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An Online Environmental Scan of Right-wing Extremism in Canada

Interim Report

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Edited by Jonathan Birdwell

About the authors

Jacob Davey is a senior research manager at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) where he leads research on the extreme right-wing and hate groups. His work focuses on mapping extreme right-wing mobilisation globally, the development of new software for tracking hate speech online, and the intersection of hate and disinformation. His recent research outputs have looked at how extreme right-wing movements connect across borders, the mainstreaming of extremist ideology and conspiracy theories, disinformation campaigns and de-radicalisation work. Jacob regularly advises senior policymakers and delivers lectures on extreme right ideology, and he has provided expert testimony to the UK Home Affairs Select Committee. Jacob's research has been featured in a range of publications and outlets including the BBC, the Guardian, The Times, The New York Times, El Pais, Sky News, CNN and the Hill. Jacob is a fellow at the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right.

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Cécile Guerin is a research co-ordinator at ISD, supporting the organisation's European development and analysis work. She works on the Online Civil Courage Initiative, a project which aims to upscale civil society efforts against hate speech and extremism online. Cécile also contributes to ISD's research and policy work, with a focus on social media analysis and network mapping related to hate speech, extremism and disinformation online. She has written for a range of publications, including the Guardian, Prospect and the Independent. Cécile holds an MSc in International History from the London School of Economics and an MA in English from the École Normale Supérieure in France.

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Summary

In January 2020 former Canadian Armed Forces reservist Patrik Mathews was arrested with two other men. The trio were suspected members of The Base – a violent neo-Nazi organisation – and had allegedly been planning an attack at a gun rights rally in Richmond Virginia with the aim of causing chaos and accelerating the initiation of a civil war.[1]

This arrest was part of a global pattern – acts of terrorism committed by the far-right have increased by 320% over the past five years,[2] supported by an increasingly connected and internationalist community of right-wing extremism. Canada has not been isolated from this trend and in recent years the number of hate groups operating in the country has tripled.[3]

Central to this increase in activity is the use of social media. It provides avenues for a broad spectrum of right-wing extremists to mobilise by recruiting new members, broadcasting disinformation and propaganda, harassing opponents, and co-ordinating activity including publicity stunts, protests and acts of violence.[4] Social media used includes popular platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, and a constellation of fringe forums including ultra-libertarian platforms with lax content moderation policies such as Gab, and specially created extremist hubs like Iron March and Fascist Forge.

This report represents the interim findings of a two-year study designed to increase understanding of the social media footprint of right-wing extremism (RWE) in Canada. This work is part of a larger project designed to understand RWE in Canada led by Ontario Tech University (OTU), in partnership with Michigan State University and the University of New Brunswick. This team are currently working on a similar project designed to map offline RWE in Canada. The project follows a similar study delivered in 2015, enabling researchers and policymakers to understand how RWE has changed in the past five years.[5]

To date, our researchers have assessed the scale of Canadian right-wing extremist activity across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, 4chan, Gab, Fascist Forge and Iron March. Over the next year we will analyse extremism on these platforms in more detail, and incorporate additional digital forums into our study. This represents one of the most comprehensive efforts to date to assess the scale of right-wing extremist activity online in Canada.

Key findings

- **We identified 6,660 right-wing extremist channels, pages, groups and accounts across 7 social media platforms for this report.** To date, this project has studied Canadian right-wing extremist communities across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Iron March, Fascist Forge, 4chan and Gab. This included analysis of a network of 6,352 Twitter accounts, 130 public Facebook pages and groups, 32 YouTube channels, 42 Gab accounts, 88 Iron March accounts and 31 Fascist Forge accounts. The reach of these channels, pages, groups and accounts was significant, and collectively they have reached over 11 million users across these platforms. Furthermore, we found that Canadians are highly active on forums associated with white supremacy, representing the third largest nationality using 4chan's politically incorrect board after the US and UK, and were the third largest community on Iron March when the platform was active.

- **A spectrum of right-wing extremist communities are active across different platforms.** We identified five ideological subgroups of right-wing extremists: white supremacists, ethnonationalists, anti-Muslim groups, sovereigntists and militia groups, and the 'manosphere'. Individuals and groups were then assigned to one of these classifications according to pre-existing literature produced by anti-hate organisations and academia, explicit references to certain ideas, and analysis of the tone and nature of material produced and shared online. We found that ethnonationalists are the largest RWE community operating on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, accounting for 60%, 53% and 46% of RWE communities on these platforms respectively. However, we found that on more fringe platforms, white supremacist groups are more prevalent, accounting for 100% of Canadian users identified on Fascist Forge, 72% of Canadian users identified on Iron March, and 40% of Canadian users identified on Gab.

- **The Christchurch attack and the Canadian federal election led to the largest increases in activity across RWE online activity.** We observed a general decrease in RWE activity on Facebook and YouTube across 2019, an increase in activity on Twitter, and a generally consistent level of activity on 4chan. However, despite these slightly different trends we observed spikes in activity on all four platforms in March 2019, and spikes in activity in October 2019 on Twitter, Facebook and 4chan. We were able to link conclusively the March spike on 4chan and Twitter to the attack in Christchurch, and the October spike across all platforms to the federal election.

- **Pages, accounts and users connected to RWE on Twitter and Facebook rarely engage in explicitly extremist conversation.** On Twitter we identified a network of 6,352 Canadian users who were closely connected to extremist accounts, and who had used the platform in a way which indicated evidence of right-wing extremist beliefs at least once in 2019, including the use of violent, dehumanising or othering language targeting minority communities; extremist slang; or reference to RWE conspiracy theories. However only 1% (76) of these users were classified as 'prolific' (posting 12 or more extremist tweets in 2019), while 43% (2,775) of these users had only made one extremist comment in 2019. Similarly, on Facebook we found that only 0.7% of posts made by pages and groups associated with RWE actively contained an anti-minority slur or extremist slang.

- **Anti-Muslim and anti-Trudeau rhetoric are the most salient topics of conversation among RWE actors in Canada.** On Twitter we found that highly prolific extremist users were more likely to be engaged in anti-Muslim conversation, and spikes in activity often contained anti-Muslim conversation. Similarly, on Facebook we found that Muslims were the most widely discussed minority community, and the most common target of posts containing explicit hate speech (23%), with anti-Semitism being the second largest grouping of hate speech (16%). In addition to anti-Muslim activity we found that anti-government sentiment was a highly salient topic in RWE circles. Justin Trudeau was mentioned in 11.4% of posts made by RWE Facebook pages and groups, and was the most frequent topic of videos made by RWE YouTube channels, accounting for 28% of all content analysed. An anti-Trudeau Twitter campaign was linked to the third largest spike in Twitter activity that we identified.

Next Steps

This report represents the interim findings of an ongoing project and we will continue to integrate new platforms and analysis into our study. These are some of the next steps we expect to explore in 2020:

- **Identify additional RWE communities.** We will continue to identify new accounts, channels, groups and pages across our social media platforms in order to ensure that this study is as comprehensive as possible. We will also study the communities we have currently identified longitudinally over the course of the year to identify shifts in membership and activity.

- **Integrate additional platforms for analysis.** We will seek to expand the number of platforms which our digital survey incorporates. In particular, we have already started scoping out the integration of Telegram, which we have identified as an essential hub for contemporary violent extremists, as well as Stormfront, which despite its age remains an important platform for established white supremacist communities.

- **Examine inter-platform mobilisation dynamics.** Analysis of Fascist Forge provided some evidence of the journeys which different users make between platforms, including those which acted as entry points to explicit white supremacist communities. As we continue to analyse RWE communities across different platforms we will seek to understand the extent to which different users operate across multiple platforms, and the ways particular platforms can act as pathways to other more radical communities.

- **Examine the impact of policy changes by social media platforms.** Policy changes by social media companies can have an impact on extremist activity by denying extremist groups' presence or prominence on platforms. This study includes a wide range of platforms for analysis, and as this research project develops we will seek to incorporate policy shifts into our analysis of the volume and nature of RWE activity online over time.

- **Carry out a demographic analysis of RWE communities.** We will seek to integrate demographic

analysis of RWE communities across platforms to identify whether different platforms attract RWE users of different ages and gender.

- **Develop additional hate mapping algorithms to classify content.** In this study we trained a natural language processing (NLP) algorithm to identify right-wing extremist conversation on Twitter. As this study develops we will expand this technology, building classifiers to identify specific facets of RWE conversation — such as anti-Muslim hate speech — and will apply these across multiple platforms.

- **Develop algorithms to identify violent content.** This study encapsulates a wide range of activity, both violent and non-violent. To better understand the relationship between violent and non-violent discussion in RWE activity online we will seek to build Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms which can help detect conversation which supports or incites violence.

- **Integrate more granular geo-location.** When identifying RWE networks on Twitter we applied a geo-location tool, which was able to assess whether individual users were based in Canada. As this programme develops we will seek to apply this geo-location capability in a more granular fashion, to identify networks of users based in particular towns and cities. We will then use this as a point of comparison for the OTU team's offline environmental scan.

Offline Environmental Scan: Interim Findings

Dr. Barbara Perry (OTU)

This online environmental scan is an ongoing project designed to identify and assess the scale of RWE online in Canada. It is being delivered alongside a similar ongoing exercise which is conducting an offline scan of right-wing extremist groups operating 'on the ground' throughout the country, updating a similar exercise which took place in 2015.[6] This team combines researchers from Ontario Tech University (OTU) Michigan State University, and the University of New Brunswick, and is being led by Dr. Barbara Perry of OTU.

This includes a media scan, analysis of court records, and interviews with staff from law enforcement

agencies, and community and anti-racist organisations, and current and former adherents of right-wing extremist groups. To date, we have completed over 60 interviews with law enforcement and community groups in western Canada (BC, AB, SK, MB) and eastern Canada (PEI, NB, NS, NF). Over the next few months, they will conduct interviews in Ontario and Quebec, and nationwide interviews with current and former adherents to RWE groups.

While it is still relatively early in the process, some key trends are emerging from the interviews. First, the offline team continue to see the same concentrations of RWE activity and presence in western Ontario, Quebec and Alberta. Unexpectedly, they are also seeing a significant growth in RWE activity in the Maritime provinces. There is some evidence of a narrowing of the targets of the animosity by members of the movement. By 2015, the movement was quite diverse in its targets, often defined by regional concerns that reflected the demographics or politics of the province or city in question. In the past three to four years, however, there is a much more united front as Muslims, immigrants and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau emerge as shared objects of scorn and antipathy, matching trends seen in online analysis. In 2020, with the arrival of the Covid-19

pandemic, RWE activists are also beginning to target Asian communities who they perceive to be the 'cause' of the virus.

In the 2015 scan, the offline team identified relatively discrete categories of right-wing extremists: variants of white supremacists and neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, anti-authority activists, lone actors and what we framed as 'ideologues' or 'gurus'. In the intervening years, this typology has been expanded to include the 'alt-right', the 'manosphere' and anti-Muslim groups. The latter is particularly important given what appears to be an obsession with Islam among extreme right activists. This revised typology of the extreme right is set out in Figure 1.

The recognition of additional categories of extremists demonstrates the growth and expansion of the RWE movement in Canada between 2015 and 2019. Far-right extremist groups have also grown in number and boldness in Canada, especially on the heels of the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the US. According to media, police and community agencies such as the National Council of Canadian Muslims, interview participants, and the online and offline activities of such hate groups, it is likely that the

Figure 1 Categories of right-wing extremists
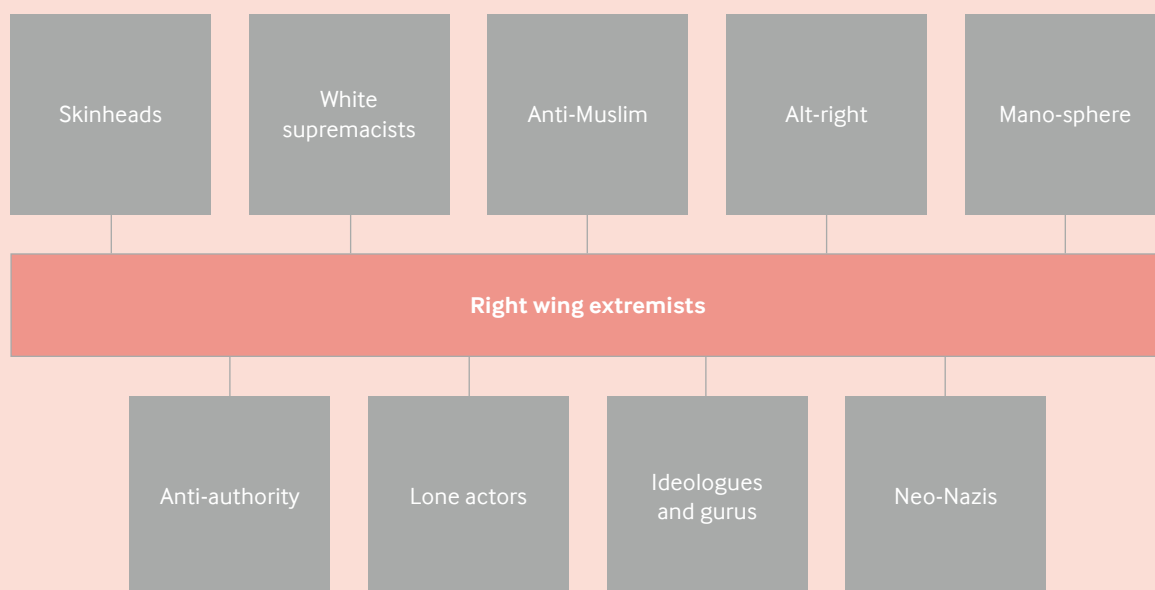
number of active groups doubled if not tripled over the course of 2017 and 2018. Activities on both the internet and the streets reveal that existing groups like the Three Percenters (sometimes called III%ers) and the Hammerskins have added new chapters across the country, and new groups like Storm Alliance and the Proud Boys have emerged. There appears to have been an alarming qualitative and quantitative shift in right-wing activism in most parts of Canada.

Xenophobic flyers have been posted by RWE groups, containing such slogans as 'Tired of anti-white propaganda? You are not alone' and 'It's only racist when white people do it'. The flyers — first appearing in 2016 immediately after the election of Donald Trump — were perhaps the first indicator of more prominent mobilisation by RWE adherents in Canada. They also suggested that the RWE movement perceived the emergence of a climate far more permissive of their hateful ideas. Across major Canadian cities, the far-right vigilante groups Soldiers of Odin and Sons of Odin have patrolled streets to 'protect' Canadian citizens from what they perceived as the 'Islamic' threat, seeking to silence and marginalise Muslims through intimidation and a show of force. More recently, they've been joined by the Three Percenters, an Islamophobic armed militia group. According to the leader of the Alberta-based group, these armed and paramilitary trained activists have several mosques under surveillance, as 'These mosques, from what we've gathered, from our intel, these mosques are fronts for training groups, for terrorist training groups. . . .We will continue to watch these mosques and monitor these situations.'

The Proud Boys, a group founded in the US in 2016, which is heavily associated with street violence, made their first public appearance in Canada on 1 July 2017, disrupting an anti-colonialist protest at the Cornwallis statue in Halifax. Similarly, the Canadian Coalition for Concerned Citizens and the Soldiers of Odin rallied against non-binding motion M-103, passed by the House of Commons in 2017, which called on the government to condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racial and religious discrimination, and called for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to study the issue. On 4 March 2017, these groups protested M-103 in Toronto, making the public claim that 'Islam is evil' and clashing with anti-Islamophobia protesters.

Racist and Islamophobic rallies have continued. In the aftermath of the 2017 rally 'Unite the Right' in Charlottesville, Virginia, which was punctuated by the murder of anti-racist Heather Heyer, Canada's far-right activists appeared to have been emboldened rather than disconcerted by the terror that ensued there. Canadian white supremacist groups seem to have taken that rally as a call to arms, lending credence to former KKK [Ku Klux Klan] Grand Dragon David Duke's proud claim that Charlottesville represented a turning point for the movement, in their effort to 'take our country back'. Similar rallies were immediately held across the country. The World Coalition Against Islam, the Cultural Action Party and the Soldiers of Odin, among others, joined forces for a rally in Vancouver in September. The Canadian Nationalist Party also stirred controversy by announcing plans for a white nationalist rally at the University of Toronto shortly thereafter. While none of these resulted in the sort of violence that characterised Charlottesville, they nonetheless represented a trend towards coalition building across sectors of the far-right in Canada. No longer are isolated groups working alone. Rather, they are collaborating in what appears to be an attempt to 'unite the right'. This heralds a decided risk, especially when armed militias like the Three Percenters provide 'security' for their fellows.

However, law enforcement officers and members of anti-racist community organisations to whom the offline scan team have spoken to date have suggested that 2019 saw a shift in how right wing extremists in Canada organise. Several participants have pointed to what might be described as an atomisation of the movement. There are still dozens if not hundreds of groups active, especially online. But the offline scan team are also beginning to see more isolated and 'itinerant' adherents to the cause. There appear to be more individuals — lone actors — espousing right-wing narratives online and offline. These are people who may be following multiple groups online, and who post hate-filled or anti-statist screeds on their personal social media platforms, but who do not necessarily affiliate with any particular group or movement. This trend warrants further attention. It is lone actors who have been responsible for the most dramatic incidents of violence in Canada, including the killing of three Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers in Moncton, the murders of six Muslim men at prayer in Quebec City, and the deaths of ten people who were run over by a van in Toronto.

What makes the latter trend more concerning is the fact that the offline scan team are seeing an increased fascination with guns and defence than had previously been the case within the RWE movement in Canada. The Three Percenters are the epitome of this more militant arm of the movement. They style themselves after their American counterpart, a far-right 'prepper' militia movement whose members are actively arming and engaging in paramilitary training in Alberta and Quebec. In June 2017 Vice published an article on the ideologies, aims and activities of this explicitly paramilitary group. Informed by Islamophobia, the Alberta group — numbering some 150–200 members — is training to defend Canada from what they see as the inevitable invasion by Muslims. Lamoreux quotes the leader's Facebook post, in which he claimed, 'We are at war folks, we have been at war, and we are in the middle of the fight of our lives . . . It's on mother fuckers. It's time to do patriot shit. You wanna fuck around, you've seen nothing yet. We will win this war.'[7]

The offline scan team have noted the presence of other similar groups, such as the Milice Patriotique Quebecois and the Permanent Active Militia. Quebec seemed to be one province where the militia movement was visible, with up to 200 adherents, according to one law enforcement officer interviewed for a separate study on the anti-authority movement in Canada. There, as with Alberta's Three Percenters, members are known to train in weaponry, paramilitary tactics and survivalist strategies. The Milice Patriotique Quebecois, for example, sees itself as the army of 'New Quebec', willing to intervene in a civil war intended to reclaim the province for white Francophones.

While the defensive narrative of such militia groups is at the extreme end of the scale, they are certainly not alone in their obsession with weaponry. The Proud Boys loudly proclaim: 'We love our guns.' Other groups such as the Northern Guard often post images of themselves bearing weaponry and engaging in field training, and there is increasing evidence of an intersection of military training and RWE group membership. In 2019 there were a number of high-profile cases of military personnel who were involved with RWE. The most dramatic case was that of Canadian reservist Patrik Mathews, who was exposed as a recruiter for The Base, a violent American accelerationist group. After fleeing Canada for the US, he and two other members of the group were arrested on charges of building an automatic weapon, stockpiling ammunition and creating hallucinogenic drugs, all in the lead up to a widely publicised gun rally planned for Richmond VA. RWE groups have openly boasted on their social media platforms that their membership includes former and active military — and law enforcement — personnel. Indeed, La Meute, one of Quebec's most notorious RWE groups, was founded by two former military personnel. Like other such groups, they invite others with similar backgrounds to join them. They also encourage members to gain at least reservist training so that they can bring learned 'skills' back to the movement.

Project overview and approach

Definitions

This project is intended to produce complementary results to those of the OTU team in Right Wing Extremism in Canada: an environmental scan and accordingly uses the same terminology of 'right-wing extremism', instead of other terms such as 'far-right' or 'extreme right'. The same overarching definition of RWE is used in this project as that provided by the OTU team in their study:

> RWE is a loose movement, characterized by a racially, ethnically and sexually defined nationalism. This nationalism is often framed in terms of white power, and is grounded in xenophobic and exclusionary understandings of the perceived threats posed by such groups as non-Whites, Jews, immigrants, homosexuals and feminists.[8]

This definition is broad, as is fitting an exercise designed to comprehensively map a phenomenon as multi-faceted as RWE, and it is therefore worth considering what is included within this definition.

Our study focuses on extremism, which encapsulates a range of both illegal and legal activity, but fundamentally represents the advocacy of a system of belief that claims the superiority and dominance of one identity-based 'in-group' over all 'out-groups', and propagates a dehumanising 'othering' mind-set. This advocacy may occur through non-violent and more subtle means, as well as through violent or explicit means.

Within the RWE definition we therefore include more egregious forms of illegal activity. This includes Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE), a term introduced in the CSIS Public Report 2019. IMVE encompasses what has been traditionally defined as "right-wing extremism" and "left-wing extremism", and incorporates xenophobic violence, anti-authority violence, gender-driven violence, and other grievance-driven violence.[9] Our definition also includes terrorism, following the decision to add Blood and Honour, and Combat 18, two RWE groups to Canada's list of banned terrorist organisations in 2019. However, whilst some right wing extremists are violent, others are not, and accordingly our study also includes a range of non-violent groups which nevertheless engage in behaviour which falls within our definition of RWE. Whilst some of the actors identified may engage in illegal activity,

such as illegal hate speech, some activity covered in this report although problematic, is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The decision to use a broad definition for this study is rationalised by a reflection on the nature of extremist ideology and activity. RWE exists on a continuum. Groups and individuals often carefully tailor their activity to ensure that it is legal, and accordingly only focusing on illegal activity would mean that a large corpus of xenophobic and exclusionary behaviour would be excluded from this paper. Similarly, although useful in helping to frame security threats, a focus purely on online activity which promotes violence would exclude a wide range of activity which is very helpful for understanding violent threats. For example, The Great Replacement theory that helped inspire the Christchurch attack is not explicitly violent, but it nevertheless has proven effective in painting migrants and Muslims as an existential threat to life in the West, an important trope in the ideology of violent RWE groups. Similarly, much of the activity by these groups, such as 'shitposting' culture, can seem innocuous but are nevertheless essential to study if we are to understand the motivations, strategies and tactics of violent extremist groups.[10]

Globally, we have also seen in recent years a shift away from more rigid group structures to a more fluid RWE landscape where individuals with no formal affiliation to a particular group are able to use social media and online material to tap into RWE material. In understanding this post-organisational landscape, it is essential to be able to broadly analyse the loosely networked RWE ecosystem online, and doing this requires a definition flexible enough to encapsulate the wide range of narratives and material which right wing extremists tap into.

It is therefore helpful to conceptualise right wing extremism as incorporating a wide range of behaviours and activities, which draw on a shared ideology and culture. Recognising this continuum also highlights the need for a multi-stakeholder response to RWE, in which government, law enforcement, tech platforms and civil society play a role.

Recognising that our definition includes a wide range of actors, for the purpose of this study we sought to break down 'right-wing extremists' into different subsets, allowing us to better understand the nuances of RWE

Figure 2 Types of right-wing extremists in Canada

White supremacists White supremacists believe in the superiority of whites over non-whites, and advocate that white people should be politically and socially dominant over non-white people. This can extend to a belief in the need for violence against, or even the genocide of, non-white people.

Example: Combat 18 Combat 18 is a neo-Nazi terrorist movement originating from the UK. It is the armed branch of the international Blood and Honour Network, and has been linked to numerous violent attacks and murders. In June 2019 the Canadian government placed Combat 18 and Blood and Honour on its list of proscribed terrorist organisations.

Ethnonationalists Ethnonationalism is a form of nationalism where the nation is defined in terms of ethnicity. Central to ethnonationalism is the belief that nations are tied together by a shared heritage and culture that is based on ethnicity. Ethnonationalists are often marked by implicit rather than explicit racism, and rarely promote overt supremacism.

Example: Fédération des Québecois de Souche Fédération des Québecois de Souche (FQS) is a Quebecois organisation describing itself as a 'nationalist political organization focusing on ending political correctness'. It presents itself as 'supporters of the principle of the sacred union between the land and its people'.[12] FQS has been involved in a range of anti-immigrant activities including the dissemination of anti-migrant material and publicity stunts like banner drops, and says it seeks to act against the replacement of native Quebecois through mass migration.

Anti-Muslim The anti-Muslim movement is a loose network of groups and individuals who share the fear that western cultures are threatened by an 'Islamic takeover'. Anti-Muslim groups are marked by their opposition to Islam as an ideology, and Muslims as a people.

Example: Canadian Defence League The Canadian Defence League describes itself as an organisation with the mandate to 'protect the inalienable rights of all people to protest against radical Islam's encroachment into the lives of non-Muslims'. Like other anti-Muslim groups,[13] it claims to be non-racist, however researchers identified a large amount of hateful anti-Muslim material on their Facebook page. Material produced by the group expresses support for Tommy Robinson – the British founder of the English Defence League, an organisation espousing anti-Muslim views.

Manosphere The manosphere is a loose collection of movements marked by their overt and extreme misogyny. Groups include 'Incels', Men Go Their Own Way (MGTOW) and men's rights activists (MRAs).

Example: Toxically Masculine Toxically Masculine is a Canadian Facebook page set up to host explicitly misogynistic content, including anti-feminist content, transphobic material, content that degrades, mocks and dehumanises women, and other material which more broadly attacks 'political correctness' and liberal talking points, with a particular focus on Justin Trudeau.

Sovereigntists and militia groups Sovereigntists are marked by their rejection of court and state authority. Joining these groups together is the rejection of the authority of the federal state, and commonly adherence to a range of conspiracy theories. In some instances, sovereigntists may mobilise as militia. It should be noted that sovereigntists as a subcategorisation of RWE are distinct from the Quebec Sovereignty Movement.

Example: The Three Percenters The Three Percenters is a militia movement originating in the US but with branches across Canada. The group's name comes from the belief that 3% of American colonists took up arms during the American Revolution. The group focuses on gun rights and anti-government activism, which it frames as an opposition to tyranny. It primarily operates as an armed militia attending rallies and providing security for various causes. The group has been involved in anti-migrant activity, and several members provided security at the 'Unite the Right' Charlottesville rally.

online. Using a review of pre-existing literature relating to the global extreme right, both online and offline, we created the typology set out in Figure 2 for dividing RWE in Canada. This helped inform qualitative coding of online communities by researchers, who situated users, accounts, channels and pages across social media groups in this subcategorisation after assessing pre-existing literature about established movements, as well as analysis of the tone and nature of content produced and promoted by these social media entities.[11] While complementary to the typology employed by the OTU team, several categories have been adjusted to better reflect trends in online communities.

Research Questions

This project has been designed to provide a broad overview of Canadian RWE online. It does not provide in-depth analysis of the activity of specific groups, but rather a snapshot of activity across a range of social media platforms. Accordingly, this project was designed to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do RWE groups operating offline in Canada have an online presence?

- What is the scale of RWE presence online in Canada?

- Do different types of RWE groups operate on different social media platforms?

- What are the drivers of RWE activity online?

- What are the topics of conversation for RWE actors online?

- What proportion of RWE conversation is explicitly hateful and/or extremist in nature?

- Does online RWE activity differ over time?[14]

Platform Selection and Limitations

Previous studies have identified that RWE actors operate across a range of platforms online.[15] These include major social media platforms (although following recent moderation efforts many of the most egregious actors have been banned from operating on them); fringe ultra-libertarian platforms which, through minimal or no
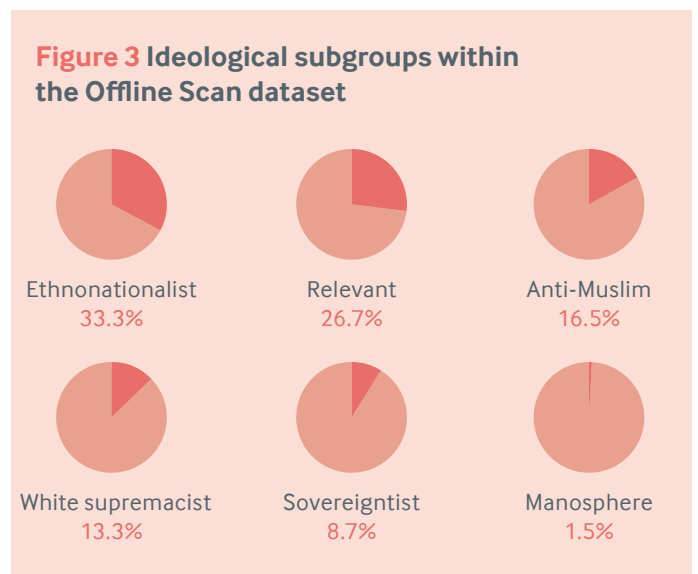
content moderation, have found themselves home to RWE groups; and specialist forums designed to provide a home to extremist communities. Working in partnership with the team at OTU we identified seven platforms for initial analysis in this project, set out in Table 1.

Working in partnership with the team working on the offline environmental scan, we identified seven platforms for initial analysis in this project, set out in Table 1.

Table 1 The seven platforms analysed in this report

Mainstream	Fringe platforms	Extremist
Facebook	Gab	Iron March
Twitter	4chan	Fascist Forge
YouTube		

It is recognised that this selection of platforms is not comprehensive, and there are a number of other chat applications, forums and social media platforms where RWE communities gather, such as Discord, 8kun (formerly 8chan) and Telegram. Furthermore, in line with our ethical framework this study draws on analysis of publicly available material gathered through platforms' application programme interfaces (APIs), and ISD did not gather or store any personal data or information which could be used to identify individual users. Accordingly, there is much material that is highly relevant to RWE activity which we have not been able

Figure 3 Ideological subgroups within the Offline Scan dataset

Ethnonationalist
33.3%

Relevant
26.7%

Anti-Muslim
16.5%

White supremacist
13.3%

Sovereigntist
8.7%

Manosphere
1.5%

Figure 4
The presence of OTU RWE subgroups, by social media platform

Platform	Ethnonationalist	Anti-Muslim	Sovereigntist	White supremacist	Manosphere	**Total**
Facebook pages	25	15	10	1	2	**53**
Facebook groups	14	3	1			**18**
Facebook private groups	5	8		2	1	**16**
Facebook combined	44	26	10	4	3	**87**
Twitter	31	11	2	10	2	**56**
YouTube	14	10	5	3		**32**
Gab	13	2		9		**24**
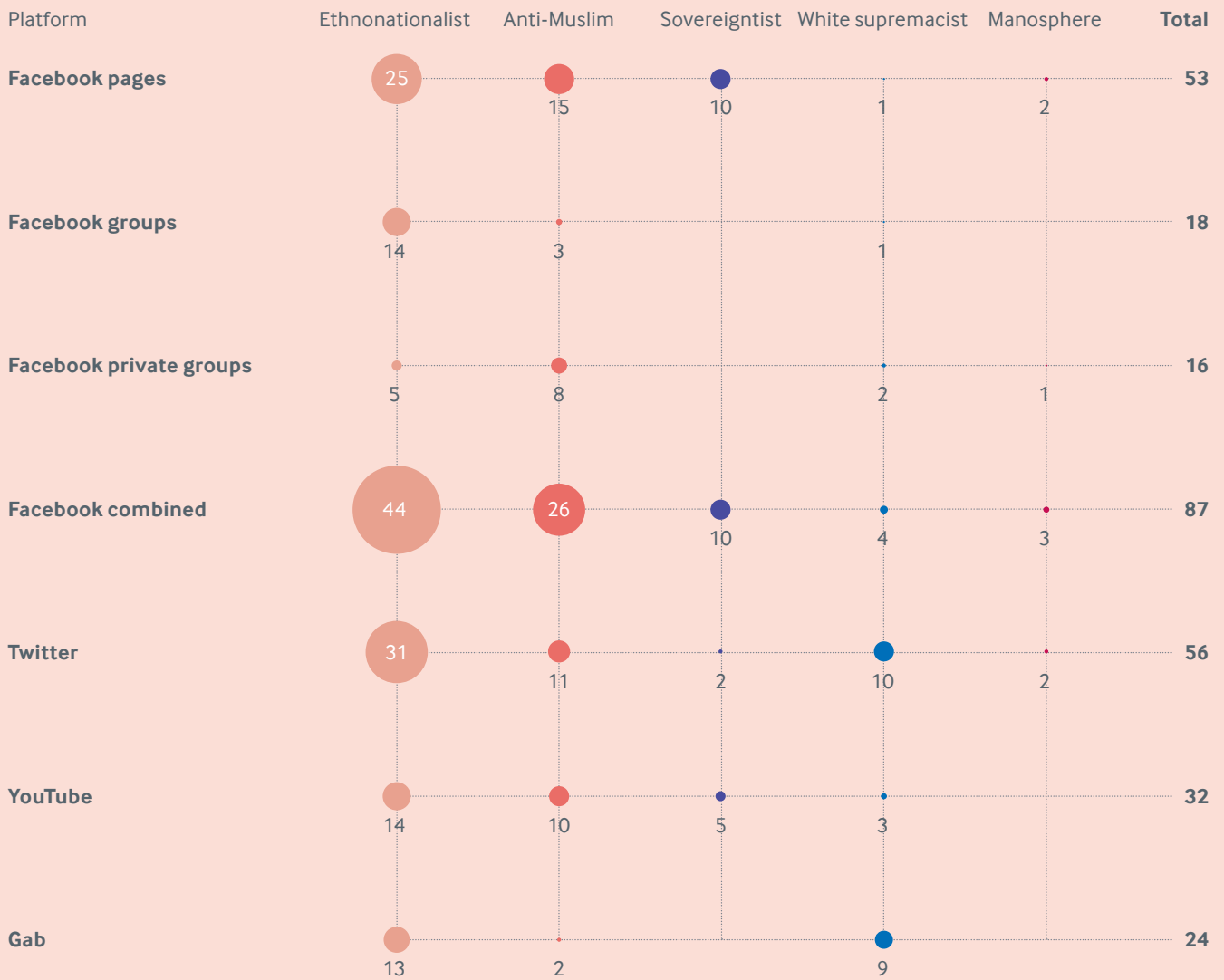
to identify or collect. This includes comments made on Facebook posts (which are not accessible through the CrowdTangle tool), and conversations taking place in closed online spaces and encrypted platforms. Activity relating to violence or illegal activity, which often takes place in these more closed online fora, has therefore not been comprehensively collected through this study. This research thus only represents a partial view of RWE activity online.

Finally, it should be noted that while the findings

presented aim to illustrate the scale and nature of RWE activity online in Canada at the present time, online extremism is not a static phenomenon. New communities regularly form, the narratives discussed change, and individuals often change the platforms they use in reaction to shifts in the policies of different platforms, or the effectiveness of their moderation processes. Accordingly, the report represents a snapshot in time, and online monitoring should therefore be a continual process that captures these changes as they occur.

However, with the above limitations taken into account, we believe the selection of platforms included in this report is broad enough to cover the spectrum of different RWE communities, and is therefore representative of the broad range of individuals and groups incorporated into our programmatic definition of RWE. As this programme of research continues to develop we predict that new digital forums will be incorporated into this study, and the platforms included in this study will be analysed in greater depth.

Identifying Communities

The OTU Dataset

To support ISD in identifying RWE actors across these platforms, the team at OTU provided a list of 195 groups and individuals associated with RWE in Canada, which have been identified through their ongoing environmental scan. Using our assessment of the online activity of these groups and individuals as well as pre-existing literature relating to certain groups, we found that 143 groups and individuals met the definition of RWE. This is not to say that the other groups and individuals shared by the OTU are not RWE, but rather suggests that certain actors and individuals are more effective at self-policing their online activity to ensure that the material they produce online toes the line of acceptability with regards to platforms' terms of service around extremist content.

Through assessing the content produced by the remaining 52 groups and individuals we found that they were all 'relevant' to RWE, in that they advance talking points which are tangential to RWE points of view, including anti-progressive talking points, reactionary conservatism, non-extreme anti-immigrant activism and anti-government activism, but that this content could not conclusively be labelled 'extremist'.

Within the RWE groups and individuals provided by the OTU team, we found that ethnonationalists were the most represented, followed by anti-Muslim groups, white supremacists, sovereigntists, white supremacists and supporters of the manosphere (Figure 3).

We searched for the presence of the RWE groups provided by the OTU team across four of our platforms — Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Gab — as these platforms are set up to be public facing, allowing for accounts belonging to a particular individual or movement to be identified. Of the

143 RWE actors shared by the OTU team, we found that 133 are present on at least 1 of these 4 platforms. Of these, 16 are present across 2 platforms, 8 across 3 platforms and 1 across 4 platforms. The other platforms in our analysis are either anonymous (4chan) or closed forums where individuals tend to avoid expressing public affiliation to particular movements (Iron March and Fascist Forge).

The ten RWE actors which had no entities on the platforms we studied were all white supremacists, suggesting that platform moderation efforts have been successful at denying the most egregious actors a voice online, or that these actors are deliberately eschewing more public platforms for fear of surveillance:

- Atomwaffen
- Blood & Honour
- Combat 18
- Hammerskins
- Northern Guard — Vancouver Island BC
- Northern Order
- Shawn Beauvais-MacDonald
- Soldiers of Odin Canada
- This Hour Has 88 Minutes
- Wolves of Odin

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the entities shared by the OTU team deemed by ISD researchers to cross the definitional threshold of RWE.

Table 2 Breakdown of entities shared by the OTU deemed by ISD researchers to fall within the definition of RWE

Platform		Presence of OTU recommended entity
Facebook	Page	53
	Public group	19
	Private group	18
	Total	90
YouTube	Channel	32
Twitter	Account	56
Gab	Account	24

Ethnonationalists were the most prevalent RWE subgrouping on all of the platforms examined, except

Figure 5
The ideological subcategorisation of accounts, pages, groups or channels

Platform	Ethno-nationalist	Anti-Muslim	Sovereigntist	White supremacist	Manosphere	Other	Total
Facebook pages	42	22	10	1	3		78
Facebook groups	19	8		1	1		29
Facebook private groups	9	8	3	2	1		23
Facebook combined	70	38	13	4	4		129
Twitter	34	9	1	11	1		56
YouTube	15	12	5	3			35
Gab	17	8		17			42
Fascist Forge				31			31
IronMarch	6			64		18	88
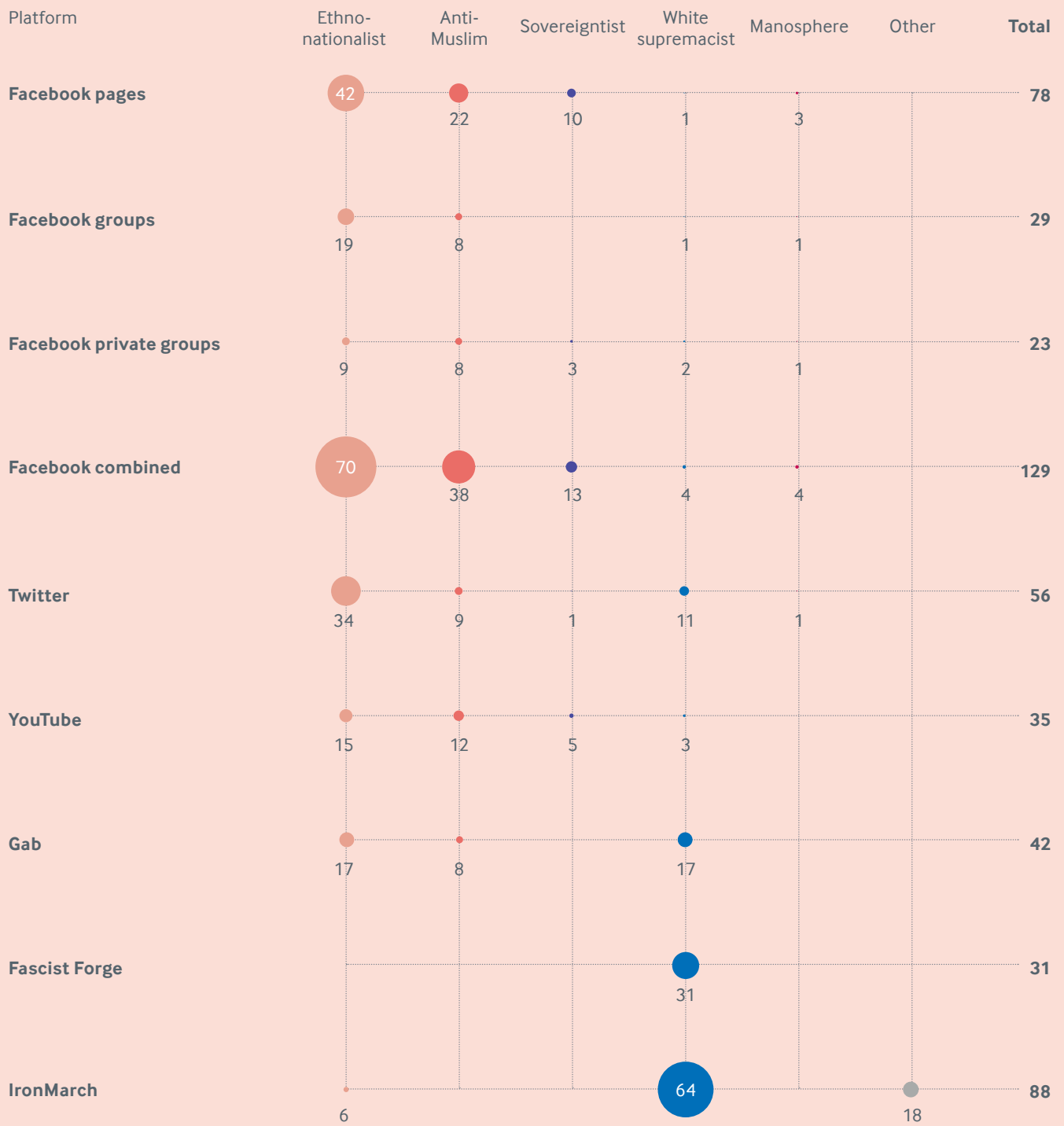
for private Facebook groups (Figure 4). Out of the 'mainstream' platforms studied, Twitter had the highest number of white supremacists, followed by YouTube. Out of the four platforms identified above, Gab proportionally hosted the highest number of white supremacists from the list shared by OTU, reflecting the laxer content moderation standards on the platform in comparison with more mainstream social networks. Interestingly, sovereigntist groups prioritised Facebook pages and YouTube — both platforms used primarily for broadcasting material over direct interaction with fellow users, perhaps reflecting the fact that these groups are made of relatively close-knit networks of members who primarily operate offline or communicate privately.

Identifying Additional Communities
In addition to searching for the presence of groups and individuals aligned to the list shared by OTU, we sought to discover other online entities associated with RWE in Canada. We deployed different discovery methodologies for each platform, drawing on snowball sampling and manual search efforts, overviews of which can be found in the platform chapters and technical appendix. To date, this project has identified 6,660 accounts, channels and pages associated with RWE in Canada, including the dataset provided by the OTU team.

Table 3 gives a breakdown of all the online entities the project captured.

The ideological subcategorisation of different entities by platform is provided in Figure 5. The figure does not include all users identified engaging with these platforms, as given the levels of data access required — and sometimes the scale of data available — it would be impossible to assess the ideology of individual followers of these networks accurately.

This demonstrates that the sub-ideological breakdown observed in the original 'seed' accounts provided by OTU continues in our expanded dataset, with ethnonationalist groups representing the predominating subcategory across 'mainstream' platforms, and white supremacist users prioritising more fringe platforms.

The individual dynamics of RWE activity on each of these individual platforms is discussed in more detail below.

Table 3 Breakdown of all online entities captured in this project

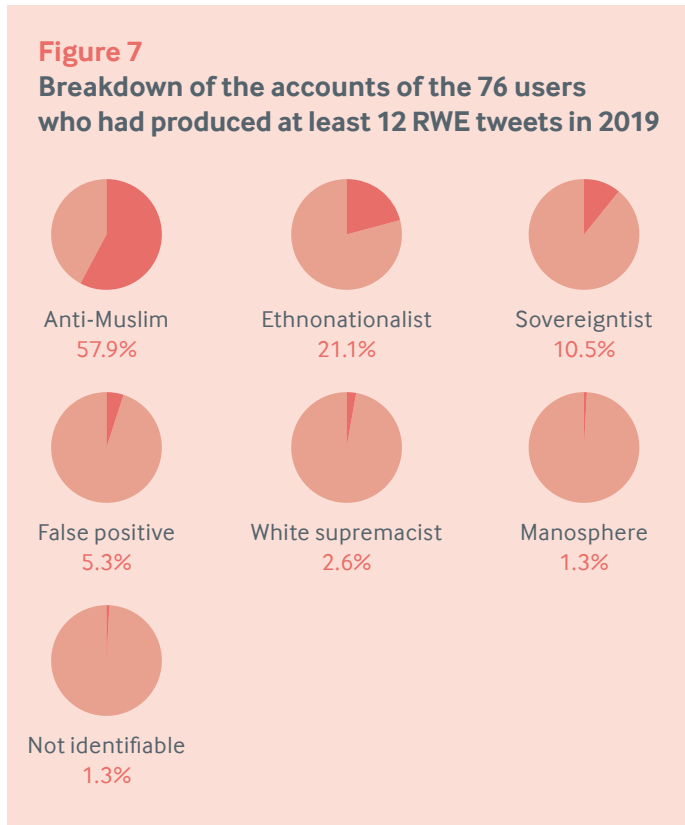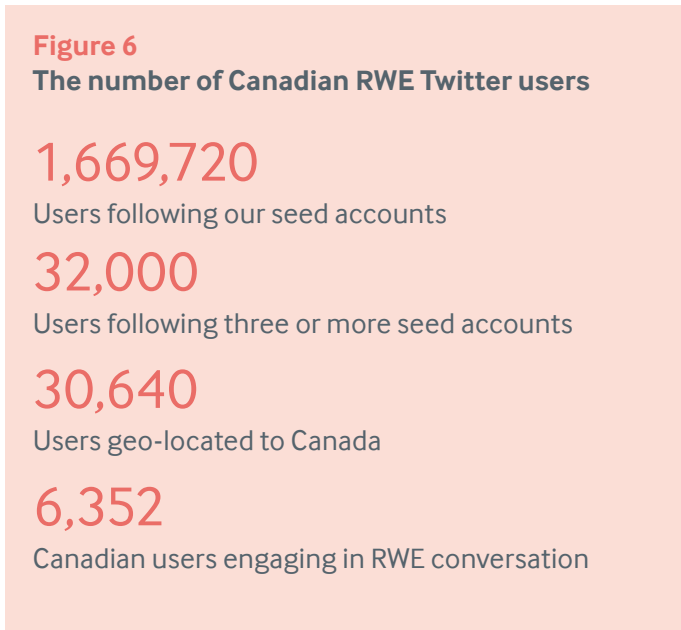| Platform	Entity	
Facebook	Public pages (78)	932,640 followers
	Public groups (29)	147,179 members
	Private groups (23)	51,150 members
	Total: 130	
Twitter	Network analysis (6,352 accounts)	
YouTube	Channels (32)	21,926 videos
		10,042,008 subscribers
Gab	Individual users (42)	
4chan	/pol/ discussion threads (37,918)	
Iron March	Individual users (88)	
Fascist Forge	Individual users (31)	

Platform overview: Twitter

Overview

OTU initially provided ISD with a seed list of 76 Twitter accounts from 31 ethnonationalists, 20 right-wing extremists, 11 andi-Muslim accounts, 10 white supremacists, 2 sovereigntists and 2 linked to the manosphere. These ranged from Canadian influencers with a global reach, such as Stefan Molyneux,[16] who has 446,000 followers, down to the Alberta branch of the Three Percenters, which has just 148 followers. Of these accounts 22 represented specific organisations, while 34 were those of individuals.

Network Expansion

To gain a more comprehensive picture of the number of Canadian RWE Twitter users, we used our seed accounts as the starting point to map out a network.

Our network expansion followed these steps:

1. We created a dataset of all users who followed one of our seed accounts. This created a network of 1,669,720 unique Twitter users.

2. To filter this down we created a dataset of users who followed three or more of our original seed accounts. This created a network of 32,000 potentially relevant Twitter users.

Figure 7

Breakdown of the accounts of the 76 users who had produced at least 12 RWE tweets in 2019

Anti-Muslim
57.9%

Ethnonationalist
21.1%

Sovereigntist
10.5%

False positive
5.3%

White supremacist
2.6%

Manosphere
1.3%

Not identifiable
1.3%

3. We used a geo-location algorithm to identify a network of 30,640 potentially relevant Canadian Twitter users.

4. We then used a NLP algorithm to identify RWE tweets made by the 30,640 potentially relevant Twitter users, identifying 6,352 Canadian users who had made at least one RWE post in 2019 (Figure 6).

Identifying Users Engaged in RWE Activity

As we built our network we recognised that it potentially included a number of users who were interested in RWE issues, but not aligned with RWE ideology, including activists, journalists and researchers. To account for these potential false positives we sought to find a way to identify individuals who were actively engaged in promoting RWE on Twitter.

To achieve this, we gathered a set of 1,966,265 tweets representing all posts which had been made by potentially relevant Canadian users. We then trained a NLP algorithm to identify tweets which met our definition of RWE (Table 4).[17]

Figure 6

The number of Canadian RWE Twitter users

1,669,720
Users following our seed accounts

32,000
Users following three or more seed accounts

30,640
Users geo-located to Canada

6,352
Canadian users engaging in RWE conversation

Table 4 **Examples of tweets analysed by NLP algorithm, by category**

Category of tweet	Examples[18]	Category of tweet	Examples
Anti-Muslim	'Climate change is not an issue! The greatest threat is Sharia law followers. These insane fuckers murder in the name of religion. They all treat women like trash. If you criticise muslims you're a racist. Well done UN. Well done globalists.' 'Islam is a murderous cult pretending to be a religion.'	Anti-left wing	'Liberalism is a mental disorder! Fuck Libtards!' 'Death to SJW's [sic; social justice warriors] and their cultural Marxism! Up political incorrectness!'
Anti-semitic	'Soros is a Rothschild agent, and is using his money for the new world order!' 'You better watch out in 'Jew York city' — 1488.' 'Don't worry about anything Goys, stay just do what (((we))) tell you.'	Anti-migrant	'Screw diversity we have had enough, take a solid stand against refugees and stop them coming before they take over! Is nobody listening to the people anymore?' 'With diversity comes more crimes and more violence, we never had these problems with the old stock immigrants after world war 2.' 'These animals won't assimilate, they won't contribute, and they never belong in a civilized country! Trudeau is enabling an invasion!'
Anti-government conspiracy theories	'Trudeau wants the UN and the new world order to have absolute power in this country! Under them you will have no rights! They are working to take you out and you have to resist!' 'The Mafia organized deepstate has control over our government, military and judiciary, wake up now! #QAnon'	Support for RWE causes	'I support the Proud Boys!' 'Marine Le Pen is the only hope for france! She is the only person standing against moron Macron's jihad migration and alliance with the corrupt EU.'

Analysis of Users Posting RWE Tweets

We identified 16,712 RWE tweets which had been sent by 6,352 users in 2019. Of these, 76 users (1%) produced 12 or more RWE tweets in 2019, while 2,775 users (43%) sent only one RWE tweet. The most prolific user – an account linked to the manosphere – produced 68 tweets identified by our classifier. The most prolific 1,291 users (or 20% of the sample) produced 50% of all RWE tweets identified.

To better understand the motivations of the most active users we analysed the accounts of the 76 users who had produced 12 or more RWE tweets in 2019 to see where they were situated in our subcategorisation of RWE (Figure 7). To achieve this, researchers

assessed the nature of the content produced by these accounts which had been identified by our classifier, and performed a qualitative assessment of the accounts themselves, examining the way these users described themselves in their Twitter bios, the videos and images which these account holders had posted, and the accounts which they commonly retweeted. We found that 44 (57.8%) of these users were aligned with our anti-Muslim subcategorisation, 16 (21%) with our ethnonationalist grouping, 8 (10.5%) with our sovereigntist grouping, 2 (2.6%) with our white supremacist grouping and 1 (1.3%) with our manosphere grouping. Remaining were four false positives, where people were posting about migration and Islam but their tweets did not cross the threshold for our definition of RWE, and one user whose account

had been closed and thus could not be assessed in detail.

This suggests that the most common pattern of activity for more active Canadian RWE users on Twitter is anti-Muslim conversation. This matches trends observed in our Facebook analysis, which showed that the minority group most commonly discussed by RWE pages and groups is Muslims.

Analysis of RWE Networks

To better understand the dynamics behind Canadian RWE activity on Twitter we built a network map of the 6,352 users who had sent a RWE message over 2019 to see their relationship to each other, and to the seed accounts from which we extrapolated this network (Figure 9).

In this map each individual node represents one of the Twitter users who produced a RWE tweet. Our seed accounts are coloured pink, and the accounts which we identified are coloured blue to red, according to the number of relevant tweets the user has sent, with blue being fewer tweets, red more, and yellow an intermediate number of tweets.

Users are situated on the map according to who they follow, with groups of users following similar accounts being grouped closer together. Users are also sized by the number of seed users they follow; those with larger nodes follow more of our seed accounts.

This reveals that a majority of the users who only occasionally posted RWE relevant content tended to follow fewer accounts than our more prolific users, who are situated in a red and orange cluster towards the top of the map. This cluster at the top of the map followed a similar cohort of 31 of our seed accounts. An analysis of these 'hyper-relevant' seed accounts which were connected to the 'prolific' section of our network revealed that 10 users were ethnonationalists, 10 anti-Muslim, 2 white supremacists, 1 a manosphere adherent, and 8 non-RWE accounts were deemed 'relevant' to RWE ideology.

We then compared the ideological subcategorisations of this 'hyperactive' section of the network, with our original 76 seed accounts to test whether, proportionally, particular groupings of users are more likely to engage in extremist conversation (Figure 8).

Perhaps most importantly this reveals that anti-Muslim users are more influential on the prolific section of

Figure 8
**Comparison of seed accounts and prolific seed accounts**

Seed accounts

Ethnonationalist	Anti-Muslim	Sovereigntist	White supremacist	Manosphere	Relevant non-RWE
38.9%	20.4%	9.3%	10.2%	2.8%	18.5%

Prolific seed accounts

Ethnonationalist	Anti-Muslim	Sovereigntist	White supremacist	Manosphere	Relevant non-RWE
32.3%	32.3%	0.0%	6.5%	3.2%	25.8%

Figure 9
Network map of 6,352 Twitter users who had sent a right-wing extremist message in 2019
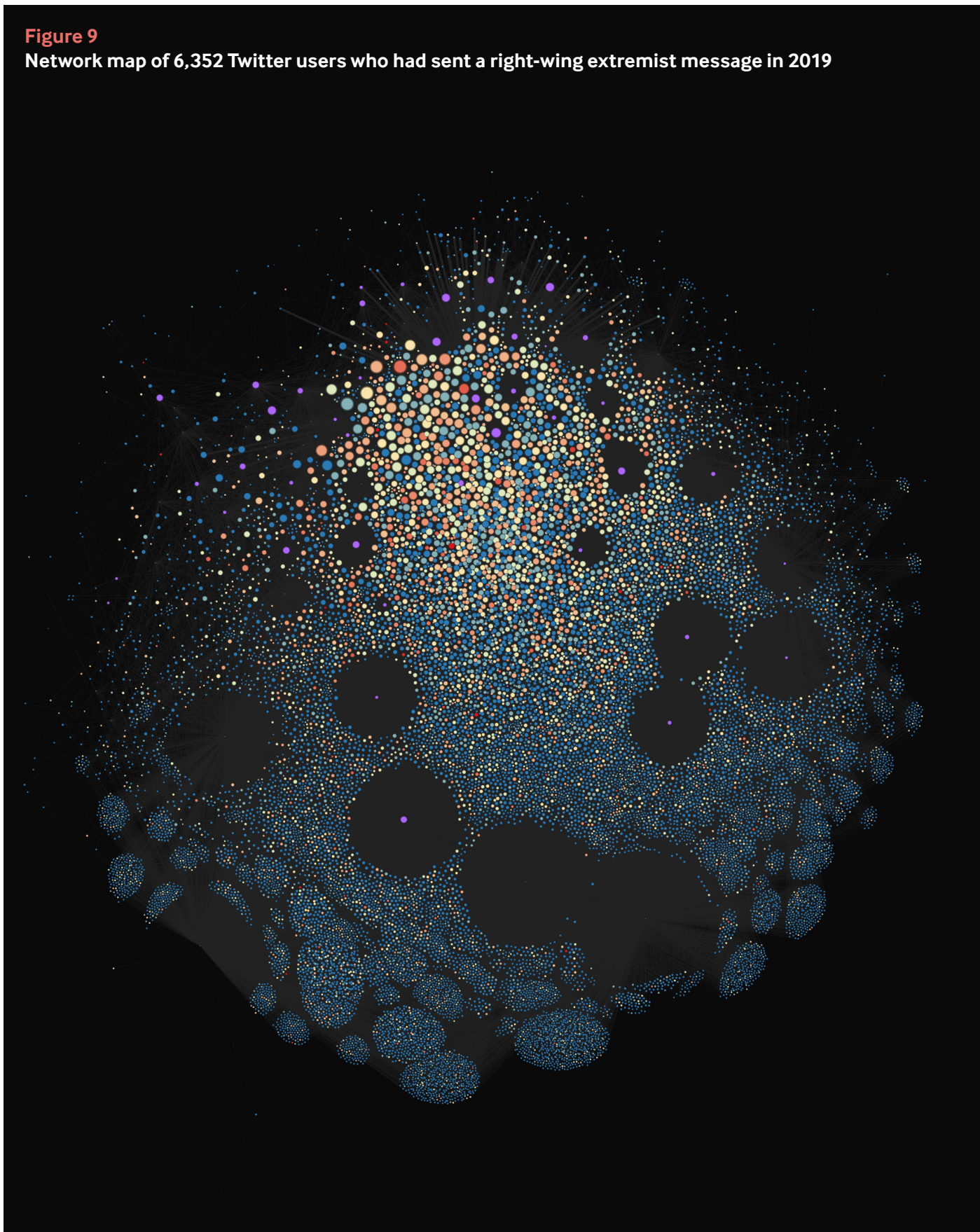
Figure 10
Analysis of network map of 6,352 Twitter users who had sent a RWE message in 2019 by colour coding those who followed similar seed accounts
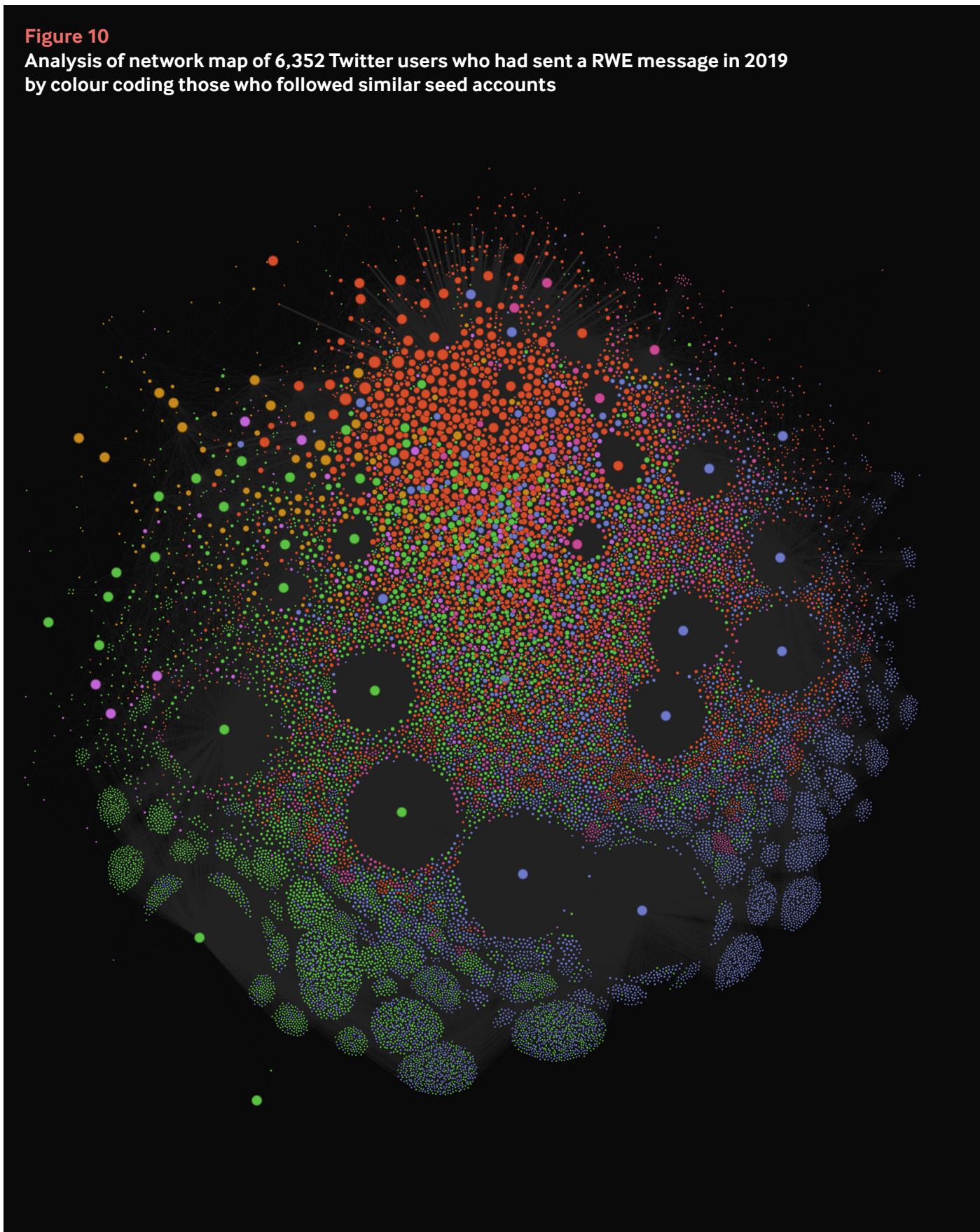
the network – matching observations made when the most active RWE users were analysed. This again reinforces the possibility that anti-Muslim sentiment is more salient to Canadian RWE actors than other topics. In addition to this, sovereigntists are not connected to the most prolific RWE users, suggesting that this subcategory is less influential than others.

Finally, we found that the accounts which did not cross our programmatic threshold of RWE, but were nevertheless deemed relevant to RWE mobilisation, were slightly more likely to be connected to our prolific seed accounts. This suggests that accounts which are not explicitly RWE, but instead operate on the margins between extremist networks and more mainstream reactionary politics, can nevertheless be influential to extremist activity.

To better understand the overall network we identified and colour coded users who followed similar seed accounts. This produced six different communities within our network, coloured green, blue, purple, gold, orange and pink, with the orange community broadly correlating with the 'prolific' users identified above (Figure 10).

To better understand these groupings we performed an analysis of the ways in which these accounts described themselves in their Twitter bios. To do this we gathered all of the bios associated with a particular colour grouping and then used an NLP algorithm to identify terms which were commonly used by that particular community. We then performed a qualitative analysis of these specific terms and used them as tentative indicators of the nature of our different groupings.

These are our findings:

- **The purple community is likely Quebecois:** Purple users were marked by a common use of French language in their Twitter bios, with a high prevalence of the terms 'indépendantiste', 'québécois' and 'québec'. This was unique to the purple grouping, and other colour categories did not use French terms. This suggests that users in the purple community, which is not as clustered as the orange, blue and green communities, and is distributed throughout the network, are associated with Quebecois identity.

- **The green and blue communities are interested users:** Green and blue users did not use terminology associated with RWE ideology in their bio. However there was a higher prevalence of terms related to libertarianism, such as 'libertarian' and 'free speech', as well as other non-political topic which might be indicative of belonging to an older demographics, such as family and other general interest areas, like 'wife', 'father', 'dad', 'god', 'jesus' and 'retired'. These users tended to be less well connected than others in the map and clustered around more prominent influencers. This suggests that the green and blue communities are potentially 'casual' users with an interest in RWE causes, and highlights how there is a range of different entry points which bring generally interested users into RWE circles online.

- **The gold community are 'patriots':** The gold community were most likely to describe themselves using patriotic terminology, such as 'proud Canadians', 'patriots', and people who 'love Canada'. These account holders tended to follow ethnonationalists, and in particular accounts associated with the Canadian Nationalist Party.

- **The orange community are pro-Trump and anti-Trudeau users who share conspiracy theories**: Those in the orange community were more likely than other groupings to mention phrases associated with Donald Trump than other groupings, including '#Trump2020', '#MAGA' and the Canadian equivalent '#MCGA'. They were the most prevalent users of the anti-Trudeau hashtag '#TrudeauMustGo', and were more prolific in their use of terminology associated with the QAnon conspiracy theory than all other groupings.

- **The pink community promote the People's Party of Canada**: Those in the pink community, the most widely distributed across our network, are marked by Twitter bios which express support for the People's Party of Canada and Maxime Bernier. This support is more prevalent among this community than in any of the other groupings.

Trends in RWE Conversation over 2019

To better understand the sort of events which galvanise RWE activity we produced two volume over time

graphs (Figure 11). The top graph shows all RWE tweets identified by our classifier for 2019, and the bottom one all the tweets produced by users who post right-wing extremist material – regardless of whether they were extreme or not.

This revealed that both sets follow the same overall pattern – one of a steady increase in volume throughout 2019, leading up to the federal election on 21 October. This is a different overall trend than that observed on both Facebook and YouTube, where we charted a decrease in activity across 2019. However, it highlights the importance of the election as a spark-point for RWE activity – something which was common across all platforms.

Figure 11
RWE tweets in 2019 by week, and all tweets from RWE users in 2019, by week
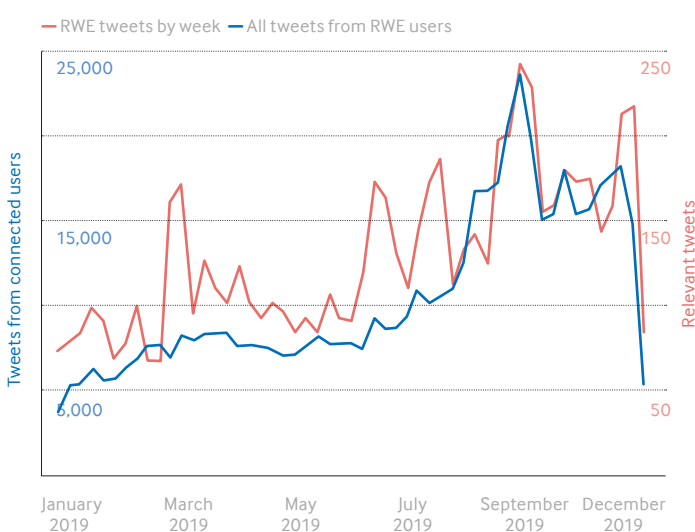
A comparison of the two sets also reveals three additional spikes in RWE activity throughout 2019 in March, July and August.

March Spike in RWE Twitter Activity
The March spike in activity corresponds to the terrorist attack on the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 March. On 15 and 16 March our classifier identified 61 RWE tweets, and in total identified 169 RWE tweets in the week following the attack. Content produced on this day

included 'what aboutism', which sought to detract from the impact of the attack by focusing on jihadist violence; giving disinformation about the attack, suggesting it was a hoax, or that the attacker was left wing; and suggesting that the victims of the attack in some way deserved it. A similar exercise listening to anti-Muslim hate speech in Australia found that in the same time period 825 tweets were sent, drawing on very similar narratives. This suggests that while RWE activity looks similar in both countries, Australia produces more RWE Twitter content than Canada. This is reinforced when membership trends observed in Iron March membership are considered, which show that Australia had 1 Iron March member for every 262,500 internet users, in comparison with 1 for 405,681 in Canada (see 'Platform Overview: Iron March' below).

These are some bowdlerised examples of tweets we identified:

> Don't be fooled by the Muslims pretending to be sad about the #NewZealandMosqueAttacks, they can't disguise how happy they are – they'll be able to milk this for sympathy for years and play the victim card to advance Islamisation.
> ISLAM IS AN INVASION!!! – SPEAK TO A MUSLIM IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME!!! They want to murder all non-believers. ALLAH IS THE DEVIL.

> Don't believe the mainstream media! This attacker was a communist socialist, not right wing at all! This is a smear on conservatives!

> When its Muslims being killed it's all over the media, but no one pays any attention to the THOUSANDS of people being killed by Muslim terror every day – It's not in the media at all! And people wonder why these attacks happen?

July Spike in RWE Twitter Activity
Our classifier identified a spike of 41 RWE tweets on 19 July. This spike corresponded with a large increase in anti-government and anti-left-wing RWE conversation, which included the use of the hashtag #TrudeauMustGo, as well as a number of tweets with anti-Muslim disinformation focused on American congresswoman Ilhan Omar. This spike in activity was part of a much broader increase in the use of the #TrudeauMustGo hashtag, which developed in response

to Trudeau's criticism of Donald Trump's attack against four sitting congresswomen, and which was identified by a number of researchers as a potential example of co-ordinated, inorganic activity designed to smear Trudeau in the run-up to October's election.[19] Our analysis of the users identified through our exercise did not find evidence to suggest that these accounts themselves were bot-like, however this nevertheless illustrates how RWE communities can become organically involved in campaigns co-ordinated by others.

These are some bowdlerised examples of tweets we identified:

Reminder that you can pander to MUSLIMS who all PROMOTE BEATING WOMEN, and the media will protect you!

Ilhan Omar is a disgrace and needs to be deported! She married her brother and is a member of the Muslim brotherhood!

All liberals are pieces of shit, Justin Turdeau rose to the top of the toilet with his pro-Islam stance and the lying press support him. #TrudeauMustGo!

August Spike in RWE Twitter Activity
Our classifier identified a spike of 34 RWE tweets on 24 August, and in total identified 186 RWE tweets that week. This spike corresponded with an increase in discussion around Maxime Bernier being excluded from the leaders' debate on 12 August.[20] RWE conversation largely focused on anti-migrant conversation and conspiracy theories.

These are some bowdlerised examples of tweets we identified:

All Max wants is to keep us safe and control who comes here like they did when your parents arrived! He doesn't want terrorists coming in to control us like Muslims are trying to do!

Mass immigration is very real and coming to Canada if you support the UN! The UN's compact for migration is a takeover, and the UN controls our politicians! Let Max speak!

Macron has lost control of France due to immigration! Trudeau says we must allow Muslims to take over our country!

Although these spikes in activity were sparked by different events it is notable that RWE users were able to connect these to anti-Muslim tropes and conspiracy theories. Furthermore, the examples given above highlight how anti-Muslim activity is often conflated with other issues by RWE actors, including criticism of Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party. This helps reinforce findings gleaned from analysis of the most prolific accounts promoting RWE talking points on Twitter, and again suggests that anti-Muslim conversation is one of the most salient tropes RWE actors draw on.

Platform overview: Facebook

Overview

We identified a series of 78 public Facebook pages and 29 public Facebook groups associated with various extreme right-wing movements in Canada that were active in 2019. We then analysed these pages and groups using the CrowdTangle tool, which enables examination of content produced by public pages and groups on Facebook. We selected these pages through two methods:

- We used CrowdTangle to search for group names, and variations of group names, in order to interact with Facebook's application programming interface (API) (Figure 12).

- ISD researchers created avatar accounts on Facebook, and joined all public groups and public pages identified in the CrowdTangle analysis. We then used Facebook's recommendation algorithm to discover new groups which were either linked to or followed by our seed pages, or which are recommended by Facebook (Figure 13).
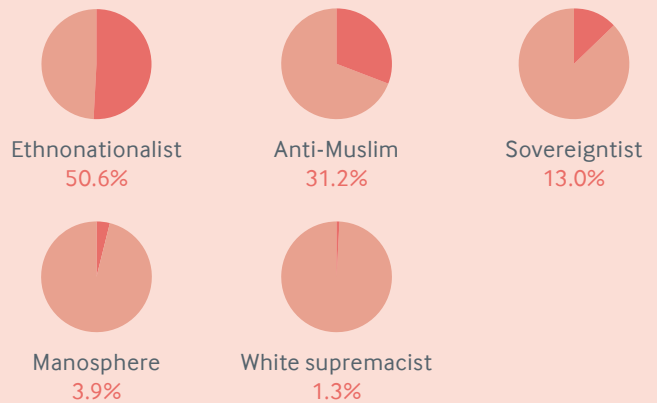
In addition to identifying public Facebook groups, the algorithm recommended 23 private Facebook groups; we assessed their names, descriptions and cover images to ensure they met our programmatic definition of RWE (Figure 14).

This was the combined reach of these entities:

- Public Facebook pages: 932,640 followers
- Public Facebook groups: 147,179 members
- Private Facebook groups: 51,150 members.

However, owing to the data access afforded by the Facebook API, it is not possible to disentangle the membership across these groups, so it is probable that individuals who like more than one page, or who are members of more than one group, have been counted multiple times. Furthermore, although these pages and groups are explicitly associated with Canada, it is not possible to determine the extent to which their membership base is Canadian because of the inability to access individual user data through Facebook's API.
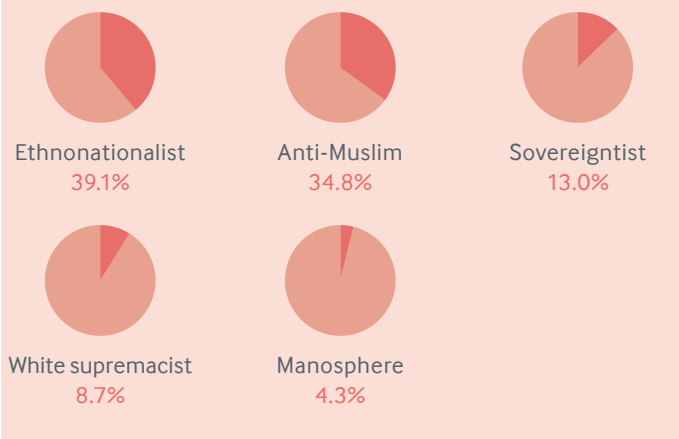
Figure 12
Breakdown of posts on Facebook pages in 2019, by ideological subcategory

Ethnonationalist
50.6%

Anti-Muslim
31.2%

Sovereigntist
13.0%

Manosphere
3.9%

White supremacist
1.3%

Figure 13
Breakdown of posts made by members of public Facebook groups in 2019, by ideological subcategory

Ethnonationalist
67.8%

Anti-Muslim
25.0%

Manosphere
3.6%

White supremacist
3.6%
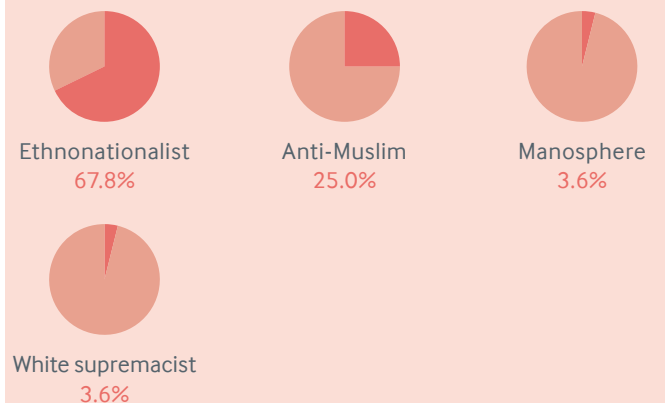
Figure 14
Breakdown of posts made by members of private Facebook groups in 2019, by ideological subcategory

Ethnonationalist
39.1%

Anti-Muslim
34.8%

Sovereigntist
13.0%

White supremacist
8.7%

Manosphere
4.3%

Nevertheless, this still reveals a pattern of use, whereby public pages – which act as dissemination points for content – reach the largest audiences, while public groups – which allow for more active interaction – have fewer members, and private groups – which act as hubs for active co-ordination – have the smallest membership. This potentially reflects a funnelling process, whereby more hard-line communities prioritise forums which afford greater privacy, as other studies have highlighted how private Facebook group posts contain egregious content which breaches Facebook's terms of service.[21] However, without access to these communities, this study was not able to affirm this hypothesis.

The analysis of ideological trends across posts on Facebook pages, and by members of public and private groups, showed that contrary to posts on Facebook pages and within public groups, where ethnonationalism is the dominant ideology, posts on private groups are largely anti-Muslim in nature, suggesting that anti-Muslim groups seek more private forms of content dissemination and discussion.

Explicitly white supremacist movements and groups associated with violence do not have an active presence on Facebook, which is likely a reflection of the platform's recent efforts to limit RWE RWE activity, including a change in March 2019 which banned white

nationalism and white separatism on the platform.[22] However, a number of individual members of these groups retain Facebook accounts, some which contain white supremacist imagery on their personal profiles, suggesting that they are still using the platform to mobilise, but in a way that is more difficult for researchers to discover at scale. Out of 227 individual members of RWE groups initially identified by OTU, ISD researchers found that 236 (85%) still had active Facebook accounts in March 2020.

The Volume of Conversation Over Time on Facebook

We observed two peaks of conversation across Facebook pages and within groups in March and October (Figure 15).

This increase in conversation was driven by the activities of those posting on Facebook pages and members of Facebook groups containing ethnonationalist content, which make the dominant ideological group in our dataset and showed substantial fluctuations in activity over time.

An analysis of the content produced by these pages suggests that the first peak was linked to the mobilisation of yellow vest protesters and activity supporting oil pipelines in late February 2019. The

Figure 15
The number of posts on RWE pages and within groups in Canada, Jan 2019 to Jan 2020

— Source: Crowdtangle
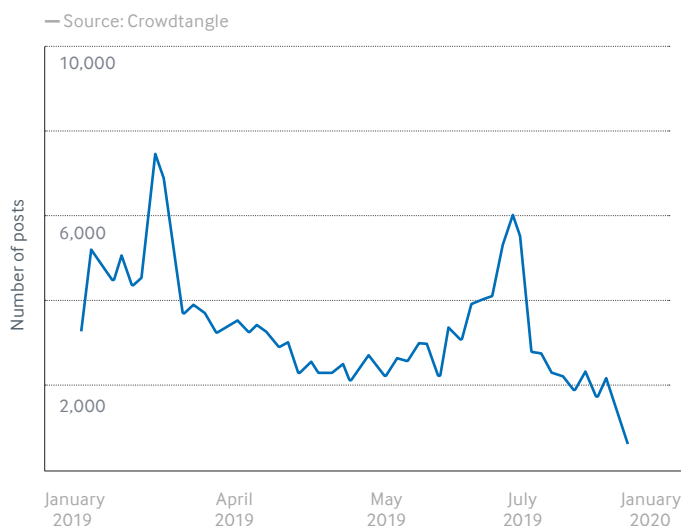
Figure 16
The number of posts on RWE pages and within groups in Canada, Jan 2019 to Jan 2020, by ideology

—Source: Crowdtangle

Figure 17 **The number of posts on RWE pages and within groups in Canada, Jan 2019 to Jan 2020, by ideology without ethnonationalists**
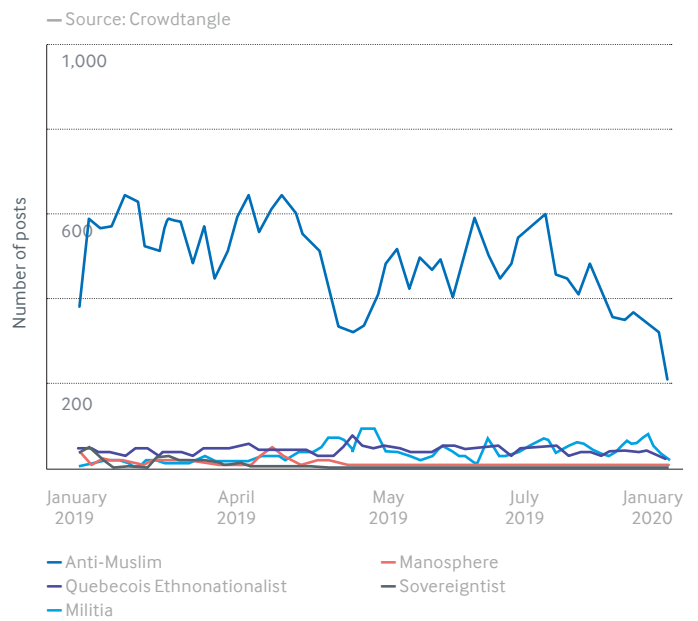
—Source: Crowdtangle
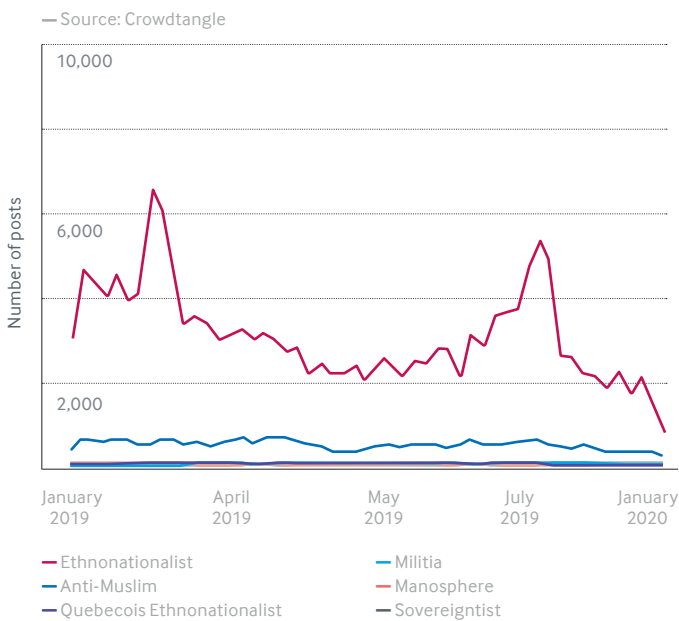
second peak corresponds to the run-up to the federal elections in October 2019, and an increase in anti-Trudeau and election-related content, including conspiratorial posts about potential vote-rigging.

Ethnonationalists and anti-Muslim actors made the most posts on Facebook pages and within groups, and produced 84% and 13% of posts in the overall sample, respectively, followed by Quebecois ethnonationalists who produced 1% of the content. Other ideological groups together account for less than 1% of the overall sample (Figure 16).

The Nature of Content Across Facebook

To better understand how Canadian right-wing extremists mobilise on Facebook we performed a topic modelling exercise producing keyword lists relating to discussion of political parties, key policy areas, specific minority communities and certain facets of extremist ideology. We used NLP to populate these lists further, and then examined posts made by members of public Facebook groups and on public Facebook pages in our lists to detect discussion around these keywords. Using

Facebook's API we were able to investigate all posts made by public Facebook pages, public Facebook group members, but not users' comments on these posts. We were not able to inspect private group data.

We gathered 194,366 posts made on these pages and by group members during 2019 and sought content relating to the subject areas set out in Figure 19.

Key findings

Within the 194,366 posts we have been able to gather, we have so far been able to identify the nature of content of 108,258 posts or 55% of all content (Figure 24).

- Within this, 50% of conversation focused on discussion of mainstream politics. Of discussion around mainstream politics, 41.6% of posts explicitly mentioned Justin Trudeau, and 58.3% of posts mentioned one of the main political parties.

- The second largest area of discussion was key policy areas, accounting for 32.1% of all discussion. Of the policy areas conversation, crime was the most

Figure 18 The topics of right-wing extremist posts on Facebook in Canada in 2019, by broad subject area

Hateful content	Anti-Muslim slurs Anti-Semitic slurs Anti-Black slurs Anti-Chinese slurs Anti-Indigenous slurs Specific slang associated with white supremacist ideology
General discussion of minority communities	Islam and Muslims Jews and Judaism Christians and Christianity
Policy areas	Defence Immigration Education Environment Crime
Mainstream politics	Trudeau Major political parties

Figure 19 The number of posts on public Facebook pages and by group members on RWE Canada, Jan 2019 to Jan 2020, by subject category

— Source: Crowdtangle

Legend:
— Crime
— Defence
— Education
— Environment
— Immigration
— Political Parties
— Trudeau
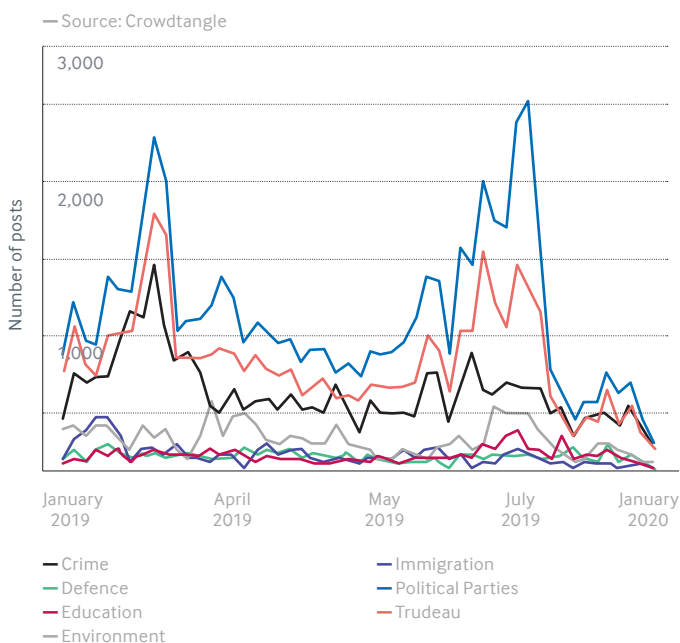
widely discussed issue accounting for 47.5% of conversation, followed by climate change scepticism (20.2%), immigration (11.2%), education (10.7%) and defence (10.2%).

- Religious communities accounted for the third largest topic area we identified, accounting for 16.5% of all discussion. Within this Islam was the most commonly discussed religion, accounting for 60.5% of all discussion of religious communities, followed by Judaism (21.1%) and Christianity (18.3%).

- Conversation which explicitly used slurs targeting minority communities, or terminology associated with extremist ideology, accounted for only 0.7% of the total dataset. General terms associated with extremist slang, such as the '14 words', accounted for 52% of this conversation, followed by anti-Muslim slurs (23%), anti-Semitic slurs (16%) and anti-Indigenous slurs (7%).

Extremist Activity on Facebook Pages and by Group Members

ISD's findings demonstrate that posts from members of ethnonationalist and anti-Muslim groups accounted for almost the entirety of extremist posts on Facebook, with 70% and 24% of the total samples of extremist posts respectively. When compared with their overall representation in our data set, we found that proportionally there were more likely to be explicitly extreme posts on ethnonationalist pages and in the posts of ethnonationalist groups (57% of the pages and groups identified) than on anti-Muslim pages and in the posts of anti-Muslim groups (28% of the pages and groups identified).

Explicitly hateful posts accounted for 0.7% of the total content produced on the pages and by the groups identified, lower than the number of posts discussing mainstream politics or minority communities. These findings suggest that, at least on Facebook, public communities associated with RWE tend to avoid engaging in conversation which explicitly broadcasts their ideology, through the use of either slurs or slang associated with extremist ideology.

A closer examination of discussion around religious minorities shows that posts were generally framed

in hostile but not explicit terms by members of the RWE groups analysed. Instead of using explicit anti-Muslim language, for example, users would be pointed towards content which shows Muslims in a negative light. Similarly, discussion of key policy areas was often framed in a way that was hostile to minority communities, presenting them as causing crime or draining the education system.

Perhaps most interesting is the way in which discussion of Trudeau dominates the RWE landscape on Facebook, suggesting that opposition to the political mainstream is of equal importance to the mainstream communications of RWE groups as overt anti-minority activity. This matches trends seen across other platforms, including Twitter and 4chan, which highlighted how the election was crucial in inspiring RWE activity online, and analysis of content on YouTube, which demonstrated that anti-Trudeau rhetoric was the most salient topic of RWE videos.

To better understand how Canadian right-wing extremists mobilise on Facebook we performed a topic modelling exercise

Platform overview: YouTube

We found 32 Canadian RWE YouTube channels that were active in 2019, whose creators produced a total of 4,095 videos throughout the year. There was significant variance in the rates of activity between channels, and the most active channel produced 2,118 videos in 2019 (51% of all content), whilst the least productive channel produced only one video.

The amount of content produced on YouTube throughout 2019 decreased slightly (Figure 26), matching the downward trend in output observed on Facebook in the same year. It would be tempting to link this to YouTube being more effective in moderating content, however none of the accounts we monitored were blocked over 2019, and many produced content throughout the year, but simply at a lesser rate in the last quarter than in the first quarter.

As on other platforms there was a spike in activity on YouTube in March, when 520 videos were produced. However, unlike other platforms we did not observe a notable spike in activity alongside the October federal elections.

The March spike in activity on Twitter and 4chan corresponded with the Christchurch attacks, but a qualitative analysis of content produced across our channels did not highlight this as a particularly salient topic. However, it is possible that although the attack did not encourage users to produce content explicitly discussing the attack, it nevertheless acted as inspiration to produce RWE content on other topics. Another possibility is that this spike in activity was linked to the SNC-Lavalin affair, which came to light in February: Justin Trudeau was found to have improperly influenced Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould to intervene in an ongoing case against the SNC-Lavalin construction company.[23]

Ideological Subcategorisation

Ethnonationalists were the most prevalent ideological subcategory using YouTube, making up 34.3% of the Canadian RWE channels active in 2019. Sovereigntists and white supremacists both had three channels on the platform.

Despite being the second most prevalent ideology, anti-Muslim actors were the most active producers, with a

Figure 20 **The number of videos produced by Canadian RWE YouTube channels in 2019, by month**
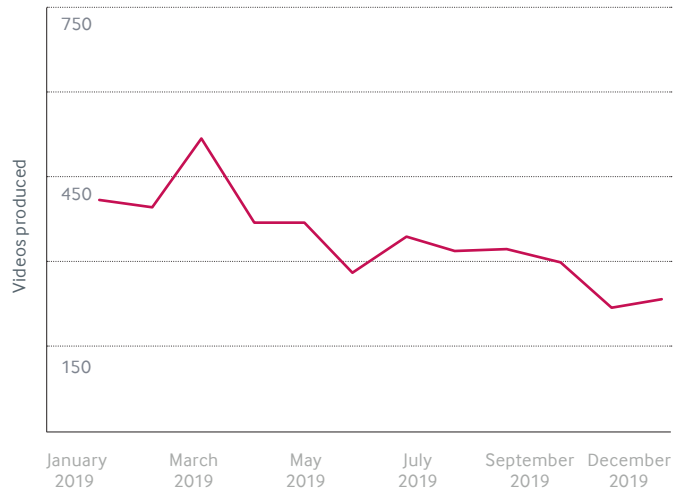
Figure 21

The number of videos produced by Canadian RWE YouTube channels in 2019, by ideology

Ideology		Videos produced
Anti-Muslim		2,695
Ethnonationalist		966
Sovereigntist		139
White supremacist		292
ideos produced	0 1,500 3,000	
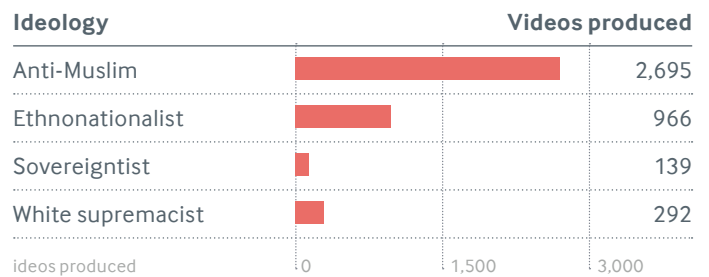
Figure 22

The number of videos produced by Canadian RWE YouTube channels in 2019, by ideology, excluding the highly prolific channel

Ideology		Videos produced
Anti-Muslim		577
Ethnonationalist		966
Sovereigntist		139
White supremacist		292
Videos produced	0 1,500 3,000	
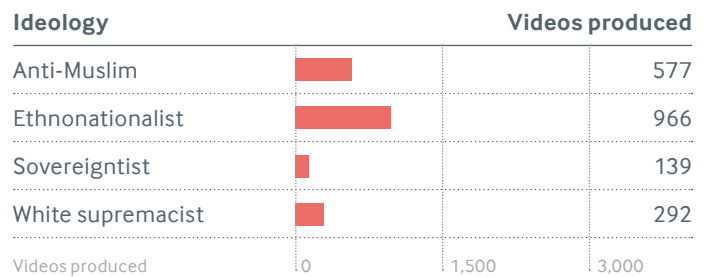
total of 2,695 videos (Figure 21). This is explained by the presence of a highly prolific channel in this set which produced 2,118 videos alone. Owing to the channel's inflated rate of production and its global focus, we removed it from the analysis to prevent it skewing the data. With this channel excluded, ethnonationalists become the most productive ideology, producing 966 videos in 2019. Anti-Muslim actors were second (577 videos), followed by white supremacists (292 videos) and sovereigntists or militia (139 videos). None of the channels coded belonged to the manosphere community (Figure 22).

Qualitative Analysis

In order to better understand which topics of conversation were most pertinent to Canadian RWE YouTube channels, we qualitatively analysed videos produced by eight of the channels active in 2019. This sample was selected to ensure that we were able to capture a broad picture of Canadian RWE active on the platform. We chose 2 ethnonationalist, 2 sovereigntist or militia, 2 white supremacist and 4 anti-Muslim channels to analyse. To weight this analysis to ensure hyper-productive accounts were not over-represented in our dataset, we coded the most viewed video of each month produced by these channels.

Where possible we selected channels which had produced content in each month of the year, however not all of our ideological subsections were represented by channels that had produced content consistently throughout 2019. Accordingly, we coded 23 videos produced by anti-Muslim accounts, 13 videos produced by ethnonationalist accounts, 13 videos produced by white supremacist accounts and 15 videos produced by sovereigntist accounts.

As videos can cover a wide range of topics researchers coded multiple themes per video. A breakdown of the themes of the videos analysed is provided in Figure 23.

Anti-Establishment
The most discussed theme of the channels we analysed was anti-Trudeau sentiment: 18 of the 64 videos analysed (28%) discussed the prime minister in a negative light, and anti-Trudeau discussion was in the top three themes of four of the channels we analysed in greater detail. White supremacist accounts were the

Table 23 The themes of eight videos produced on Canadian RWE YouTube channels in 2019

Theme of video	Videos
Anti-Communism	2
Anti-EU	2
Anti-Government	2
Anti-Immigration	14
Anti-Left wing	7
Anti-LGBTQ	5
Anti-Liberal party	7
Anti-Media	6
Anti-Muslim	7
Anti-Police	2
Anti-Socialism	2
Anti-Society	3
Anti-Trudeau	18
Anti-Urban	2
Anti-Feminism	2
Climate Change Denial	2
Conspiracy Theorist	15
Political Corruption	9
The Federal Election	5
The 'Great Replacement'	2
Gun Rights	5
The PPC	2
Denial of racism	2
SNC Lavalin	2
Tommy Robinson	1
Wexit	5
Yellow Vests	2

only category of channels not to have anti-Trudeau in their top three themes.

As we chose to focus on the most viewed videos from each channel, we can see that anti-Trudeau sentiment and discussion is connected to increased viewership. Tied to the theme of anti-Trudeau are those related to left-wing politics: anti-left wing (7), anti-Liberal party (7), anti-society (3) and political corruption (9). Importantly, this matches trends observed in analysis of 4chan, Twitter and Facebook, which suggests that Trudeau is important in galvanising oppositional RWE activity across social media platforms.

Relatedly, a sovereigntist channel discussed Wexit in five of their most popular videos. The dissolution of the federal government and the separation of the western provinces, or Wexit, became popular in the aftermath of the election, as more conservative leaning individuals exhibited their frustration with the results and the continuation of the status quo, which they see as favouring the eastern provinces.[24] In general, these themes point to a larger disillusionment with politics and the current system.

Conspiracy Theories
The second most discussed theme in our data was conspiracy theories, which had 15 mentions and appeared in the top three themes of three channels. A common conspiracy theory included extra-governmental control over Canada, with a particular focus on the UN's perceived role in dictating Canadian immigration policy, a trope which was also identified in analysis of Twitter

conversation. Other topics included suggestions that Trudeau was linked to Jeffery Epstein's paedophilic activity; and the promotion of conspiracy theories about George Soros, suggesting he is involved in 'shadowy efforts' to subvert western nations through migration.

Importantly, conspiracy theories were discussed by three of our ideological subcategories. This helps to illustrate the saliency of this theme and its relationship to RWE. More research must be done into exactly which conspiracy theories are most present and most relevant to the Canadian RWE.

Anti-Immigration
Anti-immigration was the third most prevalent theme, with 14 videos mentioning it. This theme was also present in the form of anti-Muslim discussion and the great replacement theory, which focuses on the perceived replacement of white people through mass migration, which had two mentions in our data.[25] Anti-immigration sentiment was present in each of the ideological subcategories we coded for, illustrating its importance to our definition of RWE as a form of exclusive nationalism. Anti-immigration and anti-Muslim themes are often tied to anti-Trudeau and anti-left sentiments, as RWE groups and individuals' perception that immigration is intrinsically tied to the policies enacted by Trudeau's Liberal government and left-wing politics more broadly. This theme is also tied to that of conspiracy theories, focusing on the belief that 'shadowy forces' connected to the UN and George Soros are deliberately increasing migration as part of a broader attack on white people.

> A common conspiracy theory included extra-governmental control over Canada, with a particular focus on the UN's perceived role

Platform overview: 4Chan

To better understand how the Canadian RWE operates online we decided to examine activity across 4chan's 'politically incorrect' or '/pol/' board. This platform was selected because it is hugely important in contemporary RWE culture and mobilisation.[26] It serves not only as a key hub for the distribution of highly egregious white supremacist material, but also as the progenitor for a range of conspiracy theories, extremist disinformation and meme content distributed across social media, and a number of networks of extremist trolls.

Furthermore the platform automatically labels users with a flag according to the country where their internet protocol (IP) address originates, allowing for the identification of Canadian users.[27] It should be noted that this flag can be altered through the use of a virtual private network (VPN), or the manual selection of a number of non-country-specific flags (such as a swastika) and thus it is possible for users to pose as Canadians — through the use of a Canadian VPN, and for Canadian users to obfuscate their identity. With this caveat in mind, this nevertheless makes the platform a useful source for country specific monitoring.

For this study we used a dataset produced by researchers who compiled all threads and posts made on 4chan's /pol/ board from June 2016 to November 2019.[28] In this timeframe, Papasavva et al. found that Canadian users were the third most active posters on 4chan behind the US and the UK.[29] More significantly,

when these numbers were normalised using a country's 'estimated Internet-using population', Canada became the most productive country.[30] This is important, as it matches trends also observed on Iron March, which highlighted that Canadians were more likely to use the platform than individuals based in the UK and US — demonstrating the extent of Canadian engagement with RWE causes online.

Using this dataset we examined all posts made by Canadian users in 2019, as identified by their country or flag code. This data was then analysed using Method52, where it was put through classifiers allowing us to map the volume over time of posts and comments as well as identify key themes in topics of conversation.

Volume

Using Method52, we were able to visualise the posts and comments made by Canadian users on 4chan. Posts refer to the number of threads on the /pol/ which were started by Canadian users, while comments measure the number of replies to threads made by Canadian users. Through this we found that Canadian users created 37,918 threads (5.35%) in 2019, out of 708,932 total threads globally, and 1,636,558 posts (5.71%) on /pol/ out of 28,649,533 total posts.

An analysis of user comments and posts reveals similar patterns in activity by Canadian users on /pol/, and identifies two spikes in activity, which correlate to patterns observed on other platforms, including Twitter and Facebook (Figures 24 and 25). There was a sharp increase of activity on 15 March, correlating with the terrorist attack committed in Christchurch, and a spike in activity correlating with the federal election on 21 October.

Posts made on 15 March largely revolve around support for the attack — such as discussing the attacker's 'score' — a reference to the number of people killed. This is different from RWE activity on other platforms, such as Twitter, which instead focused on justifying or diverting attention away from the attack. This highlights how 4chan attracts a community whose members are comfortable in their explicit and overt support for RWE terrorism, potentially because of the anonymity which the platform affords users.

**Figure 24 The number of Canadian 4chan /pol/ posts in 2019**
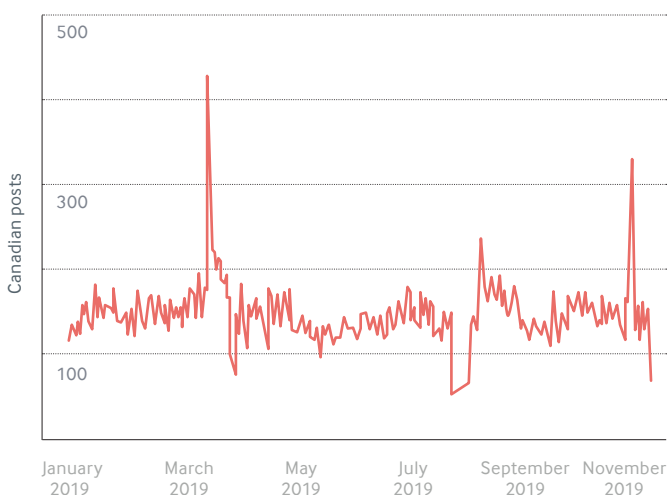
The second highest spike in Canadian activity on 4chan in 2019 was at the end of October, around 21 October. This was the date of the Canadian federal election, and activity on 4chan revolved around anti-Trudeau conversation – suggesting that the prime minister is a communist, and soft on migration and Islam. There was also a call for renewed RWE engagement in Canadian politics, including a request for the reinstatement of the National Socialist National Unity Party, which was banned in 1940 (Figure 26). This spike in activity again corresponds to trends seen across Twitter and Facebook, and suggests that although different platforms attract different constituencies of right-wing extremists, similar events are likely to trigger increases in RWE activity online.

Figure 26
Anonymous post on 4chan, 7 October 2019

Figure 25 **The number of Canadian 4chan /pol/ comments in 2019**
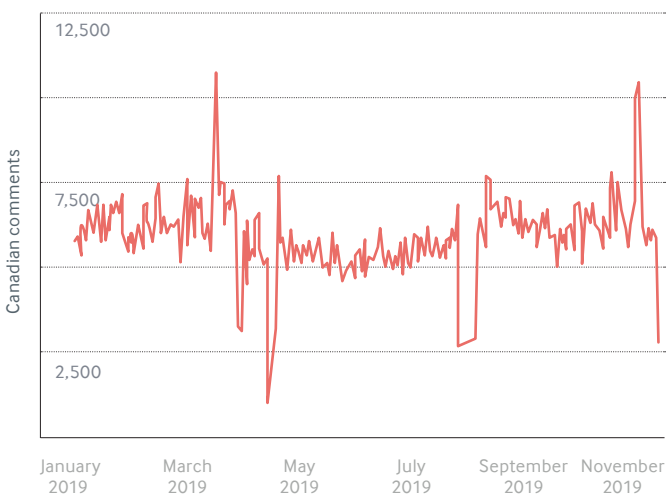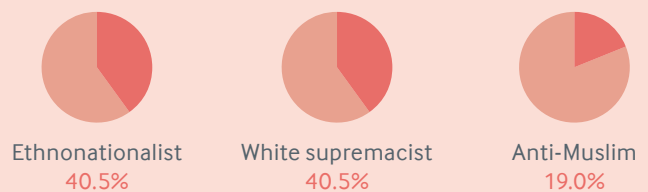
Platform overview: Gab

When scoping platforms to incorporate we identified Gab as relevant to this study. The platform has garnered a large amount of attention as a potential home for RWE influencers who have been removed from more mainstream platforms following breaches of terms of service around hate speech and extremism.[31] Accordingly we conducted a scoping exercise, examining 27 Canadian users of the platform which had been shared by the OTU team, as well as 15 additional users who had been manually identified. Using our ideological subcategorisation we found 17 of these users to be ethnonationalist, 17 white supremacist and 8 anti-Muslim (Figure 33).

Importantly, this demonstrates that proportionally Gab hosts more white supremacists than the 'mainstream' platforms which we examined, suggesting that the platform acts as a base for more explicit and egregious RWE activity. Two individuals from the list of 'ideologues, gurus and lone wolves' in Perry and Scrivens' 2015 study of RWE in Canada, have profiles on Gab.[32] However, they both have very low numbers of followers (17 and 108). Interestingly, one of these users asked his (unresponsive) followers about contact information for 'The Base', a white supremacist social network and militant group organising paramilitary training.[33] Another figure associated with militant RWE uses Gab under the alias 'Dark Foreigner'. In 2018, 'Dark Foreigner' was identified by Vice as a 21-year old Canadian graphic designer and 'one of Atomwaffen [Divisions] key propagandists'.[34]
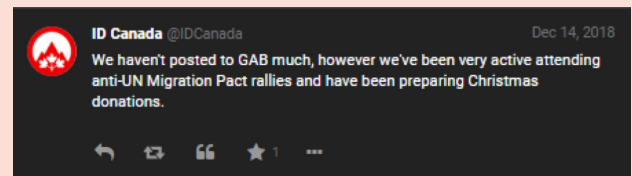
However, although Gab is able to function as a hub for more explicit actors, we found that the platform is of less importance than expected, with a relatively inactive user base. Out of the 42 users selected for scoping research we found that 12 were not active at all in 2019, including several high-profile influencers. In comparison, a similar ISD study looking at RWE online in Germany identified and analysed 38 RWE Gab accounts.[35]

We also found that our seed accounts are not particularly well connected. Only seven users identified had more than 1,000 followers. In particular a number of accounts associated with relatively high-profile influencers had very few followers. The posts made by these users also receive very little engagement. On examining the activity of these accounts we found that

Figure 27
Gab users by ideological subcategory

Ethnonationalist
40.5%

White supremacist
40.5%

Anti-Muslim
19.0%

Figure 28
Post on Gab by ID Canada, 14 December 2018

ID Canada @IDCanada   Dec 14, 2018
We haven't posted to GAB much, however we've been very active attending anti-UN Migration Pact rallies and have been preparing Christmas donations.

most posts receive fewer than five responses from other users.

Some account holders also reflected that they do not use Gab very much. For example, the Canadian Branch of Generation Identity, ID Canada (262 followers), stated it does not use the platform much (Figure 28). As Generation Identity and its international affiliates put a lot of emphasis on social media and communication campaigns, it is telling that they do not make much of an effort to establish themselves on Gab. This reinforces findings elsewhere which suggest that Gab has many fewer active users than the site reports, and potentially inflates its user numbers.[36]

After assessing the relatively inactive Canadian user base on the platform, we decided to prioritise analysis of other platforms for this study.

Platform overview: Iron March

Background

Iron March was founded in 2011 by Alexander Mukhitdinov – aka Alexander Slavros – specifically as a place for fascists and white supremacists to mobilise on, and later closed in 2017 for undisclosed reasons.[37] The site functioned as a communication platform favoured by individuals espousing violent extreme right ideologies. Iron March users have been perpetrators of violence, murdering two people in 2017, and were connected to violent groups such as Vanguard America, and the platform acted as a hub for the terrorism supporting group Atomwaffen.[38] Following its closure, Iron March was subject to a data leak in 2019, which made a large amount of information public,[39] including the personal details of Iron March users.

We are performing an ongoing number of analyses on this data, including assessing the location of individual actors from their IP addresses, evaluating their self-reported ideology, and examining the topics these users discussed. We decided to pursue this avenue of research after an internal ethical review, which balanced the use of data obtained without consent against the public good gained by better understanding how the extreme right operate and spread hate online. Mitigating factors considered include the fact that this data is now in the public domain and has been widely covered by journalists and bloggers. ISD did not gather or store any personal data or information which could be used to identify individual users.

Findings

Location

We found there were 88 Canadian Iron March users in 2017, with Canada being the third most represented country on the platform, following the US (625 members) and the UK (104 members). When this is compared with the total number of internet users in each country we found that Canadians internet users were slightly more likely to be members of Iron March than in the US or UK, with 1 Iron March member per 405,681 internet users, in comparison with 1 member per 455,520 internet users in the US, and 1 member per 433,653 in the UK.[40] When the top ten countries with the most internet users are taken into account, Canada had the fourth highest number of Iron March members

Table 5 The ten countries with the most Iron March users in 2017

Country	Members	Internet users in 2019 (m)[41]	Proportion of Iron March members to internet users (1:)
US	625	284.7	455,520
UK	104	45.1	433,653
Canada	88	35.7	405,681
Australia	56	14.7	262,500
Netherlands	26	15.5	569,153
Germany	19	60.0	3,157,894
Sweden	18	8.7	483,333
Brazil	16	144.8	9,050,000
Ireland	15	4.2	280,000
Serbia	15	4.5	300,000

Table 6 The number of Iron March users in Canada in 2017, by territory

Country	Population[42]	Iron March users	Proportion of Iron March users to population (1:)
Ontario	13,448,494	35	384,242
Quebec	8,164,361	16	453,592
British Columbia	4,646,055	20	232,302
Alberta	4,067,175	6	677,862
Manitoba	1,278,365	1	1,278,365
Saskatchewan	1,098,352	4	274,588
Nova Scotia	923,598	2	466,299
New Brunswick	747,101	1	747,101
Newfoundland & Labrador	519,716	2	259,858
Prince Edward Island	142,907	1	142,907
North West Territories	41,786	0	N/A
Nunavut	35,944	0	N/A
Yukon	35,874	0	N/A
Total	35,151,728	88	399,451

when the total internet-using population is taken into account, following Australia, Ireland and Serbia (Table 5).

Within Canada, in 2017 Ontario had the greatest number of users (35), followed by British Columbia (20) and Quebec (16). This is roughly in line with provincial population, Ontario being the most populous, followed by Quebec and British Columbia. Notably, Manitoba had only 1 member, while Saskatchewan, which has 200,000 more citizens, had 4. The northern territories had no registered Iron March users (Table 6).

The cities with the greatest number of Iron March users in 2017 were Toronto and Montréal, (11 members each), followed by Vancouver (7 members), and Calgary and Victoria (4 members) (Table 7).[43]

Ideology

Iron March had a functionality whereby users were able to list their ideology. Out of the 88 Canadian users identified from the list, there were 56 unique expressions of ideology. Although Iron March is commonly associated in media commentary with violent white supremacist movements (most notably Atomwaffen) we examined these self-identified ideological categories to test the extent to which Canadian users of Iron March were ideologically homogenous (Figure 35). Accordingly, researchers coded these self-reported ideologies in alignment with our typology of RWE.

The ideological bracket which the largest number of Canadian Iron March users self-identified with was 'white supremacist' (62 users, or 70%). This included users who self-identified as neo-Nazis (17 users) and fascist (25 users). In a number of cases an alignment to our white supremacist category was inferred (e.g. from a user listing their ideology as the swastika category; or the listing of an ideology as right-wing death squads, a
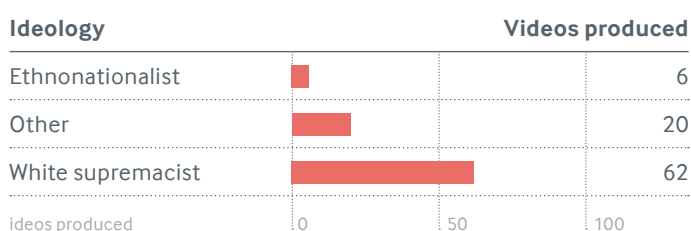
common white supremacist meme).

The next highest self-reported ideological category was 'other' (20 users). In most cases we were unable to discern a user's ideology from what they reported, because of their use of 'shitposting' – listing their ideology as something obviously absurd (e.g. 'Esoteric Dildoism' or 'Everything but rap and country'). However, three individuals listed their alignment to a left-wing ideology, and one user stated that they had no ideology. We examined these users' post histories and found that while three engaged in conversation which suggested they were white supremacists, one user was potentially an anti-fascist troll seeking to disrupt the Iron March community. The remaining user base contained six users whose self-reported identity suggested they were ethnonationalist.

Following this, we manually reviewed the users' comment and message history. Most users identified discussed extremist white supremacist tropes in their posts and conversations, suggesting that although users self-identified with different ideologies, this did not lead them to different behaviour.

Figure 29
Self-reported ideological breakdown of Iron March users in Canada

Ideology		Videos produced
Ethnonationalist		6
Other		20
White supremacist		62
ideos produced	0 50 100	

Table 7 Cities in Canada with more than one member of Iron March in 2017

City (province)	Members per city
Montréal (QB)	11
Toronto (ON)	11
Vancouver (BC)	7
Calgary (AB)	4
Victoria (BC)	4
London (ON)	3
Scarborough (ON)	3
Edmonton (AB)	2
Etobicoke (ON)	2
Richmond (BC)	2
Richmond Hill (ON)	2
Saskatoon (SK)	2
St. Catharines (ON)	2
St. John's (NL)	2

Platform overview: Fascist Forge

Background

Fascist Forge was created in 2018 as an alternative to Iron March by an individual identified only as Mathias from Los Angeles, and is designed specifically to offer a home for fascist individuals.[44] The site has been noted for its violent language and forum discussions, as well as its 'library for would be far-right terror cells'.[45]

Fascist Forge requires a multi-stage application process to ensure that only committed extremists gain entry to the platform. Prospective users are first required to introduce themselves to the community, outlining where they are from, how they found the platform, why they registered, what they hope to accomplish by entering the platform, as well as their interests, skills and political history. Following this they are encouraged to revise from the 'learning centre', before completing a comprehensive 'entrance exam' designed to vet users for ideological purity, asking them among other things their opinion on Jewish people, whether Christianity is compatible with fascism, and the relationship between man and nature.

A review of the essential reading list recommended by the platform to new members reveals that the community which the platform is attempting to nurture is also explicitly supremacist, incorporating texts from ideologues including Adolf Hitler, David Lane, Alexander Slavros, James Mason, George Lincoln Rockwell and Julius Evola. The platform also links to a depository of SIEGE — a newsletter produced by American white supremacist James Mason between 1980 and 1986, which advocates for accelerationism (the speeding up of societal collapse through extreme violence), a concept which has been hugely influential on recent white supremacist terror attacks.[46]

This multi-stage process and focus on particular ideologues suggests that ideological purity or homogeneity is valued in its user base, as an attempt to weed out potential infiltrators or individuals who may cause dissent within the community. This is supported by the fact that users are stratified according to the volume of content they produce, and rankings provided by other members of the forum, with users being kicked out by moderators for a range of reasons, including 'support for Semitic desert religions'.

Owing to the level of engagement with the community required to gain access to the platform our researchers did not attempt to introduce themselves, or complete the entrance exam. However, one can view the content of prospective members' 'introductions' and basic statistics around each user's engagement from the platform. From this we were able to find 31 individuals who claimed to be from Canada attempting to join the platform, compared with 90 prospective users from the US, and 21 prospective users from the UK. The statistics provided by the platform relating to user activity show that of the 31 Canadians who attempted to join the platform 28 were active members of Fascist Forge.

Findings

Location
The introductions of Fascist Forge users allow for much less granular geo-location analysis than the data made available in the Iron March leaks. Of the 31 prospective members we identified, 11 provided further information about their location, with the most common location being 'western Canada', followed by Ontario (Table 8). This lack of granularity is likely because location was determined from what users self-reported, as opposed to leaked data in the case of Iron March, and given the small sample size it is difficult to infer whether this data reflects broader trends.

Table 8 The location of Fascist Forge users

City (province)	Members per city
Alberta	1
British Columbia	1
Central Canada	1
Eastern Canada	1
Maritimes	1
Ontario	2
Saskatchewan	1
Western Canada	3

Demographics

- **Age:** The prospective users of the platform are young. Out of the nine who disclosed their age, the oldest was 24. Notably, four prospective users claim to be minors, with the youngest user saying they are 15. Another user who does not disclose their age says they started engaging with supremacist communities online when they were 17. Notably, a number of white supremacist influencers have explicitly stated their intention of targeting Generation Z for recruitment, and this finding suggests that these efforts may be working.

- **Gender:** All prospective users claim to be male, reinforcing findings which point towards the tendency of far-right membership to be dominated by men.[47]

Dynamics

There were 13 prospective members who mentioned how they found the platform, between them identifying 16 platforms which acted as a conduit bringing them there (Table 9).

Table 9

Platforms through which users joined Fascist Forge

Platform	Users directed to Fascist Forge
Discord	4
Gab	3
Iron March	3
8chan	1
Instagram	1
O9A[48]	1
Stormfront	1
Twitter	1
VICE	1

The gaming chat application Discord, which has become home to extreme right communities in recent years because of its anonymity, the closed nature of its chat channels, and a number of other features that support co-ordination, brought four individuals to the platform.

The next most popular conduit platforms were Gab and Iron March, which each brought three users to the platform. Only two users had come to Fascist Forge through mainstream social media sites, suggesting that the site is favoured by those already somewhat familiar with the ideology and community. However, it is also worth noting that at least one individual was made aware of the platform by reading an article in the media — in an article in Vice — suggesting that reporting on extremist channels and communities may have the undesirable effect of driving additional users to them.

These findings highlight the interconnected nature of the social media ecosystem occupied by the extreme right, demonstrating how users are directed to new resources and communities by their peers on other platforms.

Ideology

We sought to examine the ideological split of prospective users of Fascist Forge. Unlike Iron March, where there was some variation in self-declared ideology, all but one prospective user (who identified as a Buddhist nationalist) clearly aligned with a white supremacist ideology. From the 31 total users, 17 claimed to be National Socialist and 11 claimed to be fascist. This ideological homogeneity across users is likely a reflection of the site's structure and vetting process, which rewards conformity. Importantly it suggests that although it has a small user base, Fascist Forge may be important in reinforcing the world view of committed individuals, which, combined with its focus on accelerationist ideology, suggests that it may pose a security risk.

Concluding remarks

Our analysis above has revealed that right-wing extremists in Canada operate across a range of platforms, to advance a number of ideological tropes. While ethnonationalists are the largest community of right-wing extremists we documented in this study, we found that explicit and overt white supremacist activity was more prevalent on platforms which have been specifically created for extremist use, like Iron March and Fascist Forge, or platforms with very lax content moderation standards, such as Gab.

Despite each hosting different communities of right-wing extremists we found that platforms had similar use patterns throughout 2019, with increased activity around the Christchurch attack and the federal elections. This suggests that although specific communities of right-wing extremists adhere to slightly different ideological perspectives, mobilise in different ways, and choose to congregate on different platforms, they nevertheless are broadly motivated by similar issue areas and events.

Through our analysis of right-wing extremist conversation on these different platforms we found that attacks on and discussion of the Muslim community, immigrants and Justin Trudeau are particularly salient to RWE actors. However, the ways in which this manifests depends on the platform in question. Interestingly, we found that activity on mainstream social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter was rarely explicitly hateful in its tone or nature. Instead it appealed to hateful narratives implicitly, through the negative portrayal of minority communities and political opponents, in a way which is not necessarily illegal or in breach of a platform's terms of service. This suggests that right-wing extremists in Canada are becoming adept at treading the fine line around what is permissible within the terms of service for social media platforms, and may be adapting their online activity to reflect shifts in terms of service by social media companies.

Our analysis brings a range of policy considerations. It is clear that wherever possible smaller platforms should be brought to the table and offered support to address and respond to illegal terrorist or violent extremist content by the wider tech and research sectors, but this is not going to be easy. Many libertarian and extremist platforms are based in the US, and accordingly only adhere to US law. In these instances a range of regulatory approaches should be considered which can compel these platforms to act responsibly, and safeguard their users. The duty of care model for regulation as proposed in the UK's Online Harms White Paper provides a potential opportunity here, as it ensures that platforms are held responsible for the safety of their users and their protection against risks.[49]

Responding to content which is produced by right-wing extremists but is not explicitly illegal or hateful in a proportional fashion is challenging, while also upholding fundamental rights to legitimate freedom of speech. In these instances, it would be valuable to consider opportunities for a range of different digital intervention models. Our analysis of Twitter, for example, found that a large number of users operate on the fringes of a right-wing extremist network, following one or two high-profile extremist influencers, and rarely posting explicitly extremist content themselves. In these instances, it is possible that sparking a dialogue with individuals on the fringes of these communities may provide an opportunity to discredit extremist tropes before these individuals become more embedded within the RWE community.

Above all, the above research suggests that although specific platforms may attract more egregious communities, there are common narrative tropes which are consistent for all right-wing extremists. As this study develops over the coming year we will seek to test and challenge this hypothesis. Through the further refinement of NLP algorithms, we will seek to identify the specifics of extremist conversation to see where the fault lines lie between different communities. In particular, we will seek to hone our capabilities to identify the areas where conversation crosses over from the deeply distasteful into the illegal so as to better inform responses to this challenge from law enforcement. We will also seek to better understand the inter-platform dynamics at play, the impact of policy changes and the effectiveness of enforcement of terms and services by social media platforms, and test the extent to which right-wing extremists migrate between digital forums.

Technical Appendix:
Coding Guide for Ideological Subcategorisation

The following guidance was provided for researchers coding RWE groups and individuals online:

For the purposes of this project we are tracking the online presence of groups and communities which fall within the definition of RWE as established in OTU's 2015 environmental scan:

> *RWE is a loose movement, characterized by a racially, ethnically and sexually defined nationalism. This nationalism is often framed in terms of white power, and is grounded in xenophobic and exclusionary understandings of the perceived threats posed by such groups as non-Whites, Jews, immigrants, homosexuals and feminists.*[50]

This definition includes a broad range of ideologues, communities, and organisations. Different groups prioritise different organisational structures, are motivated by different issues, target different communities, use different methods to advance their agenda, and pose different threats — both online and off. Accordingly, these groups require different policy responses and intervention efforts from law enforcement, tech platforms, and civil society.

Taking this into account, it is desirable to find ways of segmenting these movements further. Breaking down the broad grouping of 'right-wing extremists' into different subsets will allow us to better understand the nuances of the ways these diverse groups mobilise online, allowing us to gauge:

- the extent to which different communities promote and engage with particular narratives in their online communications

- whether different actors prioritise different tactics to advance their agenda online

- the extent to which certain platforms are prioritised by different actors.

By reviewing pre-existing literature relating to the global extreme right, both online and offline, we have identified the following typology for dividing the extreme right in Canada. This typology includes notable ideological tenants and key narratives deployed by these different subsets, and helps inform qualitative coding of online communities by researchers.

Groupings

White Supremacists
White supremacists believe in the superiority of whites over non-whites, and advocate that white peoples should be dominant over non-white. This can extend to a belief in the need for violence against, or even the genocide of non-whites. A number of groups fall under the category of white supremacists, including various neo-Nazi communities. White supremacists are often marked by their belief in scientific racism (a pseudoscientific concept which posits the superiority of white people at a genetic level) and overt anti-Semitism, which is often linked to conspiracy theories stating that Jews are explicitly working to undermine the white race (most notably the 'white genocide' theory).

Notable groups
- neo-Nazis
- the Ku Klux Klan
- National Socialists.

Notable texts
- the Turner Diaries
- Siege.

Notable tropes
- the white genocide theory
- scientific racism
- the '14 words'.

Ethnonationalists
Ethnonationalism is a form of nationalism wherein the nation is defined in terms of ethnicity. Central to ethnonationalism is the belief that nations are tied together by a shared heritage and culture. Ethnonationalists are often marked by implicit rather than explicit racism, and rarely promote overt supremacism. The most notable ethnonationalist movement is Identitarianism, which grew out of the Nouvelle Droite in France in the late 20th century, inspiring a series of youth movements across Europe. The ethnonationalist 'great replacement' theory (which believes that ethnic Europeans are being replaced through migration and miscegenation) helped inspire the 2019 Christchurch attack. Contemporary

ethnonationalists are often defined by their opposition to Islam.

Notable groups
- Generation Identity (Identity Canada)

Notable texts
- Le Grand Replacement (the great replacement theory)
- Why We Fight: a declaration of war against the '68ers.

Notable tropes
- replacement theory
- youth activism
- the 'lambda' symbol.

Anti-Muslim

The anti-Muslim movement is a loose network of groups and individuals who share the fear that their native cultures are threatened by an Islamic takeover. Anti-Muslim actors are marked by their opposition to Islam as an ideology, and Muslims as a people. While individual supporters of anti-Muslim groups and ideologues may hold explicitly racist views, anti-Muslim groups often attempt to mark themselves as 'non-racist', and publically reject anti-Semitism. For the purpose of this project if an anti-Muslim group expresses broader ethnonationalist views they should be categorised as such.

Notable groups
- PEGIDA
- Canadians Against Sharia Law.

Notable tropes
- 'Islamisation'
- Eurabia.

The Manosphere

The manosphere is a loose collection of movements marked by their overt and extreme misogyny. Groups include 'Incels', MGTOW and MRAs. These groups are largely situated online, and are marked by a unique lexicon which they use to describe women, sex, and other men. They are explicit in their rejection of feminism which they believe has come to dominate society at the expense of men.

Notable groups or platforms
- Red Pill Room

- A Voice for Men
- Return of Kinds.

Notable tropes
- 'The Red Pill'.

Sovereigntists

Sovereigntists are marked by their rejection of court and state authority, and include a range of different groups, such as 'detaxers', 'freemen-on-the-land' and 'sovereign citizens'. Joining these groups together is the rejection of the authority of the federal state, and a belief in the principles of 'natural law'. In some instances, sovereigntists may mobilise as militia.

When a new online group, community, or individual is identified, it is necessary to assign them to one of the above categories. To do this, follow these steps:

1   Assess whether a particular movement, group or individual can fit into our definition of RWE (looking for evidence that a group racially, ethnically or sexually defines nationalism; exhibits signs of white supremacy or power; or promotes a xenophobic and exclusionary perception of the threat posed by a minority group). Base this assessment on the tone and nature of the content a particular account, user or page is producing, making sure to review material produced throughout the account, user or page's lifetime. Record a rationale in the coding document.

2   Examine the literature available to see if previous research has helped to categorise this community, and provides compelling evidence that an individual fits within a bracket of our typology (this is particularly relevant if the online group is associated with an offline movement).

3   Assess whether the group, individual or community explicitly self-identifies to one of our categorisations. (If the group doesn't self-identify to one of our subsets, it is necessary to perform additional checks as groups often use euphemisms as an attempt to obfuscate their adherence to an ideology.)

4   If a group, individual or community's ideological alignment cannot be established from either the literature or their self-identification select a sample of 40 pieces of content they have produced (if a

user, group or movement has less than 40 pieces of content then assess all content present) and perform a qualitative assessment of these looking for support of ideological tropes, narratives or actors associated with our categories.

Twitter Content Classification

Our method of creating a Twitter network involved gathering all individuals who followed three or more of our original seed accounts. This process likely gathered a number of false positives – researchers, activists or journalists with an interest in RWE individuals, but no personal affiliation to RWE causes themselves.

Accordingly it was desirable to find a way of filtering this network further, to ensure that our analysis focused solely on accounts and content which was associated with RWE. One approach we used to do this was classifying individual Twitter bios to identify those associated with RWE. However not all individuals involved in extremism online actively self-identify with extremist ideology. It was thus desirable to find additional measures to ensure our analysis focused on relevant communities.

To achieve this we created a 'RWE relevancy' classifier using our NLP tool, Method52. This classifier is an algorithm which allows us to automatically identify at scale conversation which is relevant to our study. Rather than create a number of highly nuanced classifiers associated with particular facets of extremist conversation (e.g. anti-First Nation hate speech), we sought to create a broad classifier which incorporated all content sitting within our programmatic definition of RWE.

We followed these steps:

1   We gathered all conversation created by individuals who followed five or more of our initial seed accounts during 2019.

2   An initial review revealed that a large amount of this conversation was irrelevant to RWE (e.g. 'I feel like Chicken for dinner'), with only 7/200 pieces of content comfortably sitting within our programmatic definition. This is not surprising – it is probable that our initial method of network creation incorporated

some false positives such as journalists and researchers with an interest in RWE figures, and also unlikely that individuals associated with RWE will post in an explicitly extremist fashion all of the time. However, the low volumes of explicit RWE content were such that they could not inform the creation of an accurate classifier.

3   To help refine our classification process we filtered the conversation produced by our network using a series of 161 keywords associated with various facets of RWE conversation, including hate speech targeting minority communities; nuanced terminology associated with RWE; terminology associated with political polarisation; conspiracy theories associated with RWE; the sharing of disinformation associated with a RWE world view; support for RWE figures and groups; and terminology associated with migration and minority communities. We then coded this material for 'RWE relevancy', finding that out of a sample of 400 pieces of content, 192 crossed the threshold of our programmatic definition of RWE. We used this dataset to train an algorithm to identify RWE content at scale.

Footnotes

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Jamin's tenants of RWE ideology:

- *the valorising of inequality and hierarchy*
- *ethnic nationalism lined to a mono-racial community*
- *radical means to achieve aims and defend the 'imagined' community.*

Perlinger's tenants of RWE ideology:

- *nationalism*
- *xenophobia, racism and exclusionism*
- *traditional values*
- *anti-democratic sentiment.*

Lauder's tenants of RWE ideology

- *race or ethnicity as the foundation of social solidarity and nationalism*
- *xenophobia, racism and antisemitism*
- *illegitimacy of established regime of power.*