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Article

Immigrant, Nationalist and Proud: A Twitter Analysis of Indian Diaspora Supporters for Brexit and Trump

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Abstract

The Brexit referendum to leave the EU and Trump's success in the US general election in 2016 sparked new waves of discussion on nativism, nationalism, and the far right. Within these analyses, however, very little attention has been devoted towards exploring the transnational ideological circulation of Islamophobia and anti-establishment sentiment, especially amongst diaspora and migrant networks. This article thus explores the role of the Indian diaspora as mediators in populist radical right discourse in the West. During the Brexit referendum and Trump's election and presidency, a number of Indian diaspora voices took to Twitter to express pro-Brexit and pro-Trump views. This article presents a year-long qualitative study of these users. It highlights how these diasporic Indians interact and engage on Twitter in order to signal belonging on multiple levels: as individuals, as an imaginary collective non-Muslim diaspora, and as members of (populist radical right) Twitter society. By analysing these users' social media performativity, we obtain insight into how social media spaces may help construct ethnic and (trans)national identities according to boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. This article demonstrates how some Indian diaspora individuals are embedded into exclusivist national political agendas of the populist radical right in Western societies.

Keywords

Brexit; diaspora; Indian; integration; multiculturalism; populism; radical right; Trump; Twitter

Issue

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1. Introduction

This article explores the role of British and American-based Indian diaspora supporters for Brexit and Trump. It begins by introducing how the Brexit referendum to leave the European Union and Trump's campaign and presidency in the US (both which at times deliberately targeted the Indian diaspora) utilised populist radical right rhetoric to galvanise support on social media. In response, the emergence of pro-Brexit and pro-Trump social media movements based on identitarian membership, such as 'Sikhs for Britain' and 'Hindus for Trump', as well as the establishment of advocacy organisations such as the Republican Hindu Coalition in the US which openly supported Trump's candidacy, reveals some diasporic Indians as proponents of populist radical right ideas.

One legacy of Indian diaspora political mobilisation in the West is largely based on Hindutva (or Hindu nationalism), an ideology that promotes the superiority of Hindu civilisation from the threat of Islam and Muslim 'invasion'. Hindutva resonates amongst a diaspora keen to preserve their Hindu identity by cultivating a long-distance nationalism that foregrounds belonging 'back home' whilst still creating a sense of collective identity amongst diaspora communities in the West. Sikh and Christian Indian diaspora groups have likewise successfully mobilised in community building efforts that aim to highlight their religious identities in Western multicultural societies. Consequently, non-Muslim Indian diaspora activism has attempted to distinguish a boundary against the Muslim 'other', building on Islamophobic anxiety prevalent in a post-9/11 era. This article thus posits that anti-Muslim

anxiety, and anti-establishment sentiment (who are held accountable for pro-Muslim policies), are core issues that motivate such Indian diaspora communities to support populist radical right agendas.

Following a year-long qualitative study of Indian diaspora Twitter users who express pro-Brexit and pro-Trump views, this article highlights their engagement in political discourse within the Brexit and Trump Twitter-sphere(s). Their interactions help (re)produce key issues and rhetoric within the populist radical right online milieu. Importantly, these users incorporate an ‘integration’ narrative to justify their positioning as ‘good immigrants’ in Western societies (as opposed to non-‘integration’ tendencies of Muslims). By doing so, these diasporic Indians provide insight into how online spaces may help construct meanings of ethnic and (trans)national identities according to boundaries of inclusion/exclusion.

This article highlights online Indian diaspora supporters for Brexit and Trump by situating their expressions of Islamophobia and anti-establishment sentiment in order to embed themselves within the populist radical right agenda of exclusionary nationalism in Western societies. By illuminating what may be assumed as paradoxical political views of an ethnic minority demographic, this article contributes towards understanding and explaining their support for populist radical right ideology in the West.

2. “The Most Imminent and Urgent Threat and Problem That Faces This Country, Namely Open-Door Immigration, and the Security and Social Implications of It”—Nigel Farage¹

Ideologically, the populist radical right promotes a combination of ethno-nationalism, xenophobia expressed as cultural racism, and anti-establishment populism (Rydgren, 2005, 2017). National identity is conflated with a distinct cultural identity rooted in an ethnic past; the populist radical right seeks to ‘preserve’ national culture by keeping separate different cultures, i.e., ethno-pluralism. The contemporary threat of ethno-pluralism is the apprehension that Islam—and consequently, Muslims—is the fundamental ‘other’ in Western societies. Therefore, the populist radical right holds “a visceral opposition to, and demonization of Islam” and consequently, “immigrants from Muslim countries”, whom are viewed as threatening to national values (Kallis, 2015, p. 28; Rydgren, 2007, p. 244) in the post-9/11 era. The populist radical right criticises the ‘elite’ political and media establishment for failing to adequately resolve issues such as immigration, integration, and (ethno-)national identity, using Islam as a placeholder to articulate these grievances.

Whilst demand and supply factors help explain the emergence and success of the populist radical right, including political opportunities and increasing discontent and disaffection with governing institutions and parties,

the role of mass media is also key in disseminating populist radical right discourses and agendas towards a wider audience (Kallis, 2013; Rydgren, 2005). The transnational diffusion of ideas and practices made possible through media and communication technologies reflects a pivotal shift in populist radical right platforms. The effect is a growing global wave that has taken root across numerous locales:

[S]trong points of ideological and political convergence have started to crystallize, turning the radical right into a truly transnational European and occasionally trans-Atlantic force...The topicality of a new range of issues, such as immigration, international terrorism, national sovereignty, globalization...have created a political milieu that has allowed the radical right not only to thrive but also to unite its otherwise disparate and fragmented forces. (Kallis, 2015, p. 28)

This noteworthy phenomenon describes the appeal, and at times, success, of populist radical right movements and parties. In the case of the UK Independence Party (UKIP)-backed Brexit campaign and Trump’s election and presidency, both presented issues that resonated with similar demographics, but delivered them according to local narratives.

During the 2016 referendum campaign for Britain’s membership in the EU, UKIP seized the opportunity to combine its Eurosceptic platform with disdain for Westminster. UKIP took a tactical approach by attacking the establishment for failing to address issues of immigration and integration—escalated by sensational media coverage of the refugee crisis. Indeed, then UKIP leader Nigel Farage “blamed state multiculturalism for the rise of home-grown terrorism in Europe” (Kallis, 2015, pp. 34–35), citing the metropolitan elite for enacting policies that created ‘parallel lives’ and hence, Islamist extremism within communities. In doing so, UKIP portrayed Muslims as a ‘fifth column’ within British society who were a threat to national security, but more importantly, national culture. By linking potential extremist activity of future refugees to past integration policy failures, UKIP promoted a discourse of fear in the present. Given UKIP’s stance as the party which claimed issue ownership on immigration (see Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017), its referendum rhetoric built on pre-existing anxieties surrounding uncontrolled borders.

During the campaign, UKIP employed an extensive social media strategy for Vote Leave. The party significantly used Twitter’s infrastructure as an avenue to garner support for Brexit, including the ability to broadcast the party’s platform to users instead of the mainstream media; setting the discursive framing of the Leave camp; building on previous Eurosceptic movements to create a broader coalition; and providing the appearance of democratic representation in the political realm. Yet, there was “substantial focus on mobi-

¹ Nigel Farage speech, 29 April 2016.

lization of existing supporters, rather than converting new ones” (Usherwood & Wright, 2017, p. 380). Pro-Brexit Twitter users engaged in diffusing information to ideologically similar users, thus creating online “polarized in-groups” as had also occurred in the 2015 general campaign (Segesten & Bossetta, 2016, pp. 14–15). This phenomenon reflects what are termed “ideological cyberghettos” (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017, p. 4) or “homogeneous affective echo chambers” in which individuals selectively expose themselves to sources that reinforce their political opinions (Himmelboim et al., 2016, p. 1395). The extensive use of Twitter bots by the pro-Brexit side additionally helped generate targeted content (Howard & Kollanyi, 2016). In short, UKIP exercised an impressive social media strategy during the EU referendum that helped ensure its populist radical right message had reached an intended audience.

With parallels in rhetoric and strategy to the UKIP-backed Vote Leave campaign (Wilson, 2017), Trump’s campaign likewise galvanised support employing a populist radical right narrative throughout the US national election the same year. Whilst a majority of Trump’s policy proposals were not radical, the campaign’s rhetoric was outwardly hostile towards governing political institutions (Eiermann, 2016). In a study of Trump’s Twitter following, for example, Wang, Niemi, Li and Hu (2016) found that attacks on the Democrats (i.e., the incumbent political party) received the most “likes”; in short, anti-establishment sentiment was a motivating factor for Trump supporters who were largely disaffected with the governing status quo. Further, Trump’s use of informal, direct, and provocative language on Twitter helped construct and normalise the image of a homogenous nation threatened by the dangerous ‘other’ (Kreis, 2017). More research on the Trump campaign’s social media strategy is needed in order to effectively evaluate the extent of online support for populist radical right discourse, although it has been noted how Trump disrupted the norms of election campaigning on social media (Enli, 2017).

3. A New, Growing Base?

It seems paradoxical (and rare) that ethnic minorities and/or immigrants would support populist radical right platforms. As such, there exists very little research on these supporters. Two exceptions are case studies in Sweden and the Netherlands.

The Sweden Democrats (SD) is an ethno-nationalist party with roots in Swedish fascism. Pettersson, Liebkind, and Sakki (2016) found that ethnic minority and/or immigrant SD politicians had complex, fluid, and multifaceted identity constructions. Often revealed was a “discursive tension between an assigned immigrant or ethnic minority identity on the one hand, and an asserted Swedish identity on the other” (Pettersson et al., 2016, p. 637).

By presenting themselves as a ‘good immigrant,’ these politicians reinforced the narrative that immigrants need only to work hard to succeed and will ultimately be accepted in society. As such, ‘elite’ liberals were viewed as pandering to immigrants who are assumed to “not think for themselves” and who are, importantly, non-national (Pettersson et al., 2016, pp. 637–638). Mulinari and Neergaard (2018) similarly found that migrant activists in the SD describe individual stories of hard work as a means of successful integration, as opposed to assumed cultural differences or unwillingness of new migrants to assimilate into Swedish culture. Combined with this narrative was opposition to Islam that feared new migrants of Muslim background would create “enclave societies” and foster the “Islamisation of Sweden” (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2018, p. 14).

In the Netherlands, Roopram and van Steenbergen (2014) analysed Hindustani² voters of the Freedom Party (PVV), a populist radical right party with a strong anti-immigration and anti-Islam platform. Whilst some Hindustani PVV voters promoted a “work ethos” discourse citing concerns of immigration as an economic burden on the welfare state, others feared Islam as a cultural threat to the Netherlands (Roopram & van Steenbergen, 2014, pp. 56–57). The latter spoke of Islamist radicalisation and extremism, connecting historical and cultural narratives of past Muslim rule in India to the contemporary threat of “Islamization” of Dutch society (Roopram & van Steenbergen, 2014, pp. 55–56). This is key as it signals how global Islamophobic tropes can operate and adapt to local contexts, and ultimately, bolster support for populist radical right ideology in the West.

If we are to consider how the SD and PVV appeal to ethnic minorities and/or immigrants, then such insight might also apply to pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Indian diaspora supporters. Islamophobic and anti-establishment views promoted by the Vote Leave campaign and Trump’s campaign and presidency likely resonated with some diasporic Indians³. Yet, the articulation of populist radical right ideas amongst the diaspora is grounded within a historical legacy of anti-Muslim sentiment. The next section highlights the evolution of Indian diaspora political mobilisation in the UK and US as framed according to non-Muslim identity building.

4. Building a Minority Identity

The performance of diasporic identity is a way of simultaneously constructing imaginaries of the homeland and of creating a minority identity outside India. For many within the Indian diaspora, the formation of a minority identity in Western societies is construed along religious lines as reflected in the historical and contemporary politics of nation-building on the subcontinent. Although political mobilisation and activism of Hindu, Sikh, and

² Hindustani refers to Hindus, Muslims, and Christians who migrated as indentured labourers from India to Suriname, and then to the Netherlands.

³ Based on polling data, 33% of British South Asians voted for Brexit in 2016 (Ashcroft Polls) and 16% of Indian Americans voted for Trump in the US national election (National Asian American Survey).

Christian communities in the West has alleviated these religious tensions carried over with the diaspora, one issue remains stark in the post-9/11 era: their distinct framing as non-Muslim religious identities.

Hindutva (or Hindu nationalism) ideology and its organisations have a historical legacy amongst the Hindu diaspora in the UK, US, Canada, the Caribbean, and eastern and southern Africa (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000, p. 435)⁴. Whilst joining in Hindutva activities is a way of building socio-cultural capital with others (Mathew & Prasad, 2000, p. 524), it more importantly provides comfort to a diaspora seeking to define itself in the West (see Bhatt, 2000). The demand from migrants to educate their children in Hindu traditions (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007) reflects an attempt to reconnect with the ‘culture’ of ‘back home’. Hindutva organisations seize upon this opportunity to present a version of Hinduism that can accommodate the diasporic experience.

The shift to multiculturalism as a policy agenda in the West has had a profound impact on diasporic Hindutva organisations, whether serving as ethnic lobbies in party politics, or adopting a human rights discourse in terms of a victimhood narrative (Bhatt, 2000, p. 580; Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007; Kamat & Mathew, 2003; Therwath, 2012; Zavos, 2010, p. 12). In the UK, these organisations regularly feature in British government policies related to diversity, multiculturalism, and community cohesion in the name of religious and cultural plurality (Zavos, 2010, p. 18). Self-described umbrella organisations campaign on issues of Hindu representation in the public sphere, thereby institutionalising (and essentialising) Hindu identity (see Anderson, 2015). In post-9/11 America, Hindutva manifests as a religious lobby to policy makers and legislators, as Hindu advocacy organisations frame their agendas according to US national interest. They distance themselves from the Muslim ‘other’ and exploit anti-Islam sentiments whilst simultaneously proclaim its critics as “Hinduphobic” (Kurien, 2006, 2016). Diasporic Hindutva becomes a mediator of transnational ideological manifestations of anti-Muslim anxiety, albeit adapted to local contexts. It is thus the outcome of a highly politicised agenda that combines transnational and multicultural identity politics.

In addition to diasporic Hindutva, Sikh and Christian diasporas have also played a prominent role in political mobilisation in the West. Of relevance is the rise of some Sikh activism surrounding the narrative of Muslim grooming gangs in the UK, which allegedly target Sikh girls for conversion to Islam (Singh, 2017). For these Sikhs, such cases “often feeds on existing historical narratives and contemporary Sikh/Muslim tensions” which reinforce Muslims as a threat to non-Muslim communities in Western societies (Singh, 2017, p. 6). Indeed, the issue of Muslim grooming gangs (further explored below), has created alliances between diasporic Sikhs, Christians, and Hindus, with counter-jihad organisations

such as the English Defence League, to promote an anti-Muslim agenda (Lane, 2012). In a move towards populist radical right support, such ideological connections have expanded to include issues such as immigration. In Thorleifsson’s (2016) research amongst British Sikh Brexiteers, for example, support for restrictive immigration policies was articulated in order to maintain historic Anglo-Indian links. In the context of the Brexit referendum, not only (dominantly Muslim) migrants from the refugee crisis, but Eastern European migrants from the EU were viewed as not ‘culturally’ belonging to Britain’s national imagined community. Here, British Sikhs evoked a nostalgia for Commonwealth and empire that they perceived as an entitlement for immigrant status.

A lacuna remains in how some diasporic Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians, united by the othering of Islam/Muslims as an approach to integration, translates into support for populist radical right agendas. The following section details a year-long qualitative study of Indian diaspora Twitter users who express support for Brexit and Trump. It posits that anti-Muslim anxiety and anti-establishment sentiment are core issues that motivate such users.

5. Methodology

Unlike a large number of studies conducted on Twitter that mainly incorporate a quantitative approach with data collection (Ampofo, Anstead, & O’Loughlin, 2011; Barbera & Rivero, 2014; Freelon & Karpf, 2014; Froio & Ganesh, 2018; Hartung, Klinger, Schmidtke, & Vogel, 2017; for an exception see Tromble, 2016), this article focuses on a qualitative design that aims to capture the nature of Twitter activity and interactions of users. Thirty-nine Twitter account users were manually chosen of diasporic Indians living in the UK and US who express pro-Brexit and/or pro-Trump political opinions, whether in the form of tweeting original content, retweets, and/or replies to other users. Data collection included diasporic Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians as a way of empirically demonstrating expressions of anti-Muslim Indian identity in the West. At times, Sikh and Christian diaspora users did express disdain for Hindutva, but these users distinguished themselves by explicitly asserting a non-Muslim identity. Their deliberate discursive identification reveals how individuals in the Indian diaspora choose to actively distance themselves from Muslims. Hence, these Hindu, Sikh, and Christian Indian diaspora users help reconstruct the myth of Muslim ‘otherness’ in an effort to politically integrate in Western societies.

The location of accounts collected was determined by listed profile information and/or tweets that originated with British or American content which signaled deeper familiarity of local issues (this ran the risk of assuming knowledge was linked to place of residence). What was certain was that accounts had to contain po-

⁴ For more on Hindutva organisations in the UK and US see Kamat and Mathew (2003), Mathew (2000), Mukta (2000), Raj (2000), Rajagopal (2000), Therwath (2012), van der Veer (1994).

litical content that favoured Brexit (not exclusively UKIP) and/or Trump (not exclusively Republican). Although a small number of users tweeted solely about Brexit or Trump, a large majority of accounts contained overlapping material of both. (If accounts additionally tweeted Hindutva material this was a bonus, but not a necessary condition, especially considering that Sikh and Christian users were also analysed in the sample.) By exploring users who tweet simultaneously about Brexit and Trump, this allowed for a convergent rather than a comparative analysis at a transnational scale.

Lastly, account users were both individuals and organisations, although a majority belonged to the former. Some accounts belonged to leaders, activists, or advocates, whilst others to non-affiliated individuals. The number of followers or levels of tweeting activity were not as significant as much as participating, i.e., producing content, in the pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Twitter network. The rationale for this selection was to determine *how* users perform their online political identities. Accounts that had never tweeted, however, were disregarded for the sample. Over time, some account users did change privacy settings to protected tweets and data collection of users ceased unless tweets were made public again. Others had changed Twitter handles or to entirely new accounts, making it difficult to track accounts at times.

Table 1 details the type of user accounts, for which two and seven are organisations in the UK and US, and thirteen and seventeen belong to individuals, respectively. The number of tweets for each account type is given rounded to the nearest thousandth, as is the number of followers⁵.

We can already note two characteristics of users. Firstly, a majority of account users comprise of individuals rather than organisations. Second, individuals tweet at a greater frequency than organisations, despite a majority with less than 5,000 followers (yet, it is only individual accounts that have more than 10,000 followers). Based on these characteristics, we can infer that although organisations serve as mobilising agents, it is clearly individuals that act as mobilisers in the Twitter-sphere. The findings discussed below indicate how these individuals establish an online presence which moves beyond quantitative impact, towards performing a discursive political identity.

From April 2017 to April 2018, NVivo’s NCapture software was used to scrape entire timelines of the selected Twitter accounts, providing the first to most recent tweet of each user. Scrapes were downloaded every two weeks and analysed within four chronological phases, with phase I including tweets collected from April 2017 to July 2017, phase II from July 2017 to October 2017, phase III from October 2017 to January 2018, and phase IV from January 2018 to April 2018. By allowing for a longitudinal study to prevent bias from data collection during one phase, analysing the data according to phases allowed to observe shifts, if any, in issue salience over time.

6. Findings

6.1. Employing Populist Radical Right Discourse

Utilising NVivo software tools, the word frequency of tweets was extracted, inclusive of stemmed words, e.g., ‘vote’ and ‘voting’. Figures 1 to 4, reflective of each phase, display a word cloud generated by NVivo of the most commonly used words in tweets.

Clearly, the word ‘Trump’ (as well as the president’s Twitter handle) was the most frequent word within the tweet collection across all phases. Other frequent words included: ‘people’, ‘vote’, ‘Clinton’, ‘Obama’, ‘Muslim’, ‘election’, ‘Islam’, ‘media’, ‘liberal’, etc. Visualising word frequency in a word cloud is useful as it indicates common topics discussed on Twitter. Word frequency shifted in relation to current political events during the Brexit referendum and subsequent negotiations, as well as Trump’s campaign and administration. However, as indicated in the figures, word usage tended to remain consistent across all phases. This repetition of language is key as it reflects how users choose to display themselves according to what Papacharissi (2011) describes as “a networked self”, whereby users construct a self-identity within “converged mediated environments” (p. 309) such as Twitter. Twitter becomes:

A sense of place...formed in response to the particular sense of self, or in response to the identity performance constructed upon that place. This presents the modus operandi for the networked self, and the con-

Table 1. Breakdown of Twitter account users by type of account, country, number of tweets, and number of followers.

Type of Account	Country		Tweets				Followers*			
	UK	US	0–1,000	1,000–5,000	5,000–10,000	10,000+	0–1,000	1,000–5,000	5,000–10,000	10,000+
Organisation	2	7	4	4	1	0	4	4	0	0
Individual	13	17	4	9	13	4	12	10	0	4

Note: *5 accounts (1 organisation and 4 individuals) were deleted in the period following data collection and the collation of the table. The number of followers for these accounts is unknown.

⁵ To protect anonymity of account users.

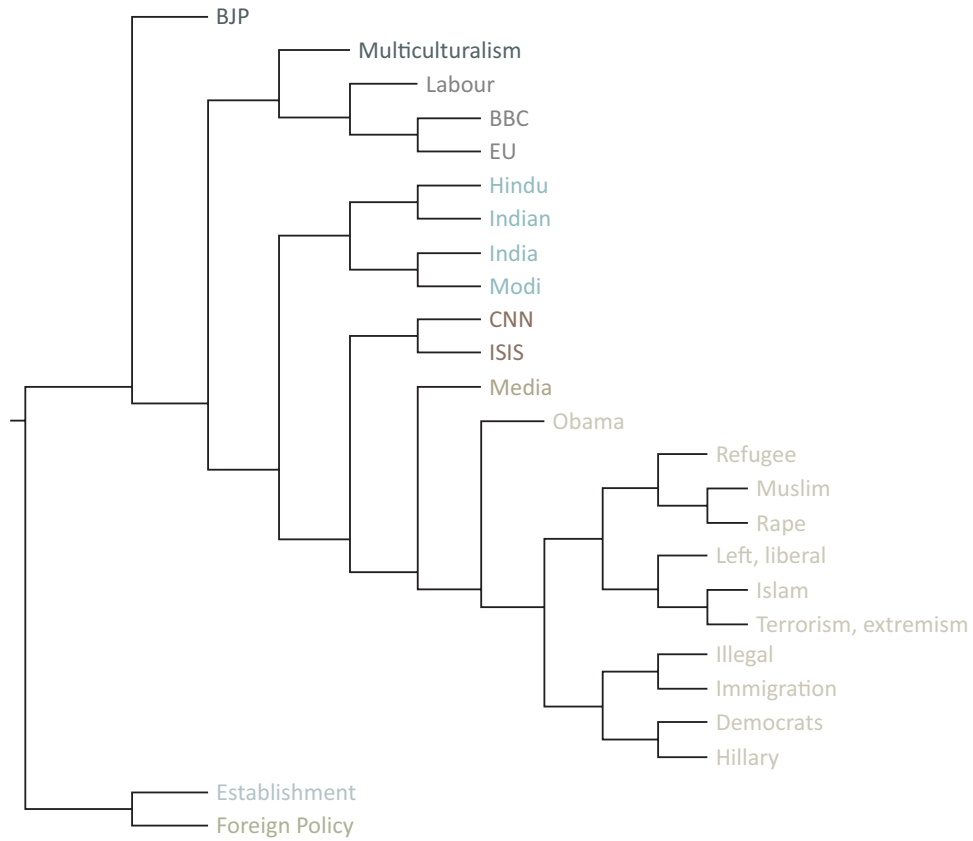


Figure 5. Phase I: April 2017 to July 2017.

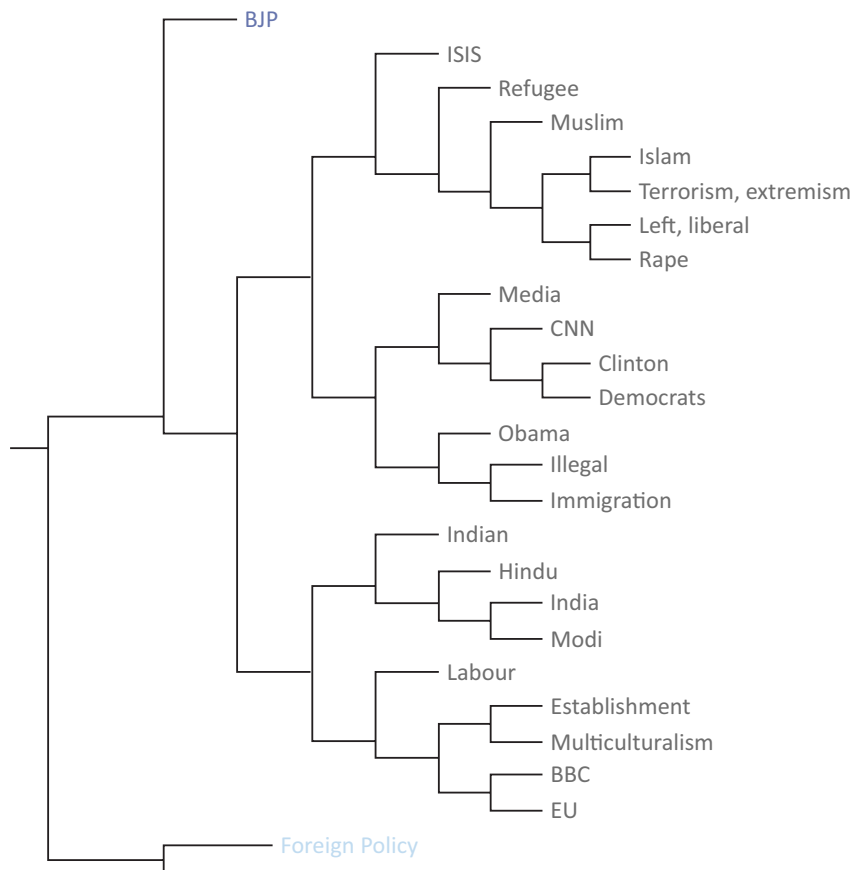


Figure 6. Phase II: July 2017 to October 2017.

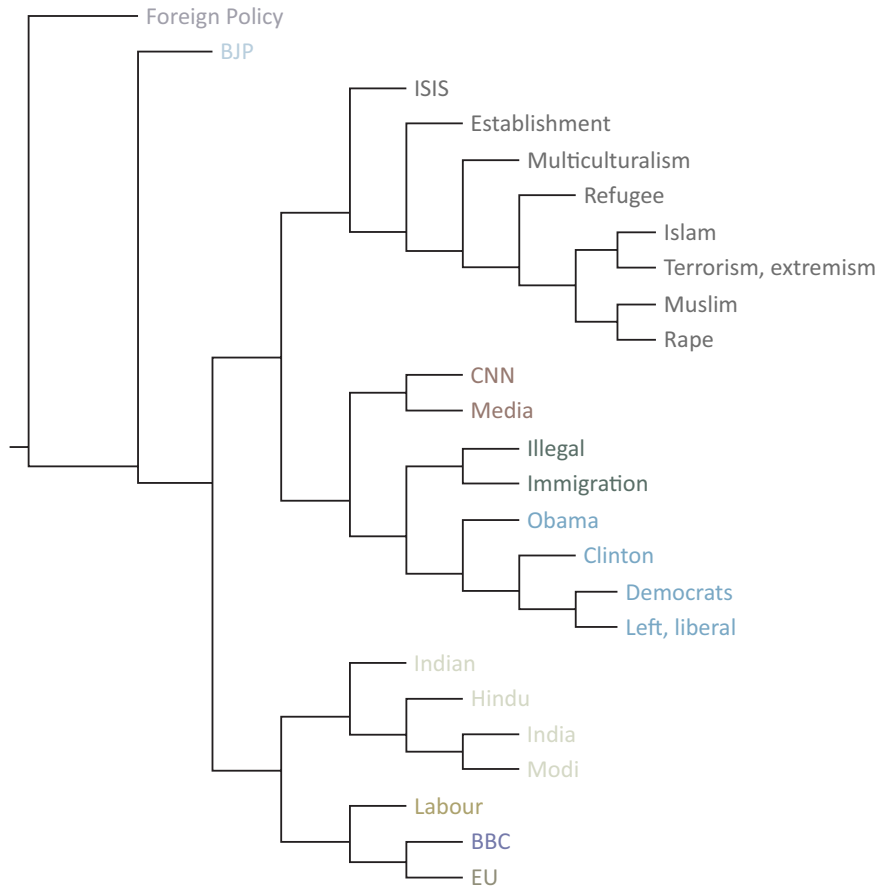


Figure 7. Phase III: October 2017 to January 2018.

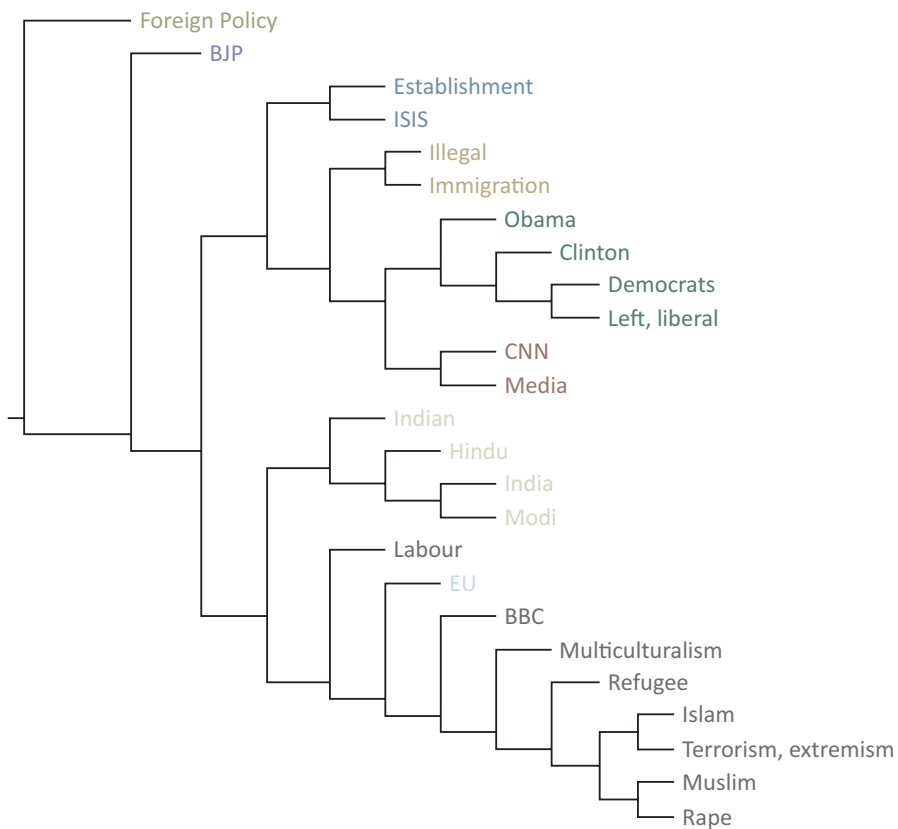


Figure 8. Phase IV: January 2018 to April 2018.

media establishment remains over time the primary opposition for these Indian diaspora users, who are in turn reinforcing populist radical right ideology.

Similarly, 'left/liberal' is often initially referenced in tweets that also discuss 'Islam' and 'terrorism/extremism', which in turn, is also related to the branch of tweets that reference 'refugee', 'Muslim', and 'rape'. But again, this shifts after six months as 'left/liberal' is then used almost exclusively in tweets that refer to 'Democrats', 'Clinton', and 'Obama' for the last two phases. This change is due to a surge in Twitter activity as the Trump administration increasingly targets the Democratic Party for opposing policy changes.

The relationship between these branches of tweets thus highlight not only how certain populist radical right narratives circulate in online conversations, but also how these conversations shifted over a year-long period in response to current events. Tracing conversation dynamics amongst users provides insight into how their articulation of populist radical right discourse adapts to wider socio-political conditions. Although all tweets were analysed combining UK and US-based accounts—that is, convergently rather than comparatively—these two examples of themes highlighted above indicate country-specific nomenclature. 'Multiculturalism' remains primarily a British term, likely due to its popular usage in the UK context, as opposed to 'diversity' as is common in American parlance. Similarly, the 'left/liberal' theme signals greater usage in US-based tweets, given the greater propensity to identify Democrats as liberals (vis-à-vis Republicans as conservatives) in American popular understanding of the liberal/conservative dichotomy. This is not to suggest all tweets within these two themes fall neatly within national boundaries, however, but serves as an indication based on volume. What is apparent is that anti-Muslim anxiety becomes a continuous refrain within both themes, thus suggesting how these users understand 'multiculturalism' and the 'left/liberals' in relation to fear of Islam/Muslims. The effect is a transnationalisation of anti-Muslim anxiety as a recurring trope.

Like the word clouds, the cluster analyses provide visual representation of the tweets at a general scale to show the relationship between themes. Repetition once again appears as a trend (e.g., anti-Muslim sentiment), as the cluster analyses indicate that word similarity generally remains consistent between themes, with slight changes taking place over a year's duration. As such, we can infer that these users tend to hold stable political attitudes in line with populist radical right ideology. The following section explores tweets of the 'Muslim' theme in-depth in order to provide insight into how these users conceptualise the notion of 'integration' through online discursive performativity.

6.2. A Case of 'Love Jihad'

By coding tweets according to word usage in conversation, this explores how these Indian diaspora users participate within Twittersphere culture and community. But in order to situate conversation dynamics *within* themes, this allows us to look in-depth at how issues are framed in tweets. In tweets coded to the 'Muslim' theme, for instance, Muslims are often characterised as violent, especially with the aim to cause "destruction"⁸ in the UK, US, and/or Europe more generally. Links to ISIS or terrorist activity is frequently cited as a major concern (as indicated in the cluster analyses above). Similarly, Muslims are described as a "cancer" in relation to Islam as a "poisonous ideology". Further references to Islam include describing the Prophet Mohammed as a pedophile and rapist, and consequently, Western women as targets of "rape" or "sex slaves" by Muslims continuing Islamic practice. Tweets also frequently describe Muslims in reference to immigration. Portrayed as "cockroaches", Muslims are seen as invaders constantly "breeding" in order to destruct Western/European "civilization". Consequently, they are viewed as foreigners who must be deported. Following this line of logic, then, tweets usually criticise the left (or "libtards") and the media (or "presstitutes") for their failure to see Muslims along these tropes. Depicting Muslims according to these negative representations fits into the populist radical right narrative. By dehumanising Muslims as violent terrorists or 'crimmigrants', this reinforces an 'otherness' that is foundational towards the ideological projection of exclusionary nationalism. Here, these Indian diaspora Twitter users are consciously embodying an image of non-Muslimness in order to assert claims of national belonging.

Indeed, these Indian diaspora Twitter users choose to emphasise a non-Muslim Indian identity in order to differentiate themselves from Muslims. Users often describe instances of "love jihad" in which not only white Western young women, but also Hindu, Sikh, and Christian girls are targeted by Muslim grooming gangs. For instance, Rohan, a young British man of Hindu background, tweets:

"Horrible sexual grooming of Hindu girls in UK."

A website link in Rohan's tweet emphasises that the perpetrators of these grooming—or "rape"—gangs are young Muslim men who have also targeted Hindu diaspora girls. Similarly, another user, Sikhs for Britain, tweets:

"A Sikh group wants politicians to stop describing the Rotherham grooming gang as 'Asian'."

⁸ Words in double quotation marks are direct usage as they appear across a majority of tweets. However, personal identifying information has not been revealed and/or disclosed in the findings. Twitter user handles have been changed to protect anonymity, unless the account is managed by an organisation. Similarly, any quoted tweets have been changed from the original, but still reflect the meaning of content, unless the tweet has been deleted by the user in which case the original is quoted. Such alterations are necessary to ensure ethical compliance according to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Here, Sikhs for Britain refers to the Rotherham grooming scandal in the UK, in which a group of British Pakistani men had been targeting young girls for sexual exploitation. This tweet highlights the need to distinguish the perpetrators' religious background (i.e., Muslim) as the rationale for their actions.

Hence, these non-Muslim Indian diaspora users fear being misidentified as Muslim in the West. They push to be recognised for their religious identity and not an all-encompassing 'Asian' descriptor. Such tweets are used to justify Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity as religions that dictate respect for law and order, tolerance, and peace. The consequent representation is that Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians—as opposed to Muslims who are instinctively intolerant and violent—are well-integrated in Western societies.

Further, many tweets on this issue target the political and media establishment with claims of Muslim "appeasement" rather than protecting "innocent" Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. Jasjit, a Sikh activist in the UK, tweets:

"Evidence that public officials withheld information of sexual grooming to protect liberalism."

By presupposing that government officials have a left-ist agenda that prevents transparency on the issue of grooming gangs, Jasjit reinforces a populist radical right discourse of anti-establishment sentiment. Other users also express this worldview. Rohan further tweets:

"The left clearly don't give a s**t about organised Muslim child grooming gangs targeting non-Muslim children."

Arjun, a young man of Hindu ancestry that converted to Christianity, similarly tweets:

"Wow, lefty white racist lady on Twitter calls me uncivilized for having an opinion on Muslim grooming gangs."

Lastly, Chetan, a young British Hindu, tweets:

"Grooming gangs prosper under political correctness."

By denoting the political orientation of the establishment as left-leaning, this serves as the basis for government officials to fail to address grooming gangs. Using terms such as 'political correctness' serves to augment the notion that multiculturalism policies promoted by the establishment have failed to address the concerns of non-Muslim Indian diaspora communities who feel victimised but are largely ignored in the public conversation.

Twitter serves as a site for these Indian diaspora users to create a networked self, one simultaneously built by fusing digitally networked action with personal

action frames. An opportunity arises on Twitter "in which new public spaces opened up by media technologies are spaces with an implicit potential to frame vigorous, 'bottom up' trajectories of autonomous action accompanied by a strong sense of moral legitimacy" (Zavos, 2015, p. 22). Tweeting about Muslim grooming gangs targeting Hindu, Sikh, and Christian diaspora girls provides these users "a strong sense of moral legitimacy" given what they view as the failure of the political and media establishment to protect victims of abuse. By highlighting intercommunity tensions within the diaspora, these users reinforce the populist radical right narrative that Muslims will never be able to fully 'integrate' due to their fundamental 'otherness'. Consequently, these users cultivate their own sense of identity and belonging on multiple levels: as individuals, as part of a collective non-Muslim Indian diaspora, and as members of (populist radical right) Twitter society.

7. Conclusion

This article highlights those in the Indian diaspora who promote exclusionary nationalist political agendas in Western, multicultural societies. It begins by situating how the UKIP-backed Vote Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum and Trump's election in 2016 advanced populist radical right discourse—in particular immigration and integration—on Twitter as a strategy to target intended audiences. Populist radical right discourse might alienate ethnic minorities and/or immigrants, yet, case studies in Sweden (with the SD) and the Netherlands (with the PVV) reveal that such supporters do exist to promote these platforms. In particular, the 'good immigrant' myth of 'integration' remains a constant refrain amongst supporters. Given previous, albeit limited, research on this phenomenon, such insight might apply to pro-Brexit and pro-Trump Indian diaspora supporters in the UK and US. This article then provides a brief overview of anti-Muslim Indian diaspora activism amongst Hindu, Sikh, and Christian communities in the UK and US in order to contextualise how these diasporic Indians, united by the othering of Islam/Muslims as an approach to integration, translates into support for populist radical right agendas. It posits that anti-Muslim anxiety and anti-establishment sentiment motivate Indian diaspora supporters of Brexit and Trump.

This article subsequently presents a year-long qualitative research design of Indian diaspora Twitter users who express support for Brexit and Trump. By exploring users who tweet simultaneously about Brexit *and* Trump, this allows for a convergent rather than a comparative analysis at a transnational scale. As active users in political conversations within the Brexit and Trump Twitter-sphere(s), they help shape ideas, strategies, and agendas within the online milieu of populist radical right discourse. For these users, Twitter serves as a digital third place, a networked media environment that best reflects what McArthur and White (2016, p. 1) describe as "sites

of online sociality that both mirror and deviate from physical gathering sites”, but can effectively create the notion of a collective place for community gathering.

This article demonstrates the ways in which these Indian diaspora Twitter users express support for Brexit and Trump by cultivating a discursive online performance of a networked self. By highlighting their Hindu, Sikh, and Christian Indian diasporic identities, these users situate themselves as socially well-integrated in which they emphasise a non-Muslim identity that reproduces the notion that Muslims are a problematic ‘other’. The political and media establishment is similarly targeted for promoting pro-Muslim policies at the expense of non-Muslim communities in order to advance ‘political correctness’. Thus, these users not only further populist radical right narratives but help it adapt towards new boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. This article sheds light on how such practices amongst Indian diaspora individuals adds complexity in their support for populist radical right agendas in the UK and US.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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