

Forum:	General Assembly 3 (SOCHUM)
Issue:	Addressing the rise of political extremism and violence stemming from digital platforms
Chair:	Phoebe Hsu (Head Chair), Joanna Chang (Deputy Chair), Evelyn Diep (Deputy Chair)

Introduction

In the modern era, it is undeniable that social media is an essential part of everyone's lives. As of October 2023, there are 4.95 billion active internet users, more than 60% of the global population. The content on the internet is hardly moderated as there are way too many users so content can be very easily posted. In addition, in the US there is a law which is the Communication Decency Act prevents all platforms from being liable for any content their users use. Section 230 of the law allows false information or illegal content like extremist ideals and violence to stem on the website because the websites have no incentives to moderate such content and would rather have everyone on social media to make more profit. These conditions on digital platforms allow political extremism and violence to stem and harm society.

Political extremism is an eminent problem in the modern era that is rapidly deteriorating each year. Between 2007 and 2022, almost 350,000 people were killed by terrorist attacks and hundreds of thousands more would be added to the number if general violence was included. Referring to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), number 16 is to maintain peace in the global community. As political extremism and violence are a threat to keeping peace worldwide, we must address this for a change and work towards achieving the SDGs by 2030. This issue also impacts a lot of people as billions of people are on the internet every day and can be influenced by these violent and extremist ideas. Thus, we need to stop this influence to work towards removing violence and terrorism from online platforms.

Definition of Key Terms

Radicalization

Radicalization refers to the process of turning a person's personal beliefs, including their political or religious beliefs, more extreme. This often leads the person to condone and even further endorse the use of violence against people or communities that go against their extremist beliefs. Social media platforms are often used by extremist organizations to identify individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization through the content these individuals post on social media. Digital platforms such as the platform Gab, with lax rules on extremism, often serve as a platform for extremist organizations to preach their radical ideologies to a significant number of individuals.

Online Disinformation

Online disinformation is spreading false information to mislead their audience. This is very prominent on multiple social media platforms and is commonly used by extremist organizations as a form of propaganda.

Propaganda

Propaganda is information that is extremely biased towards one side or party and is often very politically biased. Propaganda is very often seen on online platforms to reach a larger audience.

Censorship

Censorship is the act of prohibiting certain forms of media such as websites, books, movies, and more. Censorship is often in place to ensure security to a nation's safety.

Left-Wing

Left-wing parties are liberal socialists who support ideas of change and capitalism. Far-Left extremists are considered to be more radical, engage in motivated acts of violence, and often reject the ideologies of capitalism as well as advocate for a socialist or communist society.

Right-Wing

Right-wing parties are conservative and supporters of nationalism, they are considered to be closed-minded and dogmatists. Far-Right Extremists often reject the ideologies of socialism, support nationalism, and are conservative with closed-minded ideas. They also promote economic inequality by justifying that it is inevitable and even beneficial, and are often associated with fascism. After the 9/11 attack, there was an increase in right-wing political extremism influenced by groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Right-wing parties normally have a stronger base and more committed individuals.

Media Literacy

Media literacy refers to an individual's ability to analyze social media content critically and reflect

on the content before automatically believing that the content is a true and reliable source. Individuals who have weak media literacy are often targeted by extremist organizations on digital platforms as these individuals are the most likely to be radicalized and follow certain extremist ideologies.

Hate Speech

Hate speech is often abusive and uses extremely offensive rhetoric against someone or a community of people. These rhetorics can be based on race, sexual orientation, gender, and a person's identity in general. Individuals who support extremist ideologies are often found posting discriminatory content that includes hate speech against specific minorities across multiple digital platforms, sometimes encouraging acts of violence against these minorities.

Deplatforming

Deplatforming is the act of removing a person or a group from a digital platform that they use to share their radical ideologies and beliefs, often in an attempt to boycott this person or group from committing and encouraging acts of violence.

Counterterrorism

As terrorism continues to increase online, counterterrorism measures must be put in place to prevent acts of violent terrorism on digital platforms. Examples of these measures could include governments monitoring potential terrorists, identifying individuals who are most exposed to radical ideologies, and penalizing individuals/organizations guilty of committing or endorsing violent acts of terrorism across digital platforms.

Internet Activism

Internet activism is the use of technology, such as social media, email, websites, and more, to promote societal change at both a large and small scale. Internet activism allows activist movements to spread quickly due to the prominent use of social media and smartphone devices.

Background Information

Digital Platforms

Digital platforms are software and online networks that hold interactions between users. Digital platforms began on the internet with simple communications such as sharing information, developing into what is now social media. It is effortless for companies to rapidly spread and foster misinformation and propaganda by utilizing algorithms on platforms, influencing public opinions. Further advancements

in digital platforms raise the need to address and manage numerous challenges regarding the privacy and ethical applications of users online.

Artificial Intelligence

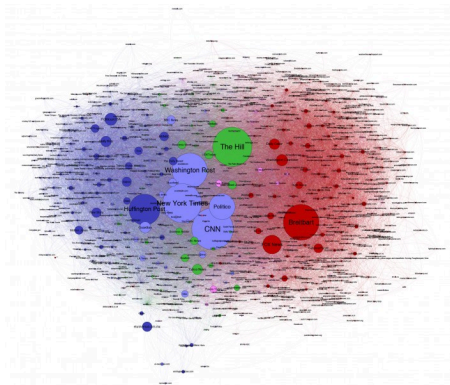
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a computer system that can perform actions and tasks that often require some form of human intelligence. The development of AI in the modern age has increased significantly, resulting in extremists increasingly contributing to the polarization of politics. AI could be used in this situation to rapidly fabricate manipulative stories that aim for sympathy from the audience to sway public opinions to side with a particular ideology. Furthermore, AI could be used to provide the extremists with a hidden identity making it difficult to trace cyberterrorism initiators.

Contrastingly, AI could also provide counters to political extremists by taking measures and filtering extremist content to prevent it from reaching public media. AI could also be utilized to track political extremists to reduce potential threats from organizers of terrorist acts.

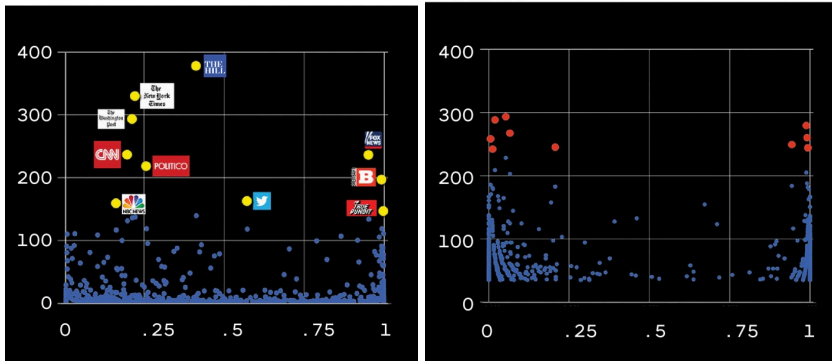
Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers

Filters bubbles and echo chambers are common tactics social media companies use to keep the user engaged in the website or app. Filter bubbles are the personalization of information that filters new information and is of interest to appear on the user's feed. The social media platform gathers basic information about the user to apply the content to their preference. Similarly, echo chambers result in users of the internet interacting with other users that have the same interests. This algorithm allows extremists on the internet to fabricate large communities with the same ideology to amplify their worldviews and beliefs.

Companies utilize these tactics to ensure that the user is interested. However, this algorithm has detrimental effects on society, as for many, social media is what they rely on to get information and news-related media. If users are constantly being shown the same information their knowledge is limited with a one-sided perspective.



Caption #1: A visual representation of a filter bubble



Caption #2: Graphs showing news platforms that are considered mainstream journalism

Propaganda

Propaganda is biased information used to persuade people towards one side of an argument. Propaganda can be used by political extremists to portray complex issues as one-sided arguments and polarize political situations to achieve reform or create groups of extremists to gain support for an ideology. In modern days, it is difficult to detect if a source is propaganda or spreading misinformation due to the varying amount of world views and sources on the internet. This makes it efficient for political extremists to recruit people through social media while avoiding arrest by utilizing the dark web to maintain an anonymous identity.

Data hacks and ransomware

Extremist groups have progressed into engaging in cyberterrorism on the internet. Cyberterrorism is cyber-attacks that are conducted by terrorist groups to extract money or information from an individual. This can be done by performing data hacks on online user’s confidential information such as business emails and banking information. Data breaches have been increasing, during 2022, data hacks were estimated to contain losses of over USD 2.7 billion.

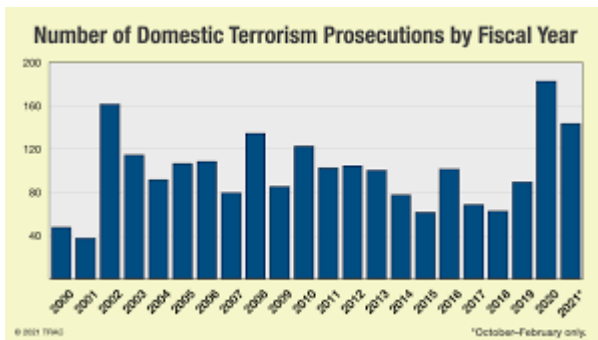
Ransomware as a means of obtaining money has been increasingly popular among cyberterrorist groups, and these groups are utilizing networks and blackmail to coerce victims into giving their money. Between January 2020 and December 2022, ransomware has increased to 47%, producing an estimated loss of USD 449.1 million globally.

Political extremism and violence

Political Extremism refers to the radical political ideologies that often advocate for extreme measures against certain communities, promote violence, and stem away from societal norms. There are many types of political extremism and violence such as left-wing, right-wing, cyberterrorism, and ransomware. Furthermore, social media often perpetuates and worsens these issues.

Domestic terrorism

Domestic terrorism is a violation of criminal law that endangers human lives with intimidation and attempts at influencing government affairs by utilizing acts that cause high casualty rates, such as public shootings and bombings. Since 2021, domestic terrorism increased to 53% in the United States. Furthermore, from 1994 to 2021, the U.S. has witnessed an estimated 1,040 domestic attacks. The escalating issue of domestic terrorism could be influenced by the improvement of modern technology in digital platforms, spreading different ideologies and terroristic ideas.



Caption #3: The number of domestic terrorist attacks since the 21st century

The effects of social media

Extremists occasionally rely on the spread of misinformation or disinformation. Social media, being a massive platform accelerates the spread of false information, by 2016, a total of 87% of political extremists utilized social media to promote an extremist ideology and agenda, a considerable increase from just 8% in 2005.

The utilization of social media allow political extremists to organize attacks together and polarize politics. In a recent event of the 2020 presidential election in the United States, insurrectionists attacked the U.S. Capitol for the first time in American history. The violence injured 5 individuals, including a police officer on Capitol Hill. The insurrectionists were motivated by polarizing political rhetoric and conversations that were facilitated on websites that spread conspiracy theories and radical agendas of the right-wing media.

Social media provides a hospitable environment for diverse content espousing violence, hate, and conspiracist ideologies. The increasing use of social media promotes and normalizes these forms of violence and permits the escalation of polarized and misinformation-suffused right-wing media sources that gain visibility and engagement.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Meta

Meta is known to be the global monopoly of online platforms, namely social media, with the strongest apps such as Instagram and Facebook, which all have millions of active users. Almost every teenager in developing countries has access to these applications. Specifically in the US, more than 97% of teenagers use the internet and social media daily which has increased compared to 8 years ago in 2015; this shows the rapid growth of social media platforms. In addition, the popularity of the platform makes them susceptible to abuse coming from political extremist groups who use the easily accessed platform to increase their popularity and promote their violent actions and beliefs. Meta also plays a prominent role in this issue as users are allowed to post any content with minor regulations.

Alphabet (Google)

Alphabet Inc. is a powerful online platform as they are well-known for their search engine: Google. Almost everyone uses applications under Alphabet to get their information. This includes Google - the most popular search engine worldwide, YouTube, and their ecosystem of Google Drive and Google Docs that make work and school much more efficient. Google receives more than 1.2 trillion searches a year while YouTube has more than 2.7 billion active monthly users which shows that a lot of people get their information on these platforms associated with Alphabet which would inevitably include content related to political extremism and violence.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is a country in Africa with the largest amount of casualties from terrorism. There have been more than 16,000 deaths and millions were forcibly displaced because of terrorist attacks. It is 2nd place in the global terrorism index with a value of 8.564 just briefly under Afghanistan. The global terrorism index measured the impact terrorism has on one country using different reports and trackers; 0 is no impact while 10 is a severe impact. In Burkina Faso, the recorded terrorism index has been steadily increasing since 2015 which shows the increase in terrorist activity. The government has put tremendous efforts towards attempting to stop terrorism; however, the impacts have not shown yet. For example, Burkina Faso is in an Intergovernmental Action Group that is against financing terrorist groups which is called the National Financial Information Processing Unit-Burkina Faso (CENTIF-BF).

United States of America

The United States has experienced a significant threat of terrorist attacks in the past 50 years and the threat has become something the global community cannot ignore. Actual attacks have also been done on US soil with a report from 2020 stating that there have been more than 850 terrorist

attacks since 1994. Famous attacks such as the 911 attack have killed almost 3,500 civilians and had a drastic impact on US society. Violence is also very prominent in the US with civilian attacks, school shootings, and more crimes that can be promoted by social media. In addition, the US is specifically important in this issue discussed because it has the most online platform companies such as Amazon, Alphabet, and Meta. These listed companies are all located in the US and are under US government and legal control.

Syria

Syria has one of the worst conditions in the world when it comes to political extremism in the country. In a report done in 2022, Syria has a Terrorism index of 8.161 which is number 5 in the world. As of 2024, there is still a civil war and many terrorist attacks happening in the country, destabilizing the region. Allegedly, the Syrian government funds terrorist groups which allow these groups to continue flourishing around the world, leading to the continuous rise of political extremism and violence. In addition, ISIS, a powerful political extremism group is also operating in the region, making Syria an even more dangerous country when it comes to the issue being addressed.

China

China currently has a low risk of terrorist attacks with a terrorism index of 0. However, there have been past attacks performed by organizations such as the 2014 Kunming attack that led to 35 casualties. Concerning the issue discussed, China currently has 960 million active online platform users which is the most in the world. This makes the influence of social media and online platforms very prominent in the country which means that they could be impacted by the violence that stems from these platforms. Additionally, China also has very strong digital platform companies such as Alibaba with more than 1.3 billion active users globally as of 2022.

Iceland

Iceland has a very low risk of terrorist attacks with a terrorism index of 0, and is known to be one of the safest and politically stable countries globally. There has only been one occurrence of terrorist attack in Iceland history back in 2022. Alongside having a low risk of terrorist attacks, Iceland is also the safest country according to the Global Peace Index which indicates that the country has little violence. Iceland's safety is also very steady as they have been the safest country for the past 14 years. Specifically to political extremism, terrorist groups are unable to thrive in the country because the government works hard to protect human rights and democracy which deters political extremist groups.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has an extremely prominent risk of terrorist attacks with a Terrorism index of 8.822 which is the highest globally. This indicates that terrorist activity, violence, and political instability in the

region are evident. Terrorist groups are likely to attack the region first due to the political instability caused by other attacks and the lack of a central government. The Taliban is still attacking the Afghan government and in 2021 Afghanistan registered more than 1,200 attacks in that specific year. Therefore, Afghanistan has one of the worst conditions when discussing the issue at hand as the country is very susceptible to political extremism and violence.

North Korea

Although there is no documented local terrorism in North Korea, North Korea involves itself in international terrorism by funding foreign extremist groups. For example, in the past, they have funded the Japanese Red Army and they were implicated in assassinations on foreign soil. However, at the same time, North Korea has the least engagement with foreign online platforms. North Korean civilians can't access the internet and therefore they are not very impacted by the rise of violence because of social media. As of April 2023, 99.9% of North Koreans have no access to the internet and the tiny amounts (0.01%) are high-ranked officials or on strictly monitored computers and devices. However, it is still undeniable that North Korea as a nation is largely involved in terrorist activities.

Myanmar

Myanmar is a very dangerous country when it comes to violence and political extremism. Myanmar is number 9th in the world for the Terrorism index with a value of 7.977. The region is governed by a military junta that is a terrorist group. The region is filled with conflict and violence as the military utilizes and abuses its power. There is also a lot of human trafficking and violence that stems from online platforms in the form of scams. Social media perpetuates this issue as more individuals buy into ads or content and get sent to Myanmar to get tortured and can not escape because the military protects these groups. Social media are the best platforms for a scam as they are able to reach a bigger audience and maximize the outcomes of the scam.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1983	ARPANET adopted Vinton Cerf's and Robert Kahn's software code and the internet was officially created.
1995	Stormfront is a neo-Nazi forum, created by a former Ku Klux Klan (KKK) leader, Don Black. Stormfront is considered to be the first major hate website on the

internet.

1997 The platform, SixDegrees was created to allow users to upload a profile and make friends with other platform users. Therefore, SixDegrees is often referred to as the first social media website.

2004 The use of social media rapidly increases with platforms such as LinkedIn, MySpace, and Friendster clearing the path for its popularity. However, social media truly entered a mainstream era when Facebook launched in 2004 and smartphones gained immense popularity.

2018 The Pittsburgh Synagogue shooter was found to be participating on the social media network Gab, which is known for their relaxed rules on extremism. On Gab, he promoted the conspiracy of Jewish People seeking to bring mass immigration into the United States.

2021 Frances Haugen, a former Facebook employee, through thousands of leaked documents, exposes the company (Facebook) for prioritizing profits over their customers' safety as well as Facebook's awareness of the damage Facebook's algorithm has on its users.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, 9 December 1999 **(A/RES/54/109)**
- Measures to eliminate international terrorism, 18 December 2015 **(A/RES/70/120)**
- Resolution 2482 on preventing and combating terrorism, 19 July 2019 **(S/RES/2482)**
- Human rights impact of policies and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism **(A/HRC/43/46)**

Possible Solutions

Working with religious leaders and faith-based organizations

Religion has been one of the primary root motives of certain extremist groups such as

Al-Qaeda, which through the use of the internet, planned their operations and attacks including the 9/11 attacks. With over 6 billion people identifying with a religion, religious-based misinformation is often used by extremist organizations to manipulate vulnerable individuals online through the use of fear-mongering to radicalize and encourage individuals to commit acts of violence against other minorities. Leaders and organizations associated with a religious faith play a key role in solving the issue of political extremism. Influential religious figureheads garner significant attention and respect from the followers of their respective religions. Through collaboration with different religious leaders, nations can promote “interfaith” dialogues domestically and globally which can develop within networks of religious organizations, preventing the divide between religions that leads to extremism.

Cooperating with digital platforms to create policies and guidelines that prevent further political extremism and violence

Due to the growing popularity of social media, it has become one of the most prominent ways political extremism can spread, encouraging and promoting violence against minorities and other communities. Although most digital platforms have guidelines on hate speech, companies such as Facebook have been found to prioritize profits over focusing on the guidelines intended to keep users’ privacy secure. Therefore, digital platforms must be held accountable for the hate speech that is occurring which can result in real-life acts of violence. Governments should collaborate to create international policies and guidelines for all social media companies to follow to ensure the safety of the global population and penalize these companies through fines and even potential jail time for executives if found guilty of violating or ignoring these policies and guidelines. Furthermore, to ensure that digital platforms protect users while reducing extremist rhetoric, cooperation “watchdog groups” or UN organizations can promote a safe online space where individuals can discuss political situations, but no hate speech is allowed and the political content are unbiased source to prevent an increase of political tensions. However, one thing to consider is that digital platforms such as X, have filed controversial lawsuits against watchdog groups and might be against international cooperation due to private ownership. Finally, encouraging digital platforms to be transparent with the UN and the disclosure of information on their algorithm as certain algorithmic biases can fuel political extremism on digital platforms, can be beneficial.

Creating international guidelines and incorporating media literacy into education curriculums to combat and prevent online terrorism and extremism

To prevent the increase in political extremism on digital platforms, nations must cooperate to develop global awareness of terrorism threats made digitally. Extremist groups have been using digital platforms to propagate their radical rhetoric and recruit vulnerable individuals. Nations should implement restrictions and improve their nation’s security software to combat and prevent the increase of cyberterrorism. Additionally, incorporating media literacy sessions into nations’ education curricula is

vital. Educating students about political extremism and its promotion will foster critical thinking on the content they view on social media and discern both factual and misinformation. By providing future generations with the resources to analyze digital content and its sources critically, nations can produce a resilient society to the danger of political extremism.

Questions for Further Research

What are possible measures to be implemented to minimize political extremism and violence?

How did the evolution of digital platforms contribute to the radicalization of the issue of political extremism and violence?

What are the different perspectives of countries and what measures have they implemented regarding this issue?

Where is the line drawn regarding setting boundaries on digital platforms to ensure there is no over-policing and stepping into user's right to privacy?

What are ways officials can spread awareness to discourage acts that promote the radicalization of political extremism?

Does modern artificial intelligence support radicalization of the issue of political extremism and violence?

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