Article

Demonising Migrants in Contexts of Extremism: Analysis of Hate Speech in UK and Spain

Darren Lilleker [1] and Marta Pérez-Escolar [2,*]

[1] Department of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University, UK
[2] Department of Communication, Universidad Loyola Andalucía, Spain

* Corresponding author (martaperez@uloyola.es)

Abstract
Hate speech has been seen as a problem within democratic societies that has been exacerbated by social media. While platforms claim to moderate content, this proves impossible. Studying popular platforms in the UK and Spain and examining content within community pages dedicated to right-wing parties, we use framing analysis to identify the predominant frames in user comments that contained hate speech against migrants. Our research demonstrates a frequent use of arguments that encourage xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes to flourish. Specifically, we find that immigrants are commonly framed as potential criminals, people who steal resources and erode norms of the dominant culture and traditions. The fact that these frames are commonly used is worrying and indicates xenophobic attitudes exist within both societies under study. However, it is difficult to imagine regulatory systems that would prevent these attitudes from being expressed. Rather, we argue that it is more important to focus on correcting the conditions that cause such attitudes to take hold within a society.

Keywords
extremism; far-right parties; hate speech; immigration; social media; Spain; UK

1. Introduction

Research on user comments has flourished across different disciplines over the last few years (Schindler & Domahidi, 2021), including studies specifically concerned with the increased use of hate speech online (Ernst et al., 2017), commenters' motivations, and how they relate to the increasingly polarized political environment (see Almoqbel et al., 2019). Citizens' comments can be used as cues by other readers regarding the stance they should take on an issue (Springer et al., 2015) and can counter more accepted or socially acceptable viewpoints (Weber et al., 2017), particularly when they are viewed as the "authentic voice" of the ordinary person. Hence, and as per previous studies of online user comments, we view these comments as instrumentalist interactions (Lilleker & Bonacci, 2017; Zurutuza-Muñoz & Lilleker, 2018). Comments, from this perspective, are made by users to express their views and gain reactions from others.

Comments within spaces on social media platforms can be homogenous, in which case this space acts as an echo chamber (Auxier & Vitak, 2019), or heterogeneous and antagonistic. However, more extreme views are most likely shared in spaces populated by like-minded individuals with a specific ideological perspective. Research suggests that these types of spaces seem to be breeding grounds where polarisation, hate, incivility, and conspiracy theories become prevalent in online discourse (Bolsover, 2020). While it is unclear the extent

to which content from within these spaces infects the wider discourse on any social media platform, there are concerns that this might be the case (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Evidence shows that holding strong affectively polarised and extremist positions is mostly caused by obtaining news from social media (Nguyen & Vu, 2019). In particular, when there is a strong link between identity and a political position, it is more likely for discourse to lead to the use of othering and hate speech (Wasilewski, 2019). The discourses within these spaces often represent a rejection of political correctness and reflect a raw emotional response towards a target deemed as the "other" (Hamed, 2020).

Using framing analysis, this article explores, comparatively, user comments regarding migrants on social media platforms that are popular both in the UK and Spain. The main purpose of this research is to identify the predominant frames used by users whose comments contained hate speech against migrants on party pages. These spaces are largely unmoderated, with groups only being closed sporadically and when identified as engaging in illegal activity. Hence, they may appear as spaces where the true views of users can be expressed and so provide research insights into currents of thinking within societies.

2. Hate Speech and Othering

Hate speech is a term that is used widely, sometimes weaponised to silence certain viewpoints (Gelber & McNamara, 2016). However, despite attempts to prevent its spread (see Jougleux, 2022), definitions of hate speech remain loose and open to interpretation. Hate speech is used to encompass language or discourse that expresses strong dislike and discrimination, encourages violence or any kind of attack, or diminishes a person, group, or institution. This broad definition includes expressions used to attack or threaten others or their rights (e.g., other commenters, journalists, politicians, or specific races, ethnicities, etc.) but to attack ideas that are damaging to their image as a member of a group.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) set out a broad taxonomy to help researchers frame hate speech alongside the post-truth communication phenomenon. They suggested three types of "information disorder," which describe the extent the content is intended to cause harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 20). Firstly, they classify disinformation as content that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization, or country (e.g., by creating a false connection using misleading or manipulated content). Secondly, they classify misinformation as false but not created deliberately to cause harm (e.g., satirical content). Thirdly, they classify malinformation as content based on reality but used to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country (e.g., leaks, harassment, or stereotyping). Based on this taxonomy, hate speech can fall into any category as it exaggerates threats intending to violate norms and attack

a group due to a specific identity factor such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or nationality, among others (Emcke, 2019; Rossini, 2020). Rossini (2020, p. 6) argues in this vein that hate speech is a subtype of intolerance because the term proves "too narrow in scope to address intolerant expressions that occur in relatively public digital spaces." Regarding online hate speech, Rossini (2020) emphasizes the need to tackle complex or abusive forms of online discourse. The most overt hate speech is simple to identify; that being said, though false stories or loaded articles that question the fitness of women to govern (Sheckels et al., 2012) or suggest children growing up with same-sex parents could be mentally or even sexually abused (Strand & Svensson, 2019) are clearly forms of hate speech, they are not always classified as such and remain prevalent despite platform moderation. Hence, many types of hate speech are explicit and relatively unequivocal as they explicitly cause harm to victims, for example, dehumanizing people by comparing them to animals or vermin (Williams, 2021). Yet, hate speech can also be implicit, as in arguments that reinforce negative stereotypes and can lead society to develop negative impressions of groups (Rieger et al., 2021). In fact, a widely used form of hate speech, which is not in itself directly threatening, is the use of negative stereotypes, low-level insults, micro-aggressions towards individuals, groups, or institutions, and/or discriminatory and/or negative content based on characteristics, such as race, nationality, religion, gender, physical attributes, ideas, ideologies, etc. Such arguments can move the Overton window, the range of acceptable viewpoints within a society, to encompass xenophobic or misogynistic perspectives (Lilleker & Ozgul, 2021). These forms of discourse should be classified as hate speech as they spread the impression that the targeted other is inferior, less than human or evil, and so represents an existential threat that is harmful to society. However, the challenge in identifying all forms of hate speech is that not all hate speech involves a direct attack or threat and so the hateful nature of the speech is only visible if one takes into account the full context of an argument.

Hence, to understand how hate speech academics should work with a broader definition that includes the context encompassing terms that become weaponised for political purposes. The negative connotation that has become attached to the term "woke" exemplifies an example of implicit hate speech. The term woke was originally popularised by Black Americans in the early 20th century to highlight the importance of being empowered to recognise and overthrow racism and oppression in society. The word gained prominence again with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, campaigns in support of legalizing same-sex marriage, and the #Metoo movement in the 2010s. However, woke has recently been adopted among social conservatives as a pejorative term employed to dismiss the arguments of those classified as "woke." The "woke" are thus classified as extremists who promote progressive social justice

policies which run counter to traditional values. Hence, woke went from a social justice concept to a pejorative term weaponised by the alt-right in an attempt to discredit or silence progressive voices (Cammaerts, 2022). The context here is crucial and relates to how a frame is constructed with clear negative connotations. Framing refers to how a shared understanding and meaning is constructed within a wider social context within which a group can be positioned, for example, the moral versus immoral frame is found to be common within the use of hate speech (Armstrong & Wronski, 2019). Those using hate speech are defenders of the values of a society and so are involved in a moral crusade against those who undermine those values; those framed as immoral can be migrants with different cultural backgrounds or the "woke" who call out anti-immigration campaigners as racist. But frames are complex constructions that may not involve overtly pejorative terms. Consequently, hate speech can only be understood by analysing how terms are used in context; a term may not be in itself derogatory but can be used in a way to define members of an outgroup and connote their exclusion from the mainstream. As Lynch (2022) notes, due to the framing of an argument, terms can develop a fixed meaning which can signal the othering and exclusion of individuals of certain backgrounds or political opinions, the process of othering can shape attitudes which underpin affective polarisation and the dehumanisation of groups.

Framing research dates back to sociology (Goffman, 1974; Sádaba, 2006) and psychology (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), and has become a reliable method in communication research (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996), media studies (Herrero-Diz & Pérez-Escolar, 2022), and political studies (Fenoll & Rodríguez-Ballesteros, 2017). For Entman (1993, p. 52), framing means to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." The frame emphasizes or gives salience to certain characteristics of a subject and forms the central idea that structures and organizes the information (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In this sense, frames act as cognitive filters that determine how the receiver will interpret and understand the complex world they inhabit (Lippmann, 1922). Hence, to understand the framing strategy within a text it is important to analyse the discourse, the terminology used, the linkages made between different items, the stereotypes employed, etc. These are all common heuristic devices used when framing an argument during social interactions to imply negative and positive associations, as strategically these aid audiences understand the wider context surrounding the specific event and its implications (Lakoff & Johnson, 2001). Thus, the frame is designed to determine the perspective that represents the shared understanding of a situation or problem (Takeshita, 1997). In the field of communication, authors have divided frames into two

general categories: media frames and audience frames (Lin, 2016; Scheufele, 1999). However, in the current digital ecosystem, it is difficult to clearly distinguish between media and audience frames, as they can combine both elite messages and representations of how the individual or a collective perceives, organizes, and interprets (cognitive processes) a topic, event, or situation (Goffman, 1974; Lin, 2016). As Qin (2015, p. 169) suggests, "a major challenge is whether the frames in social media are media or audience frames in nature, given that social media are a mixture of institutional accounts and individual accounts." Therefore, in this study, it has been deemed appropriate to adopt the perspective of audience frames because individual users and communities actively produce content (user-generated content) on the analysed social platforms.

There is significant evidence that hate speech is a feature of online discourse (Rossini, 2020), and this has led to its prioritisation in discussions regarding the regulation of online environments with little impact on its prevalence. Rieger et al. (2021) suggest five reasons why hate speech is particularly problematic online. The first one is continuity: As Gagliardone et al. (2015) note, moderators can remove hateful content but this may have already been reposted to the same or different platforms. This highlights the second reason: Hate speech is spreadable. Due to its contentious and emotive nature, hate speech gains visibility quickly within an ecosystem designed for sharing and spreading content (Jardine, 2019). Thirdly, and most relevant to certain platforms, users tend to be more aggressive or extreme when they feel they are anonymous. Anonymity makes users feel less accountable, which empowers them to "be more outrageous, obnoxious, or hateful" (Brown, 2018, p. 298) either to gain rewards from other users or because they feel they are free to say what they really think. Mondal et al. (2017) found anonymity fuels hate in online media environments, particularly concerning race or sexual orientation, and that, in turn, this can lead to further and more extreme expressions. Fourthly, using hate speech is seen, instantly, as victimless as the actual target tends to be an invisible other unlikely to be present in the space where hate speech is expressed (Rieger et al., 2021). This leads to a disinhibition that is often absent in real-life contexts. Finally, hate speech can be "memeified" and mixed with satire or humour (Rieger et al., 2021), making it even more spreadable. Memeification is a common practice among members of alt-right movements (Rieger et al., 2021) with sharing denoting membership of a user community with specific knowledge which delineates them from "clueless outsiders" (Tuters & Hagen, 2020).

Attempts to monitor and exclude such forms of language have proven largely ineffectual (Jougleux, 2022). Some terms can be detected automatically (e.g., swear words, obscenities) however it is a simple process for commenters to use acronyms, symbols, or substitute words to offend or affront others and go undetected by automated moderators. Artificial intelligence can only

detect certain words and phrases or styles of argumentation which are likely to correlate with the use of hate speech. They can detect demeaning and negative language, words in capital letters (indicating yelling), mockeries, and insults. However, the full range of language forms encompassed by definitions of hate speech cannot be detected and often the context of an argument matters. Hence the diverse ways language online clearly violates social norms of conversation and politeness and is consistent with racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and discriminatory language remains highly visible and prevalent (see Suhay et al., 2017). The detection and understanding of hate speech is important. Firstly, revealing such strains of argumentation sheds light on currents of thought within a society (Lilleker & Bonacci, 2017; Zurutuza-Muñoz & Lilleker, 2018), if not their strength. Secondly, in understanding what attitudes exist, strategies can be developed to counter those attitudes. Blunt methods such as censorship are limited in their ability but also come under attack for placing limits on freedom of speech despite it being recognised that caution is needed when allowing hate speech under the aegis of free speech. In the paradox of tolerance, Popper (1996) highlighted the inconsistencies of extending freedom of speech to extremism as their discourse by nature threatens core democratic values of pluralism and inclusivity. As Popper (1996) noted, if extremists gained power they would immediately silence dissenting voices. Thus, those who cry foul when their freedom of speech is restricted are likely the same individuals who would advocate its extinction. However, while moderation is valid, its imperfection as a tool means alternative approaches are required. Radical behaviours and extremist ideological polarization have become a global concern, substantially affecting social relationships and impacting public understanding of the world (Pérez-Escolar & Noguera-Vivo, 2022). Hence, it is far more important to find ways to prevent people from using hate speech, to stop its spread, and to ensure prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes do not become normalised within society.

3. The Context of Hate Speech: Migration and the Far-Right in the UK and Spain

Hate speech that targets immigrants tends to be the preserve of far-right political parties and groupings that adopt an exclusionary populist discourse (Jessoula et al., 2021). Hence, we analyse discourse within user comments on the pages dedicated to the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and VOX. Both parties have been at the forefront of increasing the visibility of immigration as an issue, causing more mainstream and centrist parties to adopt tougher policies.

3.1. UK

In the UK, Enoch Powell, then a prominent Conservative, made immigration a political issue in 1968 when warn-

ing of "rivers of blood" flowing through the streets in the coming conflict between the white British and growing Black populations (Atkins, 2018). Powell's speech gave succour to a growing far-right that brought violence to the streets of many UK cities leading to a backlash from immigrant communities (Renton, 2018). These tensions calmed, but residual xenophobia remained despite declarations that the UK was a truly multicultural nation (Wetherell, 2008). The bombings of the London tube by Islamist extremists in 2007, the increase of migration from Eastern European countries after the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004, and that of Bulgaria and Romania in 2014, giving them access to freedom of movement, and the migration of refugees across the English Channel, which emerged as an issue in 2018, kept immigration on the agenda from the 2010s onwards. As early as 2005, Conservatives had an election pledge to "control immigration" in response to migration from Poland. Pressure from UKIP, who claimed 30 million Bulgarians and Romanians would have open access, aligned immigration with EU membership, partially leading to the close vote to leave the union in 2016. In the lead-up to the referendum, UKIP was found to have a large and very active following on social media (Lilleker & Jackson, 2017) and their controversial discourse allowed them to gain significant attention from mainstream media (Murphy & Devine, 2020). The referendum was widely seen as a largely successful attempt by the Conservative government to head off the electoral challenge from UKIP (Smith, 2018) although the 2015 election victory meant the promise of a referendum had to be honoured. The referendum result saw an initial backlash against any person perceived to be of a non-British heritage, but focus was recently placed upon refugees attempting to make their way to the UK via dangerous crossings of the English Channel by small boats. The numbers are reported to have increased from 299 in 2018 to 28,526 in 2021 according to official figures reported by Sky News (Scott, 2022). UKIP's prominence declined after the referendum and its charismatic leader Nigel Farage left to form the Brexit party. However, it built a following amongst working-class white males with an angry disposition towards liberal values by positioning itself as a defender of Britishness. UKIP's anti-immigration discourse, focusing on both refugees and economic migrants also infected political discourse with a number of news outlets as well as leading ministers being called out for fuelling anti-immigrant sentiment (Creighton & Jamal, 2022).

3.2. Spain

Immigration has not featured among the top concerns of the Spanish public but has been placed onto the agenda by far-right party VOX repeatedly making statements and messages vilifying immigrants, specifically those from Muslim countries. This political strategy has incited extremist attitudes in some circumstances. On November 4, 2019, in Sevilla, Rocío Monasterio,

VOX's leader, visited a centre for unaccompanied minors in La Macarena to condemn young immigrants as provoking "insecurity," generating "huge problems" for the neighbourhood and creating an "unsustainable" situation. Although some traditional media and fact-checking platforms, such as *Maldita.es* ("Los bulos que ha usado VOX," 2019) and *Newtral* (González, 2019), denounced Monasterio's falsehoods, her hate speech fuelled xenophobic attacks in some neighbourhoods where migrant populations resided. The Office of the Prosecutor is yet to declare whether Monasterio's speech constituted an incitement to racial hatred.

In early 2021, VOX placed posters inside the Puerta del Sol station (Madrid), claiming: "An unaccompanied minor, [earns] 4,700 euros per month. Your grandmother's pension, [is] 426 euros per month." Even though the claim is untrue and could incite hatred, the Spanish justice system dictated it was not a hate crime as it was political propaganda. For these reasons, organizations such as UNICEF or International Amnesty (Equipo de Migración y Refugio de Amnistía Internacional, 2021), have alerted that unaccompanied minors have been targets of disinformation in Spain, enabling hate speech and discrimination. Even the term "MENA" (after *menor extranjero no acompañado*, or unaccompanied foreign minors in English) has become a pejorative term due to its framing by VOX as a synonym for criminality (Rubio Hancock, 2019).

Through their strategy, VOX has become the third force in the Spanish Congress (Martín Plaza, 2019) and gained popularity on social networks (Aladro Vico & Requeijo Rey, 2020). VOX's followership on Instagram overtook Podemos and has four times the numbers of Ciudadanos, PP, and PSOE. Although currently experiencing an internal crisis (López Agudín, 2022), VOX's popularity among particular societal groups is growing, mainly white males of the millennial generation, indicating they attract voters disenchanted with the political establishment (Morillo, 2022). Immigration, income, and conservative traditions are the party's central issues (Aragó, 2019) and it gains support in cities and towns with higher rates of immigration from outside the EU. Indeed, VOX has become ingrained in areas that have not developed their own political identity, e.g., Murcia, Almería, and Castilla-La Mancha (Aragó, 2019), though it struggles to gain supporters where there is a consolidated political identity, such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, Navarra, or Galicia. VOX also lure voters away from the PP as well as Ciudadanos (Lerín Ibarra, 2022). In addition, VOX's voters are usually Catholics and frequent churchgoers who strongly identify with the Spanish national state; they also have lower education levels but a higher income (Lerín Ibarra, 2022). Therefore, VOX appears to gain similar supporters to former US President Trump.

4. Methodology

We conducted a qualitative analysis involving the close reading of comments of posts that attracted the most intense discussion (multiple comments by different users) on pages set up to be supportive of UKIP and VOX on social media platforms (Facebook and Reddit in the case of the UK; Forocoches and Reddit for the Spanish context). These pages are public: In the case of Reddit they are accessible to anyone visiting the site; for Facebook groups you can view the posts independently or if you are a member of a group. While we recognise that a minority of social media users follow any political organisations—few of them follow parties and fewer follow more extremist parties—their discourse is argued to gain high traction due to the shareability of their content (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Hence, focusing on the content of the pages of these parties provides insights into the more extreme content that might be available online. Given the debates around immigration in both countries and high-profile cases where politicians have been accused of utilising pejorative language, it is useful to detect how supporters of the most extreme parties construct arguments that may filter into online discourse. Hence our qualitative analysis of discourse is designed to identify the predominant frames in user comments that contained hate speech against migrants on these party's pages on popular platforms. All posts referencing migrants, immigrants, or immigration in English or Spanish were collected from the pages of the parties on both platforms from January 2020 to December 2022. Posts were selected purposefully (based on them receiving more than 100 comments) and then a random sample of 50 per party and per platform, a total of 200 posts and comment threads, was selected for discourse analysis, which determined the most common terms and narratives used referring to immigrants (Laver et al., 2003). Although there were intuitive expectations, we did not develop hypotheses regarding the frames that would be discovered. Instead, we chose to assess the patterns that existed within the discourse of these users without developing predetermined categories. The reason for this strategy is that language is an essential element that allows us to conceptualize everyday life. This implies, therefore, that commenters innately introduce their convictions and perceptions in the construction of even the most straightforward arguments (Lind & Salo, 2006). Hence, the analysis is a reflection of how these users interpret their reality and construct shared frames, in particular how their framing meant them "identifying a type of object or experience by emphasising certain properties, delocalising others, and obscuring others'' (Lakoff & Johnson, 2001, p. 205). Due to the selection of the overall sample of posts by topic and then random selection of posts due to user comments, we cannot make claims about their representativeness of the attitudes of the supporters of these parties. But, our analysis allows us to understand the dynamics of discourse, which is triggered by the topic of immigration in a way that cannot be reliably determined using automated text analysis programmes (Angus et al., 2013). The qualitative approach enables us to develop an analytical

narrative regarding references to immigrants as well as offer examples of the discourse produced by the more highly engaged followers of these parties. We set out the results in a thematic narrative identifying the prevalent common frames prior to drawing the data together within our conclusion. To comply with research ethics policies, no names are used to attribute quotes despite the pages being publicly viewable.

5. Results

The pages we draw our data from are vibrant communities. UKIP's Facebook page has 484,000 followers and VOX 491,000. Across the posts selected, there were over 800 unique usernames who left comments, suggesting many followers monitor the pages, or the posts that are made visible through the Facebook algorithm, and given the nature of the comments many of them respond when the posts trigger an emotional reaction. UKIP's Facebook page has declined in support since Brexit and the departure of its leader and main publicist Nigel Farage. The page is almost entirely dedicated to commentary on the UK border, the relationship between the UK and the EU, and the nature and composition of UK society. Tellingly one of the highest-rated posts is a screenshot of a list of ethnic groups arranged alphabetically with the accusation that "white" being last is an example of "woke" culture. There is also a degree of transphobia and misogyny expressed by some commenters as part of a general anti-woke campaign which references the evils of cancel culture that those designated as woke are imposing on society. These terms are used widely as criticisms of events that are described without context. Reddit discussions are less easy to locate, with the UKIP community page having been dormant for some years. However, references to the party, which often combines them with more fringe far-right groupings such as the British Democrats and English Democrats, suggest the far-right represents the only voices of truth and common sense. The frames that are found within the selected posts across both sites and nations are set out below.

5.1. Framing Immigrants: Leaches and Criminals Who Do Not Belong

The least tendentious frame used when immigration relates to them being a drain on resources. Posts will frame the housing of migrants as an injustice and comments will then be supportive of that frame. Initially, comments can use a measured town and highlight reasonable concerns regarding the strains on public services. But there is a clear juxtaposition between the underserving outsiders and the deserving British or Spanish. The latter group is framed as increasingly marginalized—economically or socially—because "the system" is biased in favour of outsiders who should not have rights. Hence criticisms couched within valid concerns incite other users to inflame the argument using pejorative

terminology. Immigrants are described as taking jobs away from British workers or taking advantage of Spanish public services, such as health assistance or education. Anecdotal evidence is used widely to reinforce these points. Stories are told of "a friend who lost his job" or "a friend who knows someone" who did not receive urgent hospital care because doctors were treating migrants instead. On the VOX Reddit page users complained that Spanish families did not receive aid to buy school textbooks, while the children of immigrants, who "spurn Spanish education and not even go to classes" (*desprecian la educación española y no van ni a clase*), receive free books. The comments relating to this frame are mixed, some promote hostility by framing immigrants as competitors for resources who are advantaged by the system, but some comments do include pejorative terms. "Leeches" is a common term, suggesting immigrants "suck" resources out of society but give nothing back. Some claim immigrants actively seek to steal resources. Hate speech is used in both VOX communities displaying anger and indignation when claiming Spanish citizens lack decent housing because the state supposedly gives away houses to illegal immigrants; or for not having work because immigrants steal jobs. VOX communities argue that immigrants arrive to claim benefits or take money from the system to send to their home countries are often referenced as facts with minimal evidence. There is also evidence of prejudice against immigrants of colour. Some commenters question the housing of Ukrainian refugees as further stretching resources, but this policy is defended on the grounds their stay is temporary as well as claiming Ukrainian refugees arrive with values closer to those of the host nation as this argument suggests:

> A second-generation African who fails at school and cannot get a job is more likely to join the ranks of BLM and other radical leftist organisations in the belief that he has been the victim of discrimination, than will a second-generation Ukrainian who will be more likely to attribute his failure to either his level of ability or the amount of effort he has made to succeed.

The frame, however, emphasizes the notion that only those who "belong" in each nation should be entitled to societal benefits and, therefore, cutting immigrants' rights to access public services is necessary. The notion of immigrants deliberately arriving to "steal" benefits they have not earned is made explicit at points, as in the argument that should the state "cut their benefits...they won't come."

The second prevalent frame involves arguing that immigrants do not possess the same values as the British or Spanish and so they will not follow recognised norms and laws of society. On one level their lack of loyalty to the nation positions them as willing to exploit the benefits of being in the nation, at another it frames all immigrants as potential criminals. The claim is most

explicitly made in comments on VOX's pages. Consistent with the party line, users claim illegal migrants "invade" Spain to commit serious crimes; therefore, Spain must "expatriate them to guarantee that Spanish people live safely." In the UK and Spain criticism is levelled at the European international cooperation, users claim it is a mechanism that encourages illegal immigration mafias which encourage massive illegal migratory flows and act as recruiters for jihadist groups. On Reddit communities, conspiracy theories and disinformation usually feed hate speech. There are claims that illegal immigrants who arrived in dinghies, *pateras* in Spanish, were guilty of spreading coronavirus all over the country. Forocoches users offer anecdotes describing crimes committed by MENA. These are presented as evidence that the Spanish Criminal Code must be revised urgently so there is harsher sentencing. In Ceuta and Melilla, it is argued that it is imperative to "build a wall" to prevent people from Morocco from invading Spanish territories. On UKIP pages, any stories of people of colour committing crimes are deployed as evidence of the dangers of migration independent of the actual backgrounds of those accused and/or convicted. Any evidence is used to promote an anti-immigration and xenophobic narrative, with comments on shared news items adhering to an exclusionary line. As one user exclaimed regarding a story about two shop owners with Asian names who were found guilty of sexually assaulting an underage boy in their storeroom: "Dirty fucking scum!!! Then people wonder why we don't want them here."

There is clear evidence that isolated incidents involving individuals that can be identified as having non-British origins are used to tarnish the reputations of all from similar backgrounds. Within this frame, there are also claims that certain areas of cities, in particular London, have become ghettos for immigrant communities where "it is no longer safe for white people to go." Claims that parks can no longer be used "unless you're a n*****r" offer the impression that there are deep racialised divides within cities with communities co-existing antagonistically as opposed to integrating. This theme, which focuses on a lack of shared norms and values, is most prominent on Reddit and Forocoches. Alongside evidence of criminality, there are comments that immigrants violate a range of norms, and claims that they are uncivilised and likely to abuse women and children. This frame also incites the strongest forms of hate speech. There is frequent use of terms such as "dirty," "plague-ridden," or "scum," there are frequent examples of dehumanisation, comparing them to rats, plague rats, vermin, etc.

The third common frame explores the notion of the clash of civilisations, is largely Islamophobic but suggests most migrants of colour are from a homogenous, alien culture which links to a longstanding conspiracy theory that coloured races are attempting to replace white European populations. Some stories seem anodyne, such as the post reporting the closure of a British public house and conversion to a Mosque. But comments quickly reference the conspiratorial metanarrative, for example: "Typical, they want to destroy every aspect of white British culture."

Similarly focusing on the clash of cultures, many users comment negatively about the cruelty of preparation of halal meat, cultural norms, around arranged marriages, and gender segregation practised in Mosques presenting these as evidence Muslims pose an existential threat to European society. Hence a key feature is an Islamophobic discourse and the expression of strong Islamophobic attitudes. It is common to find pejorative expressions on Forocoches and Reddit such as *moros de mierda* ("shitty Moors") or in the UK to suggest all Muslims are potential rapists or terrorists. The notion of a new "Moorish" invasion is discussed in Reddit communities, referencing the Reconquest of Spain in 1492. Comments such as "We Spaniards did not reconquer Spain for nothing" (*Los españoles no reconquistamos España para nada*) highlight some feel a new "reconquest" is needed, giving strength to the motto "Make Spain great again!" (*Hagamos España grande otra vez!*), echoing Trump's and VOX's electoral propaganda.

The Islamophobic narrative links to a wider rejection of multiculturalism. Forocoches users criticize all other ethnic groups, their language, customs, and religion. Consistent with VOX campaign themes they promote the homogeneity of the nation and like many populist far-right groups claim all foreign influence to be a threat (Carter & Pérez, 2015; Mudde, 2000). These influences range from Brussels and the European Parliament as well as the more nebulous forces of multiculturalism and globalism. The discourse indicates an aspiration that all citizens must share the same national origin and ethnic features favouring ethnic Hispanicism. These statements of preference encompass expressions like "Spanish people first" (*los españoles primero*) but do not necessarily involve offensive language or insults toward migrants; they can however incite tensions between communities.

An interesting example of how ethnicity and culture become prominent was found across the UKIP pages during the September 2022 Conservative leadership campaign with the final choice being between British Asian Rishi Sunak and White British female Liz Truss. Beyond the comment that Britain was "no longer a place for white men," concerns were raised over what Sunak might legalise. The comment "will I be allowed loads of wives" was tongue in cheek but indicative of the notion Sunak might impose non-British norms on UK society. Despite being of Indian Hindu descent, some asked whether Sunak would open the door to imposing Sharia law in Britain, when challenged on that commenters responded "they're all the same, that lot" suggesting any person of colour has alien values. Similarly, arguments suggested that people of colour stick together and support one another, so disadvantaging the white British. This frame exacerbates perceptions of racial differences while at the same time offering no differentiation of people of colour

independent of their background. In this vein, it was expected that such figures would be softer on immigration, although many commenters referenced the introduction of harsh environmental policies by former Home Secretary Priti Patel, including a plan to remove illegal immigrants and house them in Rwanda. But racial solidarity was even referenced in this case, as her policies "only involved Africans…bet she opens the door if they're Pakis"; despite the fact that Patel is Ugandan-Indian and not Pakistani. The heritage of Patel and Sunak is correctly labelled by one commenter, claiming they were part of a "Hindu mafia taking over our country." The outsider narrative remains strong and users consistently questioned the motives of any person of colour, promoting a culture of suspicion of those of non-British racial heritage by classifying them as un-British.

6. Conclusion

The study of hate speech towards immigrants in extremist online communities has provided a valuable framework for understanding the ideological paradigm of these groups. Results show that hate speech towards migrants in the UK and Spain share keyframes. Immigrants are framed as a drain on resources, illegal, potential, or actual criminals, and discourse is coloured by the worship of traditional social norms and national customs—conventionalism. The strident language used represents an aggressiveness towards otherness which leads to homogenous thinking (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981), the need to transfer strength to the nation and the communities or leaders who are like-minded and defend traditional homeland values, and a closed or dogmatic mentality (Rokeach, 1960). These attitudes and beliefs may be expressed in such bold forms in ghettoes within the social media environment, but likely reflect a wider current of thinking within both societies. These ideas can also be transferred out of these communities and spread more widely across social media platforms and in some cases become tropes in some mainstream media outlets. Evidence suggests that exposure to negative stories relating to immigration can lead to the development of more extremist attitudes as users view increasingly extreme content (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021). Research suggests that the attitudes that lead to the use of hate speech can become more widespread normalising the attitudes and potentially the use of hateful frames when referencing any individual perceived as being of another race, ethnicity, or culture.

It may seem surprising that extreme language can be found on social media platforms. However, as noted, even where automated systems prevent such expressions they can be circumnavigated. Moderation remains valuable and proved crucial in fighting disinformation during the Covid-19 pandemic (Pérez-Escolar & Herrero-Diz, 2022); however, it is a blunt instrument that is limited both by the constraints of automated text detection as well as by the implementation policies of platform owners. Therefore, legislation on social media platforms can only have a limited impact. Censorship, such as the bans imposed on Trump and other individuals, can only push such attitudes to the fringes, although the less visible such arguments are the less they can be normalised. Avoiding normalisation is crucial as it can lead to widespread societal rejection of any representations of groups which are routinely framed as the other. Censorship can also, to some extent, ensure the claims of far-right voices do not feature in mainstream media reporting. If their voices do not appear on mainstream channels they are less likely to be seen, shared, or promoted by bots, and so remain ghettoed. But, to prevent hate speech requires an eradication of both the attitudes and conditions which provide succour to such arguments. Firstly, this means correcting xenophobic and other discriminatory attitudes within society. Our data suggest these attitudes exist and that there is a strong emotional attachment to the frames constructed around certain migrant groups, hence these societies would appear to contain a serious threat to multiculturalism and inclusion. Secondly, however, it is important to develop strategies that will correct the societal inequities that fuel anger and which can be channelled and given a voice by rightist extremists. Without these corrections it is hard to see a way by which the attitudes that are expressed in hate speech can be eradicated.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Darren Lilleker is professor of political communication at Bournemouth University. His expertise is political campaigning and public engagement in politics, in particular the positive and negative impact of digital technologies on political engagement and participation. He has published widely on political communication and its impacts. Past works include *Political Communication and Cognition* (Palgrave, 2014) and *The Psychology of Democracy* (Routledge, 2022). He is co-editor of the *Journal of Visual Political Communication*.

Marta Pérez-Escolar is assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Loyola University (Seville, Spain). Her research emerges from the synergy of civic and political participation, public opinion, disinformation, hate speech, and ideology. She has recently published *Hate Speech and Polarization in Participatory Society* (Routledge, 2022) and obtained a José Castillejo International Mobility Stays for Young Post-Doctoral Researchers in 2022, where she spent six months in a research stay at Bournemouth University (UK).