

# From Twitter to X: One year on, are white supremacists back?

January 30 2024, by Sarah Rodriguez-Louette and Divina Frau-Meigs

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On 28 October 2022, just one day after acquiring Twitter, Elon Musk published a message that summed up his vision for its future: "The bird is free."

The social network's emblematic blue color quickly gave way to the black X—reminiscent of the dark web—when Musk's X Corp, took control. Soon after, the billionaire announced the [restoration of 62,000 previously suspended accounts](#), including—and this was to make headlines—that of Donald Trump.

The technology mogul clearly stated his intention: to transform Twitter into a platform where freedom of speech would approach the absolute. In so doing, he [gutted the site's moderation mechanisms](#), intended to reduce hate speech and counter the epidemic of misinformation on the platform. Put in place at the encouragement of the [US Congress](#), Musk felt that they had no place in the brave new world of X.

Predictably, this new direction generated polarized reactions in the United States. Some feared a rise in extremism, in particular supremacist movements, due to the spread and possible normalization of [racist and anti-Semitic content](#). At the same time, others saluted the new "freedom of expression," and even called for the accounts of white nationalist leaders to be reinstated.

Just over a year later, Musk retweeted his original message on the anniversary of his takeover, embellishing it with the word *freedom*. So what is the actual state of white nationalist accounts on the social network, and what are the foreseeable implications for the evolution of extremism in public discourse?

## **The persistent suspension of white nationalist leaders**

X carried out an initial wave of restorations of suspended accounts [from November 2022](#), including white-nationalist leaders suspended from 2017 to 2021. The waves of ["deplatforming"](#) started after the [Charlottesville "United the Right" rally that turned deadly](#) and continued through the assault on the US Capitol.

During that period, the accounts of well-known figures such as Ku Klux Klan icon [David Duke](#) were suspended. The measure also affected less high-profile but equally important individuals, such as [Jared Taylor](#), founder of the white supremacist website [American Renaissance](#), and [Greg Johnson](#), publisher of the white nationalist magazine *Counter-Currents*.

Even with Musk's arrival, however, these and other accounts have remained inaccessible. Because they all promote the idea of a racial state in the United States based on a homogeneous white identity, their content contradicts X's new security rules, which prohibit [associations with violent or hateful entities](#). Other key accounts were deactivated by Elon Musk's teams, such as that of the anti-Semitic and white nationalist psychologist [Kevin MacDonald](#) in April 2023.

While the persistent absence of these leaders deprives a fragmented movement of points of ideological convergence, this does not mean that the platform is free of anti-democratic racialism. Many minor figures already on Twitter have managed to slip past X's new rules and establish themselves as the new voices to follow.

The platform carried out a second wave of restorations in January 2023, and while it didn't restore high-profile theorists of racialism, groups close to white nationalism, such as Nick Fuentes's [Groypers](#), have attempted to reestablish themselves.

## **The intellectual dark web or 'authentic' right-wing X**

Musk's Twitter tends to favor an essentializing line of the [intellectual dark web](#), a motley collection of personalities who claim academic qualifications in order to define themselves as thinkers. Their shared ideology is often based on a biological conception of gender, crystallizing traditionalist roles that confine men to a productive,

masculine power, while assigning women a femininity centered on the home.

The [account](#) of Stefan Molyneux, once part of the [alt-right movement](#), was reinstated back in January 2023. With a following of several hundred thousand, he is known for his libertarian views within the "[manosphere](#)", a particularly reactionary version of masculinism characterized by militant hostility to anything that its members consider to be "wokism." This ideological trend has been reinforced by the [reactivation of the accounts of Jordan B. Peterson](#) and [James Lindsay](#), two figures in this movement.

The "manosphere" also tends to serve as a gateway to other groups adjacent to white nationalism. The synthesis of identity is embodied by the return to X of Bronze Age Pervert (known as "BAP" to his followers), the provocative pseudonym of [Costin Alamariu](#). His world view is based on a rigid sexual hierarchy dominated by alpha males who enjoy ephemeral seduction. It also adds the ambiguity of virile friendships marked by a warrior aesthetic.

Since given a [green light](#) by Elon Musk, BAP has found a growing audience, which now exceeds 130,000 followers, an increase of two thirds in one year. Its presence has restored structure to a movement that commonly refers to itself as the "authentic" right-wing Twitter. It has also encouraged a shift from simple anti-woke libertarianism to more overt neo-fascism.

Indeed, BAP is not so different from the white-nationalist accounts that are [inaccessible on X](#). He subscribes to a neo-Nietzschean philosophy, placing his elitist notion of fraternity against ethnic groups. Social relations are essentialized to the extreme: they are no longer euphemistic, but sublimated by the illusion of belonging to a community based on the celebration of a strength that is achieved solely through the domination

of others.

## **The NatCon movement**

At first glance, X's rejection of explicitly racist or anti-Semitic accounts while allowing the presence and growth of an adjacent neo-fascist network may seem paradoxical. There are several possible explanations.

From a semiotic point of view, this faction of the extreme right has developed its own codes of language that enable it to bypass the recommendation algorithms. Masculinist discourses, which take a stand against gender theories, seem to be favored by Elon Musk. Indeed, he made his opposition to the "woke virus" explicit when he reinstated the satirical [Babylon Bee](#) account.

The right-wing extreme influencers returning to the platform tend to gravitate towards the "NatCon" movement, a [nationalist conservatism](#) bringing together various illiberal political branches, [under the leadership of Yoram Hazony](#). From 2019, BAP received the support of [the Claremont Institute](#), a think tank closely associated with the NatCon network, for the [promotion of its book Bronze Age Mindset](#).

This inclusion in a key organization of national conservatism establishes a link to [libertarian Peter Thiel](#), founder of Palantir, co-founder of PayPal and former associate of Elon Musk. The relationship between a Silicon Valley tycoon and a masculinist philosopher may seem tenuous, yet Thiel is a major donor to the Republican Party and has never hidden his adherence to an anti-democratic ideology akin to the [neo-reactionary thinking of Curtis Yarvin](#). BAPtism enjoys considerable support, and is at the extreme of the [continuum promoting a "New Right"](#).

The question of white nationalism can therefore be posed in strategic

terms. Despite their ideological proximity, the refusal of the NatCon conference organizers to accept the presence of the movement's leaders is justified by the [concern not to see their image linked to such an openly extreme movement](#). Association with what is labeled "white nationalism" is seen as detrimental to attracting a broad and diverse audience. On the contrary, staging its rejection helps to reassure and reinforce NatCon's respectability.

In the conference rooms and on X, NatCon seems to have set about rebuilding a movement on the basis of new codes and new figures. It is these choices that will determine whether the anti-democratic project can be perceived as acceptable, and whether masculinist extremism can become the political norm in the Republican Party. As far back as 2022, Blake Masters, the unsuccessful Republican candidate for Senator of Arizona, gained the support of the hard right with a program that was both traditionalist and protectionist.

The Twitter bird may be free, but X is being selective. A year after Elon Musk took control, fears about the rise of white nationalism need to be contextualized and rationalized more than ever. A study of the influential accounts that are actually active shows that the terms of the debate are in danger of shifting from the alt-right to the New Right. As the 2024 elections approach, this framework will be of great importance in analyzing the resurgence of all forms of white supremacy in the United States.

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