

The Most Masculine Christianity: Metapolitics and Far-Right Normalization in Orthodox Christian Online Content

1 Introduction

The modern right is increasingly drawing on religion, from the rhetoric of political leaders such as Putin, Orban, or Giorgia Meloni, through tech billionaire Peter Thiel's lectures on the Antichrist, to the Christian turn of influential figures such as Jordan Peterson, Joe Rogan, or Tommy Robinson. They all rely on, address, and kindle a digital audience that is, for the first time in history, highly spread out and disconnected, while still extremely targetable thanks to social media algorithms.

The grassroots aspect of this process is captured in the rapid growth of the "orthosphere": a decentralized online network where Orthodox Christianity, politics of gender, and far-right politics converge. This project explores the orthosphere as an engine for metapolitics: the gradual reframing of cultural assumptions that makes exclusionary and authoritarian policies appear socially acceptable.

1.1 Description

This project employs the framework of metapolitics (Schilk, 2025) to explore the intertwining of far-right ideas with Orthodox Christian popular theologizing online as a discursive alliance. Drawing on available evidence of the on-going association between Orthodox Christianity and the far-right online, it seeks to explore the directionality and mechanisms of this correlation through a combination of large-scale LLM vector embedding analysis and in-depth process tracing. Data will be collected from diverse types of online content in English, Russian, Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian from the period 2010-2025.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How has the interplay between Orthodox Christian online content and far-right metapolitics evolved between 2010 and 2025 to normalize radical narratives?
2. In what ways has the "orthosphere" adopted far-right notions, and does this represent an appropriation of religious language or the birth of new discourses?
3. What theological, social, or political factors within online Orthodox communities make them receptive to far-right narratives?
4. What are the causal mechanisms through which lay interpretations of theology facilitate the migration of far-right narratives into mainstream religious spaces?

2 State of the Field

2.1 Metapolitics & Mainstreaming

The mainstreaming and normalization of far-right discourse, while extensively researched, have been explored either qualitatively in the context of official political discourse (Rydgren, 2018) or quantitatively for the monitoring of radicalization spread (Berjawi et al., 2023). The first approach remains blind to low-level political discourse, while the second does not reflect the complexity of social discourse.

Schilk (2025), building on Keller (2024) theorizes far-right mainstreaming as a set of discursive practices, such as association, appropriation, and repetition ('discursive alignment'), the far-right seeks to produce knowledge about the world, that ultimately frame a new mode of understanding and doing politics: what Schilk (2025) calls metapolitics.

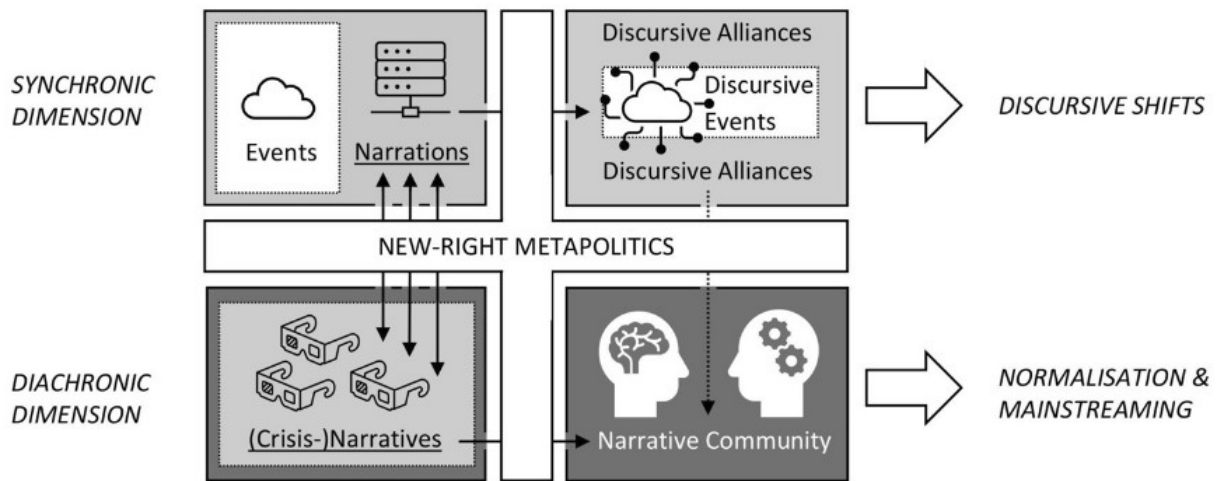


Figure 1: Analytical framework towards New Right metapolitics (Schilk, 2025)

Schilk (2025) theorizes metapolitics as an interaction between **narrations** (ways of describing or interpreting certain events or phenomena), **narratives** (larger stories about humanity and the world used as reference points), **discourses**, and **communities** (fig. 1). Exploring New Right magazines, he identifies overarching crisis-narratives that guide narration, while also galvanizing communities around themselves. Schilk uses the idea of discursive alliances through certain narrations as a way of colonizing new communities. The results of this cycle are (1) discursive shifts in New Right-adjacent discourses and (2) the normalization and mainstreaming of far-right narratives into a wider audience. Schilk's empirical focus on authoritative media allows him to clearly identify the dynamics of narratives and narrations, but does not test the low-level interaction of far-right narratives with other narrative communities.

Green et al. (2023) complement Schilk's results by following (through process tracing) typical narrative pathways for the radicalization of *incels* online: a community of self-perceived '**in**voluntary **cel**ibates', which gradually guides feelings of sexual injustice to narrations of misogyny ('red pill'), racism ('race pill') and, finally, violence ('black pill'), drawing on the red-blue pill metaphor from the popular Matrix franchise. The paper demonstrates how coexisting narratives, through discursive alliances and repetition, guide user behaviour towards radicalism.

2.2 Orthodoxy and the Far-right

Orthodoxy has seen a rapid growth in the US, especially among young men, that have come to be known as ‘orthobros’ (Graham, 2025). This rise is heavily reflected online, where discourses on masculinity and religion interact heavily with notions of authoritarianism and social exclusion (Khalil, 2025; Riccardi-Swartz, 2023).

To reflect the decentralized nature of theological notions within the orthosphere, Riccardi-Swartz (2023) coins the term *techno-theologoumena*. This concept captures the online interaction of Orthodox theology with themes and groups on which official Orthodox institutions don’t have clear positions, such as modern gender roles, the relationship between church and nation-states, or the relationship between Orthodox teaching and the theory of evolution. This term is closely linked to Schilk’s ideas of discursive alliances through narrations, whereby far-right narratives are associated with Orthodox theology through a process of reassertion of certain interpretations of history, society, and the world.

2.3 Vector Embeddings as a Qualitative Analysis Tool

Vector embeddings, the multi-dimensional representations of language at the core of LLM models, are capable of classifying nuanced meaning in both supervised and unsupervised (zero-shot) settings (Ghafouri, 2024), thus functionally ‘understanding’ it. The extent to and ways in which such models operate with human meaning is open to discussion, but to date there is relatively little research delving into these capabilities.

3 Project Description

3.1 Hypothesis

The project hypothesizes that, over the past 15 years, interaction between far-right-adjacent discourse and Orthodox Christian discourse has increased (discursive alliance), forming diverse theological and political narrations that form chains of normalizations (through repetition and association) over time and across web spaces capable of reframing secular far-right politics into theological narratives.

3.2 Key Terms

The base building block of the project’s methodology are **documents**: paragraphs of online content.

Narrations are framings, arguments, or ideas found in a document (Schilk, 2025). These will be any prominent themes in the dataset, with particular attention paid to radical narrations.

Techno-theologoumena are narrations that engage in interpreting theological problems and authors with reference to issues of modernity (nation-states, technology, internationalism etc.)

(Far-right) radical content is defined as any narration that: (1) explicitly advocates for violence against or scapegoats a minority, or (2) rejects democratic legitimacy in favor of modern authoritarian political regimes. **Injections** of radicalism happen when a radical notion appears in an otherwise non-radical context and **mainstreaming** is the process of spread of a radical notion within an otherwise non-radical node.

Narrative communities are networks of texts with shared narrations.

Discursive alliances are intense interactions between narrative communities, in this study represented by increased sharing of narrations.

4 Research Design

4.1 Data Collection

Data will be gathered through web scraping of publicly available Orthodox web content from the period 2010-2025 in English, Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, and Serbian. It will include popular content, such as blog posts and comments, social media posts, and YouTube video and podcast transcripts. The study will rely on snowball sampling, starting from known orthosphere spaces and will use the references therein to identify new spaces of interest (both mainstream and far-right). The collection criteria are purposefully vague and strive to include as much potentially relevant data as possible. Finally, a vector database will be created, with each document being represented by an LLM embedding.

4.2 Exploration and Narration Coding

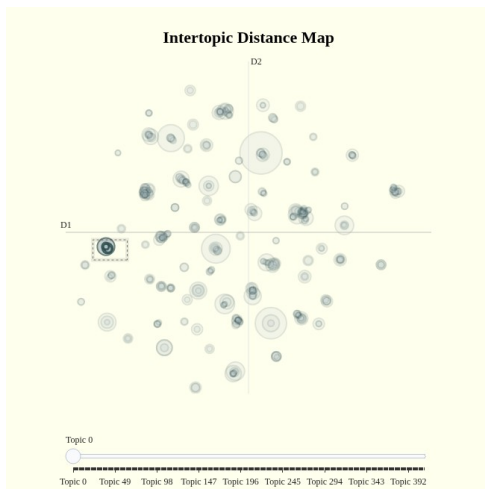


Figure 2: LLM-based thematic model cluster selection

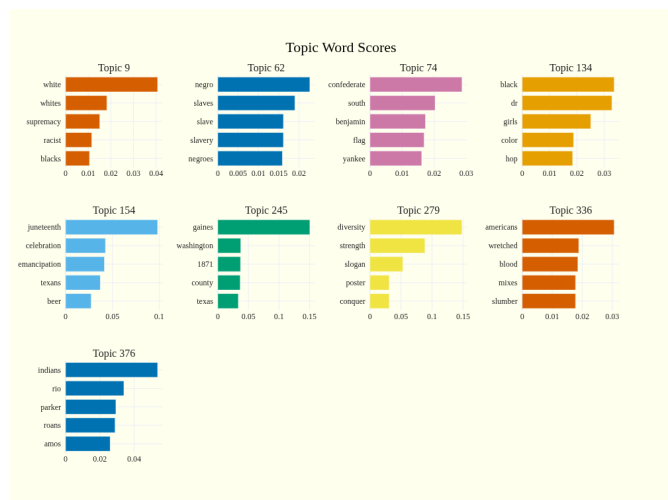


Figure 3: Selected theme keywords

The first step of analysis will be the identification of metapolitical narration codes. These will include already identified talking points and tropes of the far-right, such as white genocide or antisemitism. Then, these codes will be compared to a topic model of the full dataset (figures 2-4) and codes will be created for any prominent ideas in the dataset. Some of the narrations will be flagged as belonging to far right radical discourse (e.g. white genocide). A small-scale example of this toolset is available at Tonchev (2025), where I have scraped and loaded The Orthosphere , a conservative Christian blog active since 2012.

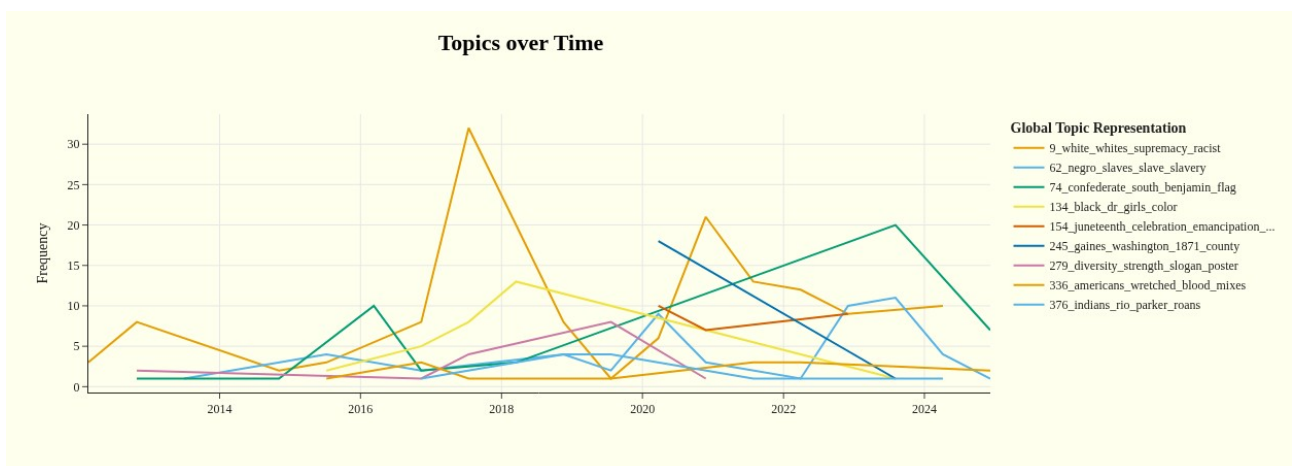


Figure 4: Theme presence over time

After identifying narrations within the dataset, a ‘Gold Standard’ sample will be semi-manually coded for each language by using the help of vector querying to find semantically similar documents. The coded

sample will be used to train and test an LLM classifier that will automatically code the remaining dataset. The results of this coding will be continuously verified through the subsequent qualitative exploration.

4.3 Graph Analysis

The coded documents will be used to create two parallel graph models: with users and with webspaces as nodes. Any two documents sharing a coding between nodes will form an edge. By calculating the proportion of radical-flagged content in each node, a node radicalism score will be created ($R_i \in [0,1]$).

This will be used to test whether:

1. Inter-node radicalism tends to grow over time.
2. Radicalism tends to transfer to closely linked nodes over time.
3. The graph will form distinct neighbourhoods, where similar narrations are prominent and that will correspond to Schilk's idea of narrative communities.
4. Certain narrations will show higher betweenness, and will function as prominent bridges between two or more communities.

4.4 Network Topology & Case Selection

By using radicalization scores (R_i), the study will identify the mainstream and far-right super-clusters of the graph. Those are expected to be distinct, while being linked through high-betweenness nodes. It is also assumed that the networks of different languages will have similar characteristics and will thus be viable for parallel analysis. If this assumption is not met, the qualitative study will be narrowed down to use only sources in English for process tracing. The strongest link chains ($N=3-4$) between mainstream ($R_i < .1$) and far-right ($R_i > .9$) nodes will be used as positive cases to be explored in process tracing.

4.5 Process Tracing

To capture the mechanism of mainstreaming, the study traces specific **Discursive Chains** across the network. The **Independent Variable (X)** is the injection of a specific 'Radical Narration' (e.g., exclusionist nativism) into a mainstream theological discourse.

The study hypothesizes that for X to result in **Normalization (Y)**—defined as the acceptance of the narration within mainstream clusters—it must pass through a specific **Causal Mechanism (M): Theological Validation**. This mechanism operates through 'techno-theologoumena' (Riccardi-Swartz, 2023), which reframes the political narration as a metaphysical necessity (e.g., reframing the war in Ukraine as war for Orthodoxy).

By tracing these chains temporally, the project avoids assuming a unidirectional flow from Far-Right to Orthodoxy. It empirically tests whether and how theological language is deployed to 'wash' radical narratives, making them palatable to mainstream religious audiences.

4.6 Limitations and Pitfalls

A major limitation of the project is its focus on content rather than individuals. This is necessitated by the inherent anonymity of online users, but it limits the results' real-life conclusions. Nonetheless, by analyzing content connections, the project is capable of demonstrating the ways discourses function and shift, while also outlining typical pathways for individual radicalization.

While the project uses publicly available online data, it touches on sensitive topics and risks to deanonymize online users. To prevent this, users will be pseudonymized at data collection and no PII (Personally Identifiable Information) will be stored in the long-term database. Analysis will be performed on aggregate narrative clusters, not individual profiles, ensuring compliance with EU research ethics standards.

The project is also fairly novel in its methodology and, while there is evidence that LLMs are capable of parsing and classifying in-depth meaning, the technology is still not fully understood and may pose unexpected problems. As a proof of concept, I have developed and published an online dashboard that showcases an LLM's capability of capturing discourse themes and meanings, demonstrating the method's feasibility (Tonchev, 2025).

Another pitfall is that Orthodox Christianity online is under-studied and the already suggested mechanisms of English-speaking Orthodoxy online may turn out to be fairly isolated from Orthodox Christian content in Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, or Greek. In such case, the project will accommodate this discrepancy and try to explain its causes in a potential article.

5 Statement of Fit

I believe I possess the right skillset to complete the project I outlined within four years, combining a strong background and experience in the social sciences, and professional experience as a Data Engineer and Data Scientist. My command of the languages which the study will cover, as well as my familiarity with Orthodoxy, ensures that I can detect and code for nuanced interpretations, jargon and dog-whistles.

I would be extremely excited to work alongside the EUI faculty. In particular, I believe my research interests are perfectly aligned with Dr. Kevin Munger’s research on AI and online communication, Prof. Elias Dinas’ work on the Greek far-right organization Golden Dawn, and Prof. Jeffrey Checkel’s research on transnationalism and political process tracing.

5.1 Potential Publications

I believe that this project offers opportunities for a number of valuable papers. Methodologically, the project promises fruitful discussions on the capabilities of different LLMs when working with complex meanings, using the qualitative analysis as a baseline. The project can also offer new challenges to existing theoretical frameworks, in particular on the role of religion in radicalization and modern politics, as the literature to date has focused disproportionately on Islamic radicalization. Last but not least, the project will produce a large and novel dataset, which can offer interesting case studies. I believe the proof-of-concept dashboard on the blog *Orthosphere* already offers valuable case studies on performances of lay intellectualism as a tool for alt-right legitimacy or the discursive labour of reconciling racist viewpoints with the inherent universalism of Christianity.

6 Bibliography

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