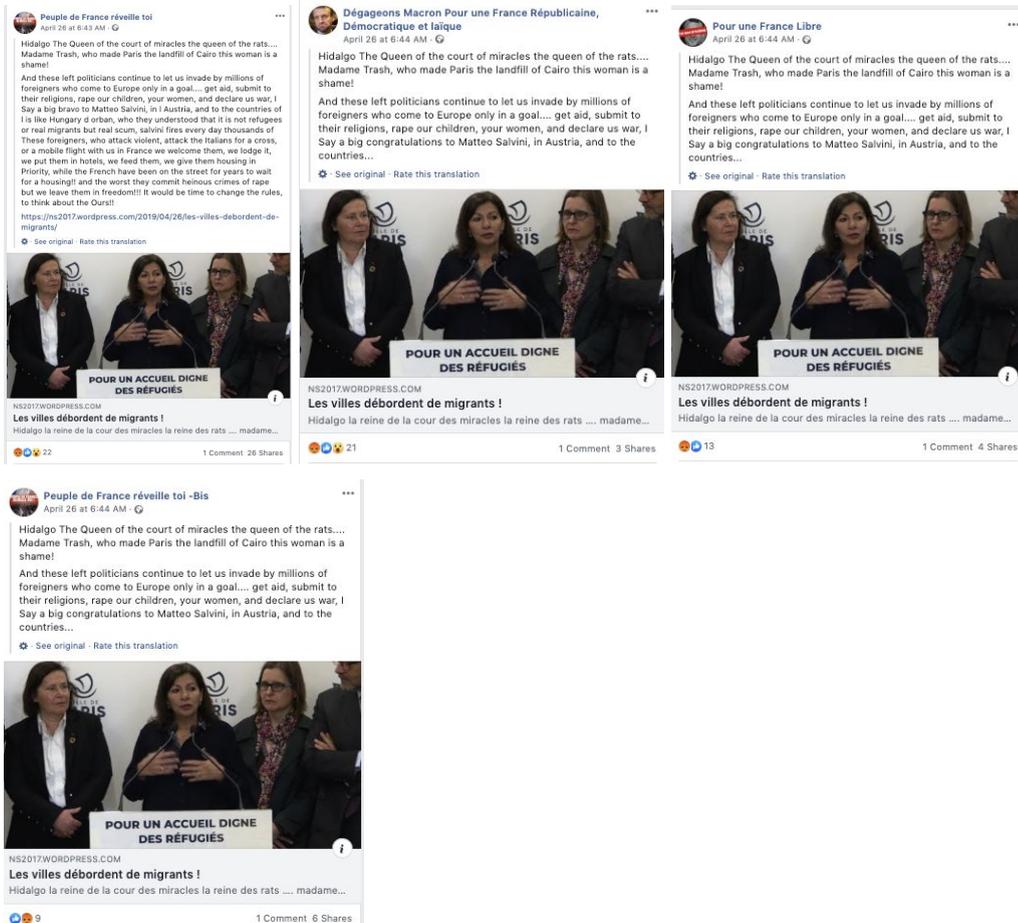
a) Coordinated sharing of disinformation and hateful speech

³⁵ <http://archive.fo/VrtQE>

³⁶ <http://archive.fo/fQCIC>

Avaaaz identified a **repeated pattern of sharing identical content** on each of the three networks. We also identified a likely fake profile as the **admin of three of the pages** whose posts closely synchronize alongside La Gauche M'a Tuer.

One example of close coordination to spread disinformation and hate speech is this post from the La Gauche M'a Tuer network, published on April 26, and **reposted that same day by several pages simultaneously between 6:43 am and 6:44 am**. The posts, although clearly identical, were posted as if they were "original" on each of the pages; **there was no "share" indication and therefore no trace of the original post**.



The post is in breach of Facebook policies on **hate speech** and includes many **unfounded** statements, and it dehumanizes immigrants who have found refuge in France by saying they are scum and alleging they rape children and women.³⁷ An extract from the post reads: "These left politicians continue to **let us be invaded by millions of foreigners who come to Europe only with one goal ... get aid, submit their religions, rape our children, your women, and declare war on us [...]**"

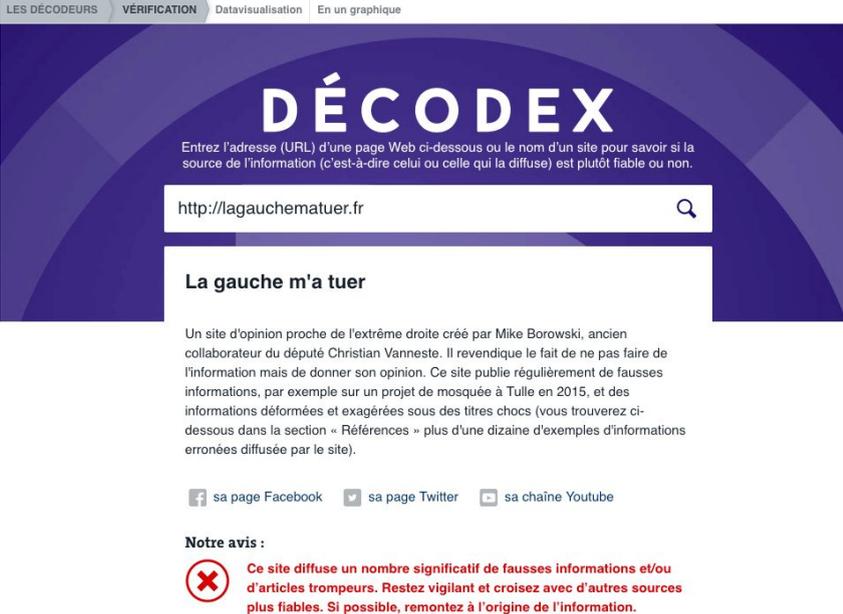
Further examples of content shared:

La Gauche M'A Tuer

³⁷ https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/hate_speech/

In 2017, [Le Monde](#) conducted an analysis of the number of fake news posted by a selection of websites and La Gauche M'a Tuer ranked first for 2017. That year, LGMT received more “likes” on Facebook than [Libération.fr](#) according to [Le Monde](#)³⁸.

Below is a screenshot from the Decodex website, Le Monde’s fact-checking agency:



LES DÉCODEURS VÉRIFICATION Datavisualisation En un graphique

DÉCODEX

Entrez l'adresse (URL) d'une page Web ci-dessous ou le nom d'un site pour savoir si la source de l'information (c'est-à-dire celui ou celle qui la diffuse) est plutôt fiable ou non.

La gauche m'a tuer

Un site d'opinion proche de l'extrême droite créé par Mike Borowski, ancien collaborateur du député Christian Vanneste. Il revendique le fait de ne pas faire de l'information mais de donner son opinion. Ce site publie régulièrement de fausses informations, par exemple sur un projet de mosquée à Tulle en 2015, et des informations déformées et exagérées sous des titres chocs (vous trouverez ci-dessous dans la section « Références » plus d'une dizaine d'exemples d'informations erronées diffusées par le site).

[sa page Facebook](#) [sa page Twitter](#) [sa chaîne Youtube](#)

Notre avis :

 **Ce site diffuse un nombre significatif de fausses informations et/ou d'articles trompeurs. Restez vigilant et croisez avec d'autres sources plus fiables. Si possible, remontez à l'origine de l'information.**

Caption: The text in red reads, “This site disseminates a significant amount of false information and / or misleading articles. Stay alert and seek other more reliable sources. If possible, go back to the origin of the information.”

Examples of fake news by LGMT:

CE QUE DIT LA RUMEUR

Le site [lagauchematuer.fr](#), qui nous apparaît peu fiable dans le [Décodex](#), dénonce la supposée « poudre aux yeux » que représenterait l'exonération de taxe d'habitation pour 80 % des foyers. En effet, la majorité des Français en seraient « déjà exonérés », assure le site, reprenant l'argument dans l'image d'illustration de l'article.



[lagauchematuer.fr](#)

³⁸ <http://archive.fo/mt3np>

Caption: This screenshot is from a [Le Monde](#) fact-checking article citing a fake news item published on the La Gauche M'a Tuer website: "A rumor spread by several unreliable sites says that 55% of French people would already be exempt from housing tax. It's wrong."



Caption: [This post](#)³⁹ on the LGMT site shows President Macron's wife and says that Brigitte Macron would cost the French public 200,000 euros a month. This was debunked in an article in [Liberation](#), which says, "No, Brigitte Macron is not going to cost the French 200,000 euros a month."

Suavelos

The website "Suavelos" (to which the Facebook pages are related) **promotes "white nationalism"**⁴⁰ and **"scientific racialism."**⁴¹ Below is an example of content they shared:



Caption: "#Italy(video): "We cannot expect an African

to know that rape is not allowed in Italy"⁴²

³⁹ <http://archive.fo/RJZVR>

⁴⁰ <http://archive.fo/HLvZk>

⁴¹ <http://archive.fo/dEj1t>

⁴² <http://archive.fo/KvU4N>



*Caption: The post (now removed) read:⁴³ “This article praises the merits of a homogeneous society using the example of Denmark [...]. Of course it **falls short of specifying which homogeneity** we’re talking about. It is apparently neither the homogeneity of the Arab countries, nor the homogeneity of the African countries, but **the white homogeneity that guarantees prosperity, happiness, equal opportunities, the status of women and of the general security of a society.**”*

4) Italy - A Wave of Disinformation Backing the League and 5 Star

In Italy, the Avaaz investigation led **Facebook to shut down 23 Italian Facebook disinformation pages with over 2.46 million followers** for breaches of the platform’s policies, such as page name changes that transformed non-political pages into political and partisan ones; the use of fake accounts; hate speech; inauthentic pages and spam behavior.

These pages were spreading false information and divisive anti-migrant content, ahead of the EU elections. Among the pages, half were in support of the League or 5 Star. **The pages had more followers than the official pages of the League (506K followers) and 5 Star (1.4 million followers) combined.** They also generated over 2.44 million interactions over the last three months.

But the pages Facebook removed are just the tip of the iceberg: Our full investigation identifies **14 main networks in apparent breach of Facebook’s rules** on misrepresentation, page and group name change, spam and related policies. They include **104 pages and eight groups**, with a total of **18.26 million followers and 23.09 million interactions** in the last three months.

Many of the pages that have not been removed appear on two blacklists maintained by the fact-checking and debunking websites butac.it and bufale.net that are widely used in studies

⁴³ <http://archive.fo/UYiEP>

and analyses by leading journalism institutions (e.g. [Reuters Institute](#)), governmental agencies (e.g. the [Italian Communication Authority Agcom](#)) and researchers and Universities (e.g. [University of Venice, Rome and IMT](#)).

Despite many of these pages having been in these disinformation blacklists for years, their continued high activity indicates that this has not led to their demotion.

Content

The most active of the pages taken down by Facebook is "[Vogliamo il movimento 5 stelle al governo](#)" (We want the 5 Star in Government), an unofficial page in support of the 5 Star Movement. An example of an item from that page is a [made-up quote](#) falsely attributed to the anti-mafia Italian writer and journalist, Roberto Saviano, saying he would "prefer to save migrants than Italian earthquake victims." He never said it, but was forced to deny it.



Caption: The post in which Saviano defends himself and denies saying what was attributed to him.

Despite the recent takedown, this page has [been reported](#) to be part of a much wider disinformation network in support of the 5 Star Movement, which was also included in the Avaaz report sent to Facebook.

The most active League-supporting page, "[Lega Salvini Premier Santa Teresa di riva](#)",⁴⁴ which was also removed by Facebook following our report, was the biggest recent sharer of a [video](#) purporting to show migrants smashing a police car. The video, which has almost 10 million views, is actually a scene from a movie and has been [debunked several times](#) over the years, but is still widely shared.

Below is a list of the main sharing pages extracted using the Facebook monitoring platform CrowdTangle.

⁴⁴ <http://archive.fo/Ttpuy>



TIMES POSTED	TOTAL INTERACTIONS	TOTAL FOLLOWERS
85	7,712	1,420,112

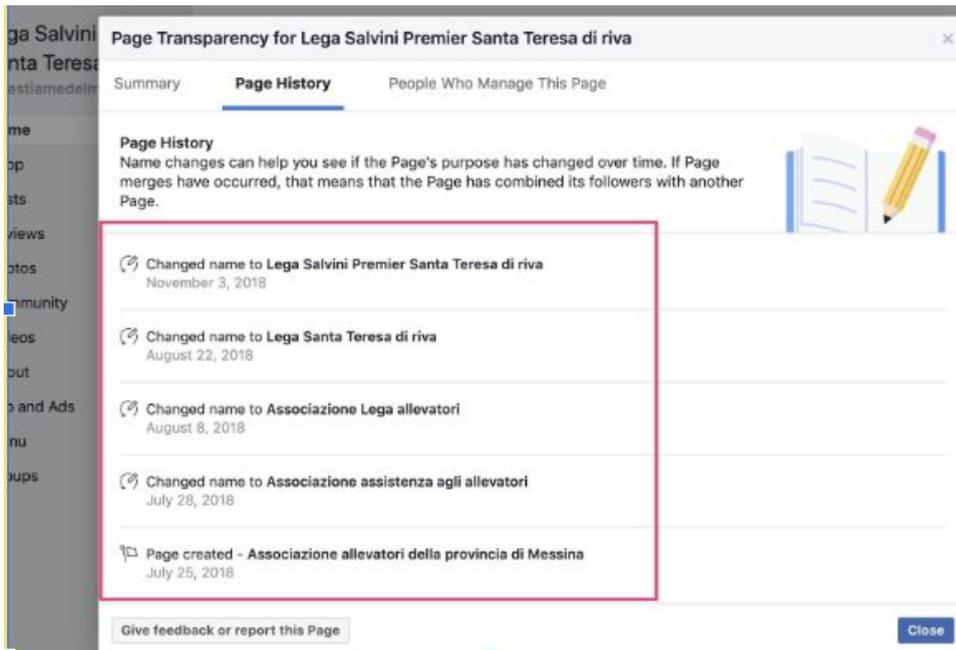
SOURCE (FOLLOWERS)	DATE	INTERACTIONS	LINK
 Вежливые Новости. Россия 128,746	Jul 14, 2018	1,074	
 Lega Salvini Premier Santa Teresa di riva 15,418	Mar 31, 2019	591	
 Українці в Італії (об'єднуємось в єдину групу!)	Aug 1, 2018	473	
 Matteo Salvini FanGruppo 17,727	Mar 19, 2019	425	
 LEGIÃO BOLSONARIANA - A favor do Super Ministro Moro 148,860	Jul 15, 2018	389	
 L'ITALIA CON MATTEO SALVINI 15,694	Mar 21, 2019	303	
 Gruppo LEGA	Mar 19, 2019	290	
 Dalla vostra parte 23,737	Mar 19, 2019	286	

Tactics Employed

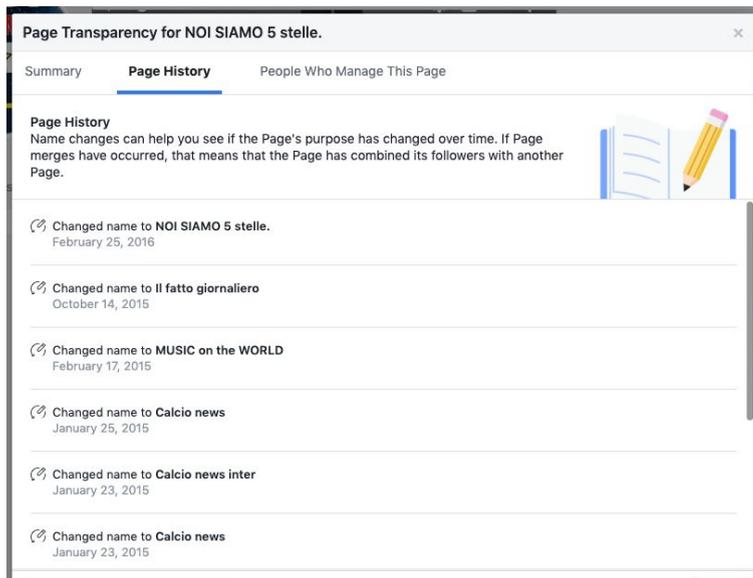
Misleading page-name changes

This happens when a page with non-political content suddenly changes its name or identity to become political or partisan, retaining all its likes and followers, who often remain unaware of the change but start to receive political content.

The page below began as an agricultural breeders' association of the Messina province and eventually became a League-supporting local chapter. The change was made one word at a time, gradually, and any automatic checks carried out by Facebook were likely not triggered because of the ambiguity of the world "League":



Another example, the page **NOI SIAMO 5 stelle** (now removed) changed its name eight times, from a very general page for football fans, “Calcio Passione,” to “Music on the World” and then ending up as a political page.



Fake Profiles

An example of a fake profile is a League-supporting page managed by a person using the name “Bernardo Paguro.” As shown in the screenshots below, the admin account for this page appears to have been removed or suspended by Facebook after Avaaz reported it, but the page itself is currently still active.



The page after the suspension or takedown of the likely fake account:



Content and suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior

Another example of a page taken down for violations of Facebook’s rules is “I Valori Della Vita” (“The value of life”), with more than 1.5 million followers. Our research showed that the page, which looks like a generic lifestyle page, is actually part of a bigger network, whose pages share, in a coordinated manner, content from the well-known far-right news site Leggilo.org.

The following table shows the frequency and coordinated posting among these pages:

Frequency of Pages posting links to leggilo.org



5) Poland - Facebook removes 27 pages with 1.9 million followers

The Avaaz investigation identified three networks in Poland spreading, with great frequency and coordination, across almost 200 pages and groups, divisive content covering a range of anti-Semitic, anti-immigration and anti-LGBT topics as well as false and misleading information.

As of May 18, 2019, **Facebook has removed 27 pages with over 1.9 million followers** that were part of the networks and has taken down for investigation 18 of the duplicated accounts connected to them.

Description and reach

The three networks our investigation uncovered, **Supernetwork (Otopress/ Propublico/ Prawdaobiektywna); Publiszer; and Inna Polityka**, which we named after the media outlets they link to, **spread politically divisive content on 197 pages and groups.**

Together, the networks had a reach of over **8 million followers**, with some **16,666,287 total interactions in the past three months alone.**

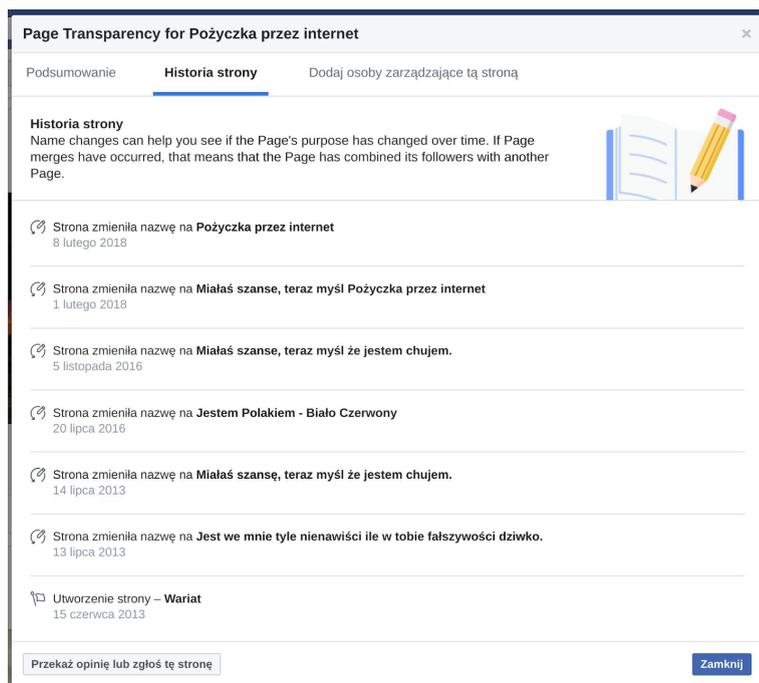
Among the duplicated accounts that were removed, one belonged to the owner of Otopress.pl, one of the media outlets we have seen posting disinformation in the Supernetwork, and four out of the five accounts of Arkadiusz L., an admin of the group "I support Zbigniew Ziobro" (the minister of justice of the ruling party PiS), which widely disseminated pro-PiS content.

Tactics Employed

One of the most common tactics within the networks is using page names changes and misleading name changes. Facebook removed 27 pages based on such violations.

For example, pages titled "Typical Pole," or "Poles are World Champions in Men's Volleyball," and three fan pages that appear related to John Paul II all suggest the type of content that can be expected, but in fact, **they mainly share links to articles** from fake-news websites like **publiszer.pl**, or the right-wing **wmeritum.pl**, or **te-mysli.pl**, a simple clickbait site.

Our investigation found misleading name changes of 53 pages within the networks, which follow a similar pattern to the example below:



Caption: This page, which spread fake news within the Publiszer network (taken down after our investigation), went through seven name changes: "A fool "→ "There is as much hatred in me as falseness in you, bitch"→ "You had a chance, now you can think you are a dick" → "I am Polish - White and Red" → "You had a chance, now you can think you are a dick" → "You had a chance, now you can think loan via the Internet" → to its current name [Pożyczka przez internet](#)⁴⁵ "Loan via the Internet"

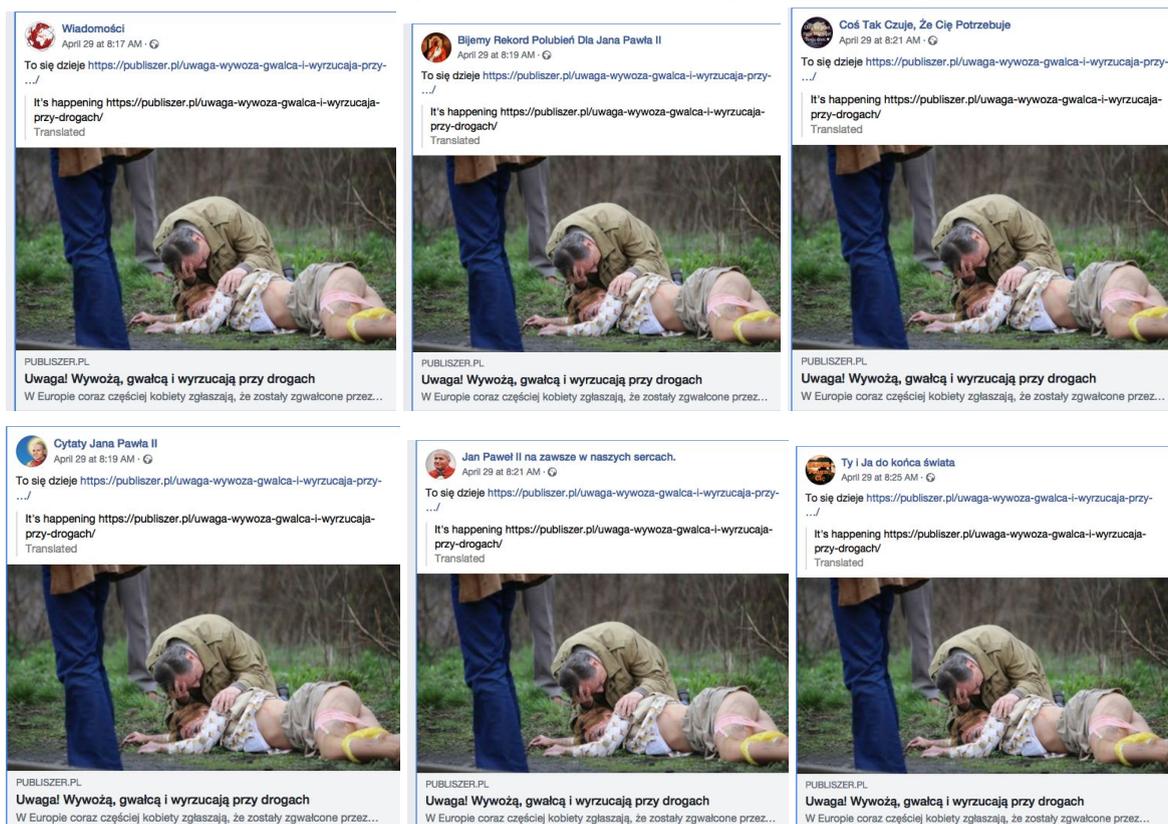
⁴⁵ <http://archive.fo/v2BnX>

Examples of content and suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior

a) Story: Migrant taxi drivers rape women across Europe

This fake story suggests that migrant drivers rape European women, citing an example of a woman raped in Warsaw. The post includes a photo taken from a Polish movie, “I am the murderer.” This fake story was reposted several times since February, always implying that it was “breaking news.”

The post, linking to an article in Publiszer.pl, was shared by 26 pages (11 of which have since been taken down by Facebook) within the network on April 29, one after the other, between 5:17 and 5:28 pm CET.⁴⁶ Below a sample:



b) Story: Donald Tusk was STASI and SB agent

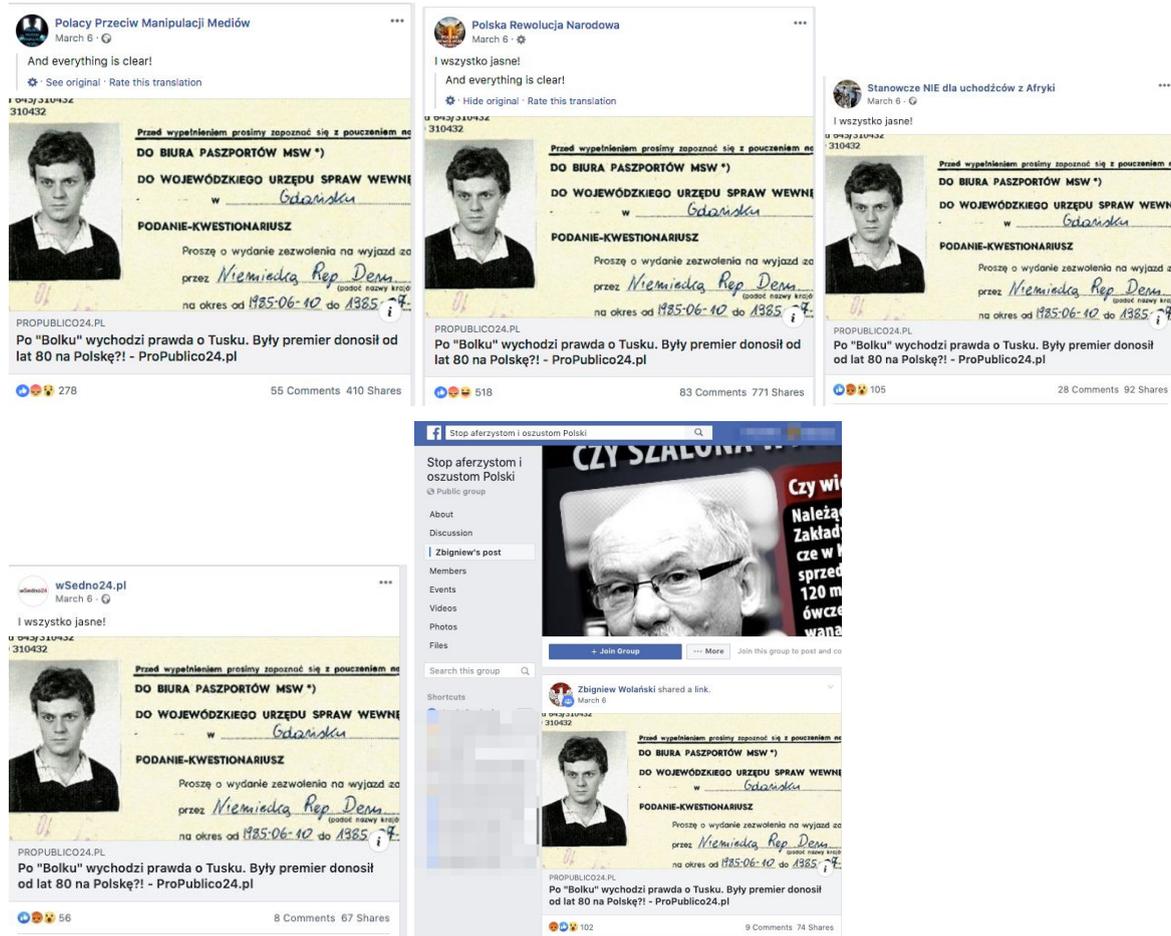
This [article](#)⁴⁷ suggests that Donald Tusk, president of the European Council and former Prime Minister of Poland, was a STASI and Polish communist agent. The article first appears on the website Propublico24.pl. The Propublico piece later admits that “there is no written proof” of the claim, but that “every STASI and SB agent admits it.”

At least four of the pages on this network shared the original Propublico article on **March 6 2019, at exactly the same minute, 11 am CET**. Seven minutes later, Zbigniew W., the

⁴⁶ Screenshots show posting time in PST.

⁴⁷ Link to the article [here](http://archive.is/Dj30w) (<http://archive.is/Dj30w>)

admin of a page in one of the investigated networks, whose two accounts have been taken down for investigation, also shared the article in one of the groups:



6) Spain - Facebook takes down 3 far-right networks

Avaaz's investigation found three far-right networks in Spain, with a reach of 1.7 million followers, using fake and duplicate accounts to manage and coordinate several pages to spread both disinformation, as well as politically divisive content ahead of the Spanish elections held April 28 2019.

We presented our findings to Facebook on April 12, and on April 23, five days before the elections, the platform took action against the accounts behind those pages for violations of their policies, leading to a total takedown of at least **17 pages with more than 1.4 million followers:**

- **Unidad Nacional Española (UNE):** 10 pages with **1,202,533** followers taken down, including the duplicate accounts of the Admin, Javier Grau.
- **Todos Contra Podemos:** 6 pages with **114,147** followers taken down, including many duplicate accounts of the Admin, Antonio Felix Aguilar.
- **Lucha por España:** 1 page with **122,727** followers taken down for deceiving name changing breach.

Content shared

Three examples of content shared by these networks are:

a) [Fake news](#) about a child cancer center being closed down by “Catalan separatists” in favor of leaving “Catalan embassies” open:



Caption: “Torra closes down hospital units for kids with cancer but keeps Catalan ‘embassies’ open.”

b) [Doctored images of Podemos leader](#) Pablo Iglesias doing the Nazi salute:



Caption: "The insults and the lack of backing Podemos is garnering lately after the European rallies were held are clear evidence of the LOW level of their crazy proposals, absurd points and incorrect behavior."

c) [Unfounded](#) claims that the Moroccan government demanded free education for Moroccan students in Spain in exchange for acting on illegal immigration:



Caption: "Morocco blackmails Spain: Demands that Moroccans have their education paid for in exchange for controlling illegal immigration"

d) One website passing as a media outlet sharing [fake statistics](#) about foreigners committing the majority of rape crimes:



Caption: the [post read](#): “Magrebs are not even 2% of the population but carry out 22% of gang rapes. And some think that the solution to this problem is hiding it.” The headline reads: “In Spain, with only 10% of foreigners the non-Spanish men are responsible for 53% of all rapes.”

Tactics Employed

a) Duplicate profiles

The Avaaz investigation demonstrates how these networks are each managed by individuals using several duplicate accounts. Each network coordinates the activity of its pages, often almost exclusively resharing each other’s content, likely in order to simulate fake public support for their content without being publicly transparent about this coordination.

We found clear evidence of how **multiple accounts were managing both the Unidad Nacional Española and Todos Contra Podemos networks**, in an apparent breach of Facebook’s Community Standards.

For example, the first network was managed by Javier Grau, who presents himself as the creator and coordinator of the Unidad Nacional Española movement (*see image below*). He appears in numerous videos posted on the UNE page, acting as solo spokesman, and **had a Facebook group and two different Facebook profiles** (removed by Facebook following our investigation [here](#) and [here](#)⁴⁸).

⁴⁸ <http://archive.fo/o7lvE>, <http://archive.fo/gaBho>, <http://archive.fo/N9dMi>



Caption: A post showing Javier Grau as creator and coordinator of Unidad Nacional Española.

The duplicate profiles were used to manage the different pages and groups of the network, where we identified various instances of suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior aimed at amplifying particular content in a non-organic fashion.

b) Suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior

As an example, we took a picture initially shared by Unidad Nacional Española on March 27 at 6:55 pm, which was then **posted that same day by all of the pages in the network in an apparently coordinated way between 8:20 pm and 8:33 pm**. The posts, although clearly identical, were posted as if they were “original” on each of the pages; there was no “share” indication, and therefore no trace of the original post. This is just one case but, looking at the timelines of those pages and groups, we found other instances where they all simultaneously shared the same content.

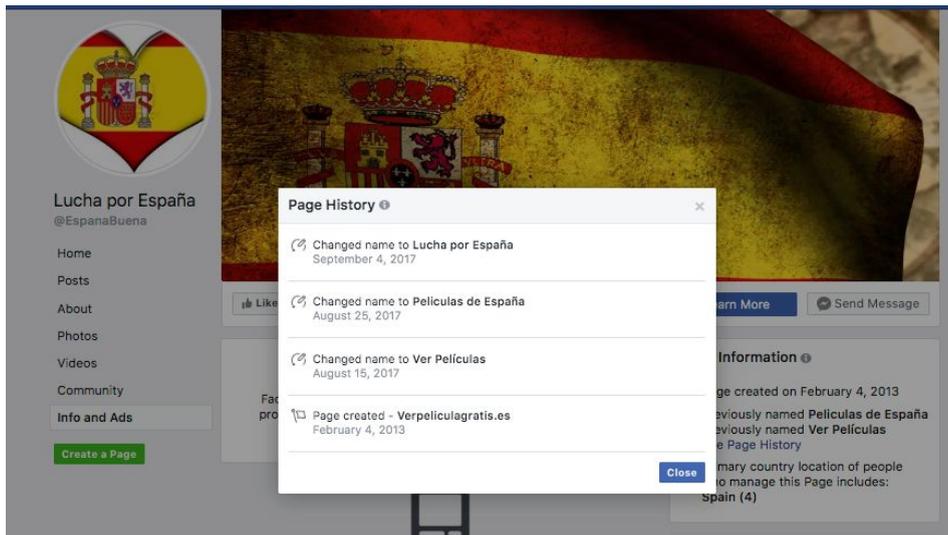




c) Page Name Changing

The third network appeared to also be engaging in suspected **coordinated inauthentic behavior** and name changes that breached Facebook policy. The page renaming seems to be an effort to mislead Facebook users and to increase likes and shares before the name change took place.

A stark example of this tactic was the name changing of the page Lucha por España, which **was initially created in 2013 and until 2017 gathered followers as a page about free movies** (“películas” in Spanish). **In September 2017**, it changed from being a non-political page to a political one, mainly publishing far-right and biased content.



Caption: Lucha por España Page changed names four times in the past five years. In chronological order the names of the page, freely translated, were: “Watchmoviesforfree.es” (2013); “Watch Movies” (August 15, 2017); “Movies of Spain” (August 25, 2017); and now, “Fight for Spain” (since September 4, 2017).

Avaaz’s New Proposal to Fight Disinformation

As this report shows, Facebook has allowed far too much suspicious activity and malicious content to slip past its safeguards and poison our public discourse. Facebook needs to immediately clean up its house; it should run a proactive and EU-wide scan for further suspicious activity on its platform, such as the mass use of fake and duplicate accounts to coordinate the spread of disinformation, misleading page name changes, inauthentic behavior, or spamming techniques.

However, the single most important thing Facebook can do to protect our democracies and counteract the influence of coordinated disinformation campaigns is to adopt “Correct the Record” and immediately begin issuing corrections from verified fact-checkers to every single user who has seen or interacted with disinformation on the platform, and inform followers of pages that have been demoted or taken down about the malign objectives of those pages.

Millions of Europeans have been exposed to the lies, manipulation, and hate described in this report, and the overwhelming majority of them will never find out about it. And neither will the billions more who will be exposed during the next election, and the next one after that -- unless Facebook acts now.

Put simply, “Correct the Record” is the idea that **every user who has been exposed to disinformation deserves to be shown corrected information from fact-checkers.** Time magazine⁴⁹ described it as a “[radical new proposal](http://time.com/5540995/correct-the-record-polling-fake-news/) [that] could curb fake news on social media.” And the platforms themselves have to do it, no one else can.

⁴⁹ <http://time.com/5540995/correct-the-record-polling-fake-news/>

Studies from researchers at top universities like MIT, the University of Michigan and George Washington have shown that corrections are highly effective. Facebook already informs users who have shared or want to share fake news that have been debunked by fact-checkers; now they just need to scale it up and show it to all users who have seen or interacted with it. And the other platforms need to follow suit.

In our view, “Correct the Record” would be a five-step process:

1. DEFINE: The obligation to “Correct the Record” would be activated when independent fact-checkers verify that content with significant reach is false or misleading;
2. DETECT: platforms must make it easy for users to report potential disinformation and for fact-checkers to access all content with significant reach.
3. VERIFY: Platforms must work with independent, third-party, verified fact-checkers to determine whether reported content is disinformation.
4. ALERT: Each user exposed to verified disinformation should be notified immediately using the platform’s most visible notification standard.
5. CORRECT: Each user exposed to disinformation should receive a correction that is of at least equal prominence to the original content and that follows best practices.

“Correct the Record” isn’t just good for democracy, it’s good for business. **Between [81%](#) and [92%](#) of people in Europe’s largest democracies agree that companies like Facebook should work with independent fact-checkers to offer verified corrections to everyone exposed to false or misleading content. More importantly, [78% or more](#) of citizens in those countries say that this measure would improve their image of social media companies.**

Research and Data Analysis Methodology

How we arrived at the estimate of the total views generated by the removed disinformation networks:

Based on our analysis of data from the pages and groups, we estimate that the Facebook takedown removed content that was viewed an estimated half a billion (533 million) times over the last three months.

We calculated these views by using a methodology similar to the one used during previous reporting.⁵⁰

VIEWERSHIP CALCULATION FOR VIDEOS: Facebook provides viewing data for videos. We followed Facebook’s definition of what constitutes a “view,” that is, a viewing experience that lasts three seconds or longer.

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VIEWERSHIP ESTIMATION FOR IMAGES AND TEXT: Facebook discloses the number of views for videos, but for posts containing only text and image content the platform displays only the number of shares and other interactions, such as likes or comments. Therefore, in order to estimate viewership for text and image content we designed a metric based on the publicly available statistics of the Facebook videos analyzed in our study, taking into account the total number of video views and dividing it by the total number of video interactions. Facebook reports a “video view” only after three seconds, while an image or text can be considered as “viewed” and having an actual impact in less than three seconds.

Therefore, the estimation of total views in this study is a conservative one and likely lower than the content’s actual total viewership.

ENGAGEMENT RATE CALCULATION FOR IMAGES AND TEXT: We computed an EU-wide metric called the *video engagement rate*, which we calculated by dividing the total video views by the total video interactions for all countries. Based on the video views/interactions, the EU-wide video engagement rate was *39.81 views per interaction*.

We then added together the total number of documented interactions⁵¹ with text and image content for each country over a three month period, and multiplied it by the video engagement rate to estimate total views.

Because we only carried out our calculations based on *documented* interactions, and that data was only available for a subset of the total number of pages on which we compiled evidence, our final estimate of total views is very likely lower than the actual total viewership of all removed content and therefore can be considered a conservative figure.

How did we arrive at a half-billion estimated views?

In summary, our calculation of estimated views looks like this:

Step 1: (total video views) / (total video interactions) = (video engagement rate)

Step 2: (video engagement rate) X (documented 3-month interactions) = (estimated 3-month views)

Country	Documented interactions (3 months)	Engagement rate	Estimated views of content (3 months)
Spain	9,700,373	39.813363	300,541,589
Italy	2,444,096	39.81336	97,307,674

⁵¹ In Poland we had data on documented interactions for 21 out of the 27 pages; in Spain 14 out of 17; in Italy 14 out of 23; in France 1 out of 1; in the UK 1 out of 1; in Germany 3 out of 8.

Poland	975,314	39.81336	38,830,527
Germany	196,555	39.81336	7,825,515
France	28,816	39.81336	1,147,262
UK	43,600	39.81336	1,735,862
Total			533,051,283

Related Avaaz reports on disinformation and elections:

In addition to the network investigations described in this report, which led to action by Facebook, Avaaz also produced a [report focusing on WhatsApp](#) in Spain, showing that disinformation and hatred on that platform reached about 9.6 million potential voters ahead of the 2019 Spanish legislative elections.

The European anti-disinformation campaign was launched with a [report showing that fake news circulating the French Yellow Vest movement](#) had reached over 105 million views. The campaign follows a pilot campaign in Brazil, where a small team of researchers was able to get Facebook to [take down a disinfo network with 12.6 million followers](#).

The Avaaz community has 50 million members worldwide, including about 20 million in Europe. Leading up to the EU elections, the Avaaz Disinformation plans to detect and deter disinformation on social networks and release studies similar to those described above.

This report is part of Avaaz’s Disinformation Project and aims in part to investigate, analyze, and expose disinformation on social media and the networks behind it. We report openly on what we find, so we can alert and educate social media platforms, regulators, and the public, and so we can more effectively advocate for smart solutions to defend the integrity of elections and our democracies from disinformation.

This report is part of that effort and summarizes an investigation to: identify and track disinformation content on Facebook to assess its reach/impact; identify and track groups/channels, networks, bots, “coordinated inauthentic activity” across the platforms; and collect specific examples of breaches of Facebook’s terms and standards in order to urge Facebook to investigate and take action.

Glossary

Disinformation Networks: Networks refers to a group of people or pages working together or sharing the same content. We call them 'disinformation networks' when they're sharing false news, disinformation and hate speech, or are using tactics to amplify content in ways that appear to breach Facebook's terms of use.

Disinformation content: Is content that lassified as false or purposefully misleading information.

Disinformation tactics: Tactics that include the systematic usage of fake accounts, misleading page name changes, or inauthentic coordination to amplify content in a way that appears to breach the social media platform's own policies.

Interactions: Interactions on Facebook include any action that a user performs on an account, page or group, including likes, shares and comments.

Coordinated inauthentic behavior: when groups of pages or people work together to mislead others about who they are or what they're doing. ([From](#) Facebook's Head of Cybersecurity Policy.)

Suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB): We use this term when we suspect accounts and pages may be involved in what Facebook [defines](#) as "coordinated inauthentic behavior." We qualify our findings as "suspected" CIB, as the amount of publicly available data on accounts and pages is too limited to make a final determination on their authenticity.

Inauthenticity: using false or misleading information to collect likes, followers, or shares (spam); creating duplicate or multiple accounts (misrepresentation); or circulating disinformation or fake news.

Fake accounts: we use "fake accounts" as an umbrella term to capture several different kinds of behavior banned by Facebook's community standards, which require users "to connect on Facebook using the name they go by in everyday life." Fake accounts include accounts which misrepresent the user's identity; impersonate others; use fake names or pictures; or participate in coordinated inauthentic behavior -- behavior which misleads users about the origin of content; about the destination of links; to get more interactions; or to facilitate or conceal a violation of Facebook's community standards. (From [Facebook's definition](#).)

Alternative outlets: These are media outlets with little or absolutely no editorial reputation. Most of those outlets are publicly known in their countries for reporting fake news and disinformation.

Hate speech: Violent or dehumanizing speech, statements of inferiority, or calls for exclusion or segregation based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, sex, gender, gender identity, serious disease or disability, and, in some cases, immigration status. (Adapted from [Facebook's definition](#).)

Spam: Using false or misleading information, fraud, or security breaches in order to collect likes or other interactions either to artificially increase distribution for financial gain; encouraging likes, shares, or clicks under false pretenses; or maliciously using login credentials. (From [Facebook's definition](#).) Facebook have also acknowledged that while spam commonly involves the offer of fraudulent products or services, they “have seen spammers increasingly using sensational political content” to build an audience and drive traffic to their websites.⁵²

Pages: Facebook's pages feature allows “public figures, businesses, organizations and other entities to create an authentic and public presence on Facebook.” Users can ‘follow’ a page and receive the pages posts in his or her newsfeed. (Taken from [Facebook's definition](#).)

Groups: Facebook's groups feature allows “small group communication and for people to share their common interests and express their opinion.” Groups can be public or private, and can allow anyone to join, require administrator approval for new members, or be invitation-only. Content posted to a group appears in subscribed users' newsfeeds. (Taken from [Facebook's definition](#).)

Follower: a user who has subscribed to ('followed') another person, page, or group and receives updates in their newsfeed when that person, page, or group posts new content.

⁵² <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/inauthentic-activity-brazil/>