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The think-tank Demos has published a study on how populist parties and movements in Europe are using online and social media to involve young people. The study reveals how media-savvy political groups of the right can push an agenda of xenophobia and extremism. In current economic conditions this could be catastrophic for democracy and social cohesion across Europe.

These right wing groups are known for their opposition to immigration, their ‘anti-establishment’ views and their concern for protecting national culture. Their rise in popularity has gone hand-in-hand with the advent of social media, and they are adept at using new technology to amplify their message, recruit and organise.

The online social media following for many of these parties dwarfs the formal membership, consisting of tens of thousands of sympathisers and supporters. This mélange of virtual and real political activity is the way millions of people — especially young people — relate to politics in the 21st century.

This is the first quantitative investigation into these digital populists, based on over 10,000 survey responses from 12 countries. It includes data on who they are, what they think and what motivates them to shift from virtual to real-world activism. It also provides new insight into how populism — and politics and political engagement more generally — is changing as a result of social media.

The New Face of Digital Populism calls on mainstream politicians to respond and address

concerns over immigration and cultural identity without succumbing to xenophobic solutions. People must be encouraged to become actively involved in political and civic life, whatever their political persuasion — it is important to engage and debate forcefully with these parties and their supporters, not shut them out as beyond the pale.

Click here to read [more about the report](#)

Courtesy of *Demos*